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Interview with
Carla Montoya

By Myrian Casamassima

n this issue, we talk to Carla Montoya, who has been a teacher at AEXALEVI for many years and who has recently made an international presentation. We wanted to learn exactly where she went and what her research project was about.

AEXALEVI *Forum*

You have recently been to Barcelona to present a research paper. Where did you make your presentation? What kind of event was it?

Carla Montoya

During March 22-24, 2018, I went to Spain to attend the *Transmedia Literacy International Conference*, which was held at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona. This event brought together a global community of media and education researchers and innovators. The conference was organized as a part of the dissemination activities of the Transliteracy H2020 action (grant agreement No 645238), a project that involved researchers from Europe, Latin America and Australia. It was organized by Dr. Carlos Scolari, an expert in the field. There were very important keynote speakers such as David Buckingham (University of Loughborough, United

Kingdom), Divina Frau-Meigs (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, France), Heather Horst (The University of Sydney, Australia), Sonia Livingstone (London School of Economics, United Kingdom), Alejandro Piscitelli (Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina) and Gonzalo Frasca – Video game designer and education researcher (Uruguay). The Conference included workshops and paper presentations. I delivered the talk "Towards a Transmedia Literacy approach: preliminary views on synergistic transmedia components in an English Classroom" on Saturday 24th. The main objective of the conference was to share research practices around the following topics: Transmedia literacy- Transmedia education- Transmedia skills and informal learning strategies- Media literacy- Educommunication- Student-generated

contents- Collaborative cultures and education- Fan cultures and education.

The results and papers can be found online at: http://transmedialiteracy.org/the-conference/

Carla Montoya

As you already know, I´m a teacher of English from IES en Lenguas Vivas "Juan Ramón Fernández". I hold a Bachelor´s Degree in English Language from the National University of San Martín and I´m currently studying for a Master´s Degree in Education, Languages and Media. My areas of specialization include evaluation of foreign languages, ICTs, media and transmedia literacy. The concept of transmedia has come into the spotlight among those who create and use media and we, teachers, are not far from this conception. Learning through transmedia can prove to be a valuable tool for teachers who need to face the challenges of this century in education. The objectives of my paper were twofold: on the one hand, I presented the preliminary results of a transmedia educational practice carried out at UNSAM. On the other hand, I delved into the pedagogical value of Transmedia Literacy with university students in an English classroom as a new approach to exploit synergistic components/new transmedia skills within educational institutions.

Carla Montoya

Incredibly fruitful! I believe that presenting at an academic conference is an important part of a researcher's life, and an opportunity that teachers should have at some time during their academic lives. I felt so excited but I was well-prepared so that made everything smoother. I tried to keep the content simple and straightforward. The structure of my paper had a clear introduction, body and conclusion. I included two very short videos to illustrate my classes at the university and the preliminary results. The audience was highly attentive, so I could maintain eye contact from the beginning. The funny anecdote I want to share is the following. At first, my Prezi didn't work; instead of panicking, I made a kind of joke and everybody laughed. Immediately, everything was fine again. As my motto says: "Always smile".

Carla Montoya

That´s an interesting question. I´m not sure if it is a question of how easy or how difficult it could be. I believe it is a question of willingness. To do research, teachers need to be systematic and involved in reading and studying. It is not a question of doing research for its own sake. Research requires discipline as well as institutional support. Sometimes, teachers feel overwhelmed with their daily tasks; they may feel research is not part of their job, because of lack of time or a fair payment. Having said this, I strongly believe that teacher development can be sought by engaging teachers in any kind of research which is meaningful to them. This should be encouraged as from tertiary level and at university level too. We need to understand that research can make a great contribution to more effective teaching and provide new pathways into the teaching and learning process. Our education system is amid a paradigm shift, where new learning and teaching methods, as well as assessment models need to be acquired. Empowering teachers to do research seems to be the only way out.

Carla Montoya

Of course I do. I consider that teachers can make the difference. Going back to your first question, most of the presenters and attendees were teachers who wanted to explore transmedia practices and learning strategies that are specific to the lifestyles of contemporary youth in formal/informal educational settings across a variety of sociocultural contexts.

