Language Learning and Dyslexia in the Multilingual Society

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Adapted for local contexts by Bulgarian, Czech, English and Welsh partners.

Please note that the original authors do not necessarily endorse all the adaptations made for the local context.

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Module 4 - Language Learning and Dyslexia in the Multilingual Society

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Learning outcomes

- Acquire a basic knowledge of the linguistic aspects that are relevant for language learning, with particular focus on the main areas of difficulties for plurilingual students with dyslexia and possible recommendations of support.
- Acquire knowledge about teaching methods, strategies and techniques that may be useful for plurilingual students with dyslexia in additional language learning.

Useful terminology

- **Phonological consciousness**: “the ability to elaborate sounds in oral language, that is the capability to analyse and manipulate the linguistic structure of the words, where adequate verbal or non-verbal stimuli are present.” (Scalisi et al., 2003, p. 44). This allows the student, approaching a new language, to segment the running flow of speech and to extract words, and also to distinguish syllables and phonemes.
- **Phonetics**: the branch of linguistics that describes the physical characteristics of human sounds and languages. In other words, phonetics studies what we do while we speak and while we listen to someone talking.
- **Phonology**: the branch of linguistics that studies the linguistic function of sounds, that is their capability to differentiate meanings. Phonology also covers how the sounds of a particular language combine together and how they can be modified in certain contexts.
- **Active vocabulary**: the stock of words regularly used by the speaker to communicate. Active lexicon is always numerically lower than passive lexicon, in the adult as well as in the child.
- **Passive lexicon**: the stock of words not regularly (or never) used by the speaker to communicate, but whose meanings are known, since they have already been heard or read. Passive lexicon is always numerically higher than active lexicon, in the adult as well as in the child.
- **Linguistics**: the scientific study of human language, in other words linguistics is defined as a descriptive discipline which aims to explain linguistic behaviour and basic mechanisms in human beings (cf. Graffi and Scalise, 2002).
- **IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)**: a system that assigns a unique symbol for a unique sound, regardless of the language of the sound (English, Turkish, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin Chinese etc.), and regardless of the writing system of the language (Roman, Cyrillic etc.). This allows careful and consistent written representation of all the sounds present in any language.
- **Morphology**: concerns the internal structure of words and the different appearance words may take with the adding of affixes or through being combined with other words.
- **Pragmatics**: concerns the use of a language’s expressions and their appropriateness to the communicative context.
• **Syntax**: the grammar relationship between the words of a sentence in a particular language which allow it to be judged ‘well formed’ or grammatically correct.
**Introduction**

During the European Council which took place in Lisbon in March 2000, a plan was issued (the Lisbon Strategy) to “strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy” and it focused on the relevance of raising the cultural level. This perspective points to the key role of a good education and the learning of two foreign languages, over and above the mother-tongue, as a crucial element.

The study of languages should not be considered as a self-contained activity, but as a primary element for permanent education and, particularly, for education to citizenship. This should apply even when objective or subjective “obstacles” are present, such as a specific learning disability.

If correct methodological choices are made “there is no reason why dyslexic students cannot learn, at least at a basic level, another language or more languages” (Gabrieli & Gabrieli, 2008, p.14), provided that such choices are orientated towards the identification of strategies compatible with different cognitive styles and not the identification of different learning objectives.

School curricula should provide an inclusive teaching approach which can ensure the right to education for everyone and guarantee that everyone can realise their potential in the professional and social environment, reducing possible emotional or relational problems.

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**Extension Material 4.1 - The Council of Europe**

The Council of Europe was founded on 5 May 1949 by 10 countries and now covers virtually the entire European continent, with its 47 member countries. The Council of Europe is based in Strasbourg (France) and seeks to develop common and democratic principles based on the European Convention on Human Rights and other reference texts on the protection of individuals throughout Europe.

One of the objectives of the council of Europe is to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe’s cultural identity and diversity. In this perspective it fosters activities aimed to promote linguistic diversity and language learning in the field of education. These activities are carried out within the framework of the European Cultural Convention, (1954) ratified by 49 states.

http://www.coe.int/lang
The plurilingual background of the learner, a condition increasingly frequent in today's society, should be considered as a resource and not as an obstacle to learning. As Daloiso (2011) writes, “Language is the mirror and vehicle for the culture of the people who speak it, and is inseparable from the language-culture binomial; from the comparison with ‘other’ cultures, students will learn not only to appreciate their culture of origin, but also to be open, respectful and curious towards people belonging to ‘other’ cultures.”[Translated from Italian by the authors]

Unfortunately, the overall linguistic repertoire of the learner is often ignored and languages are taught apart from each other. This hinders the learner from acquiring a unified, intersecting and complex competence, that redefines his/her identity and becomes part of it.
4.1 Teaching and learning of foreign languages

In line with communicative, action-oriented and affective humanistic approaches, which promote the centrality of the learner in the teaching-learning process, language teaching should always consider the specific characteristics of the learners, their needs, interests and aspirations, and take into account the differences in their learning styles, their languages and their cultures.

