



La Asociación

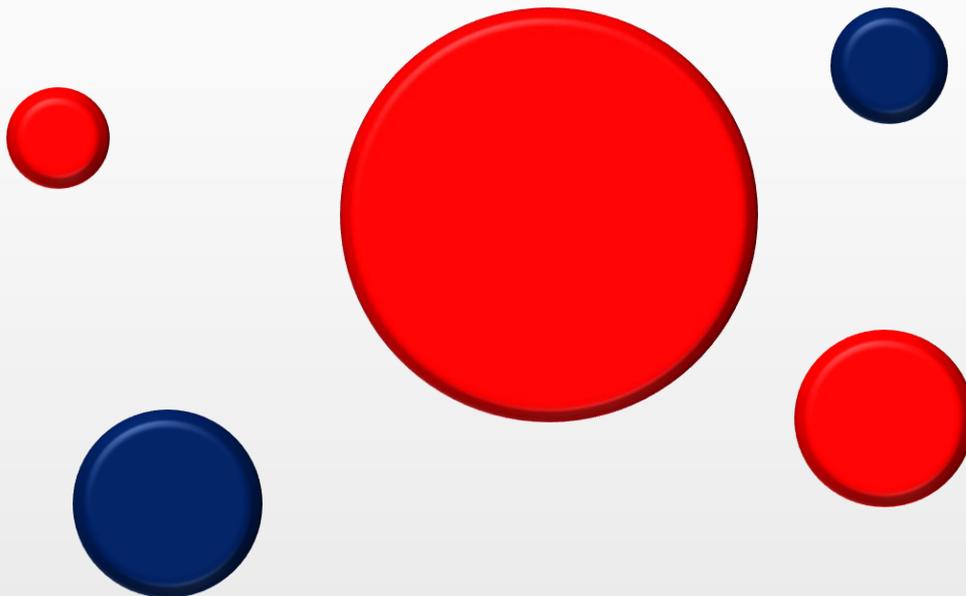
Ex Alumnos del Profesorado en Lenguas Vivas

“Juan R. Fernández”

National Exams, International Standards

Teachers' Centre

AEXALEVI *Forum*



Issue XXXV / July 2021

www.aexalevi.org.ar

Autoridades

Directora General

Lic. Diana Ogando

Comisión Directiva

Presidente

Silvia López Thomas de Ripoll

Vicepresidente

Liliana Luna

Secretaria

Magdalena Barañao

Prosecretaria

Paula López Cano

Tesorera

Amalia Díaz

Protesorera

Gilberta Buckley |

1 Vocal Titular

Graciela Morrow

2 Vocal Titular

María Alicia Cortal de Antuña

1 Vocal Suplente

Miriam Bogossian

2 Vocal Suplente

Adriana Bakrokar

3 Vocal Titular

Elena Capellini de Camuyrano

4 Vocal Titular

Elida Spinetto de Medone

3 Vocal Suplente

Graciela Gómez Kukawca

4 Vocal Suplente

Silvia Cuschnijr de Fairman

AEXALEVI Forum

Founded by Marta Moure & Myrian Casamassima

April 2009

Original name by Marta Moure

Coordinator

Marte, Myrian Casamassima

Editor

Trad. Gustavo Sevilla

Contents

Editorial	4
Interview with Paula López Cano	6
Paula López Cano, on behalf of AEXALEVI's Committee, talks about AEXALEVI's foundation days and present times.	
Simple Tips to Storytell on Zoom	9
Fabiana Parano gives us tips for successful storytelling.	
An Example of the Lexical Approach to Learning the Language	11
Gustavo Sevilla tells us about his experience with a lexical approach to teaching adults.	
It Worked For Me	15
Here is a special section on useful tools that have worked for teachers in their lessons. With contributions from the AEXALEVI community and I.E.S. Lenguas Vivas "J.R. Fernández".	
Stories from the Heart	21
María Eugenia Uria shares with us a moving story about her own experience as a learner and as a teacher.	
On Second Thoughts	22
Myrian Casamassima reflects on some frequent teaching practices.	

Editorial

This is a celebration issue. AEXALEVI has turned 105 years old! We celebrate this special occasion with an interview: Paula López Cano, member of AEXALEVI's Committee, will take us on a tour from the days of the foundation to present times. We would like to thank Diana Ogando, AEXALEVI's *Directora General*, for her contributions to the interview.



Memories of AEXALEVI's 100th Anniversary in 2016. On the right, Paula López Cano, Diana Ogando, Myrian Casamassima and Liliana Luna.

