

ENGLISH THROUGH THE MEDIA

Herewith, I solemnly declare that the present report has been written entirely by my own means and that all research sources have been duly acknowledged.

PUTZ Jean-Marc

INL

Based on a series of courses taught at the INL, the thesis will explore the different ways in which the media, i.e. newspapers, radio, TV, internet, computer and videogames etc. can be used to teach English in a way that encourages meaningful language acquisition, critical thinking, learner autonomy and life-long learning.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at how authentic material taken from the media (television, newspapers, radio, Internet, videogames etc.) can be implemented in the classroom with the aim of encouraging student autonomy and life-long self-directed learning.

The theoretical part attempts to weave 5 strands of current educational discussion – authenticity, cultural awareness, multiple intelligences, collaborative intelligence, and learner autonomy – into a coherent pedagogical vision for the 21st century. Set against the background of pervasive access to information, the proliferation of digital tools and media, and the participatory nature of modern communication platforms, this work advocates a collaborative approach to learning that ties the classroom into the larger internet community.

The practical part looks at how these theoretical concepts can be actualized in the classroom and evaluates their validity in the light of learner and teacher experience. It addresses real-life issues and considerations that have emerged in the learning process and makes suggestions for good practice.

By establishing a dialogue between theoretical enquiry and classroom actualization, I hope to have produced a work that provokes both thought and action, and proves useful to teachers who want to set up a Media class or use media materials as a supplement in their teaching.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The INL

The practical and theoretical framework of this thesis is based on an English-language Media course which I have been teaching at the INL for the last four years. In order to understand its key concepts and concerns, it is important to ground them in their social and institutional context. The INL is a language school for adults and functions as one of the cornerstones of the life-long learning policy adopted by the Luxembourgish government and the European Union towards:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.¹

Established in 1980, the INL continues to play an ever more important role in the social, educational and economic life of Luxembourg and the wider region. In 2009, there were 9000 registered students from over 100 different countries. The students who register at the INL are not all Luxembourgish residents. Many come from bordering countries, such as Germany, Belgium or France to study one of the eight languages currently on offer. The available languages - Luxembourgish, French, German, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Chinese – are considered valuable assets in the socio-economic context of Luxembourg.

If the INL has first and foremost a vocational mission, it has also assumed an important role in promoting cultural exchanges and social cohesion. For many who have just arrived in Luxembourg, the INL is a port of entry to the social and cultural life of the country. Many friendships are formed within and between the different national communities. At a time when many are worried about the segmentation of Luxembourgish society, the INL serves a beacon focusing the different segments of the large spectrum which constitutes the identity of our country.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28_en.htm

1.2. The Media Class

At the time of writing, my class includes 18 students from France, Belgium, Italy, China, Indonesia, Poland, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. Their professional backgrounds are as varied as their countries of origin. There is a teacher, a banker, an IT specialist, a public servant, a translator, a tourist guide, an electrician and a stay at home mum. There is a 19-year-old student from the university of Luxembourg and an 80-year-old retired gold miner.

What connects these people is a common interest in the English language, which they have expressed by signing up to a once-a-week Media class at C1 level promising “autonomous learning and natural language acquisition” and “full immersion into the cultural and political life of Great-Britain and the United States through articles, broadcasts and TV programmes taken from English-speaking media”².

If French is undoubtedly the lingua franca in Luxembourg, English also plays an important part in allowing people from different countries to live and work together. Indeed, there is a growing percentage, at least among the non-natives at our school, who prioritize English as their language of communication in Luxembourg, especially when they first arrive. For many English, not French, is their second language. For them, English functions as a transitional language allowing social integration and employability in the time it takes to come to terms with the linguistic complexity of Luxembourgish society.

The importance of English as a tool of acculturation is global, and it entails a set of challenges, and opportunities which, formulated as theoretical questions and practical answers, form one of the pillars of this piece of work.

1.3. Culture

² INL Brochure *Cours Spécifiques*

When teaching in Luxembourg, and in particular at the INL, the issue of culture is omnipresent. I say in particular at the INL, because we deal with adults whose cultural identity tends to be more solidified and rigid than that of younger people growing up in a multi-cultural environment. The challenge that multiculturalism poses is that it can be a possible source of conflict, and that it requires of the teacher cultural awareness and sensitivity in order to prevent or diffuse tensions that might arise out of the most innocuous classroom situations. One instance of such tension in my class was sparked by a debate on whether countries have the leaders they deserve. This, admittedly not entirely innocent question, set a Spanish student off on a diatribe against Silvio Berlusconi. I realized then that Berlusconi is similar to the English weather, not only in his constant unwelcome outpours, but also in that only natives are allowed to voice their misgivings. The two Italian students were upset and I had to cut short an otherwise interesting discussion on the views different students had on their various political leaders.

Stereotyping the other – the swindling Italian, the arrogant French, the ignorant American, the thieving Pole – is such a staple of conversation, even among the so-called educated, that any discussion about cultural or societal values in a multi-cultural classroom has the potential to derail and generate a critical incident. This issue has become compounded because of the difficult economic context and because of the growing competition between nations on a global scale, and within the Euro zone in particular. The recent squabble between Germany and Greece over the proposed economic recovery package has drawn out the simmering boil of xenophobia that still festers subcutaneously in Europe.

It is the responsibility of any educational institution to address such issues openly and to promote cultural exchange and understanding. Indeed, in a face-to-face exchange, stereotypes are quickly ousted as the cowardly and unsubstantiated inanities that they really are.

As a matter of fact, people, in the majority, are interested in learning about the beliefs, customs and mores of other cultures, and the different viewpoints that can emerge during a lesson can illuminate issues from different angles and allow for a more critical and enlightened approach. In this way, cultural stereotypes are challenged, preconceived ideas are questioned and mutual

understanding and respect fostered. This cross-fertilization of views and experiences can make for truly vibrant lessons, where meaning can blossom and the language that produces it become deeply rooted. The relevance of meaningful interaction for the language learning process will be discussed later, but the experience of most teachers will confirm that students' language performance is in relation to the emotional investment they have in an issue.

Examples of the positive effect of encouraging cultural exchanges in the classroom are numerous and easy to come by. In my class, a reserved Chinese student was drawn out of her shell by the interest that the other students showed for her country and her culture, and her speaking was noticeably improved by the willingness of the others to listen. Indeed, all too often students' language production can be severely impacted by the real or perceived indifference of their interlocutor(s). On the other hand, if students are encouraged to speak from their heart, and are able to express themselves authentically, their inhibitions might be bypassed and the language can bubble forth more freely. This aspect of language acquisition will be dealt with in more detail in the chapter on authenticity.

Allowing students to express their own cultural identity in the classroom also lowers their affective resistance to learning a new language. In the chapter on culture we will see that acquiring a language is not only assimilating linguistic structures, but also a set of beliefs, attitudes, values and perspectives, which fundamentally change the identity of the learner. Understanding British humor is a prime example of this. To laugh at the Dead Parrot sketch by Monty Python does not only require an understanding of the various metaphors for death but also empathy with typically British attitudes towards taboo subjects.

In fact, it is possible to see language teaching and learning as a form of linguistic imperialism, the very aim of which is to change the values and beliefs of the learner. The hegemony of the Anglo-Saxon way of life is intrinsically bound to the growing dominance of English as the international language. Many people resist this dominance, often on a subconscious level, and are consequently trapped in a limbo between wanting to and not wanting to learn the language. Sometimes it seems to me that certain mistakes, such as the French pronunciation of money, for example, say a lot about the speakers' underlying attitudes towards the English language and

culture. The mispronunciation might be seen to reflect an unconscious rejection of a language that is imposed as an economic necessity. In order to compete in the job market, in particular in Luxembourg, English is becoming more and more of a necessity. Those who fail to acquire the language, risk being left behind as flotsam in the wake of the economic crisis. Mistakes such as “manei” or “Beusiness” are small pockets of “résistance”, which seem impossible to eradicate, unless the classroom openly encourages students to express their own culture as equivalent to that of the target language. We will see how exercises on cultural awareness can allow students to approach the target culture on equal footing, eliminating the need for subservient or defensive attitudes.

Although the media are undoubtedly potent tools of cultural indoctrination, they can also be appropriated to raise cultural awareness. For instance, by juxtaposing the way a news item is presented in different countries, we can question the monolithic nature of political or cultural “truth” to make room for alternate perspectives. The relationship between cultural identity, language learning and the media will be further explored in chapter 3.

1.4. Multiple Intelligences

Of course, cultural differences are not only tied to nationality. Even within the same ethno-social groups there can be considerable inter- and cross-generational gaps. The broad age spectrum at the INL, for one, brings with it its own challenges. The younger students are digital natives whereas some, of a more advanced age, are at best, reluctant immigrants to the wonderful new world of technology. They are separated by what is often referred to as the digital divide. Words such as podcasting, blogging, photo-shopping and twittering are part of the daily vocabulary of the former and meaningless techno babble for the latter. When working with the Internet in the classroom, it very quickly becomes obvious that some older students lack the computer literacy skills to use this tool efficiently. Conversely, it can be very difficult to convince younger students that reading books is an effective way to improve their language skills. They consider books to be too slow and too linear a medium. They tend to see reading as a laborious waste of time when information or entertainment can be accessed so much more quickly and easily on the Internet.

Even the good old goggle box, which dominated my generation, has become replaced in the hearts of many by the Google box. Television is too boring for a generation who has become used to multi-tasking, chatting, browsing, and watching videos in different windows, at the same time.

These differing predilections have a huge influence on how people live, work and learn. In chapter 4, I will discuss new theories on how technology can alter cognitive processing in fundamental ways, but here I just want to stress the point that the ways in which we learn are in part determined by the technical and social context in which we live.

A teenager or young adult will naturally and instinctively turn to the Internet to find information. Via the Internet and social networking sites they can get in touch with a global community which uses English as a common language. For such people, English is very much a tool for communication and the learning process is continuous and largely takes place outside the classroom. They live the language through the television programs they watch, the music they listen to, the websites they visit and the games they play. The advent of the Internet has fundamentally changed the way in which people learn English and yet this change in paradigm is but tentatively reflected in the way we teach.

It is true that we are going through a difficult transitional period. For every student who actively uses the language every day, there are many others for whom it is above all a school subject, a theoretical framework of words and grammar rules. Many of the students at our school pay lip service to the practical uses of the language, for work or travel, but in reality they hardly ever apply their language acquisitions outside the classroom.

As a result, our classes tend to be very heterogeneous, a mix of practical and theoretical learners, which can be difficult to teach. In my class, I have students who are mostly interested in speaking the language. Others want to analyze the structures and feel most productive when they can work on grammar and vocabulary exercises. Some prefer reading and writing activities, whilst their colleagues enjoy watching films and documentaries. The variety of needs and expectations in the

classroom can seed a sense of insecurity in both the teacher and the learner as to what is the “best” way to learn a language.

However, the solution to this conundrum cannot lie in a monolithic teaching model or a “fundamental pedagogical principle”. Rather, it would seem to me, that it is important once again to embrace the diversity of our students and to encourage them to learn from each other.

One of the fore thinkers of this model of education is Howard Gardner, whose theories on cognitive differences valorize and embrace the different ways in which we think, feel and learn. In his seminal book *Frames of Mind*, Gardner posits that there are multiple intelligences which determine what we learn and how we learn. A person with a strongly developed inter-personal intelligence will most likely enjoy communicative activities in the classroom, whereas a person with a predominantly intra-personal intelligence might resent the constant babble and intrusive questioning. A person with a highly developed logical-mathematical intelligence is more likely to enjoy gapped grammar exercises, whereas kinesthetic learners might prefer role-play activities.

By encouraging students to express their particular form of intelligence in the classroom, we can create an environment in which every student feels respected and valued. I have often noticed that introducing left-field activities, such as drawing, poetry writing or miming, can fundamentally change the dynamics of a classroom. By allowing students to express their particular talents, we can raise their level of trust and strengthen their bonds with the rest of the classroom community. The result is a much lower drop-out rate and a feeling of congeniality that makes the classroom a safe and comfortable place for everyone.

Unlike the culturally determined learning styles discussed earlier, Gardener would seem to suggest that the different channels of acquisition he describes are inborn, the result of nature and not nurture. And in truth, when observing the different ways in which students set about learning in the classroom, one cannot help but notice that they neatly fit into the different categories he describes. Whether one agrees with this kind of categorization, or is wary of the implied determinism, I think we can all get on board with the idea that it is important to respect the diversity of our students and to be sensitive to their needs. A better understanding of the ways in

which we are different can help us come together in complementary rather than segregatory ways.

It is furthermore important to note that the differences that I have talked about above do not only affect the students. Teachers are also constricted in their choice of methodology by their personal preferences and predilections. Since language teachers tend to have a highly linguistic and interpersonal intelligence, they might find it difficult to reach students whose *modus operandi* is logical-mathematical or kinesthetic. A technophobic teacher might find it difficult to see any good in the use of technology for language learning, whereas a nerd might assume that their interest in all things Facebook and Twitter is shared by everyone. Even those who do their best to tune into the various learning channels can end up with a lot of static or white noise, which makes it hard to make out educational patterns that we can rely on. In chapter 4, we will therefore try to get a bigger and better picture of these issues. We will see how the theory on the different learning styles can help devise an inclusive teaching methodology and, furthermore, how the different intelligences have their corresponding media.

1.5. Intelligence multiplied

In the preceding sections I have repeatedly returned to the idea of bringing students together, of developing inclusive teaching methods, and the need to make our differences complementary rather than segregatory. There are educational and social reasons why I believe it is important to encourage both cohesion and diversity within the classroom. In my work experience, I have often empathized with the alienation that some students experience because of their age, ethnicity, religious beliefs, cultural and educational backgrounds, etc. One example that comes to mind is that of an elderly nun, who had joined the class in mid-term, and left after half an hour because the first reading text was about the importance of emails in modern life. Since the student had never used a computer, she felt unable to connect to the text and to the students she was supposed to discuss it with. I later discovered, when talking about the incident with her, that she had just moved to a home for the elderly and had wanted to join an English class to get “out” and to keep from intellectually atrophying. I have noted before that English is the language of a modern

global culture, the culture of computers, mass media and globalized markets, which many people, for various reasons, feel unable to join.

Another far more common critical incident in our classroom is the difficulty for Asian, and in particular Chinese students, to understand the cultural references that underlie practically every classroom activity. If, for instance, a student has never heard of a Ferrari, it is impossible for him or her to match it with the verb drive in a collocation exercise. As a teacher, one can easily become aggravated by the necessity to explain “everything”. And yet, if we were to learn Chinese, we would be in a very similar predicament.

I believe that one of our tasks as teachers is to empathize with the potential alienation of our students and to help integrate everyone into the classroom community. Carl Roger identified this empathy as one of the essential qualities of a teaching professional:

“A further element which establishes a climate for self-initiated, experiential learning is empathic understanding. When the teacher has the ability to understand the student’s reaction from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems to the student, then again the likelihood of significant learning is increased. This kind of understanding is sharply different from the usual evaluative understanding which follows the pattern of ‘I understand what is wrong with you’. When there is a sensitive empathy, however, the reaction in the learner follows something of this pattern, ‘at last someone understands how it feels and seems to be me without wanting to analyze me or judge me. Now I can blossom and grow and learn.’³

Empathy is not only important on a basic human level, but it is also a pre-requisite for learning to take place. A non-judgmental awareness of what differentiates one learner from another in terms of their cultural, linguistic, cognitive and social particularities and, openness to having every student contribute their assets to the larger learning community, are for me some of the essential tenets of effective and ethical teaching.

When looking at ways to integrate students of various backgrounds and language levels into a cohesive and productive classroom entity, I found the theories of collaborative learning to be very helpful. Collaborative learning, as discussed in more detail in chapter 5, first of all acknowledges the differences which exist between students but sees them as assets to the larger learning community. Theorists use the concept of “zone of proximal development” to express the idea of coming together in order to improve.

³ Carl ROGERS (1983), *Freedom to learn for the 80’s*, pp. 111-112

Collaborative learning also tries to deconstruct the inherently hierarchical nature of education with the teacher at the top of the ladder of knowledge, followed by the good, the middling and the bad students at the bottom. In the collaborative classroom, the teacher and the students form a disciplinary community of knowledgeable peers, who all work together to further their understanding of a subject.

By questioning the hierarchical nature of knowledge and the top-down distribution of power in the classroom, we might go a long way towards addressing the issues of cultural stereotyping and prejudice mentioned above. Kenneth A. Bruffee points out that learning “occur(s) on an axis drawn not between individuals and things but amongst people. Students learn judgment best in groups...because they tend to talk to one another out of their unshared biases and presuppositions.”⁴

The ideas of collaborative learning are linked into a wider field of theoretical research: collective intelligence. Theories of collective intelligence point to “intelligent” networks such as the Internet as examples of how intelligence is distributed between many inter-actors rather than situated within one entity. The connections between the emergence of modern media networks and a new conceptualization of knowledge and intelligence has fascinating implications for education that I hope to further explore in chapter 5.

One of the fascinating traits of this non-centralized intelligence is its adaptive nature and the constant interaction between the individual and the group. It points to a learning process that is both autonomous and connected and helps resolve the apparent discrepancy between autonomous and collaborative learning.

⁴ Kenneth A. BRUFFEE (1993), *Collaborative Learning*, p.13

1.6. Autonomy

Most classes at the INL are offered twice or three times a week. For the lower levels there are more intensive courses intended to quickly bring students - who are often unemployed and looking for work – to a level when they can manage basic communication in English. Lessons are always on the same days at the same time, and students are not able to change time slots from week to week, even if their work or their personal life requires them to.

This rather rigid system does not allow many prospective students to fit their language learning into their every-day lives. Some, whose working days often stretch until late in the evenings, are lucky if their employers allow them to leave early once a week to attend a class. Others have such busy lives at home and at work that they are simply too tired to attend a class more than once a week.

This is why certain higher level classes at the INL, including the Media class, are offered only once a week. There is a demand, in particular from professional people with an advanced level of English, for a class which allows them to practice and maintain their English, but which does not require them to invest more time and energy than they can afford.

A second reason for offering the class only once a week, was the idea that students who have reached a certain level should be encouraged to further their education autonomously. Students who are “processed” through our system tend to be very dependent on the classroom when it comes to acquiring new language. This has to do with the fact that English, for many people, is perceived as a passive asset for employment rather than an active requisite in their everyday lives. The separation between language learning and language usage is a serious stumbling block that can hamper students in improving their language proficiency. To remove this stumbling block, I established student autonomy as one of the main objectives of the Media class. In fact, the idea developed in chapters 1 and 6 is to liberate language practice from the confines of the classroom and to encourage students to find ways to integrate it in their everyday lives.

The aim is that language learning should become language usage and vice versa. For many students, learning a language requires a teacher and a classroom. They are not willing, or do not feel fully empowered, to learn the language on their own. Listening to English language music or watching a film in English undoubtedly has a positive effect on their linguistic competence and yet very few people resort to these “soft” and fun ways of learning a language. They prefer instead the hard rigor of a classroom where learning can be quantified by the number of exercises which have been successfully completed.

Not long ago, two new trends emerged in teaching in reaction to the growing recognition of the importance of student autonomy. The first new-fangled idea promising to revolutionize education was the creation of self-access centers at language schools around the world. These libraries-V2 were set up so that students could consult grammar, vocabulary, reading, and listening materials independently and in their own time. This shift towards self-directed learning also reflected the growing economic necessity to tailor the learning process to the demands of individual students. Students with specific professional needs could focus on the language that was important to them in ways that a general English class could not.

The second trend, which went hand in hand with self-access centers, was assisted self-directed learning. At the INL, students would meet twice a month with a consultant, who was not necessarily a teacher in the target language, to discuss their learning objectives, their learning techniques, and their progress. Before teaching the media class, I was a consultant in the self-directed learning module, and although it was eventually dropped from the school offer, I have tried to transfer the lessons I learnt about encouraging student autonomy, to the Media classroom.

These two methods, which were very much considered the cutting edge of didactics, as little as ten years ago, have largely become obsolete because of the rapid development of computer-assisted learning. The Internet, in particular, is such a vast resource for all kinds of learning material that the offer of self-access centers seems paltry and redundant in comparison. Indeed, it sometimes seems difficult to grasp how fundamentally the Internet has changed education. Online newspapers, TV channels, interest groups, language learning videos, etc. make access to the target language easy and instantaneous in a way that seemed unimaginable only 10 years ago.

Students can find listening activities, grammar lessons, and endless self-correcting exercises online. The new language learning opportunities are truly empowering for the individual, and yet most teachers continue teaching as if this technological revolution had never happened. More than ever, as teachers, we need to abdicate our position of absolute authority and guide our students towards these new resources.

In his guide on how to use blogs, wikis and podcasts in the classroom, Will Richardson encourages us to ask ourselves what “needs to change about our curriculum when our students have the ability to reach audiences far beyond our classroom walls? What changes must we make in our teachings as it becomes easier to bring primary sources to our students?”⁵ These are some of the questions which I will try to address in chapter 6.

1.7. Authenticity

My concern with the concept of authenticity arose from the limitations that my students felt as learners and the limitations I felt as a teacher. In the Media class, we mostly study authentic material taken from British and American newspapers, TV and radio channels and websites. For many students, this first contact with authentic, non-edited language comes as a bit of a shock. When they leave the paddling pool of the language classroom and are thrown in at the deep end, many forget all their language comprehension strategies and are at risk of drowning in a sea of words.

Students often feel that authentic language is too difficult and that even after years of studies they are not able access the language when it is used in “real contexts”. This harks back to the issue raised previously about the ways in which language use and language learning are seen as different, and how we can encourage students to cross the threshold from the classroom into the real world. It also leads us back to the question of autonomy and how students can learn to cope with language situations without the help of a teacher or textbook. It also draws attention to the more fundamental questions of what constitutes authentic language. The latter line of inquiry

⁵ Will Richardson (2009), *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and other powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*, p. 6

leads much closer to home. As a non-native English speaker teaching an advanced level, the question arose in my mind as to how authentic my English was. This issue was confounded by the fact that, having studied in both the United States and Great Britain, I feel somewhat trapped not only between two alternative versions of the language but between two cultures and two linguistic identities.