When planning a learning activity, the teacher should also consider aspects of the learner’s daily life, the large amount of extra-scholastic input and opportunities to learn to which the learner is exposed, such as, for example, the Internet and other media, and an increasingly mobile and multicultural society. Youngsters are exposed to implicit language learning, and the school has a duty to develop this and integrate it into scholastic activities, making explicit curricular learning more motivating. (Examples of such activities include the use of songs, video games, films, internet chat, and Skype technology.)

By the beginning of the 1900s, the philosopher and pedagogue Dewey had already recognised that:

> From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in the school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school. That is the isolation of the school -- its isolation from life. When the child gets into the schoolroom he has to put out of his mind a large part of the ideas, interests, and activities that predominate in his home and neighborhood.” (Dewey, 1907)

Within today’s society, the “waste” observed by Dewey can assume enormous proportions, considering the immeasurable amount of stimuli everyone can easily and quickly access. Recent research (Benson, 2006) has underlined how learners tend to undertake language learning activities outside school much more than their teachers can imagine. The risk is that teachers end up “wasting” this valuable resource. In fact, a teacher should carefully assess the linguistic stimuli that permeate the students’ living environment, and try to understand their potential in order to promote more effective and stable language learning. Unfortunately, the transfer into the classroom of the learning that happens outside the school context (and vice versa) is often very difficult to stimulate, as experimental research has demonstrated for over a century. However this must be an essential objective for language teaching (Detterman, 1993).
4.2 Basic language skills

There are four basic linguistic skills necessary to acquire linguistic competence: oral comprehension, oral production, written comprehension and written production.

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The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) includes interaction as an additional fundamental language skill that should be developed.

There are also activities defined as integrated skills (Balboni, 2007, 14-15) e.g. summarising, note-taking, writing from dictation, paraphrasing.

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The receptive skills (oral or written), are always developed before the productive skills. It has also been observed that receptive skills tend to be four times more developed than productive skills during the process of learning a new language. For this reason the teacher should keep in mind that demanding an excessive effort in oral production can be useless and frustrating for the learner, if such effort is required too early in the learning process, when the oral listening skills have not yet been sufficiently developed. Furthermore, in the early phases of learning, it is necessary to favour oral language rather than written, in order to make FL/L2 learning as similar as possible to the acquisition of L1.

The use of oral language is especially important with dyslexic students whose biggest problems occur in writing skills, due to their decoding difficulty (that in some cases can affect comprehension) and/or writing difficulties, due to spelling and/or dysgraphia.

Of course, every student with an SpLD has a different profile. In some cases, attention or memory problems can cause problems with oral production or interaction with others: a student may not be able to recall a word or a concept they would like to express (due to a difficulty with their working memory); or their attention may be diverted by external interference while they are trying to understand or transmit a message.
Extension Material 4.2 - Stages of Acquisition of an L2

In language acquisition the following stages are usually observed (Krashen & Terrell, 1983):

1) **Preproduction**: the learner has a receptive vocabulary of about 500 words, but tends not to produce any spoken language, except for some sporadic repetition of what they have heard. Comprehension is of a contextual type and is ascribed to “active listening” activities. The “silent period” can vary in duration (it can last a few days, or several months) and may be due to multiple factors: an introvert personality, a feeling of inadequacy, being conscious of not yet being able to pronounce enough sounds in the new language correctly, the fear of making mistakes and causing a negative reaction in the teacher, the comparison with peers, a teaching methodology that is inadequate and tends to keep a high “affective filter”.

   It has often been suggested that the ‘silent period’ should be tolerated as it can have beneficial effects on the L2 learner. There are activities that can help students overcome this period and start communicating in the new language. Role-play and activities of a cooperative type can be very useful (to be carried out in small groups), as they stimulate and favour the communication between peers.

2) **Early production**: The first simple spontaneous oral productions appear. The learner has a receptive and expressive vocabulary of about 1000 words and can produce sentences of one word or two words. They can also use short ‘automatic’ sentences, but not always in the correct way.

