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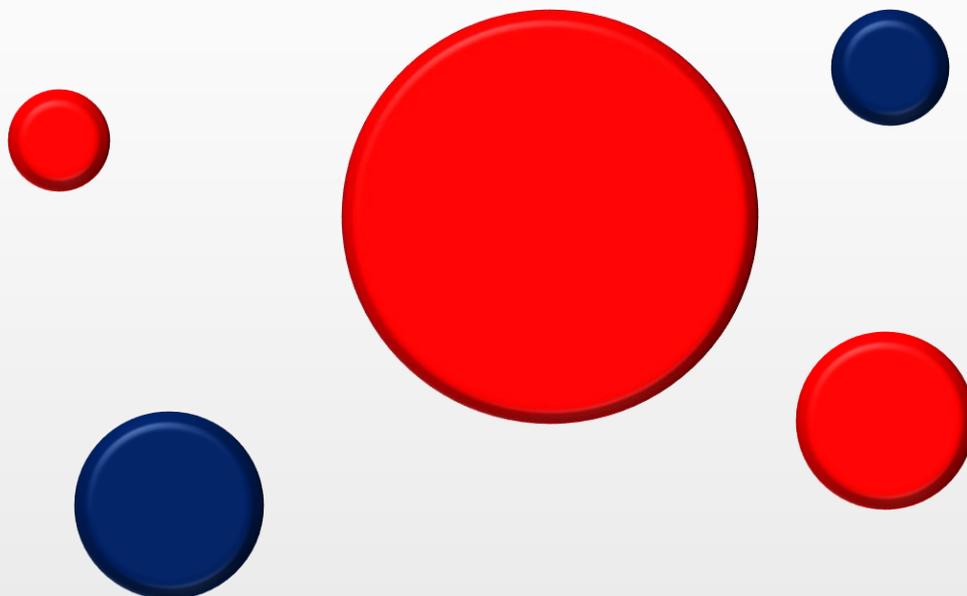
Ex Alumnos del Profesorado en Lenguas Vivas

"Juan R. Fernández"

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ALEXALEVI Forum

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How to do gym with your *brain*



Mgter. Myrian Casamassima

Brain gym is not new. For many years, we have heard about the essential connection between mind and body for learning, and between the two hemispheres of the brain to activate our full potential. Particularly, brain gym consists of a series of exercises which, if carried out regularly, help to achieve such activation.

During the lockdown, it may be of use to facilitate full mind-body activation. Our students sit at their computers when the synchronous lesson starts, and remain seated for what seems to be a rather long time unless we encourage movement. This is sometimes easier, as when we ask our learners to play a game or when we carry out a show-tell event where our students talk about their favourite objects. However, in most of the cases it is no easy task to bring some movement into the virtual class.

In this article, we would like to describe some exercises for brain gym, which teachers may find useful for their lessons through virtual environments. We will follow Dr. Carla Hannaford's descriptions in her book *Smart Moves* (1995).

Yet, brain gym should not be dropped when the time comes for us all to go back to the physical classroom. Brain gym has no restraints as to contexts. Nor is it restricted to ages. When we begin to adopt some of these exercises, we can quickly discover how valuable they can be even for the necessary break that we all need, for example, after having corrected loads of assignments.

As you read on, look at the photos and try to do the exercises so that you can fully take in what the movement is about. You will soon realize how simple these exercises can turn out to be. The photos show Agustín Ledesma and Micaela Martín, both teachers at AEXALEVI, doing brain gym with their students during synchronous lessons.

The energy yawn

Touch your face and spot the muscles around the temporal-mandibular joint. Place your fingertips gently on this area. From here, there are many nerves that run all over our face, eyes and mouth. Stress causes tension in the jaw and reduces nerve function.

Yawn as you massage gently. The energy yawn will relax all this area, enhancing nerve function, verbalization and communication.



Micaela Martín doing the energy yawn with her students.

The energizer

Neck pain, backache, headache, you name it. We all suffer from pains. Our students do too. Just think about the many hours that they spend bending their necks and heads over their mobile phones or keeping their arms and hands in endlessly weird postures to hold their joysticks.