Fabiana Parano joins us to celebrate! In this issue, she reveals some secrets for successful storytelling on Zoom.

There is no doubt that the pandemic continues to pose challenging situations for us in all areas of our lives. This is why in this issue, we have included a special section on *It Worked For Me*, with contributions from teachers at

AEXALEVI and its community of Member Institutions as well as from students teachers from Teacher Training College, I.E.S. Lenguas Vivas "Juan Ramón Fernández". We wish to thank all of them for sharing with us some of the tools that have worked for them with their students.

With Gustavo Sevilla, we will explore how to lexicalise our approach to teaching adults. We will take a break with María Eugenia Uria and her lovely Story from the Heart. We will round off the issue with some ideas that I have written as conclusions from what I have observed as a teacher trainer since the pandemic started.

The AEXALEVI community is at the heart of this issue and it could not have

been otherwise on such a special occasion.

Many happy returns, AEXALEVI!

Myrian Casamassima

AEXALEVI *Forum* Coordinator



Members of AEXALEVI's Committee.



An Interview with

Paula López Cano



Here is Paula López Cano, on behalf of AEXALEVI's Committee, on the occasion of AEXALEVI's 105th Anniversary.

AEXALEVI Forum

This year AEXALEVI is 105 years old. What was the spirit of the founding graduates? Is it still alive?

Paula López Cano

Our founders were driven by a strong sense of mission. They believed in making the teaching and learning of foreign languages widely available in our city and country. They were committed to the highest standards of scholarship and were determined to foster a spirit of union and cooperation among new graduates as they became involved in the organization of academic activities. Our pursuit of excellence has remained the hallmark of our association. This enterprising spirit is very much alive and

continues to nurture our practices as we evolve to meet the challenges of our fast-changing world.

AEXALEVI Forum

How do AEXALEVI exams contribute to raising the standards of English language learning and teaching in Argentina?

Paula López Cano

Our syllabi are designed to meet the learning needs of our students from early childhood to young adulthood and beyond. A thorough, wide-ranging analysis of learning goals and processes is at the root of our test development. This ensures that our exams are tailored to assess the performance of students in

ways that can provide accurate information about their levels of communicative competence. Exam training within our framework helps chart a learning path which will channel and scaffold the learning trajectories of students at different stages, with due attention to cognitive and developmental needs. As milestones on the road to language proficiency, our exams yield evidence of progress and enhance our students' sense of achievement. By setting high standards, our exams inspire students' best performance.

AEXALEVI Forum

How has AEXALEVI adapted to present times to make national exams still possible during the pandemic?

Paula López Cano

By now, it goes without saying that the pandemic has forced us to explore entirely new ways of reaching our students. At AEXALEVI, we rose to this unprecedented challenge by moving our exams online. Our expertise, creativity and energy were geared toward crafting an online exam environment which would meet high standards of quality and reliability. We felt duty bound to provide our community of learners and teachers with a high-quality online exam to certify their progress and enable them to continue their learning journey. This entailed a painstaking effort to focus on every single stage of the exam process

from enrolment to feedback with a view to ensuring fairness in the assessment situation.

We truly believe our team at AEXALEVI did amazing work in record time to roll out synchronous online exams, which certainly match our traditional in-person exam sessions.

AEXALEVI Forum

How large is the AEXALEVI community across our country?

Paula López Cano

AEXALEVI offers opportunities for assessment to over 8,000 students all over the country, and we are constantly growing. AEXALEVI always strives to create new developments to meet the challenges our community of learners is to face in this ever-changing world. This online scenario is no exception – we are eager to reach all students willing to take an exam and receive the certification of proficiency in English they need.

AEXALEVI Forum

How has AEXALEVI helped widen access to English and broadened educational opportunities?

Paula López Cano

From the very beginning, AEXALEVI founding members aimed at reaching more students. The early development of our exams and the network of teachers, schools and institutes who use

our syllabi and prepare students to take our exams have enabled thousands of people to monitor their progress. We have worked at expanding the reach of our activities, serving communities all over the country and making continuous professional development central to our task. Our online campus and its wealth of resources provides further evidence of our commitment to meet the increasing demand for educational opportunities in English language learning.

AEXALEVI Forum

What is AEXALEVI's message to teachers and schools all over Argentina who are committed to high standards in English language teaching?