3) **Speech emergence**: The learner has a vocabulary of about 3000 words. They can produce short sentences and are able to start a conversation, understand simple instructions or short stories, answer yes-or-no questions, complete sentences with single words and answer multiple-choice questionnaires.

4) **Intermediate fluency**: The learner has a vocabulary of about 6000 active words, can use complex sentences both in oral production and in written production. They start to show the desire to express personal opinions, share personal thoughts in the new language, ask for clarification, use the language in other subjects, and transfer strategies learned in their L1 to the new language.

5) **Advanced fluency**: This can be achieved within 4 -10 years and has been labelled “Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency” (CALP). This allows the learner to use their new language to study and carry out different academic tasks (Cummins, 1989).

Learners with specific learning disabilities may need much more time to achieve this level of competence. In some cases, they may not achieve it at all.
4.3 Linguistic areas relevant for the learning of an L2/FL

In the next paragraphs we will discuss the linguistic areas relevant for the learning of an L2/FL, focusing on phonetics and phonology, morphology, vocabulary, syntax and pragmatics. For each one of these we will try to underline possible difficulties, and in some cases strong points, a learner may experience, with particular reference to students with dyslexia and/or a plurilingual background.

We will then propose (par. 4.9.5) a series of sample activities to carry out in class, so as to improve or increase linguistic and communicative competence in the specific areas.

4.3.1 Phonetics and phonology

When we learn a new language we realise that this includes sounds that do not exist in our mother tongue. These sounds can cause problems both in perception and in production. At birth we are able to discriminate virtually all the sounds of all existing languages, but progressively, under the influence of the linguistic input we receive, this ability is lost or drastically reduced, so that we can only discriminate those sounds that we need to distinguish meanings in our mother tongue, and that are therefore functional to communication. These sounds comprise our phonemic inventory.

For this reason, when we learn a new language, it is possible to encounter difficulties related primarily to the sounds that are not part of our phonemic inventory.

If the student is a multilingual speaker, the coexistence of different languages and different phonemic inventories is generally an advantage, but in some cases, depending on the similarities and differences, it can cause some difficulties.

Phonetic skills are often neglected in language teaching, but are extremely important especially for students with dyslexia who may have particular phonological difficulties. It is very important for the language teacher to be able to bring the student’s attention to the similarities and differences in the sound inventories of the languages, to train their sound discrimination abilities as well as sound production.

“The competence in a spoken language consists of the ability to use the sounds that form words and sentences, in order to convey meanings. In order to speak we need to be able to articulate, through particular movements of the oral articulatory organs, the sounds of our language and, in order to understand the spoken language we need to recognise the same sounds in all the various auditory stimuli, that we perceive in the surrounding environment.” (Nespor & Bafile, 2008)[Translated from Italian by the authors]
First of all we should not forget that phonetic competences are the first to be acquired spontaneously in the mother tongue, but they are not acquired so spontaneously in a foreign language. For students with dyslexia, phonetic competences tend to represent a weakness. In these students, any phonological difficulties encountered in the mother tongue are usually transferred to the new language to be learnt. Dyslexic students may struggle to internalise the phonetic models of the new language implicitly with simple exposure (Daloiso, 2011). Learning new sounds, then, requires some explicit teaching at all ages (even for pre-schoolers). So it is necessary for the language teacher to have some basic knowledge of phonetics, and to be able to retrieve information about the sounds of the languages represented in the classroom. This allows the teacher to help students learn to discriminate and produce the sounds of the new language, developing an adequate “phonologic awareness”.

“Phonologic awareness” is defined as “the ability to elaborate the sounds of the oral language, that is the capability of analyzing and manipulating the linguistic structure of the words, even in the presence of verbal and non-verbal stimuli” (Scalisi et al., 2003, p. 44).

In the early stages of language learning, the sounds of the new language are perceived as a unique, continuous flow. Only later does the learner become able to discriminate and extract sound units of different sizes.

In order to be able to speak and communicate in a new language, it is necessary to be able to discriminate and produce the sounds of that language, through the correct movements of the articulatory organs. First of all, when in the presence of a new sound, we need to understand which organs we should move and how to move them, in order to acquire and consolidate new articulation habits. To do so, it is necessary to create an internal representation of the new sounds on the basis of what is perceived.

For this reason, it is very important for the teacher to have an excellent mastery of the language he/she is teaching, in order to provide students with adequate input and equally good feedback.

