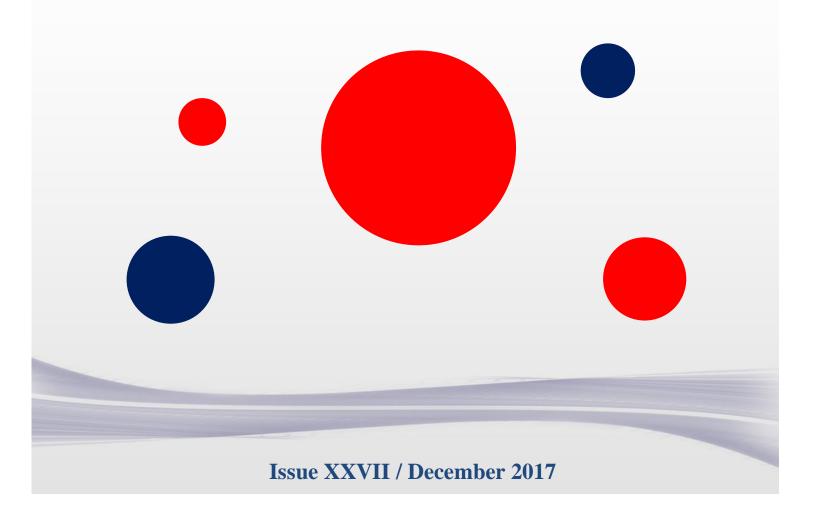


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AEXALEVIForum

Coordinator

Founded by Marta Moure & Myrian Casamassima

Mg. Myrian Casamassima

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Editor

Original name by Marta Moure

Trad. Gustavo Sevilla

AEXALEVIForum Team

Prof. Florencia Insua

Prof. Paola Verando

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Interview with Lic. Diana Ogando

By Paola Verando

e are delighted to publish this interview to Diana Ogando, who has recently been appointed *Directora General* with AEXALEVI. It is definitely a position of honour at such a prestigious institution that has been committed to the teaching of foreign languages, especially English, for 101 years.

AEXALEVI Forum

Let's get nostalgic. How long have you been a teacher at AEXALEVI? How did you first become involved with this institution?

Diana Ogando

It feels like I have known about *La Asociación* all my life. Ever since I started learning English I have been aware, in one way or another, of the name Lenguas Vivas and its alumni association. However, it was when I was a student at *El Lenguas* that I became more acquainted with the activities that were carried out there, especially through my teachers at the institute who were or had been teachers and curriculum developers at the association and shared their experiences with us in class at teachers' training college. In 1993,

when the association opened its brand new premises at Paraguay 1935, I learned they were looking for teachers for the afternoon courses and, naturally, I applied. I was interviewed by Liliana Luna, who offered me my first course at the association: 2nd Children. I couldn't be happier.

AEXALEVI Forum

When you crossed the AEXALEVI entrance doors for the first time, did you ever imagine you would lead the institution?

Diana Ogando

No, of course not. However, what I did feel was that the institute was going to play a very important part in my professional life. At this association, I have met and shared experiences with very dear colleagues, most of whom are now friends. Together we have been through a lot of different moments and situations and are now heading towards a new and promising stage.

AEXALEVI Forum

Remembering your teaching times at AEXALEVI, which groups did you use to teach? What were your strengths as a teacher? Did you examine students from other institutions? How did you see the examining process then?

Diana Ogando

In my 24 years working at AEXALEVI, I have been involved in very many different projects. As a teacher, I have taught most levels and courses. I remember my teaching experience with children as highly enriching and motivating. Teaching advanced levels and preparing students for international exams, *Advanced* in particular, was probably one of the most challenging tasks I faced as a very young professional. I have always been grateful to the institution for the many opportunities to develop my potential.

However, if I have to choose one of the most inspiring projects that have marked me as a teacher, that was my involvement in the portfolio assessment project back in 1995, an initiative brought to us by Liliana Luna and Viviana Pisani while doing their MA at NILE. I shared the design and planning of the portfolio assessment programme for 5th year with my colleague Cristina Garcia Lanoza, an endeavour which

was as demanding as rewarding. A real opportunity for professional development and personal growth.

AEXALEVI Forum

Speaking about your career at our institution, what made you take a move into a coordination position?

Diana Ogando

I did not decide to become a coordinator overnight, of course. My professional path widened gradually, through hard and committed work in different institutions, and, naturally through professional development. Since I graduated at *IES en Lenguas Vivas* I have never stopped studying. And, to be honest, I do not think I ever will.

We are living in fast-moving times and keeping updated will help us reflect and be creative in order to face the challenges ahead.

AEXALEVI Forum

And now, let us turn to your new post at AEXALEVI. First, let us congratulate you on this achievement. How do you think your experience as the Coordinator of the *Alumnos Libres* Department has influenced your decision to become the head of the institution?

Diana Ogando

I believe that promoting and leading the innovation process that the *Alumnos Libres* Department so successfully

underwent in the last six years has definitely proved a vital element for deciding to apply for this new position.

Working alongside Liliana Luna has also contributed to my decision.

Learning from and with Liliana and being able to share our vision and ideas has been a wonderful experience. My eternal gratitude to Liliana for her generosity and her trust.