In a recent lesson, a student who always has the need to test my competence and to verify my “street cred”, to use the parlance of today, asked me for the definition of a word that he had come across in a TV program: *moxie*. Moxie means courage, but it is a word that is slightly old-fashioned in American English, and is used by speakers of a certain age and a certain background. The student went on to remark that even if he was to remember the definition of the word he would probably not be able to use it in speaking. And certainly, for a non-native speaker to use *moxie* would seem strange and hardly authentic. So, language that is appropriate for one person might be completely out of character for somebody else.

The more I thought about myself as a language learner and teacher, the more important the concept of authenticity became. In the end, I realized that for me the issue of authenticity is at the heart of all the other conceptual considerations: culture, multiple intelligences, collaborative learning, and autonomy. Authenticity asks us to define our position as teacher and our relationship to our students and the subject we teach. It touches on the fundamental ethical dimension of our profession and encourages us to keep our theorizing “real”. It impels us to look at what we teach, how we teach it and why we teach it. It compels us to respect our students and to offer them genuine ways to express themselves in the classroom. It encourages us to respect ourselves by teaching in accordance to our own personality and not against it. Authenticity is what grounds our teaching in reality and keeps us from becoming carried away by the ever-changing currents of pedagogical theory. When setting up the media class, I wanted classroom reality to be first and foremost determined by the source material, and not by a specific methodology or educational philosophy. This was for me an important safeguard against falling victim to the latest pedagogical fad and to ascertain the intellectual integrity of my teaching and of the theory formulated in this work.

The other theoretical lines of enquiry framing this thesis all emerged en route, and should always be understood and evaluated in relation to the core value of authenticity. As Carl Rogers famously explained:

“Perhaps the most basic of these essential attitudes is realness or genuineness. When the facilitator is a real person being what he is, entering into a relationship with the learner without presenting a front or facade, he is much more likely to be effective. This means that the feelings which he is experiencing are available to him, available to his awareness, that he is able to live these feelings, be them, and able to communicate them if appropriate. It means that he comes into a direct personal encounter with the learner, meeting him on a person-to-person basis. It means that he is being himself, not denying himself. Seen from this point of view it is suggested that the teacher can be a real person in his relationship with his students. He can be enthusiastic, he can be bored, he can be interested in students, he can be angry, he can be sensitive and sympathetic. Because he accepts these feelings as his own, he has no need to impose them on his students. He can like or dislike a student product without implying that it is objectively good or bad or that the student is good or bad. He is simply expressing a feeling for the product, a feeling that exists within himself. Thus, he is a person to his students, not a faceless embodiment of a curricular requirement, nor a sterile tube through which knowledge is passed from one generation to another.”⁶

⁶ Carl ROGERS (1983), *Freedom to learn for the 80's*, p.106

1.8. Practice and Theory and Practice

Widdowson, in his book on pedagogical practice, reminds us that “Principles are abstractions. They have to be actualized as techniques in the particular circumstances of the classroom. (...) Teaching then, can be conceived of as a research activity whereby experimental techniques of instruction are designed to correspond with hypothetical principles of pedagogy, with provision made for mutual adjustment so as to bring validity of principle into as close an alignment as possible with utility of technique.”⁷

This thesis aims to follow this model of pedagogical enquiry, by first establishing, as I have in this introductory chapter, the real-life issues and considerations that led me to look for answers in pedagogical theory.

Chapters 2-6 will look at the different theoretical areas which pertain to the issues raised in this introduction.

Chapter 7 will look at how the various theories are translated into classroom practice.

Chapter 8 suggests activities which are generated by the use of media material.

Chapter 9 will present lesson plans, integrating some of the generic activities. It will include comments on various issues related to teaching with media material.

Chapter 10 will try to evaluate the theoretical concepts in the light of classroom experience and thus establish the dialogue between practice and theory which is central to Widdowson’s model of theoretical enquiry.

Chapter 11, the conclusion, will put the pedagogical project outlined in this thesis, into a wider societal and historical context.

⁷ H.G. WIDDOWSON (1990), *Aspects of Language Learning*, p 3

2. AUTHENTICITY

David Little uses the term *authentic material* to mean “the record of any communicative act in speech or writing that was originally performed in fulfilment of some personal or social function, and not in order to provide illustrative material for language teaching, and by extension, any communicative event that can easily become such a record, for example, radio and television broadcasts and certain forms of electronic communication: Thus defined, authentic texts have the capacity to draw language learners into the communicative world of the target language community.”⁸ Little here makes an implicit distinction between the “language learning” and the “language usage” world into which the student needs to be drawn. This distinction is at the heart of the debate surrounding the use of authentic material in the classroom. “One very common view is that *language learning* is one thing and *language use* another: that what happens in the language classroom (language learning – the gradual development of a language repertoire) is a preparation for what may in due course happen outside the classroom.”⁹ He refers to the work of H.G. Widdowson, who argues that:

“authenticity in the classroom is bound to be, to some extent an illusion: This is because it does not depend on the source from which the language is drawn but on the learners’ engagement with it. In actual language use, as the work on discourse analysis and pragmatics makes abundantly clear, meanings are achieved by human agency and are negotiable: they are not contained in text. To the extent that language learners, by definition, are deficient in competence they cannot authenticate the language they deal with in the manner of the native speaker...Furthermore, if authenticity is to be defined as natural language behaviour (and it is hard to see how else it might be defined) there is also the difficulty that learners will naturally incline to draw on their own language in any situation that calls for uncontrived linguistic communication. So the situations have to be contrived in some way, and the learner will have to co-operate in maintaining the illusion of reality. They will have to be a party to the pretence and accept that the activities in class are, to use a Goffman term, “framed” as classroom events.”¹⁰

Little takes a clear stand against this line of argumentation:

“The view that I wish to promote in this chapter is very different from the one we have been considering so far: This second view holds that because language learning and language use employ the same psycholinguistic mechanisms, they are essentially inseparable and often indistinguishable.

(...) No doubt language learners cross a succession of thresholds as their target language competence develops, but in psycholinguistic terms it is impossible to identify any one threshold as marking the point at which a shift in status takes place from language learner to language user.

⁸ David LITTLE, “Responding authentically to authentic texts: a problem for self-access language learning?”, in Benson and Voller (1997), p. 225

⁹ idem, p. 226

¹⁰ H.G. WIDDOWSON (1990), *Aspects of Language Learning*, pp. 44-45

On the contrary: all language users, native as well as non-native speakers, remain language learners for as long as they are involved with the language in question. If we do not believe in the existence of some threshold of competence below which language can be learnt and practiced but not, properly speaking, used, we shall have no good reason for postponing the introduction of authentic texts. At first glance it may seem preposterous to propose that beginning learners should be exposed to authentic texts: how can they possibly understand them? But text linguistics has taught us that meaning is not the property of texts but the product of interaction between text-presented knowledge and the text receiver's stored knowledge"¹¹

Juxtaposing Little's and Widdowson's line of argumentation reveals an interesting paradox. Both use pragmatics and discourse analysis to support their opposing points of view. In order to understand this apparent contradiction, I believe that it is important to take a step back and to put the concept of "authenticity" in a wider philosophical context. The concept of "authenticity" that dominates current discussion can be traced back to the work of Johan Herder. Herder saw authenticity as being true to oneself, as living one's life according to one's own beliefs and convictions¹².

Yet, it is self-evident that a person's system of beliefs and convictions is always determined, at least in part, by the social, political and economic points of reference that he or she accepts or rejects. Authenticity is always negotiated between the individual and the context in which he or she evolves.

Consequently, I consider that Widdowson wrongly denies language learners the possibility to interact authentically with the language. I also think that Widdowson's argument is the relic of a time when native speakers still had their natural reserves, delineated by clear national boundaries. Today when many people live and socialize on the net, when economic mobility creates an increasingly cosmopolitan world, we live in a linguistically much more complex context. Cambridge University recently had to make their English tests available to native speakers as well as non-native speakers because the old distinction simply does no longer hold up in real life. Of course, depending on their level of proficiency in the language, individuals display different, and yet authentic, interactions with the material. A beginner might only look at the photograph

¹¹ David LITTLE, "Responding authentically to authentic texts: a problem for self-access language learning?", in Benson and Voller (1997), p 227-228

¹² J. Herder (1877-1913), Ideen, viii.I., in *Herder's Sämtliche Werke*, Vol XIII

and the headline of the article to establish its meaning. Thus it is important to introduce the concept of authentic interaction into our discussion.

Widdowson's makes an interesting differentiation between the terms "authentic" and "genuine material"¹³. Authentic refers to material designed for native speakers of English. The material would only be genuine if it was used in the classroom in a way similar to the one it was designed for. For example, a radio news report about pollution is brought into the classroom so that students can discuss their own attitudes towards environmental issues. This is a genuine activity because it comes natural to a reader to discuss the content of an interesting article.

In most classroom situations, though, the authentic material is not used in a genuine way, in other words, not in the way it was intended, but in a heavily didacticised and thus artificial manner. For example, a news article might be cut up so that the students have to put the paragraphs back together in the correct order. Widdowson argues that authentic material can never be used in a genuine way in the classroom, because the activity is always "framed".

As I have pointed out earlier, I think that language learners can interact in a genuine way with authentic material. And so for the media class I wanted to use authentic material used in a genuine way as much as possible. Susan Sherman refers to this approach to authentic material as generic, generative and gentle: "The activities are generic in that they naturally emerge from the particular kind of video programme, sequence or shot, and exploit its particular qualities. They are generative in that they can be used again and again with other similar programmes, sequences or shots. They are gentle on the student because what they ask for tends to come naturally"¹⁴

The idea that authentic material can be "gentle on the student" might seem highly questionable to those who have had first hand experience with using authentic texts or recordings in the classroom. In fact, the word traumatic springs to mind when we try to describe the reaction of both the teacher and the student. The issue of difficulty is of course the elephant in the room when we discuss using authentic material in the classroom. Little and Widdowson, in the

¹³ H.G. WIDDOWSON (1990), *Aspects of Language Learning*, p. 45

¹⁴ Jane SHERMAN (2003), *Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom*, p. 7

importu debate I set up earlier, both raised the issue. According to Widdowson, language learners are by definition unable to deal genuinely with authentic material. Little argues that by relying on their previous experience and knowledge, students can access the material, even at lower levels. For me, the issue of difficulty is connected to the task, not the material. If you give a newspaper article to a student and ask them to answer highly specific multiple choice questions with fiendishly obtuse distractors thrown in for good measure, it is clear that all but the most advanced students will fold. If, however, you use a generic approach and ask students to identify some of the main ideas of the article, understanding the headline might already help them to work successfully with the text.

I would go one step further and argue that communication problems and even breakdown are an important part of the language acquisition process. Through these critical incidents students have opportunities to grow and to push themselves outside their comfort zone and across the various learning thresholds. They have to leave the controlled environment of the book and by mustering the courage to do so they take charge of their own learning. William Littlewood explains that “with respect to our subject, we aim to help learners develop their ability to operate independently with the language and use it to communicate personal meanings in real, unpredictable situations. We aim to help them to develop their ability to take responsibility for their own learning and to apply active, personally meaningful strategies to their work both inside and outside the classroom”¹⁵ (see chapter 6).

It is a trite but true observation that students tend to compartmentalize their knowledge of a foreign language. Their interest in English is often confined to the four walls of the classroom and the language blocks they acquired are safely stored away somewhere on the outskirts of neuron central, to be accessed only if a gap-fill activity requires urgent repairs. In a predominantly French-speaking environment, we need to accept that most students do simply not get many opportunities to speak English. But they do not really read or listen to it either. They study it at school, and that is that. But a language can never be just abstract knowledge; it must take root in the identity of the person and be pulled toward other objects to flourish.

¹⁵ William LITTLEWOOD, “Self-Access: why do we want it and what can it do”, in Benson and Voller (1997), pp. 81-82

One of the main tasks of a language teacher is to take the language out of the closed space of the classroom and the textbook. In a non-English speaking environment, we can turn to the different media as gateways to the English language world. Paul Sanderson, in his book on using newspapers in the classroom, reminds us of the important role that the media can play in accessing another culture: “Language and culture are inextricably linked, and the newspapers of a given target community reflect its culture through the language they contain. At one level, culture permeates language through references to the people, places, institutions, customs and traditions of that community. However, at a much deeper level, this is achieved through the values, beliefs, emotions and attitudes that a writer assumes “¹⁶ (see chapter 3).

Jane Sherman in her book on *Using Authentic Video in the Classroom* makes a similar point with regards to video: “Thus understanding video drama is an entry ticket to the English-speaking world, on a par with reading newspapers and magazines (...) It should, like them, be regarded as a language learning goal in its own right”.¹⁷ William Richardson in his book on using the Internet in the classroom calls on teachers to reach “beyond the walls of our classroom” and to join their students out there on the Web.¹⁸ By introducing students to these different media, we can open for them avenues for their language to express itself, to attach itself to meaningful contents and to create meaning in turn.

I believe that language can only become truly meaningful to the individual if it is authentic. If language is only provided by the teacher via a textbook, it is the teacher who is in control of the language. The language is his creation, over which students have no power. They can only replicate what they are provided with and the answers to all the questions that might arise are already predetermined in the teacher’s book. This can foster in students the impression that they are just jumping through a set of loops and that they are dependent on the teacher to lead them along the way of a perilous gauntlet, the purpose and final outcome of which remain shrouded in mystery.

¹⁶ Paul SANDERSON (1999), *Using Newspapers in the Classroom*, p. 2

¹⁷ Jane SHERMAN (2003), *Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom*, p. 13

¹⁸ Will RICHARDSON (2009), *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and other powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*, p. 5

Authentic material, on the other hand, can generate more organic and unexpected responses by dropping students in at the deep end. When using breaking news, for instance, teacher and students are confronted with the same developing stories. Meaning is discovered, discussed and continually re-evaluated. Lave and Wenger argue that this kind of participatory classroom is best suited to the learning process: “Conceiving of learning in terms of participation focuses attention on ways in which it is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations. ...Participation...can be neither fully internalized as knowledge structures nor fully externalized as instrumental artifacts or overarching activity structures. Participation is always based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world. This implies that understanding and experience are in constant interaction – indeed, are mutually constitutive.”¹⁹ The participatory classroom is authentic because it draws from the different reactions of the participants to the material. Learning styles and the idea of multiple intelligences play an important role in this understanding of the language classroom, because different students can contribute different ideas garnered through their preferred channels and thus provide multi-dimensional perspectives on the subject matter studied in class (see chapter 4). Ann L. Brown argues that via this kind of “emergent discourse genres and activity structures, meaning is constantly negotiated and renegotiated by members of the community.”²⁰ Critical thinking, negotiation of meaning and collaborative learning, naturally emerge in a genuine and authentic language classroom (see chapter 5).

So ultimately, using authentic material encourages students to use the language autonomously in meaningful exchanges inside and outside the classroom. In a collaborative classroom through participatory activities we empower students and help them to self-direct their learning.

Finally, if we, as teachers, quite ironically often think of autonomy as an issue limited to the students, I would argue that the lack of autonomy in our students is usually reflected in a lack of autonomy in us. Many teachers just replicate the things they were taught in the way they were taught. So, if you happened to learn English in Luxembourg a few decades ago you might still today remember that ‘to pilfer’ and ‘to purloin’ are somewhat akin to the word ‘steal’, and even feel a certain serenity in this arcane knowledge, but you might feel slightly less comfortable in

¹⁹ J.LAVE & E. WENGLER (1991), *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*, pp. 49-52

²⁰ Ann L. BROWN (1993), “Distributed expertise in the classroom”, in *Distributed cognitions*, Gavriel SALOMON, p. 194

communicating in social situations such as a dinner party or a parent teacher meeting. The language we learnt at university, however long ago or recent that may have been, is bound to become obsolete or at least anachronistic at some point. Out of professionalism and respect for our students we need to keep up to date with developments in language usage. Sanderson points out that “(n)ewspapers reflect changes in the language and, in so doing, help students and teachers keep abreast of such changes. With their finger on the pulse of language development, newspapers are linguistically topical and up-to-date, and provide valuable linguistic data”²¹ Sherman remarks that “(a)uthentic video provides a vast up-to-date linguistic resource of accents, vocabulary, grammar and syntax, and all kinds of discourse, which shows us language in most of its uses and contexts....Drama video is particularly valuable because it illustrates the kind of interactive language most foreign-language students seldom encounter”.²²

Many teachers solely rely on their textbooks to keep up with the latest developments for them. And indeed, the fact that language, and in particular English, changes at a breathtaking speed has resulted in most textbooks today using a corpus to determine the structures and vocabulary that are most relevant. The ‘face 2 face’ series reassures students that its “vocabulary section is informed by the Cambridge International Corpus” and that “students can be confident that the language they learn is up-to-date, relevant and natural”²³. I say “bollocks” a word, which is quite frequently used in English, but not included in any textbook I know of. “Bollocks”, because a lot of the most frequent expressions in the language never make it into our textbooks. The main reason for these omissions is of course that some expressions are considered inappropriate, vulgar or taboo. I was somewhat surprised when the new edition of the *Longman Dictionary of Language and Culture* urged me on various occasion to “not use this word” when, admittedly, I was idling away a few moments by looking up naughty words. I could tell you the words, but who am I to go against the commandment of the corpus C? Another reason for this discrimination against certain words is that they are considered to be too specific to a certain variety of English. As a result, the English “mate” or the American words “guy” or “dude” make rare or no appearances in most textbooks. This choice to exclude certain words is of course, and probably rightly so, a reflection of the fact that English has become an International language used today

²¹ PAUL Sanderson (1999), *Using Newspapers in the Classroom*, p 2

²² Jane SHERMAN (2003), *Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom*, p 2

²³ *Face to face* back cover

predominantly for communication between non-native speakers. But to purge the language of its cultural specificity renders it somewhat abstract and hinders the appropriation process discussed above.

A language is in great part a culture, and our students feel the need to be part of that culture. It is in television shows, films, on blogs and forums, on *Facebook* and *Twitter* that we can really see the language as it is used today. By sticking exclusively to the neutered English of our textbooks we always make our students feel that they are strangers in a strange land, awkward outsiders fumbling and groping their way along a black and white landscape. Instead we should encourage them to be bold explorers of vibrantly colorful linguistic and cultural landscapes (see chapter 3). To indulge for a minute longer in the previous metaphor, we need to encourage “grokking” in our students. “Grok” is a really useful word. Robert Heinlein coined it in his novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*²⁴. It means that you understand something so thoroughly that you have become one with it and even love it. Once you approach this stage in language learning, the process ceases to be an uphill struggle but becomes fun, and frustration gives way to the joy of learning. If I share Heinlein’s appreciation of this anxiety-free relationship with a subject matter, I do not believe that it requires thorough understanding, because, to paraphrase another wise man, all we can aspire to, is to understand how little we understand. Therefore, I believe that the joy of learning, the fun of exploration should always be at the heart of each learning process. Authentic curiosity can fuel students’ learning and precludes the frustration associated with not knowing.

I hope my previous reflections have shown how the main theoretical concepts with which this thesis will concern itself organically emerged out of an authentic approach to language learning. Using authentic materials in an authentic way allows us to tap into the natural curiosity that fuels learning and thus creates a fun, multi-intelligence and multi-cultural learning environment, which fosters students’ autonomy, collaborative learning and critical thinking.

²⁴ Robert HEINLEIN (1991), *Stranger in a Strange Land*

3. CULTURAL AWARENESS

This chapter will look at the relationship between language, culture and learner identity. To define the word “culture” is not an easy task since the word has many different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. In his foreword to Barry Tomalin and Susan Stempleski’s book *Cultural Awareness*, Alan Maley makes a useful distinction between two definitions or understandings of culture, which are both relevant in the context of our study:

“In Classic-Humanist Models of language education, culture (which usually meant high culture with a capital C) traditionally occupied a prominent position. More recent models have tended to stress the behavioral aspects of culture and in particular its role in communication (and communication breakdown)”²⁵

Culture with a capital C refers to the high arts of literature, painting, music, etc. This high culture used to be the preserve of the ruling social group and its distinction from low culture reflected inequalities within society. Culture was used as a justification for oppression and social domination because it bestowed on the cultured individual a claim to intellectual and moral superiority. It stood for an excellence of taste beyond reproach and was seen as intrinsically and universally superior. It was a tool cynically used for social engineering and imperialism. According to David Rothkopf, managing director of Kissinger Associates:

“Culture is used by the organizers of society — politicians, theologians, academics, and families — to impose and ensure order, the rudiments of which change over time as need dictates. It is less often acknowledged as the means of justifying inhumanity and warfare. [...] Cultural differences are often sanctified by their links to the mystical roots of culture, be they spiritual or historical. Consequently, a threat to one's culture becomes a threat to one's God or one's ancestors and, therefore, to one's core identity. This inflammatory formula has been used to justify many of humanity's worst acts.”²⁶

In this context, education is seen as the process through which Culture is acquired by the individual. It is a process of initiation to an exclusive social circle achieved through the assimilation of established cultural values.

In the 19th century, following the work of Rousseau, there was a movement against this concept of culture, which was seen as perpetuating artificial systems of belief that alienated man from his true nature: “Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything

²⁵ Alan MALEY (1993), in *Cultural Awareness* by Tomalin/Stempleski, p. 3

²⁶ David Rothkopf, "In Praise of Cultural Imperialism?" *Foreign Policy*, Number 107, Summer 1997, pp. 38-53

degenerates in the hands of man.”²⁷ Rousseau acknowledges that every society “must choose between making a man or a citizen” and that the best “social institutions are those that best know how to denature man, to take his absolute existence from him in order to give him a relative one and transport the I into the common unity.”²⁸ The idea of a “relative” existence, of culture as a construct, is diametrically opposed to the claim to universality that characterized the former definition of culture.

Rousseau’s idea of the “natural man” undoubtedly reflected a new anthropological understanding of the diversity of culture, an understanding ironically brought about by the colonial frenzy fuelled by the old concept of culture. Out of this understanding emerged the broader definition of culture as a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a particular group. This definition became more prominent as societal structures broke open and our exposure to different alternative cultures increased. Unlike the confining nature of the first definition of culture, this idea implies an openness, an awareness of and a sensitivity to the ways in which cultures think, feel and live differently: “The term cultural awareness encompasses three qualities “awareness of one’s own culturally-induced behavior, awareness of the culturally-induced behavior of others; ability to explain one’s own cultural standpoint.”²⁹ Culture is here understood as a tool for mediation that has a fundamentally communicative function in a world that is increasingly bringing together individuals from a wide variety of cultures. In this context, education is seen as the process through which individuals are exposed to other cultures in order to make them more aware of and more tolerant of alternative ways of living and thinking. If initially the promotion of tolerance was largely an endeavor aimed at preventing the atrocities of two world wars from happening again, in a globalized world this cultural awareness has taken on a new importance, enabling us to live together and do business together.