With the increasingly high number of multilingual students in schools, the teacher should therefore have knowledge of the phonemic inventories of the languages represented in the class in order to foresee any possible difficulties or advantages that students may encounter, at both the sound perception and sound production levels (see also Module 6). This means that the teacher must be conscious of similarities in sounds between the child’s first language, the main language of instruction in the classroom and any additional language they are learning, as the child is likely to substitute first language sounds for new sounds that seem similar to a different sound in their L1. The teacher also needs to be aware of any sounds in the new language that are not present at all in the first language as the child is likely to struggle to reproduce them.
For example the sound of the first syllable of the English word “think” is not present in Italian, so an Italian native speaker may have problems distinguishing between this sound /θ/ and the sound /t/, because the “place” where this consonant is articulated is very close to the English sound /θ/ (see Extension Material 4.3 for “place of articulation”) and the sound /f/, because the Italian consonant shares the same “manner of articulation” with the English /θ/. For the same reasons, a Chinese or Japanese native speaker may have problems discriminating between /r/ and /l/, because the sound /r/ does not exist in the phonemic inventory of these languages.
Extension Material 4.3 – Linguistic Sounds

Linguistic sounds are divided into two main categories: consonants and vowels. They are produced by the articulatory organs that are present in the vocal tract. The articulatory organs can be mobile (lips, tongue, soft palate, mandible) or fixed (teeth, hard palate).

For further information see the following links:

Consonants

Consonants are produced when a mobile articulator gets close to or in touch with a fixed one, so as to create a constriction of the air flow coming from the lungs.

Consonants are classified on a basis of different parameters:
- **Place of articulation**: The point of the vocal tract, where the constriction is created
- **Manner of articulation**: The type or degree of constriction that is created by the articulatory organs
- **Voicing**: The vibration of the vocal chords that may or may not be associated with the movements of the articulatory organs.

Further details are available at:

Vowels

Vowels are produced without air constriction and are classified on the basis of the form assumed by the oral cavity during their production. The vocal tract shape varies according to the movements the tongue makes vertically and towards the back and front of the mouth. It also varies according to the position of the lips. On the basis of these parameters, vowels are classified as:
- High (or closed) – low (or open): according to whether the tongue is positioned higher or lower than the neutral resting position.
- Front – back: according to whether the tongue is pushed forward or pulled back in relation to the neutral resting position.
- Rounded – not rounded: according to the presence or absence of lip protrusion.

Further details are available at:

Finally there are sounds defined as approximants (also called semi-consonants or semi-vowels), which can be said to fall between consonants and vowels, since they present characteristics of both types of sounds. Some examples of approximants are the first sounds of the Welsh words “Iestyn” /j/ and “wastad” /w/, or of the English words “yesterday” /j/ and “work” /w/.
For further information on classification parameters of the linguistic sounds see Extension Material 4.3.
It is very important that the teacher consistently devises exercises to consolidate and reinforce the ability to discriminate between the sounds of the new language (it is not possible to imitate and use such sounds if they are not discerned) as well as the ability to produce them.

In order to train students’ pronunciation the teacher can use the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols.

**Extension Material 4.4 - IPA Chart**

In the various languages of the world, there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between the sound and the grapheme (i.e. the written symbol that represents it). In some cases, a unique grapheme can be associated to different sounds (as is the case in English with the grapheme ‘c’ which can be associated with the sound /s/ in the word ‘certain’ but also the sound /k/ in the word ‘count’); in other cases, different graphemes or grapheme combinations are associated to a single sound (in the English language the sound /k/ can be associated with the grapheme ‘k’ as in ‘kite’ or ‘c’ as in the word ‘cane’); in further cases a single grapheme can be associated to two different sounds pronounced consecutively (the grapheme ‘x’, for example, is associated to the sounds /ks/).

In order to avoid ambiguities, the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) system has been created. This uses a single symbol to represent a single sound, regardless of the language where this sound is represented (English, Turkish, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, etc.), and regardless of the writing system used in the language (Latin, Cyrillic system, etc.). This allows consistent, careful transcription of all the sounds of the languages of the world through a finite and internationally recognised set of symbols.