Paula López Cano

We definitely want to encourage our learning community to persevere in their efforts to invest in their language skills. Language abilities are the key to

professional and academic advancement in our globalized world. All manner of communicational resources will become increasingly necessary as our ways of engaging with different societies and cultures change in their scope and nature through technological innovation. We will remain relevant and connected in this fast-changing environment if we sustain our commitment to education. We at AEXALEVI will keep at the forefront of leadership in the teaching and assessment of foreign languages as we have been doing in our long history and will support students in their quest for educational achievement.

AEXALEVI Forum

Thank you, Paula!

Cheers, AEXALEVI!

Simple Tips to Story-tell on Zoom



Prof. Fabiana Parano

English teacher & professional story-teller

As one of the oldest and most powerful forms of art, not only prior to technology but also to printing and even to writing, Storytelling implies telling a story with your body and voice, with no books in your hands. This seems to be a great challenge for virtual classes in which we often tend to rely on pictures and visual aids of all sorts.

There are certain practical tips that may help you out:

Choose simple vocabulary. Try and use every day oral language, avoiding wordy, sophisticated sentences. Even in on-site storytelling performances, the storyteller should convert and recreate the text, moving away from literature in order to reach orature. This is a Storytelling pre-requisite that seems quite aligned with Zoom, which at the same time, needs to handle shorter periods of time than face-to-face situations to keep attention and motivation high. To storytell on video

conferences, it is important to be linguistically swift, concrete and to the point. To this end, I often recommend to avoid descriptions and mental processes and to focus mainly on the sequence of actions in the story.

Trust the power of body language and work on it. Avoid placing yourself too close to the monitor. I suggest you sit in the middle of the chair, displaying your torso to your listeners. Bear in mind that the chest is a strong body-marker of

emotions; so, let's manage it for storytelling purposes! The narrator can embody characters by moving forwards, backwards, up or down to indicate diverse feelings:

- Forwards: anger, aggression, need for power, etc.
- Backwards: fear, submission, etc.
- Up: happiness, pride, love, etc.
- Down: sadness, pain, etc.



Work on pauses and use of silence.

Avoid rushing over the lines. Make an audience-oriented use of silence, instead. It is advisable to produce a significant pause before telling the most important events in the tale. I usually suggest a primary pause before certain specific moments in the oral storyline. How long should this pause be? Some storytellers advise counting silently up to five before crucial items, such as:

- The climax
- Key facts that build up the peak of tension
- The last sentence
- The slot between the title and the first sentence.

And... make sure you mute your listeners' mikes during the tale!

There are no recipes for art, of course. However, the tips above have proved to work fantastically well even with beginner story-tellers. So... Why not give them a try?

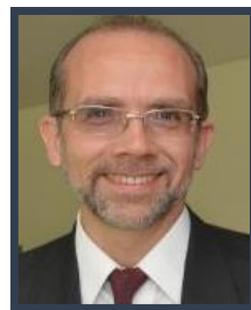
Thank you, Fabiana for your tips!

Do not miss Fabiana Parano's workshops to learn more about storytelling!

<https://shortest.link/mlq>



An Example of the Lexical Approach to Learning the Language



Trad. Gustavo Sevilla

In these times of forced isolation, some mainly adult students have decided to go for individual lessons. Once we have assessed the level of the student, there are usually no restrictions as to how to approach teaching, especially in the case of intermediate to advanced levels. In this context where there is no syllabus to complete, we may think we are free to teach anything, as if there were no rules to stick to, but there is one principle that is of essence: we have to focus on the student's interests and needs. This involves looking for materials that will arouse our student's attention as well as challenge their linguistic competences.

I will present to you the case of "S" (as in psychology, I have to keep his anonymity), an upper-intermediate student I have been teaching for several months. S works for a digital bank and is an avid learner. We have our lessons once a week but I allow, and even encourage him, to ask me questions by Whatsapp whenever he is doubtful about something he has to say or write in English at work – he happens to have English-speaking colleagues abroad he has to communicate with on a daily basis.

S used to be shy when it came to speaking with his colleagues in English, and felt insecure when he had to write an e-mail. That was one of the first things I had to help him with, that is, to overcome his fears. Over time, he has gained a lot of confidence, mainly because he finds our lessons reassuring – he asks me everything he is unsure about and he learns from my corrections on the spot. But this is not only about S and his skills. What I want to share with you is an approach I have adopted with him lately which you may be familiar with but which, not being a trained teacher, I have found to be of

great use. At first, I felt tempted to call it “functional-semantic approach”, but speaking with our Forum coordinator, an expert in the subject, she told me the proper name is “lexical approach”. The basic principle of the lexical approach is: "Language is grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar" (Lewis 1993), that is, in order to communicate fluently speakers mostly use lexical chunks or collocations which they then put together by using the grammatical structures they already know.