AEXALEVI Forum

And last but definitely not least, how do you expect AEXALEVI will change under your administration? Are there any projects you would like to implement? Do you think technological advances will, in any way, impact on your future decisions? How do you visualize AEXALEVI in the next five years?

Diana Ogando

It is probably too early to say but, naturally, AEXALEVI is a dynamic institution which has been fulfilling its mission for 101 years already. And it will go on.

As always, our main concerns will be our AEXALEVI COURSES, the language courses offered for the community, which we will continue to offer; our AEXALEVI EXAMS, designed according to CEFR standards; and our PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT opportunities offered through the

Teachers' Centre and the AEXALEVI FORUM.

As to the future, in order to stay on course and keep up with technological advances, AEXALEVI will be launching new projects in keeping with its status as the leading institution it has always been. The AEXALEVI VIRTUAL PLATFORM will be officially launched for courses in 2018, which will bring multiple opportunities for blended learning and online teacher development.

AEXALEVI has been a leading institution in the field of teaching and assessment of languages since its foundation in 1916. The present AEXALEVI staff of teachers, alumni of our dear IES en Lenguas Vivas "J. R. Fernandez", is a team of highly committed professionals who reflect upon and revise our practices to keep up with the reality around us. New challenges lie ahead and at AEXALEVI we are ready to face up to them!

AEXALEVI Forum

We wish to thank you for this interview and we wish you a successful career as AEXALEVI's Directora General.

Stories from the Heart

The Challenge to Teach English in Prison

The aim of this article is to make visible what is not so visible to many people.



Prof. María del Rosario Baigorria

Asociación de Profesores de Inglés (API), San Nicolás.

Ith this idea in my heart, I go to a school called *Esperanza* twice a week. *Esperanza* school is situated in UP3 prison, a school in a context of confinement.

My name is María. I am a teacher. I teach English to prisoners. However, they are not prisoners for me - they are students. On Tuesdays, I teach English to women, and on Thursdays to men.

Our great enterprise as teachers is to teach them how to live outdoors; to make them believe that there is beauty and hope behind the tall dark walls.

With this role in mind, education becomes liberating, a space of freedom which is achieved by teachers supporting learners and relating to them; we, teachers, are their window to the sky!

Working in prison education is a great challenge, but not for the teacher as such - it is a great challenge for the heart. I deeply believe that if we learn to see life from the heart, we will have a different outlook. Many times we are very quick to judge others without knowing their lives, their origins; we only see their mistakes, their wrongdoings.

My students come from very poor and socially marginalized suburbs. From the moment they were born, they are at risk, and they suffer all kinds of necessities: hunger, illnesses, violence... to mention just a few. They are invisible to the state; they only become visible once they are in prison.

What makes me go to this school? Common good, the feeling of social justice, passion, creativity, love for my profession, love for human beings, commitment, a key component of the teacher's attitude.

How do I feel? Although I felt a bit afraid the first time I went inside, walking through long corridors and leaving locks and bars behind, after some time, I started to feel respected, loved, welcomed and protected. The students will be the first ones to protect you in case something happens. My students are always looking forward to seeing me, especially when I take pastries and sweets to the class! I always keep a positive and optimistic attitude; a smile is of great value, soft and sweet words, an open listening attitude.

I have autonomy to develop the syllabus, the lesson plans and the material. However, lesson planning has to respond to the fluctuating learner population, their mood, their interests, (*la calle*) the street= life outside, thoughts and worries about their families, their partners, their children, their friends, special celebrations like "Mother's day".

Activities must be meaningful, engaging and attractive at the same time, and very creative; I use a lot of games, such as dominoes or memory games. Male learners are excellent at playing guessing games as they are very good observers. Female learners are not very keen on games as they feel "losers", which is not a good sensation for them.

I make use of a "Faceboard" made of paper. We write comments, we post images and articles as if it were a real Facebook. We use pictures of "hands" to show if we like or dislike the post. Learners are not allowed to use the Internet. I have created a "gossip corner" for a local magazine. We write conversations as if they were interviewing famous people. We use toy microphones and cameras. I do not censor their productions and all the questions are allowed. Everything has to be different and attractive enough to make them feel that they are learning English as well as having a good time.

I do not go to *Esperanza* school for the paycheck - I go there because I want something different in my life. I want to help other people find hope. I am very satisfied with my job.

I do my job. I plant my small seeds. Thus, I feel that I can make the "invisible" visible to some people.



Thank you, María del Rosario!

The Ubiquitous "It"

Trad. Gustavo Sevilla



ne of the first words I remember having trouble explaining to my students when I started teaching many years ago was "it". I bet you have shared, or still share, my impression. To be frank, after so many years teaching, it continues to be one of those words to which I have to devote some extra time and effort for a successful explanation and an effective understanding.

Short and ineffable as it is, it is one of the most common words in the English language (notice I have already used it three times in only five lines, and the number has just risen to four!). According to Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Most_common_words_in_English, it ranks in the 11th position among the most frequent words in the language, but, unlike most other members of the list which tend to have a single function, "it" can be particularly versatile.

With children, our first approach to "it" usually leads us to define it as the pronoun used to refer to objects and animals. We then explain to our

students that it can also be used to speak about the time or the weather. We try to make them understand that there has to be a subject in English. Subjects cannot be tacit and sentences cannot be subjectless as in Spanish. However, the range of possible uses of "it" far exceeds simple sentences like It (the cat) sleeps on the sofa, It's one o'clock, or It was very hot yesterday.