It is believed that there seems to be a disconnection between research and teaching. I do not think so. I believe in research, innovation and knowledge transfer. I believe in an educational community which develops and generates knowledge and value for its students. If I may give some advice, I would say that teachers should consider collaborations across institutions. They must contact other teacher-researchers at their institutions, teacher-training colleges or local universities if they are interested in making changes in their classes. Moreover, they should study and present their results in several ways, for example participating in academic events where they can show those changes and inform the scientific

community. The results will not only be beneficial for you and your students: the results will empower teachers as life-long teacher-researchers. The process of change is useful if it is accompanied by commitment. In this way, authentic change seems to be an *inside-out* process.

AEXALEVI *Forum*

Congratulations and thank you for answering our questions.

Carla Montoya

I would like to thank you very much for this interview, Myrian. You have always been very supportive and respectful of my educational background. *La Asociación* is like my second home and I would like to share this experience abroad with all my colleagues, the member teachers and the authorities in charge, especially Liliana Luna and Diana Ogando.

Chunk it

Myrian Casamassima

Not long ago, I was observing a lesson in which the teacher and the students were doing some oral work. It was a small class. There were some flashcards on the floor and the children were supposed to pick one, turn it over and name the object printed on it.

The first child picked up a card with a cat on it and he said "cat". "Very good!", the teacher said. The second child picked up another card with a book on it, and she said "book". "Great!", said the teacher. The activity went on like that until the first round had been completed. Then, a second round started and when the first child picked up a card with a dog on it and said "dog", and before the teacher could say "very good", I quickly remarked "a brown dog". The child looked at me from the corner of his eye, and then he looked at the card in his hand. He muttered "a brown dog". The teacher said "Very good" although she had not noticed, I discovered later, what I had done.

I said nothing else until the next child spoke. As soon as she named the car on the flashcard by saying "car", I commented "a red car". The girl looked at me in silence while the teacher insisted "Good! Car!" The interaction went on like this until the second round was complete, with me commenting in chunks and the teacher insisting on isolated words.

I thought it was a lost battle until the first child spoke again in the third round. He picked up a card and said "a black dog", his eyes fixed on me as if in a defiant attitude. I quickly joined in his game and said "It´s a big black dog". He said nothing. I felt like laughing out loud as when children misbehave and you want to tell them off, but you can´t really because they look so sweet or because what they did was funny. The teacher stared at me, now beginning to realize what I was attempting to do. She said "Yes, it´s a big black dog".

The girl sitting next to that boy had been observing the scene. When it was her turn, she produced the most wonderful "It´s a yellow flower" that I had heard in my whole life. The teacher joined in to comment as well. From then on, all the children began to produce simple

sentences or noun phrases to refer to the flashcards, with the teacher praising such production and encouraging it when it was necessary.

What had changed in that lesson? The class went from producing nouns in isolation to producing chunks. As simple and powerful as that. Why simple? Because it is easier to move from *noun phrase* into sentence than from *word* into sentence. Because languages are made up of chunks rather than of words in isolation. Why powerful? Because we can communicate more effectively when we use chunks, since our message is clearer than what words in isolation can convey. Because chunking shapes thinking and it is here, perhaps, where we have one of the strongest points.

Let us recall what we wrote on the blackboard in our last lesson. Was it "tiger" or "a tiger"? Was it "orange juice" or "some orange juice"? Was it "sunny" or "It´s sunny"? We could go on asking and recalling, but in 90 per cent of the cases, teachers write words in isolation on the blackboard. What´s more, many coursebooks prompt the use of words in isolation when they present "pencil" instead of "a pencil", for example. Go over the units in your coursebook, and you will surely spot dozens of examples that reinforce the idea that when we learn a language, we learn isolated words and only then do we learn how to make a sentence with them. It is high time these rules got defied.