The shift in the dominating definition of culture and the role it plays in education can be clearly seen in the changes to the English language curriculum. If twenty years ago a reading list was likely to include the classics i.e. Shakespeare, Dickens, Austen etc., today one is more likely to

²⁷ Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU, *Emilie or on Education*, translated by Alan Bloom (1979), p. 37

²⁸ Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU, *Emilie or on Education*, translated by Alan Bloom (1979), p. 40

²⁹ Barry TOMALIN & Susan STENPLESKI (1993), *Cultural Awareness*, p. 5

find texts such as *The Kite Runner* which have as a main theme cultural conflict and ways to overcome it.

If there has been a shift to the second more inclusive definition of culture in recent years, it is important to note that there are still remnants of the older more exclusive one. The intimate conviction amongst some students and teachers alike that the Queen's English is somehow more correct than American English, the surprising frequency with which even lower-level learners try to use Shakespeare as a benchmark tool for measuring their progress in English, the fact that a lot of the curricular reading material includes texts that are so far removed from the students' personal experience, that a meaningful exchange with the text becomes impossible – all suggest the ambivalence of our attitudes towards culture. Culture and education are still very much tinged by an elitist ideology which tries to impose a hierarchy between those who are cultured and those who are not. Culture still excludes as much as it includes.

The tension between culture as a restrictive and expansive force reflects the role it plays in the construction of identity. As Kenneth Bruffee reminds us “we are drawn to one another and distrust one another at the same time. We want to get to know one another, but we are disinclined to talk with strangers. We want to close ourselves in and at the same time open ourselves to other people and cultures”.³⁰

In the introduction to this thesis I have pointed out that interactions in a multi-cultural classroom are characterized as much by prejudice as by genuine interest in other cultures. Being confronted with a new culture always has the potential to be a threatening experience because our implicit systems of belief might be questioned. As a result, we use stereotyping to confine the other to the pre-conceived image we have of him, an image which always implies our own superiority. This bi-polar process of acceptance and rejection can take a considerable amount of time before we are willing to accept the other as a part of ourselves.

³⁰ Kenneth A. BRUFFEE (1993), *Collaborative Learning*, p 12

This process can be observed in the relationship not only of the students to each other, but also in their relationship to the subject they study. A new subject is a new system of thought, a new language, and a new set of references that needs to be integrated into our existing frame of mind. Kenneth A. Bruffee in his book on collaborative learning goes as far as equating the concepts of education and acculturation. He expresses the belief “that the first instance of our job as teachers was to find ways to begin and to sustain a much more difficult process than “correcting errors” in our students’ talk, writing, and behavior. Our job as teachers, we were saying, was to find out how, in some way and in some measure, to reacculturate the students who had placed themselves in our charge.”³¹ In other words students, whatever their subject, try to join a knowledge community which defines itself by a set of ideas, values and linguistic conventions which need to be assimilated: “Learning, as we were experiencing it, was not just inextricably linked to the social relationship among us. It was identical with it and inseparable from it.”³² So if we move away from an understanding of learning as a simple process of absorbing knowledge, but see it as a process which involves changes in the social and cultural identity of the learner, we are able to identify a new set of challenges, which we as teachers need to overcome with our students. Gardner and Lambert argue that the first challenge for the language learner is that he must be willing “to identify with members of another ethno-linguistic group and to take on very subtle aspects of their behavior, including their distinctive style of speech and their language”³³. For Bruffee this new way of looking at the learning experience resulted in an acute awareness “that reacculturation is at best extremely difficult to accomplish”³⁴. Stern defines the difficulties of this process as such: “classroom learning as well as immersion in the target language environment each entail specific affective problems which have been characterized as language shock and stress and as culture shock and stress”.³⁵ In a similar vein, Hofstede argues that culture shock can be caused by the need for the learner to re-evaluate deeply held cultural beliefs, behaviors, and values. In many ways the learner is like a child who has to acquire not only new words for old concepts, but also new concepts³⁶.

³¹ Kenneth A. BRUFFEE (1993), *Collaborative Learning*, p. 5

³² idem, p. 6

³³ GARDNER & LAMBERT, in BRUFFEE (1993), *Collaborative Learning*, p. 9

³⁴ Kenneth A. BRUFFEE (1993), *Collaborative Learning*, p. 7

³⁵ H.H STERN (1983), *Fundamental Concepts of Language Learning*, pp. 411-412

³⁶ G. HOFSTEDE (1997), *Culture’s Consequences*, p. 207

Benson, in addition, points out the deeply political nature of this process of acculturation: “The acceptance of English as a second language very often implies the acceptance of the global economic and political order for which English serves as “international language”. Secondly, learning foreign languages (and again English in particular) is more often than not premised upon inequalities between learner and target communities. Social and economic inequalities (within and between communities) are invariably underlying motivations for language learning in situations of societal multilingualism, migrant education, and EAP and Business English.”³⁷ Walsh goes even further than this arguing that “it is partially through the battle for voice that the war of colonization is waged; it is through language imposition and practices in schools that colonization is, in part, effectuated”³⁸

Quite naturally, this process of colonization is going to produce resistance in the learner, which can become a serious barrier to language acquisition. The next step in this line of thought then requires us to consider ways in which to allow students to lower their affective defenses and encourage them to accept the language and culture and to integrate it with their own. Kramsch points out the importance of establishing “a sphere of interculturality” in order to allow students to connect their own culture and language with the new culture and language.³⁹ Benson develops this idea as follows:

“My understanding of language and language learning suggests that language cannot be isolated from the particular contexts in which it is used. I have elsewhere referred to this as the “worldliness” of English, arguing that English needs to be understood not only in terms of its global position but also in terms of the specific social, cultural, economic and political contexts of use. Thus, in the particular contexts in which we teach, the notion of being an autonomous language learner cannot be considered merely within the psychological and individualistic frame of “language acquisition” but must start to pose questions about what it means to be an autonomous user of language. Such a notion is centrally concerned with voice, with how a language user can come to express cultural alternatives, with becoming the author of one’s own world. The notion of voice is intended to suggest that language use and language learning are about finding means of articulation and that this is inevitably a struggle amid the cultural politics of language.”⁴⁰

What this means in the classroom is that the ideas, beliefs and values of the target culture need to be viewed explicitly and confronted with the ideas, values, and beliefs of the learners. According to Bruffee these cultural alternatives must be discussed not between the teacher and the students,

³⁷ Phil BENSON & Peter VOLLER (1997), *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*, p. 27

³⁸ C. WALSH (1991), *Pedagogy and the Struggle for Voice*, p. 5

³⁹ C. Kramsch (1993), *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*, p 207-208

⁴⁰ Phil BENSON & Peter VOLLER (1997), *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*, p 47-48

but between the students themselves: “what does seem just possible to accomplish is for people to reacclurate themselves by working together. That is, there is a way to sever, weaken, or renegotiate our ties to one or more of the communities we belong to and at the same time gain membership in another community. We can do that if, and it seems in most cases only if, we work collaboratively.”⁴¹

It is self-evident that in a multi-cultural environment such as the INL the variety of perspectives that will emerge when students work together to establish culture alternatives, negate the monolithic dominance of the target culture and allow students to access the culture in a non-threatening and inclusive way. Bruffee describes the collaborative nature of this process as follows: “First, students learn to vest authority and trust, tentatively and for short periods of time, in other members of their transition group. Then, with more confidence, they learn to vest authority and trust in the larger community that constitutes the class as a whole, in which their transition group is nested. Finally, students learn to vest authority and trust in themselves as individuals who have internalized the language, values, and mores of the still larger community”.⁴² Giving the example of one particular student he explains that: “Re-accluration, learning began for Mary when she engaged in conversation with a peer at the boundary between the community she was brought up in and the community her classmate was brought up in (...)At the same time that conversation, external and internalized, changed Mary’s opinion; it also changed her feelings about the topic, about the conversation about herself. It made her feel ready to write and interested in what she had to say”⁴³ This exemplifies that making culture explicit in language through a collaborative approach can ease the process of acculturation and help students to produce an authentic response to the study material which in terms empowers them and fosters their autonomy in language learning. The student is no longer in a locked-down position where he or she feels dominated and oppressed by a superior body of knowledge - embodied by the teacher, the schoolbook, the grammar etc.- but instead the learning process is transformed into a fun journey of discovery of a different culture and language. The student is an explorer who, similar to a peer learning the language on site “becomes exposed and accustomed to a range of images and symbols embedded in songs and pictures, places and customs. These images and

⁴¹ Kenneth A. BRUFFEE (1993), *Collaborative Learning*, p. 8

⁴² idem, p. 11

⁴³ idem, p.11

symbols include famous people in the culture, and architectural and landscape features such as the White House in Washington and the white cliffs of Dover. Familiarity with these images helps students feel more confident and to become more fluent.”⁴⁴ Tomalin concludes that “when students have understood the language being used in a situation and then go on to gain an understanding of the cultural factors at work, this is for them one of the most absorbing and exciting parts of any language lesson. Studying culture with a task-oriented and co-operative learning approach adds a new dimension of achievement and understanding for the students – and for us as teacher”.⁴⁵

I would like to conclude this chapter with Kramsch’s reminder that: “Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Barry TOMALIN & Susan STENPLESKI (1993), *Cultural Awareness*, p. 15

⁴⁵ idem, p. 9

⁴⁶ C. KRAMSCH, (1988), “The cultural discourse of foreign language textbooks” in A. SINGERMAN (Ed.), *Towards a new integration of language and culture* pp. 63-68

4. MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

The concept of ‘multiple intelligences’ was introduced by Howard Gardner in his book *Frames of Mind* in 1983. Gardner’s main thesis in the book is that there is not one monolithic intelligence, but rather, a set of intelligences, which are developed to a greater or lesser degree in each individual: “The human mind is better thought of as a series of relatively separate faculties, with only loose and non-predictable relations with one another, than a single, all-purpose machine that performs steadily at a certain horsepower, independent of content and context. On an intuitive level, I had embraced the view of the human brain and the human mind that is now called modularity; the view that, over thousands of years, the human mind/brain has evolved a number of separate organs of information-processing devices.”⁴⁷

Gardner openly criticized the bias of traditional intelligence testing in favor of the logical mathematical and the linguistic intelligences. He argued that this focus blurred the recognition of other forms of achievement such as musical or artistic talent, which were often seen as only peripherally important: “This “equipotential position (as it was called) is no longer tenable. All evidence now points to the brain as being a highly differentiated organ: Specific capacities, ranging from the recognition of the angle of a line to the production of a particular linguistic sound, are linked to specific neural networks.”⁴⁸

In his book *Intelligence Reframed*, Garner points out that this rethinking of intelligence has not stopped with his own approach: “Other psychologists have also called attention to neglected aspects of the terrain of intelligence. For example, David Olson of the University of Toronto has emphasized the importance of mastering different media (like computers) or symbol systems (like written or graphic materials) and has redefined intelligence as “skill in the use of a medium”. The psychologists Gavriel Salolmon and Roy Pea, both experts on technology and education, have noted the extent to which intelligence inheres in the resources to which a person has access, ranging from pencils to Rolodexes to libraries or computer networks. In their

⁴⁷ Howard GARDNER (1999) , *Intelligence Reframed*, p. 32

⁴⁸ idem, p. 20

view, intelligence is better thought of as “distributed in the world rather than concentrated “in the head”⁴⁹.

So even if, as will be shown later, Garner’s theories are not without their detractors, his book needs to be understood as a seminal text in the rethinking of intelligence in recent times. This re-thinking of the concept of intelligence is not so different from the change in our understanding of culture, which we have retraced earlier. From a monolithic, exclusive model based on the implicit superiority of certain groups we have moved to a more diversified, inclusive model that recognizes and values individual differences.

The two competing models of intelligence can be best conceptualized and understood when juxtaposing *Frames of Mind* to *The Bell Curve*⁵⁰, another landmark treatise on intelligence released in 1994. The two authors of the latter, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, entered the intelligence debate with an incendiary study whose main thesis was that an individual's intelligence – the greater part of which is inherited genetically from his or her parents - has more effect than their socioeconomic background on future life experiences. So in addition to their premise that a person’s IQ is largely genetically inherited, a second important idea was that social intervention could do little to increase the life chances of socially disadvantaged people. Intelligence, they argued, inherently correlated with a variety of indicators of socioeconomic success in society, such as a prestigious job, high annual income, and high educational attainment; and was inversely correlated with crime, poverty, drug addiction and other forms of social failure. Some of the statements in the study harkened back to the theory of eugenics which had been used to support ideas of racial selection. Indeed the authors argued against supporting and, thereby, increasing the population of 'lower cast intelligences, lest there was a risk of lessening the nation's “genetic” capital. In the introduction to *Intelligence Reframed* Gardner accuses the authors of rhetorical brinksmanship: “Instead of stating the unpalatable, the authors lead readers to the point where they are likely to draw a certain conclusion on their own. And so, while Herrnstein and Murray claimed to remain « resolutely neutral » on the sources of black-white differences in intelligence, the evidence

⁴⁹ idem, pp.23-24

⁵⁰ R. HERNSTEIN and C. MURRAY (1994), *The Bell Curve*

they present strongly suggests a genetic basis for the disparity. Similarly, while they did not recommend eugenic practices, they repeatedly used the following reasoning: Social pathology is due to low intelligence, and intelligence cannot be changed through social intervention. The reader is almost ineluctably, led to conclude that « we » (the intelligent reader, of course) must find a way to reduce the number of « unintelligent » people”⁵¹ The dichotomy of ‘we’ and ‘they’ that Gardner highlights and attacks reflects an understanding of intellectual achievement similar to that of culture with a capital C. The failure of our collective intelligence to solve societal problems is blamed on the other and fails to take into account that mental and psychological deficiencies at all levels tend to trickle down and affect those at the bottom worse. Gardner intuitively rejected this exclusive definition of intelligence and its discriminatory implications and set out to find a more inclusive model based on the idea that we can learn from each other and from our differences. If this approach might seem a tad naïve or even clichéd, one only needs to look at the current state of global affairs to see that in its vast majority the world still dearly loves to stereotype and to exclude. Gardner argued that the prevalent theory on intelligence and the tests it produced only took into account a very small part of the spectrum of intelligence i.e. the logical-mathematical and the linguistic intelligences and excluded all the rest. By focusing only on these two intelligences the traditional educational system ignored the talents and assets of legions of young people whose particular skills and abilities were not recognized and valorized. The implications for their educational and professional careers were often far-reaching. In the introduction to the tenth anniversary edition of his classic book Gardner explains:

“In the heyday of the psychometric and behaviorist eras, it was generally believed that intelligence was a single entity that was inherited; and that human beings - initially a blank slate - could be trained to learn anything, provided that it was presented in an appropriate way. Nowadays an increasing number of researchers believe precisely the opposite; that there exists a multitude of intelligences, quite independent of each other; that each intelligence has its own strengths and constraints; that the mind is far from unencumbered at birth; and that it is unexpectedly difficult to teach things that go against early 'naïve' theories of that challenge the natural lines of force within an intelligence and its matching domains”.⁵²

He redefined intelligence as the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings and posited that, instead of one unified intelligence, there were in

⁵¹ Howard GARDNER (1999), *Intelligence Reframed*, p.8

⁵² Howard Gardner (1993), *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, xxiii

fact seven intelligences which were more or less developed in each individual and expressed themselves in particular skills and abilities:

1. The Intrapersonal Intelligence.

“Intrapersonal intelligence involves the capacity to understand oneself – including one’s own desires, fears, and capacities – and to use such information effectively”

2. The Interpersonal Intelligence.

“Interpersonal intelligence denotes a person’s capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and, consequently, to work effectively with others.”

3. The logical-mathematical intelligence.

“Logical mathematical intelligence involves the capacity to analyze problems logically, carry out mathematical operations, and investigate issues scientifically.”

4. The linguistic intelligence.

“Linguistic intelligence involves sensitivity to spoken and written language, the ability to learn languages, and the capacity to use languages to accomplish certain goals.”

5. The Musical Intelligence.

“Musical Intelligence entails skills in the performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns.”

6. The Bodily-kinesthetic Intelligence.

“Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence entails the potential to use one’s whole body or parts of the body (like the hand or the mouth) to solve problems or fashion products.”

7. The Spatial Intelligence.

“Spatial Intelligence features the potential to recognize and manipulate the patterns of wide space (those used, for instance, by navigators and pilots) as well as the patterns of more confined areas.”⁵³

⁵³ Howard GARDNER (1999), *Intelligence Reframed*, pp. 42-43

In addition to the seven intelligences listed above Gardner also suggested “new” candidate intelligences: a naturalist intelligence, a spiritual intelligence, and an existential intelligence.

Naturalist intelligence “designates the human ability to discriminate among living things (plants, animals) as well as sensitivity to other features of the natural world (clouds, rock configurations). This ability was clearly of value in our evolutionary past as hunters, gatherers, and farmers; it continues to be central in such roles as botanist or chef. I also speculate that much of our consumer society exploits the natural intelligences, which can be mobilized in the discrimination among cars, sneakers, kinds of makeup, and the like. The kind of pattern recognition valued in certain sciences may also draw upon the naturalist intelligence”⁵⁴

The existential intelligence is especially developed in individuals who ask questions about life, death, and ultimate realities. Gardener suggests that the spiritual intelligence could be seen as a part of the existential intelligence and defines it as the search for higher truths and transcendent states.

In order to isolate and differentiate the various intelligences, Gardner proceeded on a number of essential criteria among which the most important ones are the potential isolation by brain damage. Brain damage might deprive an individual of one of the intelligences and leave the others intact. Thus if there were documented cases of a person being deprived of a specific intelligence as a result of brain damage, Gardner took this as evidence that this intelligence functions as an independent entity.

Another criterion was the existence of idiot savants who display extraordinary aptitude in the area of one intelligence but are often inept in most other aspects. The other four criteria are a distinct developmental history, a susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system, an identifiable core operation and an evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility.

Despite his attempt to establish strict criteria for his theory they have had mixed receptions in the field of cognitive psychology because they are often judged unsubstantiated by hard empirical

⁵⁴ Howard GARDNER (1999), *Intelligence Reframed*, p. 47

data and based predominantly on intuition. They have, however, found a fertile soil in the field of education where their central tenet of the diversity of intelligence has given educators and parents a positive conceptual framework to determine, evaluate and foster the particular skills and abilities of each student. Traditionally, schools have emphasized the development of the logical-mathematical intelligence and the linguistic intelligence (mainly reading and writing). In fact, IQ tests focus mostly on the logical and linguistic intelligences. While many students function well in this environment, there are those who do not. Gardner's theory argues that students will be better served by a broader vision of education, wherein teachers use different methodologies, exercises and activities to reach all students, not just those who excel at linguistic and logical intelligence.

The first application of his ideas in schools that Gardner himself supervised was the "Spectrum classroom": "Our initial Spectrum site, a preschool, was well stocked with materials to activate the different intelligences, including specimens of nature, board games, artistic and musical materials, and areas for exercise, dance, and building. We assumed that children would find these materials inviting, that they would interact with them regularly, and that they would reveal to us, by the richness and sophistication of their interactions, their particular array of intelligences."⁵⁵

According to Gardner the experiment was a success and consequently a number of schools in America developed MI curricula. A Harvard-led study of 41 schools using the theory came to the conclusion that in these schools there was "a culture of hard work, respect, and caring; a faculty that collaborated and learned from each other; classrooms that engaged students through constrained but meaningful choices, and a sharp focus on enabling students to produce high-quality work"⁵⁶

I would like to stress two important points from the previous summary assessment to situate the theory of MI in the larger framework of this thesis. First of all, that the multiple intelligence class is said to offer constrained but meaningful choices. By encouraging students to approach study material through their preferred learning channels we allow them to authentically interact with it

⁵⁵ Howard GARDNER (1999), *Intelligence Reframed*, p. 137

⁵⁶ KORNHABER (2004), "Psychometric Superiority? Check Your Facts," quoted In Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_multiple_intelligences

in the ways that they would naturally choose. As a result, multiple-intelligence plays an important role in developing autonomy by allowing students to authentically interact with the material. Secondly, the commentator points out that through collaboration the students learn from each other. By respecting their individual talents and predilections every student becomes an asset to the class as a whole and contributes their unique perspective and experience.

Despite all of the initial positive feedback, it has to be said that Gardner's theories have over time lost the sheen of the magic bullet to slay all educational problems. Indeed, as for any educational theory, its popularity was soon dented by the inevitable backlash: "As a theory, MI is convenient, simple . . . and wrong. . . . So many people have jumped on to the bandwagon with the idea that "everyone is gifted at something" that many gifted programs have been eliminated or watered down. Some people are under the illusion that the needs of gifted students can be met in a setting that allows multiple forms of expression. MI is a simplistic, wishful-thinking approach that seems like a good thing to people who are uncomfortable admitting that intellectual abilities are not equally distributed in American society."⁵⁷ There is more than a tint of bigotry in the previous statement, which reflects why his theories have rubbed people the wrong way. Everybody is equal, but some are obviously more equal than others.

Yet, despite all the criticism, his ideas have left an indelible mark on most textbooks and curricula today. A summary look at a modern language learning method like the New English File shows that next to the more mathematical-logical gap-fill exercises, there are songs, role-play activities, debates, visualized representations of phonemes, mimes etc. that try to use all the channels available to learners. CD-ROMs or dedicated websites even go one step further in offering even more activities that target the various intelligences. The website of the New English File series has simple videogames for the kinesthetic and spatial learner, as well as cloze exercises for the linguistic learners, etc.

This diversification of the study material most certainly does not reflect a strict adherence to MI principles, but rather an attempt to make the learning process more interesting, by offering a

⁵⁷ James R. DELISLE (2000), www.prufrock.com/client/client_pages/In_Praise_of_Elitism.cfm

wider variety of activities and exercises. The scope is further broadened through study links, which connect the material covered in class to real-life online resources.