Put your hands on the desk, your chin to your chest and relax your shoulders. Lengthen your back and breathe deeply.

This is where the upper jaw joins the lower jaw. The ear opening is right in front of it.

Then curve your back to bring your chin to your chest once again.

The energizer brings oxygen into your system and helps you relax your shoulders, your neck and your back.



Agustín Ledesma doing the energizer in a class for adults.

The thinking cap



Micaela Martín and her students doing the thinking cap.

This exercise is sometimes called *Peter Pan*. It activates the link between the centers for hearing and memory in the brain. Before trying it, close your eyes and listen attentively to the sounds around you. Notice what you can hear and how much you can hear from each ear. Next, unroll your ears several times

and check again the sounds you can hear. You may notice differences. It is an interesting experiment to carry out in your lessons as the hearing and memory centers are being activated.

Lazy 8's for eyes

This exercise focuses on eye movements and eye/hand coordination. Hold your thumb right in front of you. Without moving your head, describe an infinity sign with your thumb very slowly. Follow your thumb with your eyes, making sure not to tense your head. After you have completed the sign, start it all over again without stopping. This should be repeated at least three times with each hand. You can check here with your students which thumb was easier to follow and why. It is always advisable to recognize how our body feels. A further challenge is to repeat the movement with your hands clasped and your thumbs in an X. Follow the X as you draw the infinity sign in the air very slowly. Here again you can check how the exercise felt. Students wearing glasses might wish to take them off.



Micaela Martín and the lazy 8's for eyes with her learners.

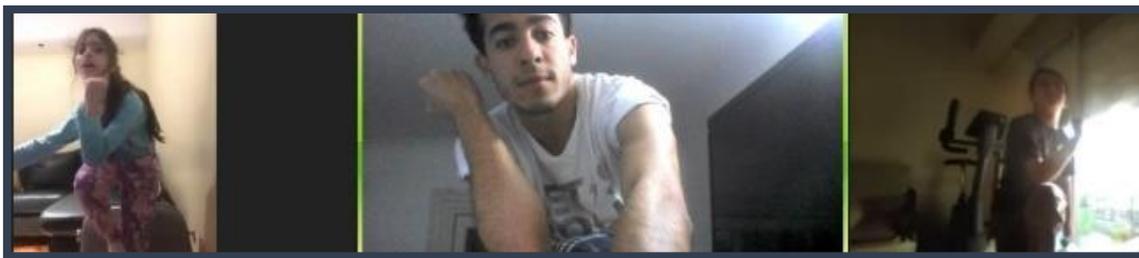
Hook-ups

For this exercise, you will have to ask your students to stand up at a certain distance from their cameras so that you can see them. Cross one ankle over the other. Cross your hands, clasp them and invert them. It is easier if you stretch your arms in front of you and then you cross your hands and clasp them. Next you invert them. Your inverted hands should rest on your chest.

As you can imagine, crossing feet and hands like this connects the two hemispheres of the brain. This posture can also be done while the students are sitting if it is too complex to ask them to stand up. The whole action of getting their hands in the right position will surely prove to be great fun, and standing with one ankle crossed over the other can be a real balance challenge. We should not worry if this exercise makes our learners giggle or even laugh out loud. We aim at relaxation and there is surely nothing more relaxing than laughter.



Agustín Ledesma doing the hook-ups in Second Children.



Agustín Ledesma doing the cross crawl with his students in Second Children.

Cross crawl

For this exercise, you will also have to ask your students to stand up at a certain distance from their cameras so that you can see them. The two hemispheres of the brain are activated as we walk on the spot in a very special manner: our right elbow must touch our left knee, and our left elbow must touch our right knee. We should do this very slowly. We might wish to play some suitable music for our students to walk to the rhythm.

Many of the exercises that we have described here involve fine motor skills and full mind-body activation. Our selection is enough to get started and

experiment with brain gym in our lessons to bring in some relaxation, variety and fun. The first time that we do each exercise, it may take a while until the students grab the idea of the right posture. Later, when these exercises are done regularly, the learners themselves may suggest which they wish to do in that particular class. As a warm-up, a break or a round-off, brain gym may make a difference in the virtual class, especially at a time of lockdown. It is worth the try.