After going over some basic aspects of grammar S was uncertain about or had clean forgotten, mainly because he had never followed a conventional learning method, I realized that, to communicate more efficiently, my student needed to learn those lexical units that would make both his writing and his speech more effective. I asked him what his main interests and needs were, mainly at work. Being an employee at a digital bank, I thought *prima facie* that information technology and finance could be among his preferences, but the point was that he was knowledgeable about the technical vocabulary, and sometimes even explained to me terms I was hardly familiar with. I then asked him when it was that he felt at a loss for words, and at his request we practised phrases for making presentations, for discussing budgets, for planning a project, for conducting a meeting, and so on. As we listened to some conversations along those lines, he repeated and took note of those phrases, either questions or answers, which he felt he might need to fall back on some day.

One day he confessed to me that small talk was one of his weaknesses. We listened to dialogues from business English books but he found it hard to remember the suitable phrases to say in each case, so we classified them as follows (please note that more variants and situations can be found, so the list below is solely provided by way of examples):

How's life questions	How's life answers
<i>How's life in...?</i>	<i>I'm getting used to it.</i>
<i>How are you finding...?</i>	<i>I suppose I'll soon be used to working...</i>
<i>Like the job, do you?</i>	<i>I miss working...</i>
<i>How's ... treating you?</i>	<i>Job/life/Family's going well.</i>
<i>What are you / have you been up to?</i>	
<i>How are you dealing with ...?</i>	

Recognizing/Remembering	Looking for privacy
<i>I think we've met before, haven't we?</i>	<i>It's getting a bit crowded here, isn't it?</i>
<i>Didn't you use to work for...?</i>	<i>Let's try and find somewhere quiet to sit down.</i>

<i>I'm sorry but I'm trying to remember your name.</i>	
<i>I'm afraid I don't recall your name.</i>	
<i>I was hoping you'd be here.</i>	
<i>I'm trying to work out how long it's been since we last saw each other.</i>	
<i>I think it was last ... in ..., wasn't it?</i>	Interrupting
<i>It could have been then.</i>	<i>Will/Would/Could you excuse me for a second? I've just seen someone.</i>

Inviting	Accepting invitations
<i>Perhaps we can meet up later.</i>	<i>Save me a place at your table / a seat in your row/near you.</i>
<i>Why don't you come and work for us back in ... / and have dinner with us tonight?</i>	
<i>I'll get you a drink.</i>	
<i>I'll take your drink for you.</i>	

I remember writing about word selectors and collocations dictionaries back in 2018. These, along with some coursebooks, are among my favourites when the purpose is to expand and enrich a student's vocabulary: words and expressions about feelings and human relations, work, money, food and drink, travel, that is, anything the student may want to speak or write about. As S's vocabulary was quite broad, I then decided that he needed to sound more idiomatic and we started seeing phrasal verbs from a theme-based perspective. One of the topics we dealt with was the following (taken from the Cambridge International Dictionary of *Phrasal Verbs*):

Agreeing or Disagreeing

Meetings in our office are always the same. Bill will suggest some crazy new scheme and Karen will **go along with** whatever it is, even if she doesn't quite **believe in** it. The rest of us will divide naturally into two groups: those who **side with** Bill and those who are against him. Julia usually **falls in with** Bill's ideas fairly quickly, knowing that it's pointless to argue as he usually wins in the end. Both Bill and Karen argue very persuasively and can **talk** the others **round** in no time at all. Barbara is always the last to **give in**, and even then she does so very reluctantly. Secretly, I sympathize with her. I **have** nothing **against** Bill, I just don't see why he should get his own way all the time!

After reading the passage and checking the meaning of the phrasals, we started a conversation where he was expected to use them, for example: *Do you go along with everything your boss says?, Do you easily fall in with other people's ideas?, How do you*

feel when people always side with you?, etc. He identified or, if not, imagined himself in each of these situations and came up with amazing answers, where he was supposed to use the same or some other phrasal we had learned. This approach to learning not only helped him with oral production. One day, I was delighted when he asked me to check an email he had written at work. I realized that, having seen the phrasals in a situational context, he was able to use them much more easily than if we had studied them as lists (lists of phrasals with certain verbs or with certain prepositions). Here follows an excerpt of the text he wrote (I left out some confidential information like the topic discussed or the people involved):

Thanks Pete, as we talked, I side with you guys regarding xxx
I'm talking xxx and yyy around to do so.