Indeed, the principles of MI and the use of more varied media in the classroom to convey knowledge has been a perfect fit. The media companies have always intuitively understood what Garner theorized on in his book – that you reach different people in different ways. There are those of us who prefer to trawl through lengthy newspaper articles and those who prefer to look at pictures. Some of us love listening to the radio while others prefer to make their own connections by clicking through a news story. By using all the resources available to us, we manage to have a more interesting and stimulating class that eschews repetitiveness and predictability to continually stimulate and excite students. By encouraging a more inclusive pedagogical approach, I believe that by and large, Gardner's theories have had a positive impact on the field of education.

5. INTELLIGENCE MULTIPLIED AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

In the previous chapters, I have repeatedly stressed the importance of collaborative learning in building the classroom community and improving the learning experience of individual students. In the chapter on cultural awareness we have seen that collaborative learning can help students overcome their resistance to assimilating a new language and makes it easier for them to develop their linguistic identity. We have also seen how collaborative learning is a means to pool the different intelligences and establish a meta-intelligence within the classroom that can allow individual students to make progress by tapping into the resource offered by the group. This concept of a meta-intelligence or a collective intelligence has been referred to earlier by Gardner as one of the neglected areas in mapping the terrain of intelligence. He mentions in particular the work of Gavriel Salomon and Roy Pea who argue that intelligence is better thought of as “distributed” in the world rather than concentrated in the “head”⁵⁸.

The theory of distributed cognition can be traced back to two very different fields of study. In the field of biology, scholars observed collective intelligence at work within certain groups of animals, such as bees or ants. Their behavior seems to be determined by an intelligent design emerging between the members of a group and transcending the abilities of the individual. The first scientist to identify this phenomenon, while observing colonies of termites, was Eugène Marais. In his book *The Soul of the White Ant* he wrote: "The termitary is a separate and composite animal." He described the termitary as an organism with a brain, a stomach, a liver, and a sexual organ - each of the parts formed by a great number of individual termites: "They have legs and arms for gathering food; they have a mouth. If natural selection continues to operate, the final result may be a termitary which moves slowly over the veld."⁵⁹ If Marais observed with awe the organizational prowess of the termites he could not provide a satisfactory explanation as to how this collaboration came about. The termites, like the cells of our body, seemed to form one entity, but it was not apparent what bound them together.

⁵⁸ Gavriel SALOMON (1993), *Distributed cognitions*

⁵⁹ Eugene MARAIS (1937), *The Soul of the White Ant*, p. 78

It was another scientist, Pierre Grassé, studying the cathedral-like structure of the termite hive, who discovered the organizing principle behind this group behavior. He called it stigmergy⁶⁰. He observed that when starting their building work termites drop soil more or less randomly. After a while however they start to bring the earth towards the biggest heap, which thus continues to grow until it connects with similar heaps created in its proximity. The result of this growing together of the different piles are the intricate cathedral-like structures that appear so inexplicable and awe-inspiring. Grassé concluded that the insects use a central object to focus their efforts. The mud left by one termite provides a signal for other termites to continue work on that mud. Thus, the term stigmergy, whose Greek components mean “mark” (stigma) and “work” (ergon). Francis Heylighen explains that “the fundamental mechanism here is that the environment is used as a shared medium for storing information so that it can be interpreted by other individuals. Unlike a message (e.g. a spoken communication) which is directed at a particular individual at a particular time, a stigmergic signal can be picked up by any individual at any time. A spoken message that does not reach its addressee, or is not understood, is lost forever. A stigmergic signal, on the other hand, remains, storing information in a stable medium that is accessible by everyone.”⁶¹

The media scholar and philosopher Pierre Lévy has proposed a similar concept to explain collective intelligence, that of a shared “object”⁶². Heylighen explains: “For example, a typical object is the ball in a football game. Football players rarely need to communicate directly, e.g. by shouting directions at each other. Their activities are coordinated because they are all focused on the position and movement of the ball. The state of the ball incites them to execute particular actions, e.g. running toward the ball, passing it to another player, or having a shot at the goal. Thus, the ball functions as a stigmergic signal, albeit a much more dynamic one than the mud used by termites. Another typical “object” discussed by Lévy (1997) is money. It is the price, i.e. the amount of money you get for a particular good, which incites producers to supply either more

⁶⁰ P. GRASSE (1959), “La reconstruction du nid et les coordinations inter-individuelles chez *Bellicositermes natalis* et *Cubitermes* sp. La théorie de la stigmergie”, *Insectes Sociaux*, pp. 6, 41-83.

⁶¹ Francis HEYLIGHEN, *Collective Intelligence and its Implementation on the Web: algorithms to develop a collective mental map*, p.6

⁶²P. Lévy (1997), *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*

or less of that good. Thus, money is the external signal which allows the different actors in the market to coordinate their actions”⁶³

The second field of study in which collective intelligence has become a subject of much interest and debate is IT. The Net itself is seen by many as an example of distributed intelligence, in the way that through the connections which are established between different sites a whole emerges that is greater than the sum of its parts. Some futurologists go as far as suggesting that at some point the net, in the manner of world-wide neural network could become prescient and be the first form of A.I. What sounds like the pipedream of computer nerds already has already very practical applications in the business world. Eric Bonabeau explains the stakes in his essay for *The Harvard Review* entitled “Decisions 2.0: the Power of Collective Intelligence”:

“Companies have long used teams to solve problems: focus groups to explore customer needs, consumer surveys to understand the market and annual meetings to listen to shareholders. But the words "solve," "explore," "understand" and "listen" have now taken on a whole new meaning. Thanks to recent technologies, including many Web 2.0 applications, companies can now tap into "the collective" on a greater scale than ever before. Indeed, the increasing use of information markets, wikis, crowdsourcing, "the wisdom of crowds" concepts, social networks, collaborative software and other Web-based tools constitutes a paradigm shift.”⁶⁴

Among all these buzz words, the concepts of “wisdom of the crowds” and crowd sourcing might require some elucidation. *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations* is a book published in 2004 by James Surowiecki. In it he argues that decisions made by the aggregation of suggestions from large groups lead to better results than those made by individuals or small groups. A popular example for the wisdom of crowds is that when guessing the weight of a pig, say at a village fair, the average of all the guesses is surprisingly close to the actual weight. Crowd-sourcing are the methods by which this collective intelligence is garnered and used for problem-solving purposes. The most intriguing technology used to this purpose is a new Internet search engine called *Propeller*. The tool offered by *Recorded Future* tracks information published online to establish links between people, companies, places and events and puts it on a timescale. It analyses everything from news articles to *Twitter* updates and uses linguistic

⁶³ Francis HEYLIGHEN, *Collective Intelligence and its Implementation on the Web: algorithms to develop a collective mental map*, p.6

⁶⁴ Eric Bonabeau (2009), Decisions 2.0: the Power of Collective Intelligence, *Harvard Business Review*

analysis to render its image of the future. Words, expressions or connections which suddenly appear with increased frequency are used to make predictions about emerging trends.

Another, less futuristic, example of crowd-sourcing is *Wikipedia*. On this encyclopedic platform many contributors cooperate to write articles, to correct inaccuracies or to update the information if necessary. This kind of collaborative effort, mediated by technology, can be understood as a form of collective intelligence. It has challenged and continues to do so, our epistemological understanding of knowledge and authority. When *Wikipedia* started many vocal critics argued that the result of this approach to knowledge would only result in a collection of erroneous and non-substantiated statements that could never be relied on to provide factual and accurate information. And yet, five years later, everyone who has experienced Wikipedia first hand will testify to its usefulness in democratizing knowledge and as a continually up-to-date reference tool that manages to keep up with and adapt to the breathtaking pace of scientific and social change that characterizes our time.

Another, even higher-impact example, for collective intelligence is the World Wide Web itself. In fact, the WWW was always conceived as collaborative entity. Tim Berners-Lee had a grand vision for the Internet when he began its development in 1989. “The original thing I wanted to do,” Berners Lee said, “was to make it a collaborative medium, a place where we could all meet and read and write”. In his introduction to his book *Blogs, Wikis, and Podcasts*, Richardson explains:

“Berners-Lee saw the potential to construct a vast web of linked information, built by people from around the globe, creating the ability to share not just data but personal talents and experiences in new and powerful ways (...) We’re in the midst of an explosion of technologies that will continue to remake the Web into the community, participatory space Berners-Lee originally envisioned, changing much of our lives in significant ways. These changes are already playing out in politics, journalism, and business. And from an educational standpoint the new Read/Write Web promises to transform much of how we teach and learn as well. ... We are no longer limited to being independent readers or consumers of information; as we’ll see, we can be collaborators in the creation of large storehouses of information.”⁶⁵

If we look at the ways in which our lives have changed over the last few years it seems hard to question the fact that the Web has fundamentally changed the fabric of society. If knowledge and expertise used to be situated in the heads of experts that people were eager to consult, for

⁶⁵ Will RICHARDSON (2009), *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts*, pp. 1-2

example specialist doctors, today many of us turn to Wikipedia or the Net, to make up our own minds. If knowledge is power, then the Internet has fundamentally changed the power structures within society. Politicians and their decision are now under constant “sousveillance” by the Internet community. Protests and civil disobedience can be organized and staged almost instantaneously via *Facebook* and other social networking sites.

Journalism has undergone similar dramatic upheavals with the advent of *Twitter*, blogs, *Wikis*, and *Facebook* groups which spread information instantaneously and without editorial control or manipulation. Richardson explains that “In 2007, USA today made it possible for readers to comment on any story, adding opinion, asking further questions, or even correcting what has been written, and most other online newspapers followed suit. In essence, every article is a blog post. By including people in the process, this new Web creates all sorts of opportunities for participatory journalism, which of course, creates all sorts of new definitions and descriptions of just what journalism is.”⁶⁶

According to author and technologist Marc Prensky, “this online life is a whole lot bigger than just the Internet. This online life has become an entire strategy for how to live, survive and thrive in the twenty-first century where cyberspace is a part of everyday life”⁶⁷ Some researchers go even further by arguing that technology does not only rewire our social networks and the power distribution in our society, it also changes our neural connections.

In a seminal article for the *Educational Researcher* Gavriel Salomon discusses how computer technology changes the very fabric of our mind:

“Examine how technologies, particularly computer technologies that aid in cognitive processing, can support intellectual performance and enrich individuals’ minds. We distinguish between effects with and of a technology: ‘Effects with’ occur when people work in partnership with machines, whereas ‘effects of’ occur when such partnerships have subsequent cognitive spin-off effects for learners working away from machines. It is argued that effects both with and of depend on the individual’s mindful engagement in the partnership. Such mind-machine collaborations also invite reexamination of prevailing conceptions of intelligence and ability: Are they properties of the individual or of the joint system? We respond to these dilemmas by offering two views, one emphasizing mainly the upgraded performance in a person-machine

⁶⁶ Will RICHARDSON (2009), *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts*, p. 4

⁶⁷ M. Prensky (2004). *The emerging online life of the digital native*

system of partnership, the other emphasizing more the educationally valued cognitive residue that can result.”⁶⁸

Richardson quotes William D Winn, director of the Learner Center at the University of Washington, who “believes that years of computer use creates children that “think differently from us. They develop hypertext minds. They leap around. It is as though their cognitive structures were parallel, not sequential. In other words, today’s students may not well be suited to the more linear progression of learning that most educational systems employ”.⁶⁹ Richardson, Salomon and Win stress the cognitive impact of technology and raise the questions of how it will affect the field of education.

Howard Rheingold, author of *Smart Mobs*, wonders how prepared schools are to embrace the digital revolution: “The kind of questioning, collaborative, active, lateral rather than hierarchical pedagogy that participatory media both forces and enables is not the kind of change that takes place quickly or at all in public schools”.⁷⁰ Indeed, if we begin to think of intelligence and knowledge not as contained within the individual but as distributed in the world, we can conceive of a different way of collaborative learning that reflects the world we live and respects our students as equal and autonomous actors.

Ann L. Brown reminds us that long before the advent of the Internet Vygotsky conceived of

“the classroom as composed of zones of proximal development through which participants can navigate via different routes and at different rates. A zone of proximal development can include people, adults and children, with various degrees of expertise, but it can also include artifacts such as books, videos, wall displays, scientific equipment, and a computer environment intended to support intentional learning. A zone of proximal development is the region of activity that learners navigate with aid from supporting context, including but not limited to people. It defines the distance between current levels of comprehension and levels that can be accomplished in collaboration with other people or powerful artifacts. The zone of proximal development embodies a concept of readiness to learn that emphasizes upper levels of competence. Furthermore, these upper boundaries are seen not as immutable but as constantly changing”.⁷¹

Brown here envisions a collaborative classroom that reflects our democratic ideals and our connected existences. Kenneth A. Bruffee in his book *Collaborative learning* calls for a similar change of paradigm in education:

⁶⁸ Gavriel SALOMON (1991), *Partners in Cognition, Extending Human Intelligence with Intelligent Technologies*, p. 2

⁶⁹ Will RICHARDSON (2009), *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts*, p. 7

⁷⁰ Howard RHEINGOLD, http://thefeaturearchives.com/topic/Culture/M-Learning_4_Generation_Txt_.html

⁷¹ Ann L. BROWN (1993), *Distributed Expertise in the Classroom*, in Salomon, p. 191

“College and university professors teach the way they do because they understand knowledge to be a certain kind of thing. Most assume (or teach as though they assume) a cognitive –that is, a foundational – understanding of knowledge. Knowledge, they believe (or they teach as if they believe) is supported or grounded on reality and fact, something that gets transmitted from one head to another: from a teacher’s head to a student’s head, an employer’s head to an employee’s, or from an employee’s head to the head of the boss. These assumptions lead to the futile circularity of mind and reality, subjectivity and objectivity that the foundational, or cognitive, understanding of knowledge has perpetuated for centuries. Collaborative learning, in contrast, assumes a non-foundational understanding of knowledge. Knowledge is a social construct, a consensus among the members of a community of knowledgeable peers.”⁷²

Brown calls for a similar rethinking of classroom philosophy: “Far from being passive recipients of incoming information, students take on the role of active researchers and teachers (...) Teachers, also, no longer managers and didactic teachers, but models of active learning”.⁷³

Carl Rogers, in 1969, had a similar vision of what education in the future could be like:

“So now with some relief I turn to an activity, a purpose, which really warms me – the facilitation of learning. When I have been able to transform a group – and here I mean all the members of a group, myself included – into a community of learners, then the excitement has been almost beyond belief. To free curiosity, to permit individuals to go charging off in new directions dictated by their own interests, to unleash curiosity, to open everything to questioning and exploration, to recognize that everything is in process of change – here is an experience I can never forget. I cannot always achieve it in groups with which I am associated but when it is partially or largely achieved then it becomes a never-to-be-forgotten group experience. Out of such a context arise true students, real learners, creative scientists and scholars and practitioners, the kind of individuals who can live in a delicate but ever-changing balance between what is presently known and the flowing, moving, altering, problems and facts of the future.”⁷⁴

Rogers, Vygotsky, Brown, Bruffee, and many others have, in their different ways and at different moments, championed an educational ideal which was rejected by most teachers for being too difficult to implement. It is a generation of students used to interactivity and participation, who might finally bring about the change they have been calling for. Their ideal of a knowledgeable community of peers has found its ultimate expression online and there is little doubt that the Internet will fundamentally change our understanding of authority in the outside world, but also in the classroom.

The world has finally caught up with them and now the onus is on us to make sure that the educational establishment finally accepts the need to change, lest, like other old and calcified regimes, it is left as rubble in the wake of the sweeping changes that affect our world

⁷² Kenneth A. BRUFFEE (1993), *Collaborative Learning*, p. xiv

⁷³ Ann L. BROWN (1993), *Distributed Expertise in the Classroom*, in Salomon, p. 203

⁷⁴ Carl ROGERS (1967), *Humanizing Education: The Person in the Process*, p. 58

6. AUTONOMY

In the previous chapter, we have seen how fundamental the changes are which affect society and how important it is to have them reflected in our classroom practice. Long before the advent of the Internet society Carl Rogers spoke of this need for change:

“Teaching and imparting knowledge makes sense in an unchanging environment. This is why it has been an unquestioned function for centuries. But if there is one truth about modern man, it is that he lives in an environment which is continually changing...We are, in my view, faced with an entirely new situation in education where the goal of education, if we are to survive, is the facilitation of change and learning. The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn; the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security”⁷⁵

Roger’s understanding of the “good language learner” is someone who is charge of their own learning both in psychological terms (someone driven to seek knowledge) and in methodological term (someone who has learnt how to learn). In other words, the good language learner, for our times, is an “autonomous” language learner. Holec’s textbook definition describes the autonomous language learner as having “the ability to take charge of his learning”⁷⁶. He sees this as involving responsibility in determining learning objectives, defining the contents and progression of learning, selecting and monitoring the methods and techniques to be used, and finally self-assessment of the progress made. Pennycook adds to this the importance of the political dimension and warns that without it there is a danger that autonomy will simply become a question of learners focusing on narrowly defined personal needs.⁷⁷ He argues instead for a more socially, culturally and politically engaged version of language education and autonomy. He suggests

“that the question of what it means to be an autonomous language user is more important than dealing with autonomy only in terms of helping students to take charge of their own learning. If, as language educators, we start to see our goal in terms of helping students to find a voice, and if we understand the notion of voice as I have described it above as a site of struggle between language, subjectivity and discourse, then the goal of autonomy in language learning becomes one of helping students in a struggle towards alternative cultural definitions of their lives. In this view, language is no longer taken as a given, a code that students need to learn, but rather as a major aspect of the cultural domain in which our lives are constructed and reconstructed. Thus, while accepting the partiality of all autonomies, our goal as language educators becomes an attempt to teach language in a way that opens up cultural alternatives for our students, that allows them to become authors of at least part of their world”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Carl ROGERS (1967), *Humanizing Education: The Person in the Process*, pp. 57-58

⁷⁶ H. HOLEC (1981), *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*, p.3

⁷⁷ A. PENNYCOOK (1990) Towards a critically applied linguistics for the 1990s, *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, pp.8-28

⁷⁸ A. PENNYCOOK (1997), “Cultural Alternatives and Autonomy”, in Benson (1997), p. 49

I have quoted Pennycook at some length here because he touches upon all the issues that have been touched upon up to this point. When he talks about the need for students to find their own voice we are reminded of the Herderian ideal of authenticity. According to this ideal, a person lives authentically if she is true to herself, and she is true to herself when she develops her life on the basis of what is of value to her. In other words living authentically is finding your own voice.

Pennycook also mentions the need to open cultural alternatives for our students. In order to learn a new language or to speak in a new voice, the learner needs to negotiate a transition between his old linguistic identity and the alternative presented by the new language he wants to acquire. This process has been described in the chapter on cultural awareness.

The concept of voice also implies the acceptance of the student's subjectivity, his or her personal perspective, on the world. The chapter on multiple-intelligences dealt with the different ways in which people process reality.

Finally, the construction and reconstruction of reality that Pennycook refers to, must be a collaborative effort, by which the individual negotiates meaning with others. This process of negotiation is continual and progressive, it goes on as long as the individual develops and evolves with and within the collective. So, if authenticity was starting point of our journey, autonomy is undoubtedly its final destination. By using authentic material, raising cultural awareness, encouraging individual learning styles, and negotiation meaning in a collaborative classroom, we ultimately aim for our students to become autonomous language learners. And for us, to become autonomous language teachers.

7. CLASSROOM PRACTICE

7.1. Autonomy in the media classroom

In his book *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*, Phil Benson provides a checklist of the areas of activity through which autonomy can be promoted⁷⁹:

1. authentic interaction with the target language and its users
2. collaborative group work and collective decision making
3. participation in open-ended learning tasks
4. learning about the target language and its social context of use
5. exploration of societal and personal learning goals
6. criticism of learning tasks and materials
7. self-production of tasks and materials
8. control over the management of learning
9. control over the content of learning
10. control over resources
11. discussion and criticism of target language norms

In the Media class, I try to follow this guide of good practice. As we have seen in chapter 2, the material used in the media classroom is to a large extent authentic and chosen by the students. The activities are open-ended in that they are generic and genuine and ask students for authentic reactions (1, 2, 7, 9, 10). In chapter 3, I discussed how important it is to learn about the social, cultural, economic and political context of the language (4, 11). In chapter 4, we looked at how learners have a predilection for certain resources and how we should encourage students to discover and express these preferences in order to take control over the management of their learning (7, 5, 8, 10). In chapter 5, I stressed the importance of collaborative group work in order to pool the different intelligences in the classroom (2, 3, 6, 11).

⁷⁹ Benson(1997), "Philosophy and politics of autonomy", in Benson (1997), p. 33

Student and teacher autonomy are undoubtedly the *ultimo ratio* of the methodology presented in this thesis. By showing how the various concepts are put into practice in my classroom, I hope to provide evidence for the validity and feasibility of this concept.

7.2. Authenticity in the Media classroom

Authentic materials used, as far as possible, in authentic ways is the main objective behind the Media class. As regards material, I usually start the lesson planning a day or two in advance, by looking for interesting articles on the *Guardian* website. I first turn to the most viewed or most commented section of the online paper to get an idea of the stories that the readers have shown most interest in over the last 24 hours.

Recently, the *Guardian* has also introduced a section called Zeitgeist, which has proven very useful as a tool for identifying emerging trends:

“Zeitgeist is a visual record of what people are currently finding interesting on guardian.co.uk. While other bits of the site are curated by editors (like the front page, or individual sections) or metadata (like blogs, which display in reverse-chronological order), Zeitgeist is dynamic, powered by the attention of users, which is why we've put this into the Community section. ... To make it easy to see what's hot at a glance, we've colour-coded each content block in line with the section it belongs to on the site (these are the same colours used in the navigation bar at the top of each page). A side-effect of using section colours is that you can see sections ebb and flow throughout the week.”⁸⁰

By relying on this these meta-tools to identify interesting topics, the choice of material for the classroom becomes more authentic, because it not only reflects my interests but those of society at large.