Reference:

Hannaford, C. (1995). *Smart Moves*. Atlanta, Georgia: Great Ocean Publishers.

Acknowledgement:

Thank you, Paula Bardi, for your inspiration.

Thank you, Agustín Ledesma and Micaela Martín for all your help.

An interview with

María del Rosario Baigorria



Interest in education in contexts of confinement is a relatively new issue, not because it has just started but because little is known about it. María del Rosario Baigorria is a key name in this type of contexts in the field of English language teaching. In this interview, *AEXALEVI Forum* talks to her in order to understand what it means to teach English in such a particular context.

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How did you start working in contexts of confinement?

M.R.B.

When I was 18 years old, I started doing voluntary work in churches and orphanages. It was a turning point for me; I realized I wanted something different in my life. I wanted to help people find hope in a miserable and violent world. Meanwhile, I was working at different schools, state and private, from different social contexts. Some years later, I was attending a seminar in Santa Fe and I received a phone call from my headmaster in Don Bosco college. He was looking for a teacher

that could substitute for another teacher in the school inside a prison. I accepted without hesitation – it was the opportunity I had been waiting for so long, to work in a place where I was needed. I felt blissful.

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What do you take into account when you teach your lessons in a prison and what is the students' attitude to English language learning?

M.R.B.

The first thing that comes to my mind is that, when I plan my lessons, I must always consider the background of my students: their places of origin, their

educational and economic marginalisation, and their high invisibility. Thus, every class must be not only interesting but meaningful, creative and engaging, in accordance with their experiences.

I teach in 2nd year so at this level students are used to going to school, they know how to behave, they are respectful and grateful. They like my subject because they find it funny and always environmentally friendly and warm. My students feel that I really care. They usually tell me that they like the way I look and smile at them. I'm always kind and gentle. A smile is very valuable to them, as are soft words.

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Would you say that teaching in a context of confinement has been your greatest challenge as a teacher? What impact has it had on you?

M.R.B.

Working in a place of confinement is a great challenge for one's heart. We must deeply believe that we as teachers are our students' window to the sky. They need to get the idea that we go to that school because we believe there's

beauty and hope behind the dark walls and bars.

Every day I go to "Esperanza" school I feel I'm learning to develop as a human

being, with no room for criticism or judgement regarding any kind of wrongdoing.

If we learnt to see life from a different point of view, we would have a better outlook.

When I step into school "Esperanza" I feel I'm planting my seeds for the future. Perhaps I won't see the fruit, the harvest, but I do not care because I do my job as best as I can; I help them find a way to freedom as I deeply believe education means liberation.

Thank you, María del Rosario!

Teaching in Times of Covid 19 and the Role of Technology

Mgter Marina Falasca



Methodology Lecturer and Multimedia Enthusiast

How has teaching changed due to the current pandemic? What is or should be the role of technology and multimedia resources in this new and very difficult context? I bet many of you have asked yourselves similar questions over the last couple of months. Unfortunately, there are no clear-cut answers at this point. But this first spell of virtual teaching and learning has taught us quite a few things.

One of the first lessons we were forced to learn was that technology was there to help. Far from being a necessary evil, technological resources became our biggest allies. If we wanted to stay in touch with our students, we had to decide what the best way to do so would be. Thus, we all became “experts” in selecting the most relevant Apps and platforms and some of us even dared to start creating and adapting our own digital content.

Soon after the school year started, teachers all over the country had to look

for a great variety of resources in order to evaluate which one was the most suitable for the age, level and possibilities of their students. In a matter of weeks, platforms like Google classroom, Edmodo, Zoom and Skype became their new “classrooms”.

Not only did these new platforms bring teachers and students together but they also made communication possible. However, many students and families were still left out. Why was this so? Simply because they had no Internet access. This was probably one of the

hardest lessons we had to learn. In this sense, we can say that the pandemic has exposed the digital divide like never before.