I think it may be useful to classify the different uses of "it" for ease of reference, in case we need, for instance, to give a complete answer to mainly adult beginners and advanced students if they ever come to us with the apparently easy and innocent

question: What does "it" stand for? or Why is "it" used here? (I have mentioned adult beginners because they are particularly reluctant to accept that things in English very often do not work as they do in Spanish.)

Full pronoun

"It" can actually refer to "something", in which case it can be said to be a "personal" pronoun.

One of the best examples we can give of the possibility of this seemingly meaningless word to refer to something in existence is its use to name the supernatural monster in Stephen King's horror story. In this case, in Spanish we would probably have to resort to a different pronoun like "Eso" or to a noun phrase like "La cosa" or "La criatura" for "it" to have an adequate translation equivalent.

I remember reading many years ago a terrifying short story entitled "It" written by Theodore Sturgeon, an excerpt of which is inserted below. Used as if it were the "name" of the main character, the pronoun is repeated countless times but, unlike proper names, its brevity allows for it not to sound redundant, at the same time that it carries the intended mystery throughout.

It

THEODORE STURGEON

It walked in the woods.

It was never born. It existed. Under the pine needles the fires burn, deep and smokeless in the mould. In heat and in darkness and decay there is growth. There is life and there is growth. It grew, but it was not alive. It walked unbreathing through the woods, and thought and saw and was hideous and strong, and it was not born and it did not live. It grew and moved about without living.

Incredible how alluring such a brief word can be, especially as a one-word title, don't you think?

The referent of "it" need not be a specific thing or animal. Sometimes, "it" refers to something already mentioned in or implicit from the context (anaphoric or backward reference):

- It (the room, the air) is stuffy in here.
- **It** (the situation) will settle sooner or later.

Occasionally, reference can be forward or cataphoric, as in:

We all suspected what it was – a new crisis.

"It" can also refer – though rarely – to a place adjunct, for example:

 They sat right in front of the stage. It was where the noise was greatest.

It usually lacks the deictic force of this or that (except in a specific case I will mention towards the end of this article), as well as the gender of he or she, and this makes it a purely grammatical or functional word, perhaps the main one or the most distinctive one of its kind, to such a degree that it may be considered one of the hardest words to define or to describe in the whole language.

However, it appears everywhere and, when grammatically necessary, its absence can render any sentence utterly wrong. Below are different uses of "impersonal or dummy it" in which, rather than refer to something in existence and have a meaning of its own, it merely performs a grammatical

role and helps make the sentence linguistically acceptable.

Empty "it" to refer to the time and the weather

In this case, the subject – which is followed by a usually climatic predication – has no semantic content at all:

- It's snowing.
- It's getting dark.
- It's late.

"It" for sentence or clause reference

"It" can refer to a whole clause or sentence (not to an object, animal or place as mentioned before) either anaphorically or cataphorically. The referent seems to be a whole situation or event:

- Many students never improve. They get no advice and therefore they keep repeating the same mistakes. It's a terrible shame. (anaphoric reference)
- It never should have happened. She went out and left the baby unattended. (cataphoric reference)

Preparatory or anticipatory "it"

This is the usual name assigned to the *it* used to anticipate a logical subject or a real object, which are said to be extraposed, that is, removed from their normal position.

Dummy "it" is more visible and understandable when preceding extraposed subjects, as in:

- It's no use crying over spilt milk. (Crying over spilt milk is no use.)
- It seems of paramount importance to establish the rules beforehand. (To establish the rules beforehand seems of paramount importance.)
- It is widely believed that global warming is irreversible. (That global warming is irreversible is widely believed.)
- It doesn't matter what you do. (What you do does not matter.)

As shown by the examples above, extraposed subjects have to be infinitival, gerundial or clausal.

Extraposition is usually advisable only for stylistic reasons. However, in some constructions which only have the appearance of clausal extraposition, the non-extraposed version is not possible and extraposition is therefore obligatory:

 It seems that everything is fine. (We cannot say: *That everything is fine seems.)

Students usually find it more difficult to understand and use anticipatory "it" properly in the case of extraposed direct objects (DO), and mainly when there is no object complement (OC):

- See to it that everything is in order. ("that everything is in order" is the DO)
- We'd highly appreciate it if you could give us your support. ("if you could give us your support" can be interpreted as the DO of the sentence, though other parsings are equally possible.)

Apart from "appreciate", there are other verbs like *love*, *like*, *hate* that can also take anticipatory "it":

- I like **it** that you follow their advice.
- She loves **it** when I help her.

When there is an OC, we can explain that "it" is required to allow DO-OC inversion if the DO is an infinitival, gerundial or nominal clause:

- ?I find to read this book boring -> I find it boring to read this book.
- ?I find explaining this to young children hard -> I find it hard explaining this to young children.
- ?I find that you have such an opinion absurd -> I find it absurd that you have such an opinion.

Someone once asked on a forum if "it" had to be used before an adjectival

object complement when the object was a "that"-clause:

- I made clear that I was in favour of the proposal.
- I made public that I would not support his motion.
- 3. I made sure that everything was fine.