I also often ask students themselves to explore the site for interesting stories which they then submit to me by email. If more than one article refers to a similar topic, I make sure to choose this topic for the class. If the stories are unconnected, I make a choice, trying to keep the students' areas of interest in mind for future lessons. This approach has the advantage that it fosters student autonomy and collaborative learning and reflects the students' cultural preferences and their primary learning styles.

⁸⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/zeitgeist>

The latter point might require some elucidation. Traditionally, if we think of a newspaper like *The Guardian*, we picture a series of articles accompanied by photographs. However, when using the online edition, readers can have access to a wide variety of video and audio files. In addition to this, there are graphs, scrollable timelines, slideshows, to name but a few of the ways in which information is presented. Students can choose the kind of material they prefer, based on their type of intelligence and learning style, and send me the appropriate link by email. Since the INL is equipped with WIFI, interactive whiteboards or at least projectors, it is possible to access all kinds of files in class and there is no need to limit oneself to the printouts of articles. Once a “hook” for the lesson has thus been identified, I try to put it into the wider context of a topic. A story about an environmental disaster will quite naturally lend itself as a starting point to discuss environmental issues. By taking this topic-based approach, it is possible to focus on larger vocabulary fields.

Afterwards, I try to find other resources related to the topic. Because there is a limited amount of topics, i.e. politics, the environment, gender, art, travel, etc., I have over the years been able to build up my own collection of resource material consisting of books, documentaries, films, TV shows, cartoons, songs, audiobooks, paintings, sketches, jokes, photographs, poems, etc. Such a resource pool is however not a prerequisite. The internet provides more than enough material, which can be adapted for use in class.

As soon as I have a good mix of materials representing the different language skills and intelligences, I set about creating the classroom activities. By sticking to Sherman’s Three G’s (generic, generative and gentle) it is possible to quickly create authentic activities encouraging communicative use of the language. As I have pointed out in chapter 2, the authentic nature of the activities is as important as the material itself. A lot of the time this involves students discussing the material in a natural, relaxed manner. When dealing for example with a text, students are usually not required to answer a specific set of questions. Rather, every student receives a different text on the same story and briefly summarizes that text for the group. This naturally generates further questions by the listeners and usually leads to a more generalized discussion of the topic at hand. By using specific expressions or interesting turns of phrase from their text, students are able to assimilate some of the language. The activity is generic, because people

naturally discuss news stories or articles they find interesting. It is generative because it can easily, and without adding to the teacher's workload, be used for all kinds of text. It is gentle because the students can choose themselves which parts of the text they find interesting or can connect to. They don't need to understand every single word, sentence or even paragraph. They can approach the text from their individual level of language competence and engage in a meaningful communicative activity with their peers.

Further activities, exemplifying the Three G's, can be found in chapter 8.

7.3. Cultural Awareness in the Media classroom

If we are to make culture an integral part of our teaching we need to use authentic cultural products. These can include newspaper articles, forums, art exhibitions, soap operas, songs, to name only a few of the sources of material that I have used in the Media classroom.

Internet newspapers, and in particular the most read and most commented sections, allow foreign readers to put the finger on the pulse of the most pressing contemporary issues of a particular community. In a globalized world, they allow students to see that people in England or the States share many of their political, social and economic concerns, whilst at the same time, highlighting how each country has a different way of thinking about, and addressing, these issues. Another way to access the culture is through video sites such as *YouTube*, which feature a wide range of material including TV shows, news reports, film and music reviews, performances, or video diaries of common people's lives. Again the most viewed section allows students to quickly get access to the most interesting contributions and, by juxtaposing the various clips, to form a vibrant mosaic of life. On TV or DVD, soap operas can make us recognize the universal nature of personal drama as well as highlight national quirks, particularities and obsessions. Art programs can join people in esthetic appreciation and yet reveal individual sensibilities. Documentaries can highlight the societal plights that are both typical for a specific culture and Western society in general. Reality TV can show us that people are silly everywhere, but in particular ways. This alternation of the same and the different, of the "I" and the other, is the racing pulse of a living and breathing classroom.

Students, however, must not merely be consumers of culture; they can also participate in it. Through forums and comment sections students can themselves get engaged in political, cultural or social discussions. They can submit their own videos on *YouTube*, and establish international ties on social networking sites such as *Twitter* or *Facebook*. They can frequent and contribute to special interest websites, dedicated to anything from videogames, to photography, to history or music. Fuelled by their particular passion, non-English speakers are very quick to appropriate the specific jargon of their field of interest and it is often impossible to distinguish native and non-native speakers on these forums. Indeed, what makes the language acquisition process so effective is the very fact that language and culture are inseparable and the line between intra- and extra-curricular activities has become blurred.

The Media class is not only aimed at encouraging students to consume culture but also to become critically aware of it. In order to make culture explicit, I usually start by choosing stories from the most read or most commented section of the online newspapers as a starting point for the lesson. These stories usually capture the reader's interest because they touch upon important aspects of English and American culture. There are the human-interest stories dealing with human tragedy or bravery in the face of aversion, for example the kidnapping of Maggie. There are the stories dealing with social plights, for example Internet addiction or binge drinking. There are the stories dealing with the state of the nation, for example the portrayal of England as a broken society. There are the big political stories, for example the election of Obama as the first black President or his first big challenge, the health reform. There are the stories about television culture, for example the rise and fall of Susan Boyle. Many of the examples above emphasize problematic aspects of English or American culture and society. By allowing students to discuss the issues confronting these two countries, it is possible to break the dominance of the target culture and to put students on equal footing with it.

As a non-native speaker it is of course important not to encourage students to become judgmental towards English or American people. On the contrary, it is important to “help students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence”⁸¹. For instance, the rejection of a part of America's population of

⁸¹ Barry TOMALIN & Susan STENPLESKI (1993), *Cultural Awareness*, p 8-9

the health reform must not be stereotyped as an example of American “ignorance” but be understood in the historical context of the country. Asking students to research the issue and finding the arguments presented by proponents and opponents alike, helps “students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture” and can stimulate “student’s intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and...empathy towards its people.”⁸² This understanding can also be fostered by asking students to connect the reading material with similar issues in their country. Thus we can “help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviors and “social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.”⁸³

To encourage multiple perspectives on one story and to break the monopoly of a singular absolute truth, it is also important to offer students different viewpoints on the same story. This can be set up through reading exchange activities during which students read articles on the same stories from newspapers with varying political allegiances and exchange the information later in groups. It can be done to greater effect even by looking at English language media from different countries such as Britain, America, Russia and China. By doing so, one can simultaneously make students aware of the many varieties of English and make them more accepting of their own accent or other linguistic peculiarities. The work in multi-national groups also situates the target language and culture as just one of many alternatives and encourages students to find their own voice by listening to those of the others.

Finally, I believe that it is important to instill in students a joyous curiosity for the target language and culture. In a learning environment there is always a risk that students will be daunted and discouraged by the heavy influx of new words and cultural references. Humor can play a very important role in lowering students’ affective filter. I have found that the random lessons on, for instance, the eccentricities of the English in inventing new competitions – such as cheese rolling, or beer barrel rugby – can go a long way towards allowing students to assuming a more relaxed an open attitude to the language and the culture.

⁸² idem, p 8-9

⁸³ idem, p 8-9

7.4. Learning styles and multiple intelligences in the media classroom

Using media material whilst trying to cater for the different intelligences is a natural fit. Long before Gardner developed his theories, the media had understood that in order to reach as vast an audience as possible, it was important to use different channels to communicate. The Internet is the first media to integrate all of these channels into a connected whole and thus it represents a tremendous opportunity for language learning.

Visual learners prefer video materials, such as films, TV programs, graphs, timelines, paintings, games etc. For these students, it is easier to remember vocabulary or grammatical structures if they can associate them with a particular image or scene. Hence, it is important to note that video activities can be used at any level. By, for instance, describing a scene set in a room or say a restaurant, students, even at elementary level, can benefit from the use of video material in order to help vocabulary acquisition. Jane Sherman points out that “ as a moving picture book Video gives access to things, places, people, events and behaviour, regardless of the language used, and is worth thousands of picture dictionaries and magazines”.⁸⁴ Video material also allows students to become more autonomous since most of them have a collection of DVDs at home for which they can easily change the voices and/or the subtitles to English. The same is true for a lot of videogames, which usually contain an English language option.

To stay with games for a little bit longer: they are a predominantly visual medium that is criminally underused in the classroom. Designed first and foremost for fun, games present a compelling experience that draws students into their world and offers them an authentic language experience. One particular genre, the so-called *Hidden Object* games, are a great way for students to develop their vocabulary skills. In a hidden object game, the player is presented with a scene, for example a children's room, in which they need to find and click on a number of objects that are listed at the bottom of the screen. Some of the objects are hidden in plain sight whilst others are cleverly merged with the background of the picture. This modern version of an Easter egg hunt

⁸⁴ Jane SHERMAN (2003), *Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom*, p. 3

is a perfect learning experience in that it is both exciting in its own right and valuable as a language learning experience.

Students with a predominantly linguistic intelligence are usually avid readers and so they will enjoy articles, poems, short-stories and other forms of written text. In the reading exchange activity described in the chapter on authenticity, it is usually easy to identify the students with a predominantly verbal intelligence, because they find it easier to glean new words and expressions from the text and to instantaneously use them in speaking. Language production activities such as writing or giving presentations also appeal to this kind of learner. Creative writing in particular is a great way for students to appropriate the target language for themselves and to overcome the resistance to learning a new language discussed earlier.

There are also less traditional ways to reach students with a linguistic intelligence. There are so-called text adventures or Interactive fiction, software programs simulating environments in which players use text commands to control characters and influence the environment. These programs, which are a hybrid of videogames and literature, ask students to follow the narrative closely in order to imply or predict appropriate prompts to further their progress in the story. Students can also become themselves authors of such interactive fiction by using text adventure creator software to develop their own games. Another form of interactive computer programs that might appeal to linguistic learners are the so-called chat-bots. A chat-bot is a form of artificial intelligence that tries to emulate human conversation. Two of the most famous chatbots are *Anna the Ikea bot* and *Jabberwacky*. Internet users can maintain a conversation with these programs by asking questions and answering queries. Every year, the best bots submit themselves to the Turing Test. The Turing Test is a test of a machine's ability to demonstrate intelligence. A human judge engages in a natural conversation with one human and one machine, each of which tries to appear human. If the judge cannot reliably tell the machine from the human, the machine is said to have passed the test. The previous two examples show how technology provides us with new and intriguing ways for language practice that can be used inside as well as outside the classroom.

For logical-mathematical learners, multimedia authoring programs such as Powerpoint or website creators, can be an interesting way to work with language. The same kind of program might appeal to spatial learners who enjoy organizing and presenting information in visually appealing ways. Musical learners will enjoy looking up the lyrics of songs and might benefit from karaoke software to study pronunciation and intonation. Bodily-kinesthetic learners can benefit from the very recent development of motion-sensing software such as Microsoft's *Kinect* or Nintendo's *Wii*. The application of this hardware for educational purposes is only in its early stages but it would be wrong and short-sighted to dismiss its potentialities.

When associating different multi-media contents with the different intelligences, I was not trying to be exhaustive or imply a one-to-one correspondence. The aim here was merely to show that when opening our minds we can find a myriad of activities that appeal to the different intelligences.

7.5. Collaborative Learning in the Media Classroom

In order to build a community of knowledgeable peers, it is important to get students involved in all the stages of the planning of the lesson and its realization in the classroom. As noted previously, I encourage students to submit their own ideas for the topics and materials used in the classroom. Since, ideally, the language learning tasks for each material is produced generically, teacher manipulation is limited, and students have access to the source material directly without interference. Giving students traditional comprehension questions for a text, implies that the teacher has somehow identified the important information in the text and students are only able to move or evolve within the limitations of this individual cognitive assessment.

During class, students usually work in groups and discuss their understanding by a method known as reciprocal teaching. Brown defines this method as follows:

“Reciprocal teaching is a method of enhancing reading comprehension modeled after studies of Socratic or Inquiry teaching and theories about plausible reasoning, explanation, and analogy. The procedure was designed to encourage the externalization of simple comprehension-monitoring activities and to provide a repetitive structure to bolster student discourse. An adult teacher and a group of students take turns leading a discussion, the leader beginning by asking a question and ending by summarizing the gist of what has been read. The group rereads and

discusses possible problems of interpretation when necessary. Questioning provides the impetus for discussion. Summarizing at the end of a period of discussion helps students establish where they are in preparation for tackling a new segment of text. Attempts to clarify any comprehension problems that might arise occur opportunistically, and the leader asks for predictions about future content. These four activities – questioning, clarifying, summarizing and predicting were selected to bolster the discussion because they are excellent comprehension monitoring devices”⁸⁵.

Although I don’t apply this method one to one, the different stages usually occur naturally if you ask students to exchange information from different texts. The students get to choose which article they might be interested in reading and discussing. Since, at first, they only have a headline to go by, they need to predict the content of the text so as to select the article that is most interesting to them. The students need to summarize their text for their peers. After presenting the text, the other students usually ask for some clarification or contribute their ideas to the text. This method, which can also be adopted for listening and viewing activities, allows students to construct their own understanding of the material. It forestalls frustration since everyone is able to contribute at least some piece of information that allows the group to paint the bigger picture.

It is obvious that a collaborative learning classroom needs to be a communicative classroom in which students spend a lot of their time speaking and exchanging ideas and viewpoints. The role of the teacher is to join into the conversation as an equal peer. I believe that it is acceptable for the teacher to give feedback on linguistic issues since this is his or her particular field of expertise. The students might supply other forms of expertise, such as their knowledge of economics, politics, sports or art and their particular national perspective on events and issues. A classroom that works in this manner respects the integrity of the students as well as the integrity of the teacher who cannot present him or herself as an absolute authority. Of course, as we are going to see in the part of the thesis concerned with the practical evaluation of these ideas, both the teacher and students might resist this shift in the balance of power.

⁸⁵ Ann L. BROWN, *Distributed Expertise in the Classroom*, in Salomon (1993), pp. 195-196

8. GENERIC ACTIVITIES

The following activities are an extension of James Sherman's approach to using authentic video material in the classroom:

"The activities are generic in that they emerge naturally from the particular kind of video program, sequence or shot, and exploit its particular qualities.

"They are generative in that they can be used again and again with other similar programs, sequences or shots."

"They are gentle on the student because what they ask for tends to come naturally."⁸⁶

In addition, I applied Benson's "check-list" for autonomous learning:

1. authentic interaction with the target language and its users
2. collaborative group work and collective decision making
3. participation in open-ended learning tasks
4. learning about the target language and its social context of use
5. exploration of societal and personal learning goals
6. criticism of learning tasks and materials
7. self-production of tasks and materials
8. control over the management of learning
9. control over the content of learning
10. control over resources
11. discussion and criticism of target language norms⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Jane SHERMAN (2003), *Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom*, p. 7

⁸⁷ Benson(1997), "Philosophy and politics of autonomy", in Benson (1997), p. 33

9.1. Text Swap

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, student autonomy, dealing with authentic material, inter-personal and linguistic intelligences
Linguistic Aim(s):	summarizing, asking for clarification, discussing issues, vocabulary acquisition (topic specific)
Material:	different newspaper articles covering the same subject
Preparation:	Tell students the subject of the lesson in advance i.e. a major news story. Ask them to find an article related to the story and to bring it to class.

Procedure:

1. Put students in groups of three and ask them to briefly summarize the article for their peers. Set a strict time limit for each presentation i.e. three minutes.
2. Give students some additional time to discuss the issues raised in the articles. This usually happens without specific prompting.
3. Finally, bring the class together and ask each group to briefly present the gist of each article. This usually leads to a classroom discussion.

Extension:

Since most students find their articles online they can easily access and read each other's selections.

Comments:

This activity is a good example of Sherman's *generic, generative and gentle* approach to authentic material. The activity is generic because it comes naturally to students to discuss an interesting article that they have chosen themselves. It is a generative activity because it can be used for any kind of news story. It is gentle because students control what they want to discuss and they can prepare their presentations beforehand.

9.2. Holiday Swap

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, student autonomy, dealing with authentic material, various learning styles
Linguistic Aim(s):	talking about future plans, vocabulary acquisition (holiday activities), expressing likes and dislikes
Material:	online travel agents
Preparation:	Using an English language online travel agent and other relevant online resources, students prepare their dream holiday in as much detail as possible. They find a flight, a hotel, a car rental agency etc. They plan their cultural or sports activities for each day and choose restaurants and nightlife spots for their evenings out. They print out the promotional material and bring it to class.

Procedure:

1. Explain the TV format *Holiday Swap* to students. Two couples plan holidays for themselves and at the last minute are asked to exchange them. Hilarity ensues.
2. Students work in pairs to present their holiday plans and to discuss how they would feel about swapping holidays.
3. Ask class for feedback on interesting holiday destinations and activities.

Extension:

In class or at home, students watch excerpts of the TV program on *YouTube*.

Comments:

For students this is a very rewarding and enjoyable activity. It is rewarding from a language learning perspective because it is a real-life task, which involves self-directed vocabulary acquisition and allows students to authentically interact with the language. They feel like they are no longer language learners, but language users, a distinction which boosts their self-confidence and motivation. The activity is also plain fun, because everybody enjoys daydreaming and discussing their holiday plans.

9.3. Data Analysis

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, logical-mathematical and visual intelligences, cultural awareness
Linguistic Aim(s):	presenting, comparing, and analyzing data
Material:	data presented as tables or graphs from <i>The Guardian</i> Data Section
Preparation:	Bring a table or a graph to class displaying survey or research results. <i>The Guardian</i> website has a section dedicated to presenting hard data. Often the data is used as the basis of an article on the main site.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to individually analyze the data i.e. to identify interesting trends, to draw comparisons and to interpret the results.
2. Ask students to work together in pairs or in groups of three to exchange the conclusions they have drawn from the data.
3. Bring the class together and ask the entire group for feedback.

Extension:

If available, students can later look at the write-up of the data by one of *The Guardian*'s journalists to see if they have come to the same conclusions. Difficulties they may encounter during the first stage will make them more receptive to assimilating new expressions related to presenting, comparing and analyzing data.

Comments:

In class, I used this activity with a pan-European survey on attitudes about immigration. Students found it interesting to compare and analyze the positive and negative attitudes in different countries. The corresponding article allowed us to focus on specific vocabulary related to surveys. This is an activity which appeals to both visual and linguistic intelligences and encourages collaboration between the two.

9.4. Agony Aunt

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, inter- and intra-personal intelligences
Linguistic Aim(s):	making suggestions, agreeing and disagreeing, discussing problems
Material:	letters from the advice or agony aunt column of a newspaper
Preparation:	Students select letters from the agony aunt section on a newspaper website and bring their selection to class.

Procedure:

1. Students present their letters in groups of three people.
2. The group tries to give advice for each predicament.
3. Students give feedback to the class on the most interesting problems and advice.

Extension:

Students read the advice given by the agony aunt but also by readers in the comment section. Together the class can focus on alternative ways of making suggestions.

Comments:

In the extension activity, students can acquire a rewarding sense of having used the language authentically whilst becoming aware of phrasal verbs or collocations that might enrich their vocabulary. Comment sections in particular are a great source of phrasal verbs and idiomatic language. They also allow students to become aware of different language registers.

9.5. The Bucket List

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, intra-personal intelligence, autonomous learning
Linguistic Aim(s):	talking about future plans, conditional structures, vocabulary acquisition (activities)
Material:	http://bucketlist.org/
Preparation:	At home or in class, students visit the site bucketlist.org where posters submit lists of things they want to do in their lives before they” kick the bucket”. They choose activities they would also like to try out and add any other dreams they still want to realize in their lives. They bring their bucket lists to class.

Procedure:

1. In groups, students present their bucket lists to see what dreams they share.
2. Students give whole-class feedback on the most interesting dreams and ambitions.

Extension:

Students put their bucket list online.

Comments:

The first part of the activity is another example of self-directed vocabulary acquisition which can produce highly personalized vocabulary. I learnt, for instance, that there is such an activity as parahawking. It is also an activity ideally suited for community building purposes. Through their dreams students are able to express many aspects of their personality. In class, it would also be possible to discuss how cultural and geographical differences affect life ambitions.

9.6. Person of the Year/Decade/Century/Millennium

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, autonomous learning, various intelligences
Linguistic Aim(s):	presenting biographical information, talking about achievements, debating
Material:	newspaper/ magazine articles or <i>Wikipedia</i> entries on famous people
Preparation:	Students consult at home the shortlist for <i>Person of the Year</i> in <i>Time Magazine</i> . They choose one of the candidates listed or come up with an alternative recipient deserving of the title. They research the person and their achievements on the Internet and build a case for their candidate.

Procedure:

1. Students work in groups of four and they each present the case for their candidate.
2. Each group agrees on one candidate which is presented to the class as a whole.
3. In a class discussion, students decide on their recipient for the award.

Extension:

As a follow-up activity, students read up on who eventually wins the title and discuss the argumentation of the magazine in class.

Comments:

This activity can easily be adapted to only focus on the *Greatest Briton* of all time, a TV program by the BBC, available on *YouTube*, which provides fascinating insights on some of Britain's most renowned historical figures. Students can research the short-list of nominees and present their favorite to the class.

The activity is also a good example of *emergent learning* in that both teacher and students follow a developing story in class.

9.7. Job Interviews

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, autonomous learning, cultural awareness, intra and inter-personal intelligences
Linguistic Aim(s):	preparing for a job interview, talking about personal achievements, vocabulary acquisition (action verbs, character traits, etc.)
Material:	job ads found in English language newspapers or online
Preparation:	Students look at online job ads to find their dream position. They bring the ads to class.

Procedure:

1. In pairs, students exchange their job ads.
2. Each student prepares interview questions for their partner based on the ad.
3. Students interview each other.
4. Students give class feedback on the most interesting questions and answers.

Extension:

Students write a cover letter to apply for the job.

Comments:

This activity is seen as meaningful and useful by most students since the majority regards English as a professional asset. It can also serve as a lead-in to a discussion about economic and social pressures, as well as other conventionalized reasons for studying the language.

9.8. The Turing Prize

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	autonomous learning, inter-personal and linguistic intelligences
Linguistic Aim(s):	practising small talk, questioning, rephrasing
Material:	different chatbots available online ⁸⁸
Preparation:	Students engage in a conversation with a chatbot at home or in class, if a computer lab is available. Each student is assigned a different chatbot in advance. They print out the logs of their conversations and underline interesting or funny exchanges. They rate the bot's human-like behavior on a scale from 1-10.