My understanding is that, with students at any level, we have to lay stress on the importance of practising certain words and phrases, always within a particular semantic field, so that when they need to speak about the subject they will promptly resort to what they have learned by filling in any grammatical frames they may know with the lexical pieces we have provided them with, thus grammaticalizing lexis in Lewis's words. I do hope that, in spite of my lack of formal knowledge about English teaching methodology, you find this experience of mine, if not inspiring, as least illustrative of how this approach may be useful in some specific teacher-student interface.

Bibliography:

- *Appleby, R., Bradley, J., Leeke, N., Scrivener J., Business One:One Advanced, Oxford Business English, Oxford University Press, 2011*
 - *Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs, Cambridge University Press, 1997*
 - <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/lexical-approach-1-what-does-lexical-approach-look>
 - *Robbins, S., Collins COBUILD Business Vocabulary in Practice, The University of Birmingham, HarperCollins Publishers, 2006*
-

It Worked for Me

In this section, we are pleased to share with you what has worked for some teachers in the pandemic. We hope that their tips will be useful for us to keep trying out new ideas in our lessons. We thank the teachers who have sent us their contributions.



Julia Waldman

Teacher at Hampstead School of English

AEXALEVI Member Institution

We all know by now that teaching a virtual class differs a lot from teaching a face-to-face lesson. At Hampstead School of English, we do our best to foster virtual classes where students feel at ease and learn while having fun. We felt that the first thing that students lost when moving classes into the virtual world was the possibility to socialize with one another, something that we consider to be key for them to enjoy their learning process. We'd been using *Kahoot* and *WordWall* for a long time, but we felt that it was becoming a bit repetitive.

That is why we started to try out other activities to make the lesson unfold differently and bring the learners' lives to class. It was back then when we came across a classroom version of "Among Us" (a popular video game among our students), where the teacher lets them know through the box chat whether they are impostors or crewmates. If they are the latter, they get a secret word in the chat. Then, students take turns saying one word they can connect to the secret word to prove that they are not impostors, while the real impostors need to fake understanding and say a word that makes them pass

unnoticed! Students have tons of fun while playing this game and actively pay attention to catch the impostors or fool the crewmates!

We've also used *Educaplay* to design our own game of "Pasapalabra"! Students are divided into BreakOut Rooms, which they usually love. One of them opens the link and shares the screen. They have five minutes to work together and complete as many categories as possible. Other game-like dynamics we have tried require less preparation, such as sending students a question or word through the chat and asking them to talk about that with their camera on while the rest have theirs off and listen closely in order to guess the secret word or the original question while writing on the chat. In this way, they can take a break from having their cameras on, which teenagers in particular love, while they have to listen closely to win the game.

These activities have worked with different age groups and levels and have contributed to creating a lively and playful learning environment in our virtual classes where students can learn while using English with a real purpose.



Agustín Ledesma
AEXALEVI Staff

We celebrated the International Day of Museums at AEXALEVI by visiting a museum on a virtual tour. I was doing a unit about cities with my students in Children 2 and I thought it would be a great idea to visit Pretend City Children's Museum. We toured the museum virtually and my students were able to identify many of the places and things that we had learnt about in the unit. After the tour, they talked about their favourite places and we made a collaborative picture. The kids enjoyed the whole experience and they were able to put into practice their communicative competence. I had not expected such a keen interest in the tour.

Silvina Domenichini
AEXALEVI Staff



**Silvina recreates “Portrait of a Woman in Hat”
by Amadeo Modigliani for The Getty Museum Challenge.**

At AEXALEVI, we carried out a project on the International Day of Museums. When I was considering what to do with my students, I thought that the proposal had to be something different, attractive, an activity that allowed teenagers to get to know the world of paintings and also have fun. As adolescents like challenges, I felt that they would enjoy this activity. Therefore, before choosing a famous painting to recreate, we saw a video where different people represented pictures of famous artists and, then, I invited my students to do the same. Also, I told them that I was going to take part in the challenge, and of course I did. You can see my recreation in the photo. My students liked the idea of recreating a painting. They had fun and made interesting comments in class. It was a very nice activity.

Carla Rosso
AEXALEVI Staff



Teaching English as a Foreign Language, in my opinion, does not only imply enabling students with grammatical and lexical tools to be able to communicate effectively, but also involving them in the language culture by reading fiction, listening to music, watching movies/plays and - due to the current pandemic situation – engaging in virtual travelling.