When we write a word in isolation on the blackboard, we are actually not telling our students much about that word. Instead, if we write "a table" or "an umbrella", we are providing our learners with information about the grammar of those words. We are telling them that "table" is used with "a" and that "umbrella" is used with "an", all together in a chunk that is perceived as a unit, copied as a unit in the students´ binders, recorded as a unit in the students´ minds and, best of all, retrieved as a unit when the time comes for production orally or in writing, or when the time comes for understanding spoken or written text. What do we generally do instead? We teach "table" and "umbrella", and then we spend quite a long time teaching the indefinite articles "a" and "an" plus giving our students endless exercises for them to fill in the gaps with the right indefinite article. Undoubtedly, two radically different ways of approaching the language. Now, if I teach my students "an elephant", then there is no choice in the slot before "elephant". It is "an elephant". If I produce a gap there for an exercise, I am making them choose: Is it "a" or "an"? Far too complicated, especially for a child. It is all right for us as teachers to know that "an" is an indefinite article and how it is used, but for our learners it works more naturally

to expose them to, and help them produce, "an elephant" straight away. Like this, there are thousands of examples in the English class. Just take a couple of minutes to think about how you go about the content that you teach.

We chunk naturally in our mother tongue. However, in a foreign or second language we have to learn to chunk, to understand and produce units of meaning that recurrently appear together in discourse. Definitely, chunking shapes thinking. If we can understand a chunk, we will have a more direct access to the idea that it conveys. If we can retrieve a chunk from our memory, we can express our ideas more readily. On the contrary, words in isolation are like the pieces of a puzzle that must be put together, not always successfully. Chunking is about organizing thought.

Next time we write a word on the blackboard, let us remember that chunking is about organizing the input to which we expose our learners and the output that we encourage from them. But also, next time we ask our students to read the text and to underline all the *words* they do not understand. Let us adopt chunking as an organizing routine for all the activities we do automatically in a certain way. Then, after some time, our learners will be able to enjoy the benefits.

It Worked for Us

Mariana Gimenez,

Aldana Ledezma,

Silvia Vilariño.

Instituto Tiempo Educativo, Barracas.

Fifteen years ago only some of our students used to sit for the AEXALEVI exams. Those were the students who liked the language or whose families considered it was an important step for their learning.

Luckily, we decided to include the AEXALEVI exams as part of our Institutional Project in 2010. It meant a great challenge for our schoolwork. All the students from first to seventh form had to practise and study in order to be ready for the external final exams. We had to catch their interest so as to make them realise the importance of not only learning a foreign language but also getting a certificate. It was not easy at the beginning but it was worth the effort.

As time went by, we could notice considerable improvement. The students who were not willing to study the subject improved their approach to English.

Since then, our students have accepted the tests as part of their learning process and have met our goals. They have increased their English level! They feel confident and on exam days they look calm and enjoy the instance of showing their knowledge. For our students, those exam days are special and important. All the schoolteachers are there so the kids feel relaxed and comfortable. Moreover, as it was explained before, this is an institutional project so the other teachers of the school know how important these exams are. They help us in the organization of those peculiar days, creating teamwork.

As a conclusion, we can say that it was the best decision we could ever take. Furthermore, we analyse and work on the feedback we receive after the tests, which helps us improve our students' performance. It worked for us!

Thank you, Mariana, Aldana & Silvia.

The World of Conditional Sentences

Gustavo Sevilla

Many reactions from native speakers have called my attention during my years participating in English grammar and language forums, but few as vehement as a native speaker's reference – endorsed by other English-speaking users – to the three (or four) types of conditionals we usually teach as an "ESL fiction". Such a reaction is perfectly understandable – we don't like our own language, with all its richness and subtleties, to be artificially simplified. However, some teachers – including myself – may have been influential in downgrading such derogatory opinions as they seem to have gradually subsided to show some understanding of the learner's (and the teacher's) need to rely on the three- (or four-) type classification, and those who used to scoff at the type 0, 1, 2, 3 categorization of conditionals might have started to appreciate the pedagogical utility of it:

> This just shows that ESL teachers are incorrect when they say that there are only three (four? five?) conditionals in English, and try to fit all conditionals to these templates. (Although I understand why they do it — simplifying complicated stuff makes it much easier to teach.) – Peter Shor May 7 '17 at 13:40

> The "first, second, third, etc conditionals" are not linguistically meaningful categories, just pedagogical crutches to help learners get a primitive grasp of conditionals. You seem to have mastered enough English to throw away the crutches and walk on your own. – StoneyB Mar 5 '17 at 13:45

It is reasonable that native speakers should not readily accept that the many possibilities that language offers to express conditional meaning be pigeonholed into a limited set of categories. In a clever answer, a native user of one of those forums explained:

The reason you may not find these [non-typical conditional tense patterns] *in your "grammar books" is because learning materials for non-native speakers always grossly simplify the possible combinations down to a very few reduced but common forms. They*

do this because they are trying to make sure learners do not accidentally stumble over combinations that actually are ungrammatical.