Procedure:

1. Students bring their notes to class and decide which chatbot should be awarded the *Turing Prize* for human-like interaction. They provide concrete examples of authentic language such as phrasal verbs, idioms or collocations, which made the computer program sound human. They discuss and analyze examples of communication breakdown.

Extension:

Students can take the *Turing Test*⁸⁹ online.

Comments:

A chatbot is a software program capable of imitating conversation. They are used in the field of artificial intelligence to create programs capable of “thought”. The *Turing Test* is an annual competition to determine if the different computer programs competing can fool interlocutors into believing that they are human. Even if most chatbots are far away from being able to maintain even the most basic conversation they provide the learner with an opportunity to experiment with the language and to become involved in deliciously surreal conversations.

⁸⁸ <http://www.jabberwacky.com/>

⁸⁹ <http://www.turinghub.com/>

9.9. What's in a headline?

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, student autonomy
Linguistic Aim(s):	asking and answering questions, predicting vocabulary and content
Material:	newspaper headlines
Preparation:	Select the headlines for some of the top news stories of the day and copy paste them on a document leaving enough space after each headline for students to write down some notes.

Procedure:

1. Put a sample headline on the blackboard and ask student to brainstorm what kind of information and vocabulary an article with this headline might contain. Tell them to put their ideas in the forms of questions and write the questions on the board.
2. When their suggestions have run dry, answer as many of the questions as possible referring to the original article.
3. Put students into pairs and give them two more headlines to brainstorm. Ask them to write down their questions below the headlines.
4. Give one of the articles to each student and ask them to read it and answer the questions.
5. Students exchange answers.

Extension:

Students can look for interesting headlines themselves and bring them to class for a repeat of the activity.

Comments:

This activity encourages students to tap into their prior knowledge when approaching an article. It is also possible to invert the activity by asking students to write the headline for an article.



This activity has been adapted from Paul Sanderson's *Using Newspapers in the Classroom*

9.10. Ambiguous Headlines

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, verbal intelligence, fun
Linguistic Aim(s):	dealing with ambiguous language
Material:	a collection of ambiguous headlines
Preparation:	Select a dozen ambiguous and funny headlines to bring to class. Collections can be found on the Internet.

Procedure:

1. Put students into pairs and hand out the list of headlines. Ask students to identify the double meaning and to rewrite the headline in a clearer way.
2. When your students are ready, check the answers with the whole class.

Extension:

Listen to an excerpt from Stephen Fry's *English Delight* on puns and the playfulness of the English language. *English Delight* is a BBC program, available on *iTunes* and *Amazon*, about the peculiarities and eccentricities of the English language.

Comments:

Here are a few such 'delights':

PROSTITUTES APPEAL TO POPE

KIDS MAKE NUTRITIOUS SNACKS

STOLEN PAINTING FOUND BY TREE

QUEEN MARY HAVING BOTTOM SCRAPED

MINERS REFUSE TO WORK AFTER DEATH

DRUNK GETS NINE MONTHS IN VIOLIN CASE

KILLER SENTENCED TO DIE FOR SECOND TIME IN 10 YEARS

9.11. Mastermind

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning
Linguistic Aim(s):	asking and answering questions, vocabulary acquisition (topic specific)
Material:	two newspaper articles
Preparation:	Students or the teacher bring articles to class.

Procedure:

1. Put students in pairs and give them two articles. Student A reads the article and tries to memorize as much information as possible. Student B reads the article and writes questions for student A. Set a time limit of 10 minutes.
2. Student A turns over the article and tries to answer student B's questions. For each correct answer student A scores a point.
3. Students A and B repeat the activity with a different article. The student who scores the most points is the "Mastermind".

Extension:

This activity can be continued as a knockout competition to find the class "Mastermind"

Comments:

Mastermind is a BBC program in which competitors with a unique field of expertise have to answer questions within a certain time limit. The program can easily be adapted for classroom use. This activity helps to create the community of knowledgeable peers that was discussed in chapter 5.



This activity was adapted from Paul Sanderson's *Using Newspapers in the Classroom*.

9.12. 3 Minutes

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	Collaborative learning, student autonomy
Linguistic Aim(s):	Memorizing a newspaper article
Material:	A newspaper article
Preparation:	Bring an interesting article to class or ask students to do so.

Procedure:

1. Hand out a very short sample article and give students 2 minutes to look at it. After this lapse of time, students cover the article and the class brainstorms what they can remember.
2. Students repeat the same activity in pairs with a longer article and a longer time limit.

Extension:

You can ask students to try and rewrite the article, either in class or at home.

Comments:

The collaborative nature of this task can allow even weaker students to feel a sense of achievement. It also encourages students to develop different reading skills, such as scanning or skimming.



This activity was adapted from Paul Sanderson's *Using Newspapers in the Classroom*.

9.13. News from Abroad

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, student autonomy
Linguistic Aim(s):	translating, presenting information
Material:	non-English language articles
Preparation:	Students choose an article from their national press that they find interesting. They summarize the article in English.

Procedure:

1. Students bring their article to class and present it to their peers in groups of three.
2. Ask for class feedback.

Extension:

Students can use the Internet to find out more about the stories presented by their peers.

Comments:

This is a good activity to rise cross cultural awareness and to increase the stake that students have in the class. By allowing students to talk about their own culture and country in class, it is possible to lower their emotional defense against the target language.

9.14. Favorite Phrases

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, verbal intelligence
Linguistic Aim(s):	vocabulary acquisition
Material:	human interest stories from newspapers
Preparation:	Ask students to find an article that touches them on personal level and to bring it to class.

Procedure:

1. Students exchange their articles in pairs. They read the articles and highlight words or phrases which move them or to which they can establish a personal connection.
2. They discuss their words and phrases with a partner.
3. They present their favorite expression to the class.

Extension:

Students return to articles previously discussed in class to collect more language.

Comments:

This activity is a very good way to building personal connections between the target language and the students. It allows students to appropriate language more quickly by establishing an emotional connection to it.



This activity was adapted from Paul Sanderson's *Using Newspapers in the Classroom*.

9.15. Metaphorically speaking

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, visual intelligence
Linguistic Aim(s):	learning metaphorical language
Material:	human interest story
Preparation:	Bring an article to class dealing with an important event that contains a lot of metaphorical language. When looking for a suitable article, remember that almost all language is in fact metaphorical. See Fry's <i>English Delight</i> on the use of metaphor in the English language.

Procedure:

1. After having briefly explained the idea of a metaphor with a few examples, ask students to read the article and to underline examples of metaphorical language.
2. Students exchange their findings in groups of two or three .
3. Ask the class for feedback and discuss if similar metaphors exist in the students' first language.

Extension:

Listen to Stephen Fry's episode of *English Delight* on the use of metaphorical language.

Comments:

Making students aware of the fundamentally metaphorical nature of language can help them connect to the target language and is particularly important for visual learners.

9.16. 24 Hours in Picture

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, visual intelligence, autonomous learning, intra and interpersonal intelligences
Linguistic Aim(s):	describing photographs
Material:	<i>Guardian</i> Photo Gallery: 24 hours in Pictures ⁹⁰
Preparation:	Make sure to have a classroom equipped with a projector, laptop and an Internet connection to display the photo gallery.

Procedure:

1. Students look at a slideshow of *The Guardian's* selection of the best images from around the world. Hide the captions and ask students to describe each picture and to identify the news story it illustrates.
2. Ask students to prepare a similar photo gallery for the next class. There should be 24 pictures taken in one day, showing different aspects of their lives.
3. Students bring their photos to class and present them in groups of three.
4. Each group chooses the best three pictures and presents them to the class.

Extension:

In class watch some excerpts from the BBC documentary *The Genius of Photography* available on *Amazon*.

Comments:

Although there is obviously a very personal element to this activity, students ultimately choose the subject of their photographs and so they decide how much they reveal about their lives. This is a great activity to develop classroom cohesion and to connect the classroom experience to the outside world.

⁹⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/series/24hoursinpictures>

9.17. Horoscopes

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, linguistic intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence
Linguistic Aim(s):	idioms and phrasal verbs
Material:	the horoscope section of a newspaper
Preparation:	Bring the horoscope section to class.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to read the horoscope and to underline all the idioms and phrasal verbs that they would be interested in learning
2. Students exchange the expressions they have found in pairs and try to think of situations in their own lives to which they could apply the expressions. For example, students think of an occasion when they “put a foot wrong” or when they were “on cloud nine”.

Extension:

Students continue to read their horoscopes in the following weeks to collect more interesting vocabulary.

Comments:

By making personal associations, students are much more likely to remember the vocabulary. Horoscopes offer a great selection of idioms and phrasal verbs and are a great example of how different sources of media material can give us access to different language registers.

9.18. Typically English?

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, visual intelligence, inter-personal intelligence
Linguistic Aim(s):	reading, understanding humor
Material:	English cartoons
Preparation:	Bring to class a selection of single cartoons or strip cartoons from UK publications.

Procedure:

1. Project the cartoons and ask the class to discuss what makes them typically English.

Extension:

Students look for more cartoons, jokes or comedy segments that they find “typically English” and bring them to class to share the fun with their classmates.

Comments:

This is a very good way of looking at the target culture critically but in a fun and non-judgmental way. We laugh with the English, not at them.

9.19. News Board Game

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness
Linguistic Aim(s):	giving information, questioning
Material:	photographs relating to people, places or events in the news
Preparation:	Go through a newspaper and cut (out) a selection of photographs that illustrate the top stories. Arrange the photos in a square on a DIN A3-sized sheet of paper. Bring the board game to class with a set of dice.

Procedure:

1. Students form groups of four to play the board game. They roll the dice and when they land on a picture, they need to make statements about the photograph they have landed on. For each correct statement, they score one point. If they run out of ideas, the student on their right can try to make additional statements, and so on. The student with the highest score at the end wins.

Extension:

For the next class, students can prepare their own board game with the stories that they are most interested in.

Comments:

This is a great activity to get students speaking.



It was adapted from a teacher training workshop on the use of humor in the classroom.

9.20. Choose your words wisely

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	autonomous learning, authentic language acquisition
Linguistic Aim(s):	learning conversational language
Material:	Excerpt from a reality TV show such as <i>Come Dine with Me</i>
Preparation:	Prepare a classroom with an Internet connection, a laptop and a projector. Alternatively download a segment from <i>Come Dine with Me</i> from <i>YouTube</i> and burn it on a DVD or store it on your laptop.

Procedure:

1. Give students some background information on the program they are about to watch. In the case of *Come Dine with Me*: it is a reality TV format in which four strangers each host a dinner party for the other participants and vote on the host's performance at the end of the evening. Explain to the students that, whilst watching, they should look for high-utility expressions which they understand but don't use themselves.
2. Students watch the program and note useful expressions.
3. Discuss the selected vocabulary in class and put it on the blackboard.
4. Review the vocabulary on the blackboard by encouraging students to remember the context in which each expression was used.

Extension:

Students watch further excerpts on *YouTube* and bring the vocabulary they collect to class.

Comments:

Material from *YouTube* can be downloaded and converted to a format readable in any DVD player with the help of a Firefox add-on called *Download Helper*. *YouTube* offers automatic subtitles for a lot of their videos but they tend to be inaccurate. Another way to collect video material is via satellite TV and a DVD recorder. All major British TV channels offer subtitles for the hard of hearing.

9.21. Culture Clash

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness
Linguistic Aim(s):	describing routines
Material:	a soap opera, sitcom or reality TV program
Preparation:	Bring a soap opera, sitcom or Reality TV program to class.

Procedure:

1. Ask student to watch an episode and to focus on particular cultural aspects and how they differ from their own culture. You can divide the class into groups and assign each group a different aspect: food, clothing, family life, education, dress, etc.
2. Students present their anthropological research to the class.

Extension:

Students can repeat the activity at home and bring the results of their research to the next lesson.

Comments:

A sitcom like *The Simpsons* is particularly suited to this kind of cultural analysis since it is a caricature and exaggerates behavior and personality traits. It is of course important to discuss with students the danger of stereotyping.

9.22. Ad Analysis

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, visual intelligence
Linguistic Aim(s):	describing and analyzing ads
Material:	television or newspaper ads
Preparation:	Students look on <i>YouTube</i> for funny or interesting ads and send you the links so you can bookmark them for use in the classroom.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to look for ads online and to identify what the implicit and explicit messages are and how they are conveyed. Students should also rate the ads for originality, memorability, persuasiveness, and visual impact.
2. Students present their ads to the class.
3. The class votes for the most effective ad.

Extension:

Watch with the students one of Chomsky's documentaries on consumerist culture.

Comments:

Ads represent a good way to learn vocabulary and structures since they are designed to be memorable and associate pictures and words in order to amplify the message.



This activity was adapted from Jane Sherman's *Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom*.

9.23. Experts

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, multiple intelligences, autonomy
Linguistic Aim(s):	specialist vocabulary
Material:	various
Preparation:	Students research at home different aspects of a wider topic. The topic could for example be the United States or the UK. The different aspects could include: politics, culture, celebrities, sports, employment etc. The different aspects to be considered could be determined by the class in a brainstorming session.

Procedure:

1. Each expert presents in class the aspect they have chosen in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.

Extension:

You could put the presentations online, on a class blog, for students to consult at home.

Comments:

The idea of student experts is very empowering for the individual learner. The use of PowerPoint presentations can be very motivating for visual and spatial learners.

9.24. Debate

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness
Linguistic Aim(s):	presenting and refuting arguments, changing topic
Material:	American Presidential debate or UK Prime Ministerial debate
Preparation:	Find a video on <i>YouTube</i> of a political debate and prepare to play it in class.

Procedure:

1. Students come together in groups of four to discuss one or more of the issues covered in the debate, collecting arguments for and against, for example, a cap on immigration.
2. In class, collect the ideas of the different groups and discuss them.
3. Students listen to excerpts of the debate on the issues they have just discussed. They note down the arguments of both sides.
4. In pairs, they compare their notes.
5. Watch the segment a second time and ask student to focus on language used to present ideas, to agree, to disagree and to change an awkward topic of conversation.
6. Take a different issue and ask students to discuss it in pairs encouraging them to use the key language they identified earlier. Students can express their own opinions or you could ask them to step into the shoes of one of the participants of the debate.

Extension:

Students can watch the entire debate on their computer at home and continue to collect useful language.

Comments:

This kind of activity where students first engage in an activity which will later be mirrored in a TV segment or an article is a great way of convincing students that they are engaged in authentic language production. They become aware of the language they lack and are more receptive to it. when viewing the debate. The second debate allows them to use and fixate the language they have thus acquired.

9.25. WebQuest

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, multiple-intelligences, autonomous learning
Linguistic Aim(s):	developing reading techniques, listening skills
Material:	an online web quest
Preparation:	Although it is possible to prepare your own WebQuest, you can find many examples online covering a wide variety of subjects.

Procedure:

1. In a computer lab or at home, students try to solve a WebQuest.

Extension:

Students could prepare their own WebQuest to share with their peers.

Comments:

“A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented lesson format in which most or all the information that learners work with comes from the web. The model was developed by Bernie Dodge at San Diego State University in February, 1995 with early input from SDSU/Pacific Bell Fellow Tom March, the Educational Technology staff at San Diego Unified School District, and waves of participants each summer at the Teach the Teachers Consortium.

Since those beginning days, tens of thousands of teachers have embraced WebQuests as a way to make good use of the internet while engaging their students in the kinds of thinking that the 21st century requires. The model has spread around the world, with special enthusiasm in Brazil, Spain, China, Australia and Holland.”⁹¹

⁹¹ <http://webquest.org/>

9.26. A different kind of test

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, autonomous learning, intra-personal intelligence
Linguistic Aim(s):	vocabulary acquisition
Material:	online personality or life-style test
Preparation:	Find, or ask students to find, interesting personality or lifestyle tests online. For example: MBTI ⁹² tests, or tests to calculate your carbon footprint ⁹³ .

Procedure:

1. Students take the test online in a computer lab. They research difficult vocabulary in an online dictionary in a second tab.
2. Students present the results of the test to the class and say if they agree or disagree with the final assessment.

Extension:

Students try more online tests out for themselves.

Comments:

Some tests reveal information of a private or personal nature so one needs to be aware that in some cases students might be reluctant to share the information.

⁹² <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>

⁹³ <http://www.nature.org/greenliving/carboncalculator/>

9.27. Who Wants to be a Millionaire?

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness
Linguistic Aim(s):	vocabulary acquisition
Material:	PC or MAC version of the game <i>Who Wants to be a Millionaire?</i> available on <i>Amazon</i> or Direct Download sites.
Preparation:	Set up the classroom with a laptop, a projector, and a “hot seat” in front of the screen. Darken the room to create a game show atmosphere.

Procedure:

1. Select a candidate for the first round of the game. The other students can play the role of lifelines in the form of “ask the audience” or “call a friend”.
2. The teacher plays the game show host and enters the candidate’s answers into the computer.
3. If a contestant is eliminated or wins the million, you can choose another student to take his or her place.

Extension:

IOS (mobile) versions of the game are available for less than a euro, so if students are interested they can continue to play at home.

Comments:

The first, easy, questions in particular are interesting for language learners because they are often about tidbits of English culture or language that everyone is supposed to know. They can be useful in broadening the repertoire of cultural and linguistic references of students.

9.28. Family Feud

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, cultural awareness, autonomous learning
Linguistic Aim(s):	vocabulary acquisition
Material:	PC or MAC version of the game <i>Family Feud</i>
Preparation:	Set up the classroom with a projector and a laptop running the game <i>Family Feud</i> .

Procedure:

1. Separate the class into two groups or families.
2. Play the game (see comments). Students suggest possible answers and the teacher enters them into the computer.
3. After you finish playing ask students to give you feedback on the vocabulary they learnt.

Extension:

If students are interested, there is a free trial version of the game online at *BigFish*⁹⁴ games. The full version of the game is 5 euros.

Comments:

Family Feud is a game show where contestants need to find the name the most popular responses to a survey-type question posed to 100 people. The game is relevant for classroom use because the questions are often about culture-specific behavior. For example: How often does the average American go to the hairdresser? Or: What kind of information should you keep secret from your wife or husband? Moreover, there are a lot of language-related questions such as: Name the top five synonyms for “toilet”.

⁹⁴ <http://www.bigfishgames.com/>

9.29. Hidden Object Games

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, visual intelligence, fun
Linguistic Aim(s):	vocabulary acquisition, prepositions of place, describing pictures
Material:	Copy of a Hidden Object game for PC or MAC. Free versions and trial version are available.
Preparation:	Set up the classroom with a projector, a laptop and a copy of a Hidden Object game.

Procedure:

1. The class plays the game together, trying to find in picture the objects listed at the bottom of the screen. Explain unknown vocabulary.

Extension:

Students can play an endless number of free trial versions of this kind of game online. It is fun and motivating way to learn new vocabulary, especially about everyday objects.

Comments:

A lot of teachers might be reluctant to spend money on a game, even if it is for classroom use. But they can at least try the trial version, which are usually limited to one hour of gameplay. The full version of the games cost around 5 euros each.

9.30. Neg , neg, neg

Metalinguistic Aim(s):	collaborative learning, interpersonal intelligence
Linguistic Aim(s):	commenting on issues, vocabulary acquisition
Material:	an online comment section
Preparation:	Bring to class a printout of an online comment section on an article about a divisive issue.

Procedure:

1. After having discussed an article dealing with a divisive issue in class students read the comments about the article and attribute a + if they agree or a - if they disagree with the commentator.
2. After they have read all the comments they compare their pluses and minuses with other students and explain why they agree or disagree.

Extension:

Students can themselves write a comment to the article. This gives them a feeling of belonging to an English language-usage community and can be a great boost to their motivation.

Comments:

Comment sections are a great language resource because they provide written samples of “spoken” language. They also allow students to participate in discussions with native speakers, whose language they will try to emulate.

9. INTEGRATED LESSON PLANS

9.1. Introduction

The following lesson plans are examples of how different media materials and activities can be integrated into a topical unit. Each lesson plan includes a comment on some of the most frequent issues arising in the Media classroom.

9.2. Made in England

Title: Made in England

Aim: raising cultural awareness of British identity

- Activity 1: *Made In England*

As students enter the classroom at the beginning of the lesson, the song *Made in England* by Elton John is played on the sound system.

- Activity 2: *Group discussion*

In groups of three or four, students discuss the differences between the UK and their country.

- Activity 3: *Class discussion*

The class brainstorms images they associate with England.

- Activity 4: *Board game*⁹⁵

Students play a board game on famous English people, landmarks, traditions etc.

- Activity 5: *Reading exchange*⁹⁶

In groups of three students read different articles on British identity taken from the British Identity and Society section of *The Guardian*⁹⁷. They orally summarize the articles for their peers and discuss the issues, i.e. sex, alcohol abuse, mixed race, and quality of life.

- Activity 6: *TV documentary*

The class watches part of a documentary on *Brick Road*, a traditional immigrant area in London, which represents modern multi-cultural England.

- Activity 7: *Class discussion*

Students identify and discuss the issues raised in the documentary.

Follow-up: Book and Film recommendations for further reading or viewing: *This is England*⁹⁸ and *Watching the British*⁹⁹. Make book and DVD available to students who will report to the class in the next lesson. Book and film will continue to circulate between students.

⁹⁵ see 8.19.

⁹⁶ see 8.1.

⁹⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/britishidentity>

⁹⁸ *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* by Kate Fox

⁹⁹ *This Is England* [DVD] [2006]



Activity 6:

Videos have the potential to immerse the students in the language. However, the set-up needs to be right. First of all, it is always preferable to project videos onto a big screen. Asking a class of twenty or more to students to stare at a small TV screen will make for a poor viewing experience and can cause students to quickly lose interest. Secondly, the sound is as important as the quality and size of the picture. The integrated speakers of a TV set will not carry the sound far enough to be clearly audible to all the students. Poor sound quality is often one of the main reasons for the students' failure to understand a video. The ideal solution is a projector with a set of exterior loudspeakers. When using a projector, it is important that the room should be darkened so that that the image is clear and there are no reflections from windows. Finally, the teacher needs to consider whether to provide English language subtitles or not. The argument against using subtitles is that students rely too much on their reading skills and not enough on their listening ability. The argument for subtitles is that students usually find it easier to follow the video. It also helps them to “capture” specific expressions or vocabulary. The decision on whether to use subtitles or not should be taken for each video activity individually, depending on different factors such as the sound quality of the source material and the task that is set for the viewing. I usually switch the subtitles on, not least of all as a kind of safety net for the weaker students in class. After all, it is always possible for students to ignore the close-captioning and to only focus on the video.