The International Day of Museums project that we carried out at AEXALEVI has served as a "perfect excuse" for my students to explore every cultural and historical aspect. We experienced a Virtual Tour of London, interacted with the Globe Theatre in 360° and read some historical facts. After enjoying the visuals and exploring the Globe, the students were asked to create an interactive presentation using *Genially*.

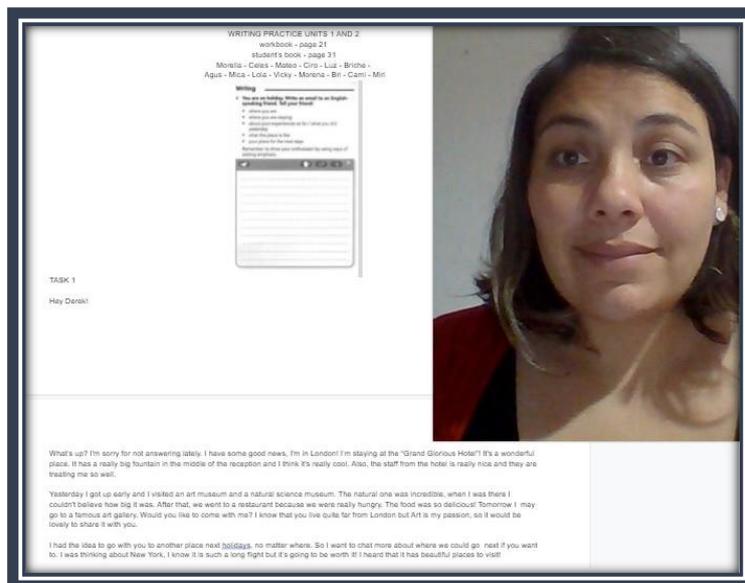
What I enjoyed the most about the final product was realising that the students had got involved through and through, and it really showed: some created a dynamic presentation on The Beatles, others focused either on the life and works of Shakespeare, on the different museums in London, or even on describing a wide range of musical genres in England. Citing one of my students' feedback: "Thank you for bringing closer the opportunity to do something creative and with interesting topics that has allowed us to travel a bit."

Daniela Vincelli

Newly grad from I.E.S. Lenguas Vivas "J.R. Fernández"

In the times we are living in, it is good to hold on to whatever new tool we manage to find. In my case, teaching phonetics and sounds can become a very monotonous task. Therefore, you need something fun to spark up enthusiasm. Natalia, one of my colleagues, introduced me to *Flippity* (<https://flippity.net/>), which is a website with different game templates. These can turn around your class and even bring back the ones who got distracted watching their Instagram feed. You will find several games and their templates, which are usually programmed with Google Drive (especially Spreadsheets), so if you do not have a Gmail account yet, you definitely need to consider getting one. Once you set up your game, you will find in one of the tabs from the spreadsheet the link to either share with your students or use on your presentation, depending on the aim of the activity.





On AEXALEVI Day, we discussed how to write with our students in the synchronous class. It worked for me! Experiencing *Joint writing* in class was a real success! And I tried it with 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th year, so I can tell!

To give one example, in 5th year I took a writing task from the student's book, which was guided, and I made my students follow the guide step by step, but taking turns in a Google doc. It went like this. Task: You are on holiday. Write an informal email to a friend. Tell him/her: - Where you are (student 1) - Where you are staying (student 2) - What you did yesterday (student 3) - What the place is like (student 4), and so on. One student after the other wrote one or two sentences and they had so much fun that we did two versions: one summer holiday and one winter holiday. Not only did they practise vocabulary, grammar, and writing, but also editing and self-correction, something which I find very challenging for them.

Finally, we went a little bit further with the task and they wrote a similar piece from the workbook on their own in the same document. We did the editing of all the writing pieces collaboratively. As I said, a real success indeed.

Alejandra Fuenzalida
Teacher at Marie Manoogian School
AEXALEVI Member Institution

Kahoot! Has helped me create a fun and more positive learning environment. I've been able to observe an increase in engagement and motivation, as well as interaction between my students. With this tool, I have been able to create trivia quizzes and slides to be used in different instances of my students' learning process: from a warm-up activity to get them into the topic, to a simple task to integrate old and new knowledge. Students are able to participate in a safe way too when they perceive the quizzes as instances where they are free to participate in a fun and relaxed environment.