The conclusion we reached was that "it" sounds better when the adjectives undoubtedly refer to the object, as is the case with "clear" and "public". In the case of "making sure" (or "making certain"), the adjectives could be said to refer to the subject, and as a result "make" forms a more closely-knit lexical unit with "sure" and "certain", which accounts for the usual absence of "it" between "make" and these two adjectives. Thus, while it is very usual to find:

1.a. I made **it** clear that I was in favour of the proposal.

and

2.a. I made **it** public that I would not support his motion.

it is rather infrequent to find:

3.a. I made **it** sure that everything was fine.

Emphatic "it"

Unlike preparatory "it", which merely anticipates a subject or an object that for structural or stylistic reasons needs to appear later in the sentence, emphatic "it" gives prominence to a

component that is placed at the beginning of a cleft sentence for emphasis:

- It is your son (that) you should help, not your daughter.
- It is only yesterday that he discovered the truth.
- It is in the kitchen where servants are supposed to eat.

Identifying "it"

"it" can be used to introduce specifying predicates, that is, predicates that reveal the identity of an unknown subject.

- A: There's someone at the door. Who is **it**?
- B: It's the postman.

In this case, both the question and the answer can be interpreted as reduced cleft sentences:

- A: There's someone at the door. Who is it that is at the door?
- B: It's the postman that is at the door.

The referent need not be personal, as in:

- A: What's that noise?
- B: Never mind. It's only the children.

In these constructions, "it" can be the stress-reduced form of "that" and echo the deictic determiner in the question. We can say that, in this case, "it" carries a slightly deictic force:

- A: Who's that?
- B: **It** (the person over there) is my brother.

Well, thank you once again for taking the time to accompany me during this overview of one the most mysterious and tricky words in English. I hope you will share the same enthusiasm when you join me on my next grammatical tour of the secrets of the language.

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It Worked for Me

Mg. Myrian Casamassima



Methods Chair at Teacher Training College I.E.S Lenguas Vivas "J.R. Fernández"

t the time of teaching practice at Teacher Training College, trainees enjoy trying out new ideas in their classes. They do so in their search to find something that can work for their students, something that can motivate them and that can be useful for a certain goal. Trainees generally spend a long time thinking about tasks and techniques, and designing materials. As a teacher trainer, I learn a lot from my student teachers every year, and the teachers in the schools where we carry out our teaching practice are always grateful to benefit from fresh ideas as well. In this issue, our section "It Worked for Me" is dedicated to trainees and their creativity.

The Triangle

Florencia Pelegrini used the triangle, developed at the Teachers´ Centre, to help her elementary students make simple sentences in order to talk about the elements in a story. Thus, to describe the setting, she used "The wood cutter – lives – in the forest" for each vertex of the triangle so that her



students could produce "The wood cutter lives in the forest". As her learners began to recognize sentences to talk about the plot, the conflict and the resolution, she turned the task into a competition. She split her class into two groups and she had a representative of each go to the board to rearrange the three elements in a simple sentence by means of the triangle. The students loved it! It worked for Florencia!

The Flip Chart



Josefina de Vedia took colour pages, markers and world maps to her class for her students to make a flip chart to describe the setting in place of the stories they were working on. The flipchart consisted of several categories: language spoken, fun facts, landscape, typical weather, location on the map. Each category was written on a colour page of a different size so that they could be later compiled in the flip chart. Josefina's students got enthusiastic about their flip charts and they googled for extra information to complete them. It worked for Josefina!

The Mind Map

Julieta Marcolla worked on art with her students. They studied different movements such as pop art, cubism and impressionism. Julieta asked her students to work in groups and to summarize the main characteristics of each movement in a mind map. But here comes her innovation: she asked them to use the type of art that they had to synthesize. Thus, the mind map about pop art looked pop-art, the mind map for cubism looked cubist, the mind map for impressionism look impressionistic. Her students were able to experience the characteristics of the movements by actually applying some of them to their mind maps. It worked for Julieta!





The Stencil





María de los Ángeles Bustos asked her students to produce a very creative *stencil*. After having seen adjectives to describe personality, her students were asked to decorate the shape of a head printed on a sheet of paper. They were able to decorate the head in any way they wished.

Then, on a transparent sheet, they had to answer the question "Who am I?" by writing sentences about themselves, mostly using the personality adjectives that they had learnt. Once completed, the transparent sheet was placed on top of the other page to produce a lovely work of art. It worked for María de los Ángeles

The Strings



Verónica Montagna tried out a way of organizing her students in pairs so that they would not always be working with the same classmates. She got pieces of string of the same length and held them from the middle, leaving both ends free at both sides. She gave half her learners a slip of paper with the title of one of the stories they had been working on. She gave the other half a piece of paper with an element of a story: conflict, resolution, characters, setting in place and time. She asked the first group to stand on her right and the second group to stand on her left. As she was holding the strings from the middle, each student had to seize the end of a piece of string as it can be seen in the photo. Next, she held her arm up in the air and let go, with each student

finding himself or herself holding a piece of string by one end and a classmate holding it by the other. Thus, pairs were organized and they had to sit together to look at the slips of paper they had been given. One student had the title of a story and the other had an element of a story. Therefore, they had to discuss that element for that story. Verónica found that this technique helped her to have her students stand up and mingle as they got together to solve the task. It worked for Verónica!