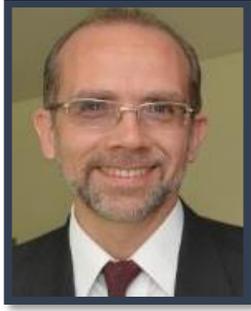
Among the many inequalities unveiled by COVID-19, the digital divide has definitely become one of the most obvious. According to one of the latest articles by the World Economic Forum, more than one billion children across the globe are currently locked out of classrooms because of quarantine measures. No matter what teachers may be doing to run daily online classes, many of these children simply cannot take part. Even in developed countries, the situation is often more complex than we might think.

But perhaps the solution is not that complex after all. We could even combine synchronous and asynchronous forms of instruction. Although it is far from being something new or revolutionary, flipped learning might actually be one possible way of addressing some of these inequalities. Why not send the students Word documents or PDF files with short explanations and examples and then make the most of pre-scheduled Zoom meetings to help them practise and put relevant language into meaningful use? Such an approach would not only give parents the possibility to become more

involved in their children's homework but it would also help reduce the amount of online instruction.

If we adopt and adapt flipped learning as suggested above, then Zoom meetings would start with a short recapitulation of key concepts and the rest of the session would be devoted to practising the new grammar or vocabulary through interactive games or meaningful discussions in breakout rooms, which is a feature in Zoom that allows you to open multiple "rooms" and assign students to them for a set period of time. For example, you could use this to get students to speak in roleplaying tasks. Thus, everyone would be more likely to speak longer while staying focused and motivated.

Apart from breakout room tasks, there are a lot more ideas to help students remain active during synchronous Zoom meetings. Screen sharing and the whiteboard function can also help foster student participation and engagement. Whatever option you choose, don't panic. After a few lessons, everything will probably begin to feel natural, just as it did when you first started teaching face to face. And, hopefully, more students will soon start to have access to this and other forms of technology.



Nice Stories in the Middle of the Pandemic

Trad. Gustavo Sevilla

Words are powerful. According to psychologists and mind control experts, words are much more than vehicles of meaning for communication – they can influence our lives. If we keep speaking or listening to negative words all the time, the effect can be devastating.

In these bleak times, we have unfortunately got used to expressions we had probably never heard or only scarcely used before, like *pandemic*, *coronavirus*, *flattening the curve*, *close contact*, *healthcare system collapse*, *quarantine*, *social distancing*, *self-isolation*, *mouth coverings*, to mention just a few. Even the only one that might have a nice ring to it, “close contact”, is now associated with the likelihood of contagion.

Under these circumstances, when I had to think of a possible topic to write an article for this new issue, I decided that writing about grammar, my all-time favourite subject, would be somewhat out of place, and not of much help. I thought that finding and producing positive stories to counteract the effect of so much negative news could be far

more beneficial, and was delighted to see that there are dozens of publications on the Internet seeking to encourage their readers to develop feelings of sympathy and trust.

Here are some of the headlines, videos and ideas I came across:

- ***#SomethingGood: Stories of Comfort, Generosity, Solidarity Amid Pandemic***
- ***‘Don’t Worry About Paying Me’: NYC Landlord Waives Rent Because of Coronavirus***
- ***NYC Pizza for Health Care Heroes at Coronavirus Front Lines***
- ***‘Shopping Angels’ Help Those at High-Risk During Pandemic***
- ***Stay Safe & Take What You Need***

- ***Local girls start newscast to focus on positive stories during pandemic***
- ***12-Year-Old Sews Hundreds of Masks and Feeds Strangers***
- ***Messages of encouragement are left for hospital workers in sidewalk chalk***
- ***This nursing home staff is throwing parties to help residents cope without seeing their visitors***
- ***This group of teens created a website to deliver groceries to seniors***
- ***Texas Roadhouse CEO is giving up his salary and bonus to pay his workers***
- ***A South Dakota math teacher helped his student from her front porch***
- ***This Reiki instructor is helping families and individuals deal with anxiety through online breathing sessions***
- ***Your Stories of Love During The Pandemic***
- ***Positive News Stories You May Have Missed During The Coronavirus Outbreak***

As it arises from the items above, and as I read in one of the articles I found, in dark and distressing times like these humankind can really show its good side. Many people who remained aloof

in the past, or could only focus on their own interests, now find multiple ways to aid those around them. As teachers, we can join that army of silent heroes.