These symbols are all included in the IPA chart, available and downloadable at: http://www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/IPA_chart_%28C%292005.pdf

**On Reflection Task 4.1**

- Think of a sound your students find particularly difficult. Why do you think that sound is so difficult?
- Would you be able to describe that sound and the way to produce it?
- Can you think of an activity to help your students discriminate that sound from other potentially similar sounds?
- Can you think of an activity to help your students practise the production of that sound in a funny and motivating way?
4.3.2 Vocabulary

The most recent approaches to the teaching/learning of languages favour communicative competence and grant a primary role to vocabulary, rather than syntactic aspects. Developing even a limited vocabulary repertoire can permit a basic form of comprehension and communication which will form a basis onto which syntactic knowledge can subsequently be added.

The vocabulary proposed by the language teacher should, especially in the initial stages, be stimulating for students, and very close to their interests, their needs and to aspects related to their life.

In the case of students with dyslexia, the learning of vocabulary elements can be especially difficult, both because of a likely phonological memory deficit, and because of difficulties with word retrieval. For this reason, there will be an even greater difference between the size of the receptive and productive vocabularies (see useful terminology). In the case of multilingual students, the knowledge of more than one language can be both an advantage and a disadvantage in the acquisition of new vocabulary.

On one hand, as mentioned in Module 1, being bilingual/multilingual increases cognitive flexibility and usually has a positive general effect on language learning, including the acquisition of new vocabulary; on the other hand, any affinity between the languages involved (see Module 6) can produce a dual effect. Let us consider, for example, two languages such as Italian or Spanish, both neo-Latin languages, and therefore containing many lexical elements that share the same root and appear analogous. When the similarity in sound shape corresponds to a similarity in meaning, vocabulary learning becomes easier; when, on the other hand, this similarity in sound shape does not correspond to a similarity in meaning (the case of the so called ‘false friends’), some difficulties can be encountered. (In English the object represented by the sound /kiː/ ‘key’ is used to lock a door, whereas in Welsh the same sound /kiː/ ‘ci’ represents an animal with four legs that barks and wags its tail.)

Another aspect to consider is that in the first phases of language learning, a similarity in sound shape and in meaning can facilitate oral comprehension (and consequently communication), but at later stages the same early facility in communication can lead to the use of similar words in the wrong contexts. This may be a passing problem or, in some cases, it may lead to consolidation of the errors.

Students with dyslexia can experience a significant increase in the cognitive load when attempting to learn a new language. This, added to a possible deficit in phonological working memory and to word retrieval difficulties, can make language learning particularly hard. This is primarily true if the teaching approach adopted by the language teacher is mostly implicit, as this type of teaching relies heavily upon memory and requires a large commitment in terms of attention resources, which are often poor in dyslexic students.
4.3.3 Morphology

The morphological and morphosyntactic aspects of the language, as well as the phonetic-phonological ones, are learnt in an implicit automatic way both for the L1 and, partially, for the L2/FL. These aspects already cause problems for the dyslexic student in the L1 and these difficulties are transferred to the L2/FL. For this reason, in the L2/FL the learning experience must be guided by explicit teaching. As mentioned in Module 6 (Extension Material 6.5), differences in morphological typology between languages can be the cause of interference. It is therefore necessary for the teacher to acquire basic knowledge of the main morphological differences between the languages involved, in order to be able to foresee possible difficulties (as well as advantages) that students may encounter due to their particular L1s.

Knowledge and awareness of such differences will help the teacher understand whether any difficulties that arise are due to a student’s multilingual background or could be a possible indication of dyslexia.

4.3.4 Syntax

As mentioned before, a communicative approach to language teaching puts more emphasis on vocabulary than syntax. However, syntax also needs to be granted due attention because it is important for achieving adequate linguistic and communicative competence. It is important for the teacher to be aware of any syntactic differences between the languages involved, so as to foresee any difficulties or advantages students might encounter in the learning process. This will also help the teacher to distinguish between anticipated difficulties in learning a new language and any possible specific learning disabilities.

In general, reflection about syntax is more effective if it has been preceded by practical use of the structure to be learnt. In other words, reflection should come after such structures have already been internalised as communicative behaviour. This is true for all kinds of students, but especially for students with dyslexia, as they can have the biggest difficulties with retrieval and use of syntactic rules due to a “working memory” deficit. On this topic, it is important to bear in mind that syntactic difficulties experienced by a dyslexic student could actually be attributed to a specific language impairment (SLI). Several studies have demonstrated that individuals with SLI tend to develop dyslexia in 50-80% of cases.
Extension Material 4.5 - Cross-linguistic Language Diagnosis (CLAD)

European project on the study of Specific Language Impairment and Dyslexia

This four-year project is studying language disorders, in particular Specific Language Impairment (SLI) and dyslexia, in the various languages of the participating countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Lithuania and Romania). It is analysing the differences between typical language development and the language development of children affected by this disorder.