The Revision Board Game



Mercedes Bustos designed a board game to help her students revise for the test. They had worked on a unit about music so she made a board game in the shape of a sol clef. The students had to roll a dice. If they fell on a yellow square, they had to pick a yellow card to answer a question about vocabulary. If they fell on an orange square, they

had to pick an orange card to answer a question about grammar. If they did not answer correctly, they had to stay on the same square, answering that type of questions until they got a right answer. Like in any board game, they could move forward if they fell on squares that allowed them to do so -in this case, the ones with the music award symbol. But here comes the best part: if they fell on a square with the picture of a broken guitar, they had to choose which group would miss a turn. This significantly increased the excitement during the competition. It worked for Mercedes!

The Concertina

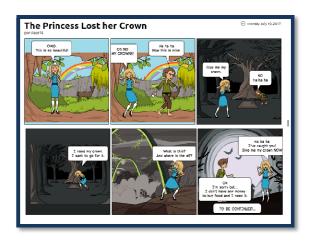


Andrea Della Nina made long concertinas by sticking sheets of paper, one to the next, on which she had pasted the pictures of a story in chronological order. In groups, her students had to spot the different parts of the plot in the concertina: the exposition, the rising action, the climax, the falling action and the resolution. Andrea designed this task on the basis of the stories that they had worked on in class. Next, the students had to intervene in the pictures of the concertina by drawing elements that were not originally in the story and that would make the story more modern. Andrea wanted to build up the

concept of what it means to reimagine a story. The students had to colour the elements that they had drawn. Then, they wrote their new versions of the story. The concertina proved to be a very creative tool. It worked for Andrea!

The Comic Strips





Sabrina Baqueiro taught her students to use *Pixton*, a tool to generate online comic strips. In groups, the children had to create a story and, with *Pixton*, they were able to produce their own comic strips. They chose the backgrounds,

the characters and the props, and added speech bubbles like in the sample above. The students were very enthusiastic about using this tool. It worked for Sabrina!

The T-shirts



María Lascano cut out T-shirts and took them to her class the last day of her teaching practice spell. At the time of evaluation, she asked her students to reflect on what they had learnt - what new things they had on, metaphorically speaking. They had to write down their ideas on the T-shirts, which were displayed for the group's final reflection and then taken home. It worked for María!

The Three-Picture Game

Elisa Dominguez designed this task for her students to recognize elements in classic stories. Three elements belonging to the same story had to be spotted out of the ones on the poster.

As part of the task, the class learnt some vocabulary that was necessary to talk about the elements and the stories. The students got really engaged in trying to decipher which stories were behind the pictures. It worked for Elisa!



s we announced at the beginning of this section, we have seen fresh ideas of tasks and techniques that have worked for these trainees in their classrooms. Sometimes, a technique may not be novel, but what makes it original is the way in which a teacher decides to put it into action for a group of students in particular. It is comparable to cooking a frequent dish. There is surely a lot of familiarity with the ingredients and the step-by-step procedure. However cliché the dish may have become, a small strategic change may render something unique. This is exactly what happens in our classes. Reading about tasks and techniques as they have been applied by real teachers in real classrooms always inspires us all to keep thinking about that little twist that may make a world of a difference so that something can work for us too.

Special thanks to the trainees in the Methods Chair for having contributed their ideas and materials.

Connected Learning: Engaging Young Learners

Prof. Florencia Insua



n December 1st 1862 Abraham Lincoln in his 2nd Annual Message to the US Congress wrote: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves and then we shall save our country." Teachers, students, parents and experts in education are aware of the complexity of teaching in a world of constant change. Our educational system has been shaped to meet the circumstances of the past century, not this century. Then, every education system around the world is under a process of reform, which gives rise to discussion and controversy about the direction formal education should take. There seems to be agreement, though, on the challenges of teaching 21st century learners: the impact of hyperconnectivity, the abundance of information, the influence of local needs and the difficulty of engaging students, among others.

One of the challenges the education system has is finding the way in which we can best support learners in an era of absolute abundance in terms of access to information and social communication. In her presentation at the 8th Annual 21st Century Learning Conference held in Hong Kong in February 2016, Mimi Ito, anthropologist and professor at the University Of California, makes reference to the fact that our educational institutions were founded on the basis of a world with much less information. She states that

our education system was designed for a world where access to information and expertise require a different set-up and institution configuration. However, our young learners are learning in an era of abundant connectivity, an era when everything seems to be at their fingertips and at click distance: connection to information, connection to their peers and connection to experts and expertise.