But despite the best of intentions, by committing this facile reduction they neglect — egregiously to my mind — to teach learners that English does not have some tiny and frozen set of viable combinations of constructions in the paired halves the way some other languages do.

Many combinations are completely grammatical, yet mean something different in a subtly nuanced way. These they do not teach, because the many real possibilities are too confusing for quick classification by learners.

But it does learners a disservice to pretend that these few possibilities are the only ones that exist or the only ones which are grammatical. They do not even reflect actual usage by native speakers, as Christian Jones and Daniel Waller observe in their journal entry from the English Language Teaching Journal titled "If only it were true: the problem with the four conditionals" when they write:

"It is clear that a division of conditionals into the zero, first, second, and third categories does not adequately reflect actual usage."

If you actually look at corpus occurrences, as they have done, you find that many of the modal combinations frequently found in speech and writing by native speakers are simply not explained to beginners. By attempting to deflect learners from common errors, these errors of omission lead to even more confusion. And this can do genuine harm, as explained below.

This is hardly the first or earliest time this observation has been made in professional literature. In the April 1988 edition of ELT Journal, David Maule has a paper titled "'Sorry, if he comes, I go': teaching conditionals", in which he writes:

"Michael Lewis, in his recent book, The English Verb *(Lewis 1986), makes the point that to indulge in artificial simplification is merely to store up trouble for the future. The damage is compounded when the simplified explanation is backed up by a few well-vetted examples, inconvenient 'exceptions' being actively suppressed.*

When these two tendencies are unleashed on this area we run the risk of our students coming to believe that either the standard Type 1 structure is the only way of dealing with real non-past conditions, or, perhaps at a later stage, that it is the 'correct' way, and that all other examples encountered are colloquial, or dialectal, or instances of sub-standard usage. Incidentally, it is worth noting that if the collection I made is in any way representative, suppression of other structures would involve ruling out something like 90 per cent of real non-past conditionals."

There are in fact hundreds of possibilities, with multiple combinations of tenses and widely different meanings. That being the case, we also have to admit that it is unfortunately easy for non-native speakers to concoct sentences that would not be grammatical at all. That is the only reason why learners are taught such a small subset of valid conditional propositions. However, they should be aware that there exist hundreds more valid combinations used daily by native speakers than have ever been, and will ever be, mentioned in their grammar books.

Declerck, considered by many as the "master of tenses", acknowledged this situation and, even if in his book "Conditionals: a comprehensive empirical analysis" he recognizes that conditional sentences can express countless meanings, he does refer to types 1 to 3 as the canonical tense patterns, and respectively describes them as expressing the following meanings, so familiar to us teachers: possible ("open conditionals"), unlikely or improbable (also "tentative"), and contrary-to-fact or past hypothetical (also known as "counterfactual"). These are the examples he provides for these canonical tense patterns:

- Pattern 1: *I will be happy if she comes.*
- Pattern 2: *I would be happy if she came.*
- Pattern 3: *I would have been happy if she had come.*

He admits that many pedagogic grammars and handbooks restrict the treatment of conditionals to the three patterns above. In the author's opinion, "there are many more types of conditional and there are at least three dozen ways in which the three tense patterns (taken together) can be interpreted". This is something new to most of us, that is, the fact that the same tense pattern conditionals (the ones above or any others that may exist) can receive different interpretations.

My take, which I bet most of you share, is that we can use this initial classification as a starting point to facilitate learning. As the level of our students increases, we can start explaining different meanings associated with the same patterns, as well as revealing the existence of other variants:

Type 0: Present / Present

Type 1: Present/*should*+infinitive / Future, imperative, present/future modals

Type 2: Past/*were to*+infinitive / Conditional, *could, might*

Type 3: Past perfect / Conditional perfect, past modals

In more advanced levels, we can also address the possibility of inversion in the condition with *should, were to* and the past perfect, as well as deal with mixed conditionals. The division between the three types of conditionals that seemed so clear-cut starts to blur and to allow for the most incredible combinations, those native speakers so proudly boast of when asked about all the possible conditional patterns.