The project stems from the necessity of studying language disorders in a multilingual context, a need that is becoming increasingly pressing in view of the continuous increase in migration across the region.

Schools and institutions may only offer early, effective intervention to immigrant students with language difficulties if they are able to identify the source of those difficulties. In fact, the deficits in language comprehension and production can be confused with difficulties and delays related to the multilingual condition of the student.

Studies identifying specific markers that also occur in a bilingual context allow an appropriate understanding of the nature of the problem and a consequent acceleration of diagnostic and therapeutic processes.

**Aims of the project:**
- to identify specific linguistic markers suggesting an SLI in a bilingual context
- to formulate detection tools, based on these markers, which can be used by teachers starting from kindergarten
- to create tests based on these markers, in order to achieve an early diagnosis
- to understand the extent to which the SLI can overlap with dyslexia

The tools honed within the project will be developed in all the languages of the partner countries.

**Search Results:**
- bilingual subjects with SLI show characteristic symptoms of the disorder in both languages spoken
- their condition of bilingualism does not exacerbate any of the symptoms
- There is a partial overlap between SLI and dyslexia.

http://www.cladproject.eu/
4.3.5 Pragmatics

Pragmatic competence is what allows people to “act” or “do things” through language. It is therefore essential if effective communication is to be achieved.

Normally learners with dyslexia do not have difficulties in this area, and it is therefore important that the pragmatic dimension is particularly valued in the context of teaching and learning languages. It may in fact constitute a kind of compensation in linguistic processing difficulties.

It is important that teachers value the clear, effective and appropriate use of language even when it contains syntactical errors (see also par. 4.7.3). This is particularly important in the case of dyslexic students, in order to avoid frustration and demotivation.

In oral communication it is also important to be able to decode “non-verbal language”, that is gestures, facial expressions and body movements, which are closely bound to the culture of the language speakers. (See Extension Material 4.6).

It is important, therefore, that any extra-linguistic elements are taught together with the linguistic aspects, bearing in mind the increasingly shared view that language and culture are inextricably linked together. These extra-linguistic elements, i.e. gestures, facial expressions and body movements that are part of non-verbal language, may in certain circumstances facilitate the understanding of the message, but could, if misinterpreted, cause misunderstandings or accidents in communication. Communicating with people from a different language and culture implies that the conventions on which we normally rely to understand the underlying and therefore real meaning of the message, can be different and difficult to understand. This is because non-verbal aspects of communication are often considered to be “natural” and globally applied to everyone instead of “cultural” (Caon, 2010) with their meaning varying from culture to culture.
Extension Material 4.6 - Gestures in different cultures

“We speak with the vocal organs, but we converse with the whole body”
(Abercrombie, 1963, p. 55)

Body language is a fundamental aspect of communication. We use it all the time, even more than we may be aware of.

The language teacher, especially when addressing plurilingual students, should include activities based on non-verbal language and promoting intercultural perspectives. This will help avoid awkward misunderstandings.

The following are some of the many gestures that have different interpretations in different countries:

• Moving your head from left to right, means “NO” in most countries, but in India, for example, it means “YES”. Similarly, moving your head up and down means “YES” in most countries, but in Asia it usually means “NO”.
• Raising your thumb up usually means “OK” in most countries, but may be misinterpreted in South-Asian countries, where it is considered an offensive and disrespectful gesture.
• Using your finger or hand to ask someone to come to you is considered offensive in some cultures as it is a gesture that is only considered suitable for beckoning dogs.
• Eye contact is associated with attentiveness and honesty in western cultures but in Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, it is considered disrespectful or rude. If a pupil does not look at the teacher, it should not be assumed that they are not paying attention.
• When talking, people from north Africa tend to stand closer to each other than Western Europeans usually consider appropriate.
• In Finland people don’t greet each other when they meet in the street unless they know each other. They think it’s embarrassing and wonder if they should know the person who greets them.

Other similar examples can be found in the Links and further reading.

On Reflection Task 4.2

• Can you think of any other examples of gestures that have different meanings in different cultures?
• In your classroom, have you ever had to handle misunderstandings due to different interpretations of body language?
• What would you do if such a misunderstanding occurred between your students?
4.4 Spelling

Languages present considerable differences in terms of the degree of transparency of their orthographic systems. In other words, there is considerable variation between the degree of grapheme-phoneme correspondence in different languages.