Paula Bardi & Natalia Sanchez
Student teachers at I.E.S Lenguas Vivas "J.R. Fernández"

Often times we find it difficult to get feedback from our students. A simple "What did you think?" or "Do you have any comments or suggestions?" is not enough to know what they think about a class we've just taught. But there is a simpler and more interactive way to get our students to voice their thoughts. Mentimeter is an online platform that allows us to create something resembling a Power Point slide on which students see a written question. Then, through [menti.com](https://www.menti.com) they access the slide by inserting a code that is given to them on the screen and they can enter their answers. It is recommended to allow around three answers so that students answer more than one thing but not too much. As they submit their answers, they will pop up on our screen. Repeated answers do not appear twice, but the word/phrase gets bigger on the screen. This can then be used as a springboard to have some students give their opinion on the matter. Moreover, this resource can be used not only for feedback, but to review vocabulary, to round off a lesson, as a warm-up activity, and actually in any other way you think might be useful in your classroom. We strongly suggest you give it a go.



Stories from the Heart

María Eugenia Uria

AEXALEVI Staff



You should be a teacher!” Beatriz Petrucelli, former teacher at AEXALEVI, told me when I was 18. “You have to go to *Lenguas Vivas* and then, once you get your degree, come and work with me here at AEXALEVI”. I perfectly remember how I looked at her and sneered. No way I would ever teach – I had zero tolerance and zero creativity. Yet, as it was my last year of high school, I needed to get some extra money to buy teenage stuff my parents wouldn’t pay for. So maybe teaching wasn’t a bad idea after all.

A few weeks later, along came Andrea – my very first student. She was eight, small and a total nervous wreck. She made me realize that, despite my many rookie mistakes, I was actually good at comforting her and making her feel less anxious about the subject and speaking in a language she didn’t really understand. I was good at making her feel safe. I discovered I began celebrating her success and I couldn’t wait for Saturday mornings to start, so we could have a chit-chat. Teaching her encouraged me to reflect on my teaching practice and I realised Beatriz had been right all along: I should be a teacher.

Years later, not only did I become a teacher at *AEXALEVI*, but I happen to have Andrea in my course as well. She’s a young adult now. When we saw each other online, we couldn’t believe it! The relationship we had built during her childhood never disappeared. All the feelings resurfaced. I think we truly went full circle.



On Second Thoughts

Mgter. Myrian Casamassima

The uncertainty of pandemic times may have meant a turning point for many teachers. Who has not had to unravel the skilfully knitted teaching repertoire that was grounded in a world that used to be different? You may have found yourselves about to tell your students to get together in groups and the next second you realized that it was beyond the realm of your video call platform or that it broke the rules of social distancing. You had never imagined you would have to teach a lesson to a frozen image of Lisa Simpson or Luke Skywalker in its Lego version while you hoped for the participation of the students behind the cameras. Needless to say, multitasking requirements have soared with teachers having to do both in-person and synchronous teaching simultaneously while checking attendance, managing groups, balancing interruptions and, of course, handling mikes, cameras and the Internet connection. As we question our practice and conceive of new ways to reach our students, we see, however, that the glass is half full rather than half empty. This is it. Let us engage in second thoughts on what we considered to be the established teaching practice.

Reading aloud and choral repetition

When students read aloud in the synchronous class or with their face masks on, it can turn out to be quite difficult to figure out what they are saying. Tiny interruptions on the Internet or background noise can impair understanding very easily. If you have

ever tried choral repetition in a synchronous class, you have surely concluded that it is not worth it. Delays caused by the Internet may make choral repetition a chaotic experience. Let us not worry about either of these two situations at all. In fact, we may see the new context as a chance to reconsider how effective it is to ask our students to

read aloud or to repeat in chorus the words that they have just learnt.

Having been able to observe many lessons in various contexts, I am in a position to say that reading aloud is a favourite among teachers. Students are asked to read aloud, mostly first-sight reading, quite often in class. Whether it is a text for the presentation of grammar or a text for reading comprehension, both tend to be dealt with in the same way: "Who would like to read it aloud?" In general, teachers regard reading aloud as a necessary practice for improving pronunciation. This is actually what most teachers answer when I ask them about it. However, we may give it a second thought. Is it the right moment to practise pronunciation when the students have never seen the text before and will go through the inevitable struggle of decoding the text as they read it aloud? Comprehension is about chunking. If we can chunk a text correctly, we can build up understanding. This process is neither about words nor about pronunciation. Comprehension is actually an internal process through which we shape mental representations of the text. What if we asked our students to read silently instead? This will surely give them the time to process the text and ask any questions that they wish. What if we read aloud to our students often so that we can model chunking for them? When

reading aloud is under our control, we can stop and interact with the students while we assist them with comprehension. What if we asked them to read aloud texts that they are already familiar with and for a clear purpose? It does not need to be something from the coursebook necessarily. It could be a paragraph or a story that they have written. Every time we are about to say "Who can read it aloud?", we may stop for a moment to think about what the benefits would be for the learner and for the rest of the class. Having to endure the poor rendering of a text read at first sight definitely cannot contribute to anyone's understanding. What about choral repetition? It should be given a second thought as well. It would not be unreasonable after all to decide to give it a rest after years and years since it came into use in the '60s with the Audiolingual Method.