If students need to take notes it is sometimes necessary to not completely darken the room. However, note-taking needs to be used carefully because it takes students out of the film or program and makes it more difficult for them to follow. Students should train themselves to make mental notes and to memorize expressions and vocabulary of interest to look them up later.

9.3. Eccentricity

Title: Eccentricity

Aim: discussing personality, raising cultural awareness

- Activity 1: *Reading*

Students read a *Guardian* article about Marc Boyle, an eco-activist, who has given up cash and lives in a tent. His entry on the *Green Living Blog* attracted over 400 comments. From harsh criticism to marriage proposals, the reactions were mixed¹⁰⁰.

- Activity 2: *Class discussion*

Students express their reaction to the article.

- Activity 3: *Neg, Neg, Neg*¹⁰¹

Students read a selection from the comment section on the article and put a plus if they agree with the comment or a minus if they disagree. They proceed to exchange and discuss their reactions with a partner.

- Activity 4: *Reading exchange*

In groups of three, students read accounts about three different English eccentrics from *Wikipedia*. They orally summarize the articles for their peers and discuss the odd behaviour on display.

- Activity 5: *TV Interviews*

Students watch excerpts of interviews with famous eccentric John Ward¹⁰².

- Activity 6: *Reading*

Students read an excerpt from Henry Hemming's Book *In Search of English Eccentricity*¹⁰³ on the relationship between eccentricity, madness, perversion and creativity and what it means to be English.

- Activity 7: *Class discussion*

Students discuss the relationship between madness and genius.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/green-living-blog/2009/oct/28/live-without-money?INTCMP=SRCH>

¹⁰¹ see 8.30.

¹⁰² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5GBXIVJBao>

¹⁰³ *In Search of the English Eccentric: A Journey* (2008) by Henry Hemming

Follow-up: Book and Film recommendations for further viewing or reading: *In Search of the English Eccentric* by Henry Hemming's, *Curing Hiccups with Small Fires* by Carl Shaw and *The Aviator* by Martin Scorsese. Make books and film available to students who will report to the class in the next lesson. Books and films will continue to circulate between students.



Activity 6:

Some teachers, and also students, might object to reading a text or watching a video just for itself, without any kind of language exercise or comprehension check, either before or after the viewing. “What is the point?” as one students succinctly asked.

I believe that there are several points to be made. First of all, some video or reading activities, usually the shorter ones, can simply be used to influence the flow or rhythm of a lesson. After a heated group discussion, students sometimes need a moment to settle down and to refocus. A short text or video can be used to this effect. Secondly, the issue here is the differentiation that some students and teachers make between language learning and language usage. I believe that language usage is always language learning, but not necessarily vice-versa. From my own learning experience, I remember sitting in English class, daydreaming while I was waiting for it to be turn my turn to read a sentence from a grammar exercise. I was not learning a lot because I was not using the language a lot. I believe that whenever language is used in a meaningful way, learning takes place. It is, however, important to empathize with students who feel that by filling in all the gaps their English will eventually be flawless. Hence, I believe that comprehension questions can and should be used, but not necessarily all the time. Finally, I believe that by limiting teacher input in the form of exercises and comprehension questions, some students can attain a level of immersion where they “grok” the language and are able to overcome all self-consciousness and self-censoring to express themselves freely in English.

9.4. Who do you think you are?

Title: Who Do You Think You Are?

Aim: talking about family and ancestry, migration, and raising cultural awareness

- Activity 1: *Reading exchange*

Students read two articles about the apologies presented by the British and the Australian Prime Ministers for the years of abuse and pain suffered by thousands of orphans and children sent to Australia from Britain, often without the knowledge of their parents¹⁰⁴. They orally summarize their article for their partner.

- Activity 2: *Group Discussion*

In groups of three, students make a mental map of all the reasons for immigration. Each group briefly presents their ideas to the class.

- Activity 3: *TV Documentary*

Students watch an excerpt from the BBC documentary *Who Do You Think You Are?*: “The program follows the journeys of known personalities as they delve into the past to explore their family trees, uncover their family history and discover fascinating facts about their ancestors that have been hidden by the passage of time” (DVD Jacket). In one particularly moving episode, Stephen Fry traces his great-grandmother’s whereabouts back to a house in Vienna, only to discover that all the inhabitants were deported to concentration camps by the Nazis.

- Activity 4: *Quiz*

Students take a multiple-choice test on black sheep in the Royal family, for example Henri VIII.

- Activity 5: *Idioms*

Students discuss the possible meaning of other animal idioms, for example, as snug as a bug in a rug.

- Activity 6: *BBC Video*

Students watch a few episodes of the BBC online program *The Teacher*¹⁰⁵, which presents in a humorous way idioms (in this case animal idioms).

¹⁰⁴ this lesson was taught in 2009

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/theteacher/>

Follow-up: Book and Film recommendations for further reading or viewing: HBO's *The Tudors*, the BBC's *The Teacher*, and *Who Do You Think You Are*. DVDs are made available to students who will report to the class in the next lesson. Books and films will continue to circulate between students. Students can also be asked to research their own family history and to report back to class in a later lesson.



Follow-up:

Asking students to reveal information about themselves or their family is a sensitive issue. Some class participants resent this intrusion into their private lives and they might point out that they come to class to learn English not to talk about themselves. As teachers, we need to be acutely aware of when students feel that a line has been crossed and never force them further than they are willing to go. It also takes some time for students to trust the teacher and the class to be a safe place where they can express themselves without fear of judgment or ridicule. The teacher can foster such a zone of trust by behaving in a professional, respectful and non-judgmental way in the classroom. The teacher also plays an important role in mediating between the students and in diffusing conflicts that can always arise.

On the other hand, the majority of students do enjoy talking about themselves and learning about the lives of the others. To personalize conversation questions and activities, often has a positive effect on the language production of students because it is a genuine activity that comes natural to them. Another advantage is that by strengthening the bonds between students, at least in adult education, it is possible to dramatically reduce drop-out rates and to improve attendance. The class can become a social space that student enjoy being in, and where they can use the language for genuine and meaningful exchanges.

9.5. I have seen the future baby, it is... .

Title: I have seen the future baby, it is... .

Aim: making predictions about the future

- Activity 1: *Reading Exchange*

In groups of three, students read texts about technologies which are going to change our lives in the future, for example: virtual reality, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, etc. They orally summarize their article for their partners.

- Activity 2: *The Turing Test*¹⁰⁶

Students interact on the classroom computer with a chat bot, a primitive form of A.I. If a computer lab is available, students can do this individually; if not, the class can come up with questions and answers for the computer bot, which the teacher then submits.

- Activity 3: *TV Documentary*

Students watch a brief excerpt from the BBC's *James May's 20th Century*, on recent breakthroughs in robotics and possible future developments in the field.

- Activity 4: *Group Discussion*

In pairs, students make predictions about future developments in one area of human life: work, play, relationships, school, health, war, the environment, the economy, etc. Each group briefly presents their ideas to the class.

- Activity 5: *Songs*

Students listen to songs about the future and discuss what vision they present of things to come. Songs or poems could include: *The Future* by Leonard Cohen, *22nd Century* by Nina Simone, *Where Will the Children Play* by Cat Stevens, *In the year 2525* by Zager and Evans, *The Second Coming* by William Butler Yeats etc.

Follow-up: Book and Film recommendations for further viewing or reading: *Future Shock* by Alvin Toffler, *AI* by Stephen Spielberg, *Escape from New York* by John Carpenter, *The Future is*

¹⁰⁶ see 8.8.

in the Past by Stephen Fry. DVDS and books are made available to students who will report to the class in the next lesson. Films and books will continue to circulate among the students.



Activity 5:

Using ambiguous texts, such as poems or songs, in the classroom can be an interesting way for students to impose meaning on the language, rather than the language imposing meaning on them. This reversal can help students to overcome their anxiety of not understanding and it can lower their resistance to assimilating a new linguistic and cognitive system.

The problem is that it can just as easily have the opposite effect, if it is the teacher, who in the end imposes his reading of the text. This often happens when the initial reaction in the classroom is silence. This silence can be scary, because it is a space in which endless possibilities exist and where the clear path we follow through life seems to get lost. But by allowing ourselves and students to explore this space, we can reach places we never thought existed and become people we never thought we could be.

I find that first encouraging students to discuss the personal meaning they attach to paintings, can help put them at ease and prepare them for discussing poetry in a second stage. If students are willing to take a leap of faith, because they feel that the teacher and the class will follow them, language learning can transcend the merely utilitarian function to which it is often reduced and become a tool for self-expression and self-discovery.

9.6. A life less ordinary

Title: A life Less Ordinary

Aim: discussing adventure

- Activity 1: *Reading*

Students read an article about a South Korean who was the first woman to climb to the top of the 14 highest mountains.¹⁰⁷

- Activity 2: *Video*

Student watch the famous Monty Python sketch “The two peaks of Mount Kilimanjaro”¹⁰⁸ in which a British wannabe explorer with double vision tries to organize a rescue mission for his twin brother who has disappeared in the Himalayas after trying to build a bridge between the two peaks. Students discuss what the sketch says about English Imperialism and its perspective on the rest of the world.

- Activity 3: *The Bucket List*¹⁰⁹

Students make a list of the adventures they would still like to have in their lives. They discuss their list with a partner. Optional: they publish their list of activities on *Bucketlist.org*.

- Activity 4: *Reading exchange*

In groups of three, students read articles about famous adventure seekers, for example: Richard Branson, Philippe Petit, Alain Robert, etc. They orally summarize their article for their group and discuss the achievements of the different adventurers.

- Activity 5: *Video*

Students watch an excerpt from *Man on a Wire* by James Marsh, a look at tightrope walker Philippe Petit's daring, but illegal, high-wire routine performed between New York City's World Trade Center's twin towers in 1974, what some consider, "the artistic crime of the century."

Follow-Up: Book and Film recommendations for further reading or viewing: *Man on a Wire* by James Marsh, *A Life Less Ordinary* by Danny Boyle, *Touching the Void* by Kevin Macdonald,

¹⁰⁷ The lesson was originally taught in April 2010. The text could be replaced by a more current adventurous feat.

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46btEgKmCTo>

¹⁰⁹ see 8.5.

127 *Hours* by Danny Boyle. DVDS and books are made available to students who will report to the class in the next lesson. Films and books will continue to circulate among the students.



Activity 3:

Personally, I am not sold to the idea of using modern information technology for social purposes. I don't use *Facebook*, or *Twitter* or any other social networking site. I don't comment on articles and I rarely participate in forum discussions. However, as we have seen in the chapter on multiple intelligences, it is important for a teacher to understand that his or her preferred channels of receiving and sending information might be different from those of the students. Hence, I believe that the participatory potential of modern media is an aspect that I have to a certain point neglected in my teaching.

It is undoubtedly very motivating for a lot of students to share their work via a blog, or to communicate with native speakers on forums or to befriend American or British people on *Facebook*. The impact of this form of online communication on language acquisition might very well be profound. From personal experience, on some of the English language forums I consult as a "lurker", it becomes increasingly difficult to tell the native from the non-native speakers. We witness here the development of international communities, which use English as a lingua franca, because it was in America and England that the Internet first took off. If students become a part of such a community, they have an entirely different stake in the language. It is no longer an abstract subject but becomes an important tool for social cohesion. It is my intuitive belief that the brain prioritizes knowledge which has an important social function and thus the speed of language up-take is increased.

Finally, by contributing to discussion online students cease to be passive recipients but take on an active role. This certainly boosts their self-esteem and motivation to become ever more proficient.

9.7. But is it art?

Title: But is it art?

Aim: discussing art

- Activity 1: *Video*¹¹⁰

Students look at a video on the year's *Turner Prize* winner. In 2010, Susan Philipsz won for her sound installation, which involved playing Scottish laments under bridges. The class discusses if this is art and try to interpret the artist's intentions.

Activity 2: *Neg, neg, neg*¹¹¹

Students read the comment section on the article in *The Guardian* announcing the Turner Prize winner. They discuss if the comments reflect the view they expressed earlier or if there are other ways to look at the work of Susan Philipsz.

- Activity 3: *Reading Exchange*

In groups of three, students read articles on controversial artists, for example: Banksy, Damien Hirst, Tracy Emin, etc. They orally summarize their text for the group and discuss the work of each artist.

- Activity 4: *Video*

Students watch an excerpt of the BBC program *Private Life of a Masterpiece*, which looks at the creation of Salvador Dali's *Christ of St. John of the Cross*. The program presents opposing views by experts on whether the painting is art or kitsch. Students note down arguments given for and against the painting and compare their notes.

- Activity 5: *Group Discussion*

Students discuss the role art plays in their lives. The discussion is guided by a list of questions such as: What paintings do you have on your walls? Have you ever spent money on a piece of art? Who is your favourite painter? Would you call yourself an artist?

- Activity 6: *Video*

Students watch an excerpt from the comedy show *Absolutely Fabulous*, which explores the relationship between art and death.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWeKzTDi-OA>

¹¹¹ see 8.30.

¹¹² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZH2N38gY4k>

Follow-up: Book and Film recommendations for further reading or viewing: *The Private Life of a Masterpiece* (BBC Video), Simon Schama's *Power of Art* (BBC). DVDS and books are made available to students who will report to the class in the next lesson. Films and books will continue to circulate among the students.



Activity 1, 4, 6:

The video material used in this lesson comes from different sources. The BBC programs *Private Life of a Masterpiece* and *Absolutely Fabulous* are available on *Amazon.co.uk*. At the time of writing the entire series of the former (7 DVDS) costs £29.47 and one season of the latter costs £3.97. Even if the pedigree of the BBC should assure you that this represents great value for money, many teachers might baulk at the cost involved with acquiring all this material. For me personally, this was never an issue because I consider the DVDs as important teaching tools for my students and learning tools for myself. It is one of the ways in which we can stay in touch with a language and a culture that we left behind at university. It should however also be possible for schools to set up a video resource centre for teachers.

The video on Susan Philipsz's sound installation was downloaded from *YouTube*. It has to be said that most sites streaming video do not offer users the possibility to download the video material to their computers and to later burn it to DVD. There is however a free add-on to Firefox called Downloadhelper¹¹³, which allows users to save to their hard disk videos from most sites. The program also takes care of converting the files you download into the most commonly used formats.

This brings us to the thorny issue of copyright. It has to be said that a lot of copyright laws have never been tested in court and for good reason, they are simply too exclusive and prohibitive. To my knowledge, there has been no case of a teacher being sued for using a DVD in their classroom for educational purposes. Big corporations, such as the BBC, show a certain amount of tolerance when it comes to their material being made publicly available, as can be seen by the amount of BBC footage on *YouTube*. Entire TV series are available to watch and to download without the BBC asking *YouTube* to take the material down. Moreover, in classroom situations, teachers use excerpts rather than entire programs, so that the rules of fair usage apply.

¹¹³ <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/video-downloadhelper/>

9.8. Gadget, gizmos and widgets

Title: Gadget, gizmos and widgets

Aim: discussing technology

- Activity 1: *Class discussion*

Students discuss what the word “gizmo” could mean and invent interesting or funny definitions.

- Activity 2: *Class discussion*

Students look at pictures of various gadgets and try to guess what they could be used for. For example: the nose picker for lazy people, the keyboard with blank keys, or the sauce dispensing chopsticks.¹¹⁴

- Activity 3: *Group discussion*

Students discuss the gadgets and gizmos they cannot live without.

- Activity 4: *Video*

Students watch an excerpt of the *Dragon’s Den*, a BBC program where young inventors and entrepreneurs present their products and inventions to a panel of business magnates, who then decide if they want to invest their money in the product and under what conditions. Students watch the presentations of three budding entrepreneurs and discuss which product they think is most worthy of an investment.

- Activity 5: *Reading exchange*

In groups of three, students read *Time* magazine articles on *The Invention of the Year* and the runner-ups. They present their invention to the group and decide together which one should win the title.

Follow-up: Book and Film recommendations for further reading or viewing: *The Dragon’s Den* (BBC Video), *James May’s Big Inventions* (BBC Video). DVDS and books are made available to students who will report to the class in the next lesson. Films and books will continue to circulate among the students.



¹¹⁴ for more pictures of strange gadgets and gizmos google the keywords

Activity 2:

Photographs, drawings and paintings are a great, and underused, resource for language teachers. They can be used for vocabulary work, but also provide a great stimulus for conversation. I find that using paintings or artistic photography, in particular can encourage less verbal students to express themselves through the pictures.

Describing pictures is also a non-hostile form of exchange during which students can contribute complementary bits of interpretation. When discussing articles, there is usually a clear message that students can understand or fail to understand. With pictures, there can be no such failure in understanding and this lessens the pressure on the students. I find that when talking about pictures, students usually go much further in their interpretations and analysis than they would do with a text. This leads to very interesting discussions in which students can reveal the entire scope of their thinking and feeling.

The easiest way to find pictures online is to use *Google*. You need to enter your subject, for example gadgets, and switch to a picture search. To make sure that the pictures are of a size and quality that makes them suitable for printing, ask *Google* to sort them by size, which means by the number of pixels. For paintings, *Wikipedia* is a useful resource since their picture banks only include high-quality picture files.

When working with picture in the classroom, it can be interesting to use PowerPoint presentations, which allow users to embed pictures, but also video and audio files.

9.9. The Media

Title: The Media

Aim: discussing the Media

- Activity 1: *Reading*

Students read a *Guardian* article published before the last bird-flu epidemic¹¹⁵. Students discuss how many of the harrowing predictions have come true.

- Activity 2: *Class discussion*

The class brainstorms other examples of recent media “hysteria”: global warming, the bird flu, the healthcare reform, child abuse in the church, etc.

- Activity 3: *Video*

Students watch a segment *The Daily Show*¹¹⁶ by satirist and political commentator John Stewart on the debate on healthcare in the United States and the way the reform is presented in the right-wing press, i.e. *Fox News*. Students discuss how the issue is presented and why it is such a divisive issue in the United States.

- Activity 4: *Class discussion*

Students discuss how they get their news and what they think are the advantages and disadvantages of the different forms of media.

- Activity 5: *Video*

Students watch an excerpt of *Newsweek*¹¹⁷, a critical look at the week’s news coverage, by comedian and *Guardian* contributor Charlie Brooker.

Follow-up: Book and Film recommendations for further reading or viewing: *Wag the Dog* by Berry Levinson, *The War of the Worlds* (Original Audio Recording). DVDS and audio recordings are made available to students who will report to the class in the next lesson. Films and audio recordings will continue to circulate among the students.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jul/16/swine-flu-pandemic-who-warning?INTCMP=SRCH>

¹¹⁶ <http://www.thedailyshow.com/>

¹¹⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHun58mz3vI>



Activity 2:

One aspect of the media class that for me is very important, especially if one were to teach such a class to younger students, is critical awareness. The grasp that the media have on our lives today seems at times sheer inexorable. At the time of writing, the nuclear disaster in Japan is the latest media frenzy to grip the world. There is no denying that what happened there is catastrophic, and yet the way it is portrayed in the press just feeds the mood of gloom and doom which seems to be the Zeitgeist of our era.

One wonders how children deal with the seemingly never ending end-of-the-world scenarios. The general anxiety which seems to affect an ever greater number of people is already seeded in our psyche at an early age. The media's attempts to glue us to our TV screens, computers, or mobiles by alternatively stoking our fear and our Schadenfreude are one of the worst perversions of our time.

When using the media in the classroom, it is always important to keep in mind the brainwashing techniques this particular industry employs, and to provide our students with a sense of perspective and choice. The obvious bias of opposing newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Guardian* can be used to subvert the monolithic messages presented by each side. In reading exchange activities, it is possible to make students discover for themselves examples of this bias. Other ways to encourage critical thinking is via the online comment section of the articles. Here, inaccuracies or one-sided arguments are quickly uncovered.

Humourists and satirists, such as the aforementioned Charlie Brooker or John Stewart, also function as court jesters to the political and media elite and their commentary in newspapers and on TV can provide some much needed perspective.

As teachers, I think it is also important to have a small subversive streak, to alternate the serious and the light-hearted in ways that precludes emotional manipulation.

9.10. Work

Title: Work

Aim: discussing work-related issues

- Activity 1: *Songs*

Students listen to various songs about work, for example *The 7 dwarfs theme song*, Bruce Springsteen's *Promised Land*, Billy Joel's *Allentown*, etc. and try to guess the topic of the lesson.

- Activity 2: *Song*

Students read the lyrics to *Promised Land* and identify the phrasal verbs in the song.

- Activity 3: *Idioms*

Students look at a list of work-related idioms and try to guess their meaning¹¹⁸.

- Activity 4: *Reading exchange*

In groups of three, students read texts about the world's worst jobs. They orally summarize their text for their peers and discuss which job would be the most unbearable.

- Activity 5: *Video*

Students watch an excerpt of the TV program *What's My Line*¹¹⁹, in which celebrity panellists need to guess the curious occupations of the contestants, by asking yes and no questions.

- Activity 6: *Game*

Students receive cards with interesting jobs, which their group partners have to guess.

- Activity 7: *Group Discussion*

Students discuss their first jobs.

Follow-up: Students watch more episodes of *What's My Line* online.

¹¹⁸ <http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/work>

¹¹⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXT2E9Ccc8A>



Activity 6:

Fun and learning are intrinsically connected. Once people stop learning, and many of us do once we reach a certain age, we stop having fun. It is almost as if fun is an evolutionary tool to encourage us to keep developing and evolving¹²⁰. When children are playing, having fun, they are actually learning in the most efficient manner possible. It is an unfortunate tragedy that very early in life, we teach them to differentiate between fun and work, between play and school.