However, the vastness of the topic should not scare us, or our students. It should instead make us all aware that things are not so simple but that this complexity is largely softened by the amazing news that conditionals is one of those topics where translation into Spanish can be of help. The typical case is that of the Past Simple, which can be real or unreal. We can use translation to make this difference clear to our students:

- If he was with her, she was happy. (real past condition: *Si **estaba/estuvo** con ella, **era/fue** feliz.*)
- If you did (OR If you've done) what you had to, you'll have no problem. (real past condition: *Si **hiciste** lo que debías, no **tendrás** problemas.*)

BUT

- If you did what you should, you'd have no problem. (unreal past condition: *Si **hicieras** lo que debieras/deberías, no **tendrías** problemas.*)

In a past context, the conditional expresses backshifted future, that is, future from a past perspective, and the past in the condition is real:

- Jerry knew that if he did what he had to do, the way he was supposed to do it, he would win. (*Jerry sabía que **ganaría** si **hacía** lo que tenía que hacer.*)
- If she did what she had to do, she would never be able to talk to her mother again. (*Si **hacía** lo que debía, nunca **podría** volver a hablar con su madre.*)

It is simply impossible to summarize in an article all the combinations that are available for us to use, but once the canonical and the mixed types of conditionals have been taught, some time may be devoted to at least showing our students that conditional sentences present us with a vast world of possibilities, not only as far as tenses are concerned but also as regards meaning.

For example, the so-called Type Zero conditional, which is usually described as "**cause-and-effect**" (in which case "if" can be substituted for by "whenever"), is often used to express other meanings:

- If you **mix** these two substances, you **get** an explosion (cause and effect for scientific or eternal truths) = Whenever you mix these two substances, you get an explosion.

- If I **go**, you **go** = If I go, then you have to go too / If the table **stays**, the sofa **goes** = If the table stays, the sofa has to go (there's not enough space for both, or they don't match) (conditional imperatives)

- If it **rains**, it **pours** (This may be interpreted as: *In these parts the storm may start off as a drizzle, but sooner or later a downpour will come*, but can also have a reformulatory value: *Whenever we say 'it rains' in these parts, what actually happens is that it pours.*)

- There **are** biscuits on the sideboard if you **want** some (known as "biscuit" conditional. Notice how this differs from: *There are biscuits on the sideboard if Bill hasn't moved them*, which is a conditional assertion.)

- If Bill **has** an alibi, he **isn't** the culprit (inferential meaning).

- If he**'s** so clever, why **isn't** he rich? (inferential meaning: Perhaps he's not so clever after all).

- If he **is** the general manager, I **am** Shakespeare! (*ad absurdum* inference: I'm clearly not Shakespeare, so he isn't the general manager).

- Children **are** orphans if their parents **are** dead (set-identifying conditional clause: Having his/her parents dead defines a child as an orphan).

We can also find the past simple, or the present perfect, in both clauses:

- If he **went** for a walk, his dog **went** with him (cause and effect in the past) = Whenever he went for a walk, his dog went with him.

- If you**'ve met** John, you**'ve met** his wife (or: you must have met his wife). They are inseparable.

Or even the future:

If you **are going** to the show, I**'ll give** you a lift.

Type 1 conditional clauses can also have different meanings:

- If it rains, we won't go to the seaside (preclusive meaning).

- If it rains, we'll still go to the seaside (non-preclusive meaning).

As we've seen above, even conditionals containing past in the condition and conditional in the result can be interpreted differently from unreal-past Type 2 conditionals:

- Jerry knew that if he did what he had to do he would win.

- If she did what she had to do, she would never be able to talk to her mother again.

As is already evident, no combination of tenses will render a single meaning, and no single meaning will always be expressed by the same tense pattern. Here are some other peculiar conditionals which, natural as they sound, clearly depart from the probable / improbable (or hypothetical) / impossible (or past hypothetical) classification we used to be taught and we might be used to teaching to our students:

- *I'll come to you at five – if you will be alone.* (Postcript or afterthought conditionals: notice that the dash could be replaced with ",that is,".)