One of the ways consists of encouraging our students to write and retell stories along these lines which they may have experienced, or heard about, these days. We can even inspire them by reading what I have found is called “hero’s journey literature”, descriptive of adventures which end up teaching the characters, as well as the readers, invaluable lessons:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/04/02/middle-school-teachers-creative-way-framing-pandemic-kids/>

The first exercise might consist of listening to one of the reports or reading one of the articles above, one we find particularly appealing to and suitable for our students. The level of grammar and vocabulary is obviously an issue to take into account. Depending on the interests and linguistic level of our students, we can choose the article we find best suited to them.

We can then invite them to retell what they have read or, alternatively, to refer to some similar experience they may have undergone, or to express their wishes and hopes. They can also be asked to make their contributions to a publication, something like Our Stories during the Pandemic. All four skills can

thus be practised, and although the environment will probably remain the same, the attitude will be different, and so will the effect on the audience.

I hope my next article will be about grammar – not because I have not liked writing what I wrote, but just because that will be an indication that things have begun to get back to normal, that our lives are gradually getting back on track. In the meantime, we will have learnt a lot about ourselves and about our ability to cope with difficulties that far exceed those of learning a language.

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Listening Comprehension: Tips for the Synchronous Class.

Teachers' Centre Team

A few years ago, we published an article about listening comprehension, which was the result of research work carried out by the Teachers' Centre Team. Today, some of the tips in that article become relevant for the synchronous class.

For most students, listening comprehension is still the hardest skill to develop. It is vital that listening material should be interesting and that it should provide the tools that are necessary to face the challenge of understanding our interlocutors when we interact in the real world.

In synchronous lessons, it may seem even harder to develop listening skills as perhaps it is not always easy to hear clearly due to a frequently failing Internet and the inevitable noise at our students' home.

We present here a few difficulties that you may have experienced. We also present some tips, which we hope may be useful in these times at which we

need to keep building up how to teach in a context unexplored for most of us.

Difficulty: The passage is too long and the students do not understand.

Tip 1: Ask the students to reconstruct the passage in pairs so that the listening task is turned into a collaborative activity, with the students talking to each other. In order to do this, we can play the audio and then ask the students to work in pairs or small groups. This can be done through the so-called break-out rooms if the feature is available in your videocall. After pair or groupwork, you can play the audio again and work on it as a whole-class. This simple difference in the usual procedure, in which we play the audio and the students immediately

report on their answers to the questions, involves reconstruction and may mean a good chance for some students to process text. Students will be able to show what they have understood and they will profit from listening to others.

Tip 2: Work thoroughly at the pre-listening stage. The more preparation work we do, the easier the listening task should be. Students sometimes lack the vocabulary or the knowledge of the world to understand a passage and pre-listening activities in coursebooks may not be enough to pave the way for comprehension.

Difficulty: The students find listening too frustrating.

Tip 1: Give the students the opportunity to react non-verbally (gestures, thumbs up or down) while you are playing the audio. Students may often need to feel they have some control over the listening task.

Tip 2: If you are planning to do a listening task in the synchronous class, you may wish to send the students the audio beforehand and ask them to listen to it. This will allow them to become familiar with the voices, tones, some of the words. It may do the trick!

Tip 3: Flip it all! Instead of doing the listening task in the lesson, ask the students to do it on their own. We must

choose simple tasks if we wish to try this out. We should also tell them how to go about it: for example, how many times they should listen and how they should listen. In the synchronous lesson, they may report on how it went. This experience will give them the chance to develop strategies and to work independently.

Difficulty: The students do not understand the recording at all. It goes too fast!

Tip : Try doing live listening instead, at least in some classes. In live listening, the teacher talks to the students about a topic, and they have the chance to interrupt for repair and to interact with her or him as the listening activity is going on. Some teachers may not have enough self-confidence to carry out this sort of talk in class, but they can surely gain it as they give themselves the chance. The live listening may be based on the activities in the coursebook so that we do not have to create new materials.