Among European languages, Finnish seems to be the most transparent, English the most opaque. German, Greek, Turkish, Bulgarian, Czech, Italian and Spanish are fairly transparent languages; Danish, French and Portuguese are essentially opaque languages. For example, Italian has 25 phonemes represented by 33 graphemes or combinations of graphemes, French has 35 phonemes for 190 graphemes or combinations of graphemes, English has approximately 40 phonemes for 1120 graphemes or combinations of graphemes.

The degree of transparency of a language strongly influences the ease with which it can be read and the speed of access to the vocabulary. Consequently the difficulties caused by dyslexia in different countries (see Module 2, par. 2.1) will depend on the spoken language, both in terms of incidence and in terms of the severity of the disorder in the individual. Any orthographic difficulties that the student with dyslexia has in their mother tongue will be transferred to the second or foreign language. However, if the new language being learnt has a more transparent orthography than the mother tongue, learners may have fewer difficulties in the FL spelling than in their L1 spelling.
4.5 Learning a foreign language

To make the teaching/learning process effective, it is necessary to know how the “learning brain” operates in language learning.

The mother tongue is acquired mainly through imitation. For this reason, using strategies of teaching/learning that at least partially rely on this mechanism can be particularly effective, especially in the early stages.

An important role is also played by the associative capacity of the brain that, according to Dehaene (2009), is a pattern recognition system, and this is one of the major strengths of the human mind.

Associative activities can facilitate memorisation especially in the presence of factors such as:

- positive emotions
- multi-sensory stimuli;
- creative, interesting and meaningful activities;

The implicit (incidental/non declarative) memory also plays an important role in language acquisition/learning. It is the oldest and most important memory in humans, the one that first appears in the child (already in the foetus) and the last to disappear in the elderly. Thanks to the implicit memory, acquisition of the L1 can happen without any effort and without us being aware of it (see Module 1, Extension Material 1.2).

What is acquired implicitly, that is naturally and without any conscious effort, is automated through experience and practice, and becomes part of a stable set of acquired skills. At the language level, therefore, the implicit memory is what allows us to understand speech and to speak fluently.

We too often tend to use teaching methods that relate learning mainly to the explicit memory. This is a type of long-term memory (for more details see Module 1 Extension Material 1.2 and Module 2 para. 2.6.4) and is essential for the conscious (not automatic) use of the language. The methods based mostly on explicit memory do not result in an adequate level of communicative competence. They focus mainly on translation and on the explicit teaching of grammar rules (grammar-translation method). They require a huge effort in terms of working memory. This is not good in general, and in particular for students with dyslexia. It is more effective to provide examples of sentences that contain a certain grammar rule and let students inductively retrieve that rule. The teacher should obviously assist students in this process.

Implicit learning is important for fluent, automatic elocution and should generally prevail over explicit learning. However, implicit learning is not sufficient on its own to reach advanced levels of linguistic and communicative competence and can be difficult for dyslexic learners who may need rules explaining explicitly to them more than others.
It is therefore essential that teaching continuously connects explicit and implicit learning especially after students have reached a certain level of competence.

This is particularly true in the case of adolescents. According to recent studies, the maturation changes in the brain that occur during childhood and adolescence lead to a reduced involvement of the implicit memory in L2 learning (Ullman, 2004; 2005) and especially in FL learning. With older students, therefore, as well as dyslexic learners, the support of explicit teaching becomes particularly relevant, although opportunities for implicit learning should be provided as much as possible.
4.6 Dyslexia and foreign language learning

Partly summing up the content of the previous paragraphs, we will list the major difficulties that can affect the dyslexic student’s ability to learn languages. They may have difficulties:

- in the discrimination of the sounds of the language
- in reproducing the sounds of a language
- of a morpho-syntactic type
- in vocabulary acquisition
- in word retrieval
- in the application of grammatical rules
- in decoding
- in writing from dictation
- in written production
- in the acquisition of spelling accuracy
- in carrying out tests at school
- in taking notes.

These difficulties may result in:
- high levels of frustration
- fluctuating efficiency
- fatigue
- demotivation due to the difficulties encountered
- defensive strategies (avoidance, bypassing, passive resistance).

This does not mean that the person with dyslexia cannot learn languages. On the contrary, the teacher must assume that they can do so, provided that the teaching approach, particularly in the early stages, links the learning of the new language as closely as possible to the mechanisms of L1 acquisition.