It is a common scene in urban areas to see people of all ages interacting with either mobile phones or tablets in buses, subways, trains, restaurants, parks, the street, the airport, schools, and almost everywhere. People are verv concerned about "being connected" to their devices and any problem in the communication system generates certain degree discomfort. The Merriam Webster online dictionary defines connectivity as "the quality or state of being connected or connective". Cambridge online dictionary provides another meaning of connectivity related to "the ability of a computer, program, device or system to connect with one or more others". The word connective comes from the Latin word connexive, which means "serving to unite or join". Very frequently people in social meetings reflect on the impact technology on the way we communicate with our family, friends and colleagues and it is hardly objectionable that at present face-toface interaction coexists with other forms of interaction through screen mediation, which is the one that is believed to be preferred by teenagers and young adults. It is in this context that Connected Learning becomes an opportunity to engage students and offer them a possibility to learn in a different way. Connected Learning consists in helping students pursue a personal interest with the help of peers, mentors and caring adults in order to provide students with opportunities to explore their interests and discover their talents. Connected Learning is supported by the Connected Learning Alliance coordinated at the Digital Media and Learning Research Hub of the University of California Humanities Research Institute. It is coordinated by the John D. and Catherina T. Mac Arthur Foundation as part of its Digital Media and Learning Initiative. Their mission is based on the idea that traditional education is failing to engage students as they enter high school and college. Many kids and teenagers seem to find a contact to their interests in outof-school learning activities. But whereas some families have the possibility to offer their children out-ofschool learning and foster children's potential, less privileged kids may be deprived of these opportunities. Actually, it is in those out-of-school experiences in athletics, art or science when they find their first opportunities to feel they are making a genuine contribution, when they feel committed and recognized. Connected Learning begins with students' self-interests, and adds academic-oriented purposes to those interests in order to guide through iournev students а exploration supported by peers, mentors, teachers and members of the community, thus making learning meaningful and relevant. Connected Learning is based on three main principles: it is interest-powered. academically oriented and peersupported. It is production-centered because students are encouraged to produce, create and experiment. They are also expected to find people who share their interests and passions. It is openly networked because it links learning at school, home and the community considering learning goals are best achieved when they are reinforced and supported in multiple settings.

Many questions may come to our mind when we read about Connected Learning: How does it work in practice? Is it complex to implement? Does all learning need to be Connected Learning?

Meet Paula

When Paula was eleven years old, her parents decided that the English she was being taught at school was not enough and decided to send her to an English Language School. At first she was a typical pre-adolescent who did not more than what she was required to do. She did her homework and moderately participated in class. When they were working on a unit about food, her teacher had the idea of organizing a food fair for the rest of the institution, in which every group/pair would have to cook something, bring it to the fair, design a mini stand and give a short presentation on the food exhibited. Paula had been diagnosed with the celiac condition a year before and she had been asked to make many changes in her diet. The teacher gave Paula's group a special assignment and told them that they should bring "the most delicious food people with the celiac condition can eat". Obviously Paula would lead the assignment. Paula went back home, told her mom about the assignment and began to do some research on the Internet. Paula and her group had to cook something delicious but simple enough for them to make and explain in English. Her group saw some videos on YouTube and did research on websites about recipes for people with Paula's condition. Paula's mom helped them buy the ingredients and the shop assistant of the store where they buy things for Paula was told about the assignment. The shop assistant gave Paula and her group some advice. The following week Paula and her group went to the food fair with a menu prepared. They cooked some bread in the bread maker Paula had at home with a sauce made with avocado. Then they cooked pizza and chocolate

brownies that people with the celiac condition can eat. Their stand was a success and the impact of the assignment on Paula extended the scope of the English class objectives. We may consider that this assignment could be part of a Connected Learning experience. If we revise the principles of Connected Learning and relate them to Paula's experience, we can easily conclude that the assignment was connected to the student's interest and concerns and was, therefore, interestpowered. There was an academically oriented goal related to the organization of a food fair, in which the students would design a stand, cook and give a mini presentation of the food they would bring. Lastly, there was support from her peers, the teacher, Paula's mom and the shop assistant at the store. Paula's group also got support from the videos on YouTube and the research done on the Internet. There is creativity and production involved since Paula's group had to create the menu, cook and design the stand to exhibit their work. The stand was open to other students and teachers at the Language School. The result was positive in terms having a memorable learning experience with a high degree of autonomy, strongly oriented to the students' interests and connected to the students' everyday life, in which they learned a lot of vocabulary related to food and the celiac condition, working with the support of peers, family, the teacher and technological resources.

Connected Learning takes into consideration the relevance of personal interest, local needs, and social and cultural aspects. The term "connected" in Connected Learning is about human connection. It does not necessarily require the use of technology, but we must admit that digital and networked

technologies expand the opportunities to do research and keep in touch with people in remote places, making learning more accessible to However, Mimi Ito makes a point of the fact that not all learning has to be Connected Learning. There should be a space in which students learn in a context that is strongly associated with their interests and needs, but still there could be moments in the classroom for students to learn something that may not be so much in keeping with their interests and which require a different format. Mimi Ito says that "the secret sauce about Connected Learning is that a little bit goes a long way and what seems to be at the margins of what you are doing as an educator is lifechanging for a kid."

It is clear that the education system needs to motivate teachers to create the conditions for meaningful learning experiences, which provide students with the possibility to develop their autonomy, to explore their interests, to lead, to negotiate, to solve problems, to innovate, to create and to believe in themselves. In world а hyperconnectivity, it is absolutely necessary to plan tasks to help students connect to their talents, passions and dreams.

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Songs

and their Literary Value

Prof. Paola Verando



Fact #1: We ESL teachers are all fond of using songs in the classroom because of their potential to aid retention of a structure by repeating a catchy chorus.