Testing vs. Developing

How about pronunciation then? It should be developed first. Asking the students to read aloud for us to check their pronunciation does not usually follow up from sections on sounds, intonation and stress. It is actually the result of another resistant-to-change procedure which consists of *testing* rather than *developing* our learners' skills. There are many examples that fit into this category.

Let us consider listening activities. In general, we do some preparation for listening before we play the audio at least twice, with a task for general understanding and another for grasping specific information. Within this scheme, there is no room for developing listening skills mainly because once the students have done the activities, we check their answers to test how much they have been able to understand. In some coursebooks, we may find activities that focus on listening for key words, recognizing features of connected speech, identifying the communicative functions of what the speakers say, etc. These are instances of skill development. It is useful to be able to tell one situation from the other, that is to say when it is that we are *testing* the skill and when it is that we are *developing* it. This is always relevant for our teaching practice, but nowadays it has become even more useful if we consider that, whether for alternating groups learning in person or synchronically, the time that we have available may be less than it used to be when classes did not need to be split. If we have to shorten listening activities, we could add opportunities for listening to short stretches of discourse in the audios for specific purposes. This can also be done with the audios for the presentation texts. The class can focus on a brief exchange, for example, if it is a dialogue. How do the speakers say it? Or on a single utterance. Later, these

stretches can be read aloud. They can even be read aloud to convey different meanings: in a polite manner, in an angry tone, etc. This type of work, however short it may appear to be, helps to develop listening and speaking together in a simple way that will not take too long.

Writing may provide us with a further example of this test-develop dichotomy. We used to do writing in class in pairs or in groups, but now? Let us first admit the fact that more often than not we used to assign writing for homework while we did the pre-writing in class. This is not different from what we discussed in relation to listening. Pre-writing is not writing. It is preparing for writing. How about writing then? It is taken for granted on the assumption that, given the necessary vocabulary and linkers plus a model text, the students will manage on their own. This is exactly like “listen and complete” and “let us check your answers”. What if we did some writing *with* the students in class? This would provide them with a moment-to-moment demonstration of how to write a text, with the teacher thinking aloud with the whole class. In the synchronous class, this is easy to do on the screen where the text can be typed, shuffled and deleted instantly. If there is not enough time, the composition can be started in class and continued for homework. Some investment on skill development needs

to be made and the time to change from *testing* into *developing* is ripe now.

Unplug it!

We are witnessing like never before a strong demand for material design that synchronous and asynchronous work requires through various platforms. We are increasing our knowledge and command of apps and sites to search for and create materials for our lessons. It is always wise to share this knowledge as we have attempted to do in this and previous issues of *AEXALEVI Forum* in the section *It Worked For Me*. However, we can give a second thought to this surge of adrenaline.

I have no doubts about the effectiveness of visual support in synchronous lessons and the motivation of learners to complete tasks online. Yet, I have also seen groups of adult learners struggling over the login and unable to do their assignments. The “just click on the link” instruction may fail in some cases. Like with all resources, we need to assess what is worth doing and what is not.

Furthermore, I have no doubts about how exhausting this new experience may prove to be for some teachers who have a lot of courses and may not be able to engage in material design for every lesson. What if we just went unplugged at least once? Like when we start a diet and we skip it to give ourselves a treat. It would not be wrong

to teach a lesson based on what the students want to talk about and what they wish to do, at least from time to time, for a change. It could mean an enormous relief for many teachers and an extraordinary occasion for the students to take control of their lesson by suggesting what they would like to do.

Give it a second thought

Some of the ideas that we have discussed may sound rather controversial, but this is always the case when we move away from established practice. Let us think of some of the variables at work: the simultaneity of interactional modes (in-person and asynchronous), the autonomy that asynchronous work presupposes, the continuous need to reorganize our lessons, to name a few. This is definitely a good occasion to reconsider teaching practices that have become automatic for many of us. It is not that this need was not here before the pandemic. It is just that now it has become more overt because of the nature of the teaching and learning context. I would like to suggest revising certain practices that have been among us for as long as we can remember. Shall we give them a second thought?