- *If he does show up, I wouldn't let him in.* (Probable condition, tentative result)

- *If he does show up, you shouldn't let him in.* (Recommendation given in case the probable condition occurs)

- *If you need basics like saucepans, ironing boards and kettles, a department store may well be the place to start looking.* (Neutral, theoretical conditional: neither "you need basics" nor "you don't need basics" is presupposed as true.)

- *If, as you say, you can't accompany me tonight, I'll have to look for someone else.* (Echoic condition which the speaker assumes to be fulfilled in the real world.)

- *If he really wants something, he wouldn't just take it. I know him well, and I'm sure he'd ask nicely.* (Probable condition, result expressed in tentative terms on the basis of the speaker's knowledge of the person's typical behaviour.)

- *If Liverpool won their home match yesterday* (which I hope they did)*, they still have a chance of winning the championship.* (Condition in the past considered uncertain though really possible, combined with a present result, i.e., the actual possibility of winning the championship.)

- *I would appreciate it if you seated us sooner* (Declerck and Reed call the "if"-clause in this type of conditional "semi-nominal", and go so far as to state that the "if"-clause "seems to be an extraposed noun clause" in relation to "it". They give two arguments for

analyzing these structures as conditionals. First, they are naturally paraphrased with the addition of a "that"-clause in extraposition to "it": *If you seated us sooner, I would appreciate it that you seated us sooner.* However, if we compare the "that"-clause above with that in "I appreciate it that you seated us sooner", we see that although the latter presupposes that the event happened, the former does not. Second, they point out that if we rephrase the main clause using "will" as in a Type 1 conditional, we must use the present simple in the main clause, just as we would in a real Type 1 conditional: *I will appreciate it if they seat us sooner.* Therefore, we are faced with a conditional sentence where the subordinate clause has some nominal value.)

In conclusion, I think that a classification based on tenses and meaning, allowing for lots of exceptions and special cases (like mixed conditionals or the ones mentioned above), is too disperse and wide for students to take in, so the canonical three- (or four-) pattern classification is useful as a first step in the teaching of conditionals: *If I have money, I'll buy the car / If I had money, I'd buy the car / If I'd had the money, I would've bought the car.* With these or similar examples, students capture how basic conditionals work and get used to the unreal "had" and the counterfactual "had had", avoiding saying things like "*If I would have the money" or "*If I would have had the money", which are very usual mistakes. Once students learn the basic types, they are in a better position to go on learning the rest.

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AEXALEVI's Got Talent:

Reconstructing our Notion of Human Capacity

Florencia Insua

When I was a student, I was always told that my education was important because it would prepare me for the world I would face when I finished school. The illusion that life was more or less predictable was very usual not so long ago. At present, that mission has become almost an impossible task to accomplish considering we have absolutely no idea what the world will be like in five or ten years. Research shows that many jobs which are usual today will no longer exist in ten years or will change drastically. This level of uncertainty, caused by the fast changes in technology and their impact on society, leads to a heated debate: what content should be taught at schools? Which skills should be developed?

The scenario seems to be the following: teachers are trying to do their jobs in classrooms with lots of students. Those students have a lot of visual stimuli and content available, perceive school as something very far from their own interests, and yet as teachers we need to try to educate them for the fast-changing world to come.

According to Sir Ken Robinson (Doctor of Philosophy, British Professor of Art Education at the University of Warwick in the UK, writer, researcher and most watched speaker in TED history) every educational system around the world is organized under a similar hierarchy of subjects. At the top we get Maths and Sciences, later Languages and Humanities and finally the Arts. And within the Arts, Art and Music get a more dominant role than Drama or Dance. It seems that "as children grow up we start educating them progressively from the waist up. We focus on their heads and slightly to one side" (Ken Robinson, TED Talk "How schools kill creativity"). This is all based on the dominant role of academic ability and the reason is that public education systems came into

being in the 19th century to meet the needs of industrialism. Therefore, the most useful subjects for work were at the top. However, the world has changed, partly because of technological innovations and partly because people are changing their views on what life should be like and self-fulfillment is becoming a trend among new generations. In the past, most people were discouraged from studying or exploring certain areas because they would not get a job related to them and be able to live off it in case they did.

Those well-intended pieces of advice which most parents gave are now no longer practical for the world we live in. Ken Robinson argues that the result of this view on our children's education is that many talented and brilliant people think they are not because what they liked doing wasn't valued or was actually stigmatized. Many people gave up their dreams and got jobs they hated their entire lives. We have to redefine this idea for the new generations. Education is failing to engage students. Students lose interest because their passions and dreams are not considered by the educational system.

Our students are demanding changes in the way we teach them and educational systems in many countries are under reform in an attempt to adapt to the new challenges this century poses basically in terms of technological and social changes. It is likely that in five or ten years what will be most valued will be skills such as innovation, creativity, emotional intelligence and the capacity to keep learning constantly. Processes change at such a high speed that the capacity to keep on learning, adapt to new situations and solve new problems will be essential to survive in the world of work. All this is forcing educational systems to review the contents and skills that should be taught, developed and reinforced.

Last year at AEXALEVI we carried out a Talent Show in which students from different courses could present their talents to other students. We were not sure whether students would be willing to participate or not, but as soon as teachers suggested the idea students of all ages, children and teenagers, were willing to take part in it. It was an open invitation in the sense that a wide variety of talents qualified for the show. There were students who brought their photographs, drawings and paintings (actually we learned that one of the students would exhibit her drawings at *Centro Cultural Recoleta* the following week). Other students played musical instruments, some of them performed their dancing skills, gymnastics, martial arts, and there was even a magic show. It was an enriching experience for everybody, an instance in which teachers and students were able to

interact and get to know each other at a different level. Of course, language was used in order for them to introduce themselves and their talents, explain their work and when they had started developing their talents. Learning was taking place at every moment, the focus was different since it was not centered on language, but it included the use of language at every stage of the process. Students had the chance to show and share their talents with their classmates and students from other courses.

It is a great challenge to reconstruct our notion of human capacity and rethink the principles on which we are educating our children. New tendencies are pointing at educating the "whole being". Technological advances are taking over many jobs around the globe and causing social changes due to new working conditions. Most experts think that in the future education should be oriented to focusing on those capacities that only human beings and their imaginations have, those inner capacities that could never be replaced by a robot: innovation, creativity, empathy, compassion, among others. There is a long way to go. We may not get to see such a world but our children and students will surely do and we have to prepare them for it. One thing is for sure: all our students have got talents and different voices. Many of us found our voice in teaching. It is one of

our jobs as educators to help our students discover their own.

Literature in the Multicultural Classroom

Paola Verando

Years ago, I used to work in a middle-class school in the CABA neighbourhood of Balvanera (more commonly known as Once). My group was a first year of a secondary school belonging to a Galician community. Therefore, many students descended from Galician (great)grandparents. Besides, given the characteristics of the neighbourhood, there were students coming from diverse ethnic groups: children with Chinese, Korean, Jewish, Bolivian, Venezuelan, Peruvian or Senegalese (grand)parents came together in the same classroom. Admiring that panorama, I challenged myself to work on multiculturality throughout the schoolyear.

Our first unit in the textbook consisted of a revision including vocabulary on countries and nationalities and the imperative mood. My initial idea to work on multiculturality and cover the whole contents was to work on students' family trees. But as I am a literature freak, then I remembered reading a poem by Benjamin Zephaniah (called "The British"), which was really a recipe that gave instructions on how to make British people. The recipe was full of different names from peoples all over the world, apart from containing many instances of imperative mood.

So below goes the tale (or plan) of what I did with my students in those very first ice-breaking classes:

First, we looked at the image accompanying the poem (the UK flag made up of different faces representing different ethnic groups). Students immediately recognised the flag and they tried to identify the ethnic groups that conformed it. We also worked on the

Union Jack (the real UK flag) and how it came into being so that students learned about the multicultural origin of the United Kingdom.

It was at this point that students reflected on the inclusion of those faces in this rendering of the Union Jack and they came to the conclusion that every country (even our own, which was actually one of my points) is a mixture of peoples.

In the next step, students were presented with some vocabulary on cooking. We concentrated on the following: *take, remove, settle, add, mix, blend, combine, turn up the heat, simmer, serve*. In order to teach them, we read different cooking recipes and then they wrote mini recipes to any dishes they were able to cook (the making of their own recipes was crucial to an activity we did some time later, so you may not want to exclude it).

Afterwards, I wrote the title of the poem on the board and I elicited from my students characteristics that described the British. The idea was to work on stereotypes and to see whether the poem could actually deconstruct them in order to shape up a new conception of what being British actually meant. Students produced the following characteristics: *punctual* (five-o-clock tea included), *white, polite, elegant, heavy drinkers* and *cold*, among others.

To contradict their stereotypical visions of British people, I showed them a picture of the author, a Rastafarian writer born in Birmingham to a Barbadian father and a Jamaican mother. They were really surprised that this writer was indeed British. Somehow, this picture clashed with their mental picture of what being a British writer entailed.

This was the moment at which we embarked on the reading of the poem *per se*. First, we read the clarifying note under the title, saying "serves 60 million". I tried to make my students think of what this phrase meant both literally and metaphorically. Then we moved on to the first stanza. Even though the students did not know all the names of the pre-Roman peoples and the Germanic tribes that invaded Britain after the fall of Rome, they could identify some cognates that helped them realise that this stanza referred to history (easily identifiable are Celts, Romans, French and Vikings).

The reading of the second stanza ensued. This part of the poem concentrates on immigration in the British Isles. After learning the vocabulary on cooking and identifying some nationalities, students could grasp the gist of the stanza: the British do not only descend from many peoples, but are still in the making, like we Argentinians are.

Requiring more introspection, the third stanza, the warning and the note made students understand the meaning of the poem: all ingredients are important in the making of the recipe. This was a climactic moment in the classroom. Their faces lit up as I told them that we could make a poem about us, Argentinians, by changing the names of the peoples or tribes. To this end, students sat down in groups and thought about their own recipes to make Argentinians. They included the nationalities of their own ancestors and they were allowed to use their cell phones in order to look these up. They also needed to search for the names of some of the natives that had inhabited our country before Spanish colonization.

It was only after this that I made a point of the imperative mood structure and the nationalities that appeared in students' textbooks.

In the subsequent classes, my students were so enthralled by Benjamin Zephaniah's work that I showed them a Youtube video of this poem, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZ1yYOAwvvo, and we worked on the way in which it was filmed: the food metaphor continued and speakers from different ethnic groups retold it. Students decided to make the videos for their own poems by using their cellphones. I must tell you that this activity was suggested by them. I actually wanted to go on with the syllabus, but as I thought there was authentic motivation and a real socially communicative purpose behind it, I let them produce their versions of the poem in film.

Conclusion

My original plan did not include such instances of reflection and, if I had followed the coursebook to the letter, my students would not have had the opportunity to experience tasks that required from them a bit more than filling in the blanks or matching pictures of actions/flags to their corresponding orders/countries. It was only after reading Myrian Casamassima's book *Planning as Narrative* that I understood that the plan had not failed because all the tasks in it were intended to be meaningful social events which students experienced.

Below goes the complete version of the poem:

The British (serves 60 million)

Take some Picts, Celts and Silures

And let them settle,

Then overrun them with Roman conquerors.

Remove the Romans after approximately 400 years

Add lots of Norman French to some

Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings, then stir vigorously.

Mix some hot Chileans, cool Jamaicans, Dominicans,

Trinidadians and Bajans with some Ethiopians, Chinese,

Vietnamese and Sudanese.

Then take a blend of Somalians, Sri Lankans, Nigerians

And Pakistanis,

Combine with some Guyanese

And turn up the heat.

Sprinkle some fresh Indians, Malaysians, Bosnians,

Iraqis and Bangladeshis together with some

Afghans, Spanish, Turkish, Kurdish, Japanese

And Palestinians

Then add to the melting pot.

Leave the ingredients to simmer.

As they mix and blend allow their languages to flourish

Binding them together with English.

Allow time to be cool.

Add some unity, understanding, and respect for the future,

Serve with justice

And enjoy.

Note: All the ingredients are equally important. Treating one ingredient better than another will leave a bitter unpleasant taste.

Warning: An unequal spread of justice will damage the people and cause pain. Give justice and equality to all.

Bibliography

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