Fact # 2: All of us use songs chosen by us (depending on the structure the students are seeing) as a way of practising language by means of a set of closed questions like gap-filling, ordering, matching, error correction, multiple choice or replacement of images with words, substitution of (near) synonyms or antonyms.

Fact # 3: Most of us work on the meaning of the song, at least the outer one, the one that is evident through skimming a song.

Fact # 4: Most of us would like to have further time to read literary texts in the classroom, but we are not able to do it because of time constraints.

aking the four aforementioned facts into consideration, this article will aim at helping ESL teachers to kill three birds with a stone. We will explore the use of songs in the classroom as a way not only of aiding grammatical structure retention but of making students contribute to the classroom curriculum and, most importantly, we will exploit songs (and, if possible, their music videos) as the superb literary genre they are. In order to do the latter, we will refer to different literary concepts belonging to a range of literary theories, namely Postmodernism, Structuralism, Disability Studies, Environmental Studies, Gender Studies, Postcolonialism or Intercultural Analysis, Adaptation Theory, Postmodernism and New Historicism.

So as to choose a song democratically and exploit its literary value, we must go through different stages:

Stage 1

Ask your students to write the names of their favourite songs or bands in English on a piece of paper and collect them to take them home.

Stage 2

At home, count how many students voted for each song and keep a record of them, listing them by number of votes. For instance, in my 12-year-old students' list, the top of the chart was occupied by "Radioactive" by Imagine Dragons with 11 likes and was tightly followed by Justin Bieber's "Sorry" with 9 likes.

Stage 3

Let students know about the Top of the Pops chart and start by dealing with the song that received the largest/lowest number of likes first (this can be done in any way, but bear in mind that if you start with the largest number of likes, when you reach the song with the lowest number, the interest in the activity will probably wane). You can even make a poster showing the most frequently chosen songs in order for students to keep track of the chart and to know which song will be seen next in class.

Stage 4

Google as much information about the chosen songs as you can:

- a) Are they covers and, if so, which was the original song?
- b) Has it ever been covered? Who by?
- c) Is it a mash-up of other songs?

- d) Does it have a video clip?
- e) Has it ever been part of the soundtrack of a film?
- f) How did it come into being?
- g) What was the critical reception like?
- h) Who wrote it? Under what circumstances?
- i) Is there anything interesting about its performer(s) that you would like your students to know about?

All these pieces of information will prove really useful when preparing the class activities.

Stage 5

Prepare the class activities following the criteria below:

(NOTE: The following activities are based on Imagine Dragons' Radioactive)

1) Working with vocabulary (Pre listening task)

In order to start exploiting a song as literature, we could start by providing students with a list of words that appear in the song (new words- I explain them at that moment and give students a task to complete- and words they already know) and ask them to come up with predictions about what the song may be about. I strongly recommend including verbs in this list. They can even make up a mini story using the words (depending on the students' level).

My vocabulary list for this song was: wake up, ash, dust, wipe, brow, sweat,

rust, breathe, chemical, shape up, check out, apocalypse, system, radioactive, raise, flag, don, revolution, fit, sun, and deep.

2) Working with grammatical structures (pre- listening and while-listening activities)

This song is quite simple, consisting mainly of instances of present simple and continuous and only one instance of present perfect in the bridgeⁱ. The lyrics are as follows:

I'm waking up to ash and dust
I wipe my brow and sweat my rust
I'm breathing in the chemicals
I'm breaking in and shaping up
Then checking out on the prison bus

I'm waking up

This is it, the apocalypse

I feel it in my bones

Enough to make my systems grow

Welcome to the new age

To the new age

Welcome to the new age

To the new age

I'm radioactive

Radioactive

I raise my flag and don my clothes

It's a revolution I suppose

We're painted red to fit right in

I'm breaking in and shaping up

Then checking out on the prison bus

This is it, the apocalypse

All systems go

Sun hasn't died

Deep in my bones

Straight from inside

Before I started working on this song per se, I asked students to provide the ING form of the verbs on the list in order to remember the rule. Then, I used the song as an exercise on tenses (present simple/ present continuous) to be completed as they listened to the song.

3) Post listening: Reading comprehension

You may go about the lyrics together and, after each stanza, students can be asked about the meaning of that part of the song. For instance, after the first stanza, we can ask our students: "Who tells the story? Where is this person? How does he/she feel?"

This is the moment in which we can start analysing the song in the light of different literary theories without our students noticing it. This song in particular may be said to have some connection with the powerlessness of fighting for someone else's interests. and thus could be analysed from a New perspective. Historicist Though "Imagine Dragons" have denied the relations conscious intertextual between the Russian Revolution and their piece, they admit that it sounds like an anthem against the vices of an antidemocratic society. Even so, as I read it for the first time, I could not help but think of the Chernobyl disaster. This song is juicy and could be exploited in the light of Environmental (because of the high degree of radioactive pollution in Ukraine) and Disability Studies (considering the genetic mutations that were generated by the accident) too. Do encourage your students to read songs in this light since, according to Reader Response Theory, there are as many interpretations of a piece of work as there are readers (Iser, 1972ii).

Working with students' various readings of a song could be done by asking them to substantiate their interpretations in different manners: producing a picture showing the most shocking part of the song, coming up with a comic strip following the storyline in the song, providing a fictitious dialogue between the narrator and someone else, acting out a news flash, etc.