Fun and play should be an integral part of any educational endeavour. Boredom, on the other hand, is a clear indicator that we are not learning. It is the brain's way of telling us that it wants new stimuli, new information, new patterns to assimilate. Reasons for boredom can be manifold. The patterns that we study can be too difficult or too easy. There can be too much repetition or too much chaos. But worst of all, the pattern can be imposed on us, instead of us discovering it. This is why it is so devastating when teachers impose an interpretation, a pattern on a text, without allowing students to discover it on their own. The result of this imposition is a fundamental interference with the learning process, which in the worst case, if it happens systematically and repeatedly, can destroy a student's desire and ability for future learning.

The older we get, the more dependent we become on pre-formed patterns. Partly this is because we get lazy and we believe that we know all there is to know, partly it is because we live in a world which exploits false patterns to shackle people and make them function in unfair and inhuman systems. When writing this very text, I have often felt trapped in the academic pattern that is considered appropriate for this kind of work and I have found myself unable to break out of the rut and to proceed on the journey of self-discovery that every intellectual endeavour should entail. Consequently, fun is definitely one of the criteria which we should use when evaluating our teaching. If our students have fun, if they forget time, they are truly immersed in the language learning process.

¹²⁰ Ralph KOSTER (2005), *A Theory of Fun*

9.11. Come dine with me

Title: Come Dine with me

Aim: discussing food and eating habits

- Activity 1: *Video*

Students watch an episode of the TV reality show *Come Dine With Me*¹²¹ in which four strangers organize dinner parties and score each other at the end of the evening. Students make a list of the positive and the negative comments the participants make after each evening. After the viewing they compare their notes.

- Activity 2: *SMART Thesaurus*

Students look at a printout of the SMART Thesaurus box on food, found in the *Online Cambridge Dictionary*. They try to group the words according to different categories such as cookery terms, preparing food, pleasant to eat and drink, savoury dishes, flavours and tastes, pasties and pies, cuts of meat, sea fish, desserts, cheese, pasta, potato dishes, etc.

- Activity 3: *Group discussion*

Students talk about their best and worst culinary experiences.

- Activity 4: *Video*

Students watch an excerpt of the BBC program *Masterchef*¹²² where young professional chefs compete for the title of Michelin *Masterchef* of the year. Students decide which cook they are most impressed by and try to predict the final verdict of the judges.

- Activity 5: *Video*

Students watch the Monty Python sketch *The Cheese Shop*¹²³ and discuss what it says about English customer culture.

Follow-up: Students watch further episodes of *Masterchef* on YouTube.

¹²¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXT2E9Ccc8A>

¹²² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjckqAU8IkM>

¹²³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3KBuQHHKx0>



Activity 1:

Whatever one's personal opinion on the ethics of reality TV is, it is undoubtedly a valuable resource for language teaching and learning. It provides us with samples of language as it is used today in everyday life in England or America. Because it is genuine, students can connect to it with more confidence than to class book English or even the scripted language of films. The language used in these programs is recognized as authentic by the student and thus they accept and assimilate it much more quickly. Moreover, these kinds of program provide interesting glimpses into American or British everyday life. In the case of *Come Dine with Me*, which has to be said is worlds away from the garish and lurid voyeurism of *Big Brother*, students can have a look inside the flats and houses of British people from all social classes to see how they cook for the party, how their houses are decorated and furnished, and how they interact socially at the dinner table. The high occurrence of modern lingo such as *spot on*, *not to set a foot wrong*, *to be stumped*, *knackered*, *gutted* etc. allows students to pick some natural and authentic language to widen their vocabulary range.

There is a great variety of shows such as these focusing on different aspects of life, for example, *Coach Tour* is about the travel experiences of a group of strangers on a bus, the *Dragon's Den* or *The Apprentice* are about young entrepreneurs trying to find their way into the business world, *The Family* is about the everyday life of a modern family, etc. These formats exist in such numbers because they are popular and people enjoy watching them. Excerpts are available on *YouTube* and they lend themselves particularly well to cultural awareness activities.

9.12. I am depressed

Title: I am depressed.

Aim: Talking about depression

- Activity 1: *Reading*

Students read an article on *Facebook* depression¹²⁴. They discuss how *Facebook* could have a negative aspect on the psyche of its users.

- Activity 2: *Reading exchange*

In groups of three, students read different article on modern day psychological disorders, for example Internet and gaming addiction, addiction to pornography, generalised anxiety syndrome, etc. Students summarize their article for their partners and discuss the severity of the medical condition.

- Activity 3: *Agony Aunt*¹²⁵

In groups of three, students receive problem letters and need to discuss what advice to give to each person. Students then read the advice given by the agony aunt and by the commentators on the articles.

- Activity 4: *Video*

Students watch an excerpt of the HBO series *In Treatment* about the work of a psychiatrist played by Gabriel Byrne. The excerpt in questions shows a couple coming to the doctor for relationship therapy. Half of the class focuses on the point of view of the husband, the other half on the point of view of the wife. After watching, students try to present and discuss both sides of the argument.

Follow-up: Book and Film recommendations for further reading or viewing: *In Treatment* (HBO Video). DVDs are made available to students who will report to the class in the next lesson. Films will continue to circulate among the students.

¹²⁴ http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/1104/110401-facebook_depression_flash.html

¹²⁵ see 8.4.



Activity 2:

There are a number of taboo subjects that teachers tend to shy away from in the classroom, for example, death, sex, religion, politics, depression, etc. There are many obvious reasons to stay away from these taboos. Death, for instance, is a subject that touches people very personally and you can never know if someone in your class has just lost a loved one. Sex might obviously disturb students of a certain age group or from certain cultures. Some teachers find it difficult to even discuss the body parts with, say, students from an Islamic background. Religion is a question of personal belief and it is difficult to discuss its validity in a non-confrontational manner. Political debates also have a tendency to turn hostile, because they involve a clash of rigid systems of beliefs.

At first sight, it would seem best to stay from such subjects which could hurt individual sensitivities and have a disastrous effect on class dynamics. Yet, there are also points to be made for talking about these issues in class. For one, although the INL is a multi-cultural environment, it is a Luxembourgish school and we should take as stand for the open and free society that most of us want to live in. There can even be an element of prejudice in excessive displays of cultural awareness since we tend to generalise on the beliefs and sensitivities of entire ethnic or religious groups. Furthermore, if we agree that it is important for students to develop authentic voices in the classroom, we must embrace all aspects of the human condition, also those that might be more difficult to approach or to discuss. For grown-ups in particular, discussing adult issues might counteract the movement of regression to child-like docility that many experience in the classroom.

When weighing the pros and cons, it is a decision for each individual class to make. Personally, I think there are three ground rules for discussing taboos in the classroom. First, the teacher must act as a moderator and not take sides in the discussion. Secondly, students must agree to disagree. Finally, taboo discussion should always be about specific situations and avoid questions encouraging generalisations or blanket judgments. When used in this manner, they can contribute to making the classroom a more meaningful place.

9.13. Japan

Title: Japan

Aim: discussing current affairs and natural disasters

- Activity 1: *Reading Exchange*

At home students read articles from different newspapers on the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan. They select one aspect of the story that they are interested in and bring an article to class. In groups of three, students summarize and discuss their articles.

- Activity 2: *Debate*

Divide the class in two halves. One half brainstorms ideas in favour of nuclear power, one half against. The two groups present their arguments in class.

- Activity 3: *Note-taking*

Students listen to a debate, organised by *The Economist*,¹²⁶ between proponents and opponents of nuclear power. They make a list of the arguments presented by each side. First they compare their lists in groups then in class.

- Activity 4: *Vocabulary*

Students look at a list of vocabulary, for example: to sway, to erupt, to rock, to wade, to be left stranded and associate each term with a natural disaster.

- Activity 5: *Photographs*

Students look at pictures of different disasters and try to use the vocabulary from the previous activity to describe each picture.



Activity 4:

¹²⁶ <http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/686>

Activity 4 caused some embarrassed laughter in the class because it appeared frivolous to use this kind of matching activity, especially in view of the recent events in Japan. I included the activity in order to provide students with a more logical-mathematical mind an exercise they would think of as useful.

This raises, again, an issue that I have been struggling with all along while teaching this class, namely whether to include traditional language exercises on grammar and vocabulary. It cannot be denied that for many students, and teachers as well, language exercises are a proof that learning is taking place. Their absence is conspicuous and makes students question the utilitarian value of the class. I have stressed before the importance of fun in the classroom. And yet, this is also a double-edge sword. If students have too much fun, this can also make them question the seriousness of their studies. I have always been in two minds about this issue. On the one hand, I do believe that exercises can be a serious barrier to student learning. I often observe in the classroom, that grammar exercises in particular, have a tendency to confuse students more than they help them understand and improve usage. For example, students can be perfectly capable of forming questions, but give them the QUASI rule and an exercise and they might be completely disoriented. Furthermore, in the Media class, which focuses on authentic material, inauthentic language exercises seemed contradictory and counter-productive.

On the other hand, empathy requires me to recognize and accept the needs of students. And if students need exercises to feel more secure and to learn, I think I should be ready to compromise. Including traditional language exercises in the Media class is actually quite straightforward. Since most advanced textbooks have a similar topical approach, it is not difficult to find and integrate more traditionally didacticised study material. There are also EFL books which can be used as a rich source of complementary materials. Donald Watson's *Advanced Vocabulary in Context*, in particular provides language practice on articles that cover a wide variety of topics.

I think that this discussion brings us once again back to the idea of using genuine or authentic activities in class. Students did not find it inappropriate to discuss the articles or to debate nuclear power, but an artificial vocabulary activity seemed inappropriate.

10. THEORY THROUGH PRACTICE

10.1. Authentic material

The use of authentic material in the classroom has overall been a positive experience with the advantages outweighing the disadvantages by far.

The main advantage of using authentic material in the classroom has been to make the learning process more meaningful. Over the years, a lot of students have expressed their appreciation for being taken seriously, not only as language learners, but as whole persons. Each lesson holds for the entire class, the teacher and the students, the promise of acquiring not only new words, but new concepts in art, psychology, politics, environmental studies, sociology, history, etc. By building such a knowledge community you create strong bonds with and between the students, some of whom have stayed in the class for four years. In all that time, I have never taught the same class twice and only very rarely used the same resource, such as a video or an article. The use of authentic material always provides new ideas and activities and it makes teaching a meaningful learning activity for the teacher as well. It is, for lack of a better word, a liberating experience, when you find yourself as a teacher on equal footing with your students. This kind of partnership for learning changes your attitude to your work in fundamental ways because, by seeing eye to eye with your students, it makes you care and think more deeply about the individuals in your class.

Many of the other advantages of using authentic material discussed in this thesis have lived up to their promise in class. Authentic recordings and texts on real-life issues stimulate conversation and discussion. If a lesson is successful, the Media class is bustling with conversation and discussion, which often continues after class in the corridors of the school. Students often take the videos home to share and to discuss with their family or friends. Thus, the gap between language usage and language learning is reduced and students develop habits of autonomous, perpetual

language acquisition. Students often return to class from their exploratory trips into English and American culture, with new words or expressions that they want to share with the teacher or the class. So the language used in class stays up-to-date and relevant to the students. As has been pointed out earlier, this is also important for teacher development because it forces us to continually stay in touch with changes and developments in language usage. Overall, the use of authentic material allows the teacher to display a greater level of professionalism and creativity. It serves as a safeguard against ideologically biased fads in teaching by rooting the curriculum in the real world. If used with authentic, generic activities, it helps us to develop a pragmatic teaching system that has automatic up-dates built in.

The only negative aspect that has some weight is the issue of difficulty. Authentic newspaper articles often have a density of difficult vocabulary that can severely impact understanding. The problem is compounded with video where in addition to difficult vocabulary, accent, the speed of delivery, mumbling, etc., can make it hard for students to find their bearings.

Initially, it may seem that the best way to control the difficulty is during the selection process of the material. Indeed, some articles are easier and shorter than others, and in some forms of video, such as documentaries, the language used is usually Standard English, clearly enunciated at relatively low speed. Comprehension aids such as glossaries or, in the case of video, subtitles can also influence the difficulty level.

However, it is clear that this approach is, in more than one way, disingenuous. First of all, because by selecting material based on its difficulty, we interfere with the students' ability to interact authentically with the target language and culture. This interference negates the sense of empowerment and autonomy, which students can gain from authentic material. We also lie to our students in making them believe that they can deal with authentic material, when in fact we only expose them to a heavily censored selection.

Without becoming ideologically entrenched, I think that this pre-selection of material by the teacher is not an intellectually honest way to deal with the issue of difficulty. If there is a selection of material, and it is difficult to see how we can avoid this, in particular at lower levels,

I think it needs to be discussed with the students. The students themselves are able to evaluate what they want to be able to do at different levels. I doubt that at lower levels students expect to be able to enjoy a Shakespeare play in English, they might however be interested in watching CNN or in understanding the lyrics of their favorite songs. And they are able to do so if they trust their own coping mechanisms for generating meaning, and if they can accept that meaning is always negotiated between the subject and the object i.e. that predictions, interpretation and approximation are normal ways to process information. Students do not need to be taught this, they do this instinctively, it is just that at school and as language learners we often ask them to unlearn these coping mechanisms, by insisting on one hundred percent accuracy.

If, however, we use open-ended, generic tasks, which allow students to approach the texts from their current level of proficiency, they will regain their self-confidence and acquire the language in a much more natural way. It may come as a surprise, but students in my classroom very rarely complain that a text is too difficult. This only happens at the beginning of the semester or when a student joins the class in mid-term. I spend a lot of time monitoring their discussion and I am always surprised at how much of the text they are able to understand and to process for their peers. Of course, there are misunderstandings and mistakes in the summaries at times. But, these are a normal feature of genuine subject-text interaction and they are often clarified through the process of reciprocal teaching explained in chapter 7.5.

10.2. Cultural Awareness

The culture-focused lesson plans such as the ones about England, eccentricity or textese are usually the most successful in terms of learner motivation and involvement. I completely agree with Barry Tomalin when he enthuses that “In our own teaching we have found that, when students have understood the language being used in a situation and then go on to gain an understanding of the cultural factors at work, this is for them one of the most absorbing and exciting parts of any language lesson. Studying culture with a task-oriented and cooperative

learning approach adds a new dimension of achievement and understanding for the students – and for us the teachers!”¹²⁷

I have found that students are genuinely interested in learning about British and American traditions, history and society. By mapping these cultural landscapes students can manage to find their bearings in the language. The language takes on a new reality and it ceases to be just an abstract set of grammatical rules and vocabulary items.

It is, however, not the Culture with capital C or the History with capital H that most interests students. Watching a historical documentary on the Norman invasion will alienate students more than it draws them in, because this is the overbearing monolith of Culture and History rigidly set up by the educational institutions. It is an example of how meaning is imposed instead of being discovered. I find that students are much more interested in the living culture that imbibes local traditions, interesting personalities, culinary customs, etc. From these experiences, students can glean a true empathic understanding for the target culture. By focusing on the odd, the strange, the peripheral aspects of the human condition, students find it easier for themselves, the outsiders, to be accepted into the realm of experience of the target culture. English culture in particular is so choke full of eccentric personalities, traditions and customs that there is no end to the fun that can be had exploring it. For teachers it is equally important to keep up-to-date with cultural developments in the target language community. A language is a frame of references which are continually changing. If we do not keep up with these changes our language proficiency will suffer in the long run.

Finally, it is also worthwhile delving into the culture that every student brings to class. This can be his or her national culture, the culture of certain interest groups such as economists, sociologists, IT specialists to take a few examples from my own class. In this way, the students can take on the role of specialists inducting their peers into their world of knowledge and expertise. As I have pointed out at the beginning of this thesis, students’ language performance improves if they feel that they are really being listened to and paid attention to. Cultural awareness is a two-way street and we need to allow students to express their own cultural

¹²⁷ Barry TOMALIN (1993), *Cultural Awareness*, p.9

identities. As teachers we can tap into the enormous resource that our students represent and use it to the advantage of the class as a whole. By thus changing the power distribution (and I hereby mean not only authority, but energy) in the classroom from top-down to proximal zones of development, we can set up a system of cross-fertilization that potentializes learning opportunities. By working on cultural awareness, we can also minimize the potential of conflict when discussing taboo issues and contribute to helping our students integrate into a multi-cultural society.

I have until today not had any negative experiences when using cultural awareness activities in the classroom. Of course, the teacher needs to be sensitive to and aware of cultural differences. We must be empathic and non-judgmental and bring to class the same curiosity that we expect from our students.

10.3. Multiple Intelligences and Intelligence multiplied

The two concepts go hand in hand. Before we can pool the various talents and intelligences in the classroom, we need to allow students to discover and express their own proclivities. We can do this by allowing students to choose themselves the material used in class or by making sure that we select materials that appeal to the different intelligences. By using the full spectrum of learning channels I find that the lessons become more interesting and less predictable and boring. To mix the right cocktail can be at times a hit and miss experience. If you focus too much on the verbal intelligence and have too many reading or language exercises, the class can become too dense and slow-moving. If, on the other hand, you have too many inter-personal activities, such as pair, group or class discussions, there is a palpable nervousness and hyper-activity and in the end a feeling that nothing concrete has been achieved. If you use too many listening activities, students find it, after a while, difficult to focus because they have become saturated. Accordingly, it is really important to have a good mix of activities without, however, hysterically jumping from one to another. With time, you learn to defer conceptual considerations and to dynamically adjust

your teaching to classroom reality. Sometimes it is necessary to drop some activities or to prolong others depending on how things develop in the classroom. I guess one of the rookie mistakes to avoid when teaching creatively is to want to do too much; first some reading, then some listening, followed by a class debate, some role-play and finally a brainstorming recap session. If, as a teacher, you begin to act like a show master, you realize that something is wrong because you don't give students the space to develop their autonomy. There is a risk that you try to show off and prove how clever and original you are, at the expense of being receptive to students' needs. In order to avoid this pitfall, it is important that the teacher's speaking time is as limited as possible. In the Media class, students spend most of their time working in groups of three. I prefer groups of three to pairs because in pairs the power can sometimes be distributed unevenly. In groups of three, this tends to happen less.

The group work can take on a dynamic of its own where the interference of the teacher can be seen as a negative factor. If you join a group in their discussion you risk breaking the internal dynamics and focus the attention of at least one student onto yourself. This happens because many students hesitate to vest trust in their peers. For them, group work is a somewhat unsatisfying experience because it lacks the feedback of the authority figure to assure them that what they are saying and doing is correct. For this kind of student, group work and collaboration can seem to be a waste of time. Because of this, it is important to tie the group work into a wider collaborative context with the help of the Internet. Comments sections, forums, collaborative online projects, class blogs and other participatory online platforms can allow us to redistribute authority and knowledge horizontally, instead of vertically. In this way, we can promote acceptance for collaborative learning even with initially skeptical students. Also by allowing students to become "experts" themselves by assigning research tasks or even just by assigning individual texts in a reading exchange, students can gain the confidence to trust themselves and others. By opening up the language acquisition process and the receptive focus we encourage autonomous and life-long learning.

10.4. Autonomy

The previous chapters have shown how intricately autonomy is linked to authenticity, cultural awareness and collaborative learning. By translating these three concepts into classroom practice I have been able to clarify and develop my own understanding of student autonomy.

I have always struggled with the question of autonomy. Can we encourage autonomy? Can we impose it? Can we, as teachers, design tasks that *make* our students more autonomous? Whenever we look at what we, as teachers, can do to make students more autonomous we run into the same contradictions. To some this may seem a purely philosophical issue, but in a world where truth and authenticity are more and more undermined by double speak and communication bypasses, I believe it to be one of the fundamental questions that any teacher must ask themselves. For too many students *autonomy* is defined as “the freedom to think and do what the teacher expects you to”.

This problem was first addressed by Paulo Freire when he argued that “not even the best-intentioned leaders can bestow independence as a gift”.¹²⁸ We cannot force our students to be autonomous but we can provide for them a classroom environment which allows them to act autonomously.

By allowing students to suggest the topics, to choose the materials and to present them in class, I believe that they can engage in authentic, i.e. personally meaningful, language learning activities. By encouraging them to exchange their points of view, they can develop a socially and culturally engaged version of autonomy, by way of which the individual becomes an important contributor to a knowledge-building group. By opening the classroom and situating it within the contemporary societal and cultural context, students are enabled to take control of their own learning and to become part of the target language community.

This participatory version of education reflects the reality of our world today. In the Internet society knowledge is distributed vertically and not horizontally. Our students expect us to acknowledge this change. As teachers, we have to take a leap of faith. I have found it difficult to turn my authority over to the students and to conceive of learning as a partnership. I still find it difficult and there are no doubt many examples in my teaching of inconsistencies or contradictions. What I have tried to tentatively approach, is a radical change of paradigm in

¹²⁸ Paulo, FREIRE (1970), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.53

education. This change has been a long time in the coming and there is growing chorus of voices, only a fraction of which have been acknowledged in this thesis, all heralding a new era.

11. CONCLUSION

At the time of finishing this thesis, the so-called *Facebook* revolutions have forever changed the political and social reality in the Middle-East. If these popular upheavals will usher in a new democratic era remains to be seen. What is already abundantly clear today is that the Internet is progressively changing all aspects of our lives. The controversy around *Wikileaks*, in particular, has highlighted the conflict between the establishment, who tries to maintain, at whatever cost, the status quo and the old distribution of power and knowledge from top to bottom, and a new emerging awareness of the I-generation who have discovered that, through the Internet, they can focus their power and influence to achieve change and to reshape the world according to the reality of their lives.

The four rooms of our classroom will not protect us from these sweeping changes. Our students will no longer be satisfied with an education that does not reflect the world they live in and that fails to address the issues they encounter in real life. Most teachers already experience the erosion of their authority, either through the disrespectful behavior of their students or through the questioning of teaching methods and contents. We cannot behave like the late leaders of the recently toppled regimes, who against all evidence claimed that everything was fine and that they and their methods of government were fully endorsed by their subjects.

We need to look for more inclusive and participatory forms of education such as those championed by the theorists on multiple-intelligences and collaborative learning. We need to make sure that our teaching is authentic, that it reflects the economic, social, intellectual and philosophical concerns of our students. Above all, we need to respect and encourage the autonomy of our students by allowing their natural curiosity to freely express itself in the classroom.

I believe that the model of teaching I have tried to describe in this thesis and tried to implement in the Media classroom is adapted to the present reality because it channels the collective energy of our time into positive avenues for teacher and student development.

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