Moreover, as we shall see below, it is important that the teaching approach is:
- structured
- sequential
- multisensory
- full of repeated positive feedback.
4.7 What to do in class

European and worldwide organisations such as the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education and UNESCO are calling for increasingly inclusive schools (Watkins, 2007, p. 16). Teachers must respond to different cognitive styles, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and socio-economic conditions.

As emphasised in the “Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education - Recommendations for Practice” (p.10):

- In all settings, diversity must be celebrated and valued and difference considered as a resource for learning.
- Celebrating diversity means valuing the peculiarities, hence the uniqueness, of the individual.

The next few paragraphs will focus on some practical suggestions that the teacher can use in the classroom and which can in fact be beneficial to all students.

4.7.1 Different cultures, different languages, different cognitive styles: how to create a welcoming atmosphere in the classroom

First of all, before undertaking any specific teaching activity, the teacher must focus on the creation of a welcoming atmosphere of collaboration, curiosity and mutual trust. They will then introduce the concept of diversity as a valuable resource to promote integration in the classroom. To do so, they could start from a literary passage, a film, a cartoon or a song, encouraging a collective discussion touching upon differences of personality, tastes, interests, dreams, physical appearance, country of origin, language, traditions and customs, etc. to finally reflect on the fact that diversity can also cover individuals’ cognitive styles. In this way the teacher can create an atmosphere that is favourable to learning, where students can feel at ease, and able to tackle different schoolwork.

The teacher should try to distinguish between signs of possible dyslexia and language difficulties related to a student’s bilingualism/multilingualism. They must avoid merely expressing an opinion without analysing the types of mistakes made and their frequency, and should try to determine the cause of the difficulties even if colleagues have not raised any issues or concerns.

4.7.2 Structuring learning activities

It is important to structure the classroom work into different stages, in order to ensure meaningful and effective learning. The teacher needs to ensure an initial phase of motivational activity, in which they elicit the interest and curiosity of the learners. Later the teacher will introduce a certain topic and devise activities aimed at a global, general understanding of the topic itself. Time will then be spent on developing
a more detailed understanding of the topic through the use of specific, targeted exercises. There will then be a phase of synthesis and reflection, in which learners can re-elaborate and internalise what has been learnt in the previous phase.

After a possible test, the teacher should reserve time for a final phase where leisure activities are devised in order to reward students for their efforts and to allow them to practise the language again free of any explicit learning purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASE</th>
<th>Examples of techniques/activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Brainstorming, watching a video, film, cartoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globality</td>
<td>Multiple choice, matching, transcoding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Completion, reordering, use of highlights, or circles, arrows, colours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis and Reflection</td>
<td>Role-play, role taking, role making, dramatisation, open dialogue, description of images, reconstruction of mind maps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test</td>
<td>Matching, transcoding, monologue, multiple choice, true/false, open questions (oral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deconditioning</td>
<td>Ludic activities of various kinds, like songs, dances etc. aimed to revise what has been learned, but without making the learning purpose explicit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.7.3. In addition...

It is important to remember that to increase the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process, it is necessary to make the objectives of the learning activity explicit so that students know what they will do, how and why. As Pontecorvo (1995) says, “Knowledge of the objectives allows anyone who is studying to direct its activity and its interest, and it is true that students learn sooner and better if they know (and understand) the objectives of their work” [Translated from Italian by the authors].

This becomes particularly relevant in the case of dyslexic students, who often have an attention deficit and may have more difficulties in tracing the link between a task/activity and its purpose. This prevents the learner from building a mental representation of the task and causes a further decline in attention. So explaining the objectives of the proposed task to the learner helps provide them with a frame of meaning in which the task can be done more easily.
Regarding reporting and correction of errors, it is important to remember that:

- If errors occur in oral production, the teacher should avoid correcting them explicitly. The teacher should show they have understood the message, and respond using the student’s words as much as possible, but with the correct syntactic form or pronunciation. For example, if the student says “The tree are green,” the teacher should respond: “Oh, yes. That’s right. The tree is green!”

- If errors occur in written production it is generally better to clearly delete them rather than highlight them. During study, students tend to highlight the important parts, those they want to remember. Because some dyslexics have a good visual memory, they are likely to remember the highlighted forms, and in so doing may inadvertently internalise the error!

Finally, it can be very useful:

- to suggest the student records the lecture (first ensuring this is permitted in the particular learning institution).
- to remember that dyslexic students may find homework assignments more tiring and more time-consuming so it is appropriate to reduce the