4) Watching the video clip as an adaptation:

This song has a video clip. Many songs are not adapted into video format so this activity would be impossible in those cases.

Following Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006)ⁱⁱⁱ, adaptation is similar to translation in the sense that a code is translated or adapted into another one, but the meaning must stay intact. In this case, the audio verbal source is translated into an audio visual verbal one.

To work on adaptation, students can be asked to watch the video adaptation of the song and then express whether they think the video reflects the

sentiment of the original song and how: is it about powerlessness? Are there any instances of tyranny? Is there a revolution or change somehow?

Video clips usually follow a storyline, so a structural analysis of its narrative structure could also be possible: where does the introduction start and finish? What is the conflict? Which is the antagonistic force? Which is the climax? Where does the denouement begin? How does the video finish?

This video clip in particular can be analysed as an intertext with fairy tales, as the opening scene shows a fearful hooded girl carrying a basket and walking through some woods (somewhat like Little Red Riding Hood). Therefore, students could compare this opening scene to scenes in films or cartoons showing Little Red Riding Hood in the woods. Regarding Gender Studies, an analysis of the hooded girl as the saviour of the members of the band (all male) may also prove to be fruitful to analyse female empowerment.

Again, this video opens up a new scenario: illegal fights between innocent "animals" (they are actually stuffed animals in the video). You could have students working on this topic too, considering all instances of animal cruelty, such as cosmetic tests or bullfighting. An intercultural light may also come in handy since bullfighting and illegal animal fights are usually associated with different cultures.

What is probably objectionable about this video clip is that the gamblers and the man that runs the bets for the illegal fights look Latin American. This can spark some discussion about stereotypes of other peoples or ethnias, in the light of Postcolonial Theory.

5) Extras:

These will vary according to the song of your choice.

A) Intertextuality

Through parody: "Radioactive" has been parodied by Weird Al Yancovich in his song "Inactive". The parody exploits the life of an obese young adult who has transformed into a couch potato. The song is jolly, but is very critical of a reality which is becoming starker and starker around the world. So, students could also work on the importance of sport and a healthy diet. The song does not have an official video clip though there is an unofficial version that students could watch and analyse as an adaptation.

Through covers: This song in particular has been recorded by a handful of performers, other namely violinist Lindsev Stirling and the band Pentatonix. You could ask students to compare adaptations and to express their views. Again, you could ask whether the sentiment is kept in the adaptation. The inclusion of a violin could also be exploited. Violins are usually associated with romance, misery and tension if played at a faster speed.

Through mash-up: Though it is not the case of "Radioactive", there are some songs which contain parts of other songs in their choruses. For instance, JLo's "On the Floor" contains the melody of "Llorando se fue," a Bolivian saya which was turned into the famous "Lambada" in the 1990s. Students could analyse all three music styles: reggaeton, saya and lambada, and explore them in groups in order to work on interculturality.

Through "Writing Back": Again, no song "writes back" to Imagine Dragons' hit. However, there are some songs which are dialogues between one another. Take "Oh Neil", by Carole King, which responds to "Oh Carol", by Neil Sedaka. Or John Lennon's "How do you Sleep?", which writes back to Paul Mc Cartney's "Too Many People".

B) Context of Production

The context of production refers to the situation in which the song was produced. The band has never revealed much about how the song "Radioactive" came into being, so this point cannot be well exploited with this song. However, there are plenty of songs that do have a history behind. Take Nirvana's "Smells like Teen Spirit". The story goes that the band's leader Kurt Cobain had a girlfriend who used a deodorant called "Teen Spirit". He had probably been making out with her when a friend told him that he stank of her, so he smelled like "Teen Spirit". Kurt, who was rebellious and had talked to his friend before about revolution and change, understood that his friend meant he sounded like an adolescent and kept the phrase for his next song.

The historical context of production also plays a crucial role in the analysis of the song. Take Michael Jackson's "We are the World" and famine in Africa in the 1980s.

C) Context of Reception

This refers to the situation in which the song was received by critics, fans and non-fans: whether it was well acclaimed or a total flop and why people reacted to it in different ways.

D) The Song's Narrative Structure

Ask students to identify the climax of the song in question, i.e. the highest note(s) with the highest tension in the piece. Why is the climax placed there? What happened before? How is the tension in the conflict marked? Is there an introduction? How does the song end? Is there a denouement or does it end in *media res*, in the middle of the conflict?

E) Literary Devices

Why not analyse metaphors, similes or symbolism with students? They are usually trained to find these devices in Spanish. Try not to select too many for them to analyse. One instance in our sample song is *I sweat my rust*. Why does this persona refer to himself as having rust and being able to sweat it? This is both a metaphor and an oxymoron. People do not rust, but they sweat.

To sum up, it is vital to take at least one of the threads suggested above in order to exploit a song's literary value. Otherwise, the use of songs in the classroom will be just restricted to text and to grammar practice. Try one or some of these activities! You will not regret it!

A song consists of stanzas, like poems, a chorus which is repeated after several stanzas and may include a bridge, which is a part of the song which does not follow the melody of the stanza or the chorus, a different part which is usually included towards the end of the piece.

ii Pope, R. (1998) *The English Studies Book.* Routledge: London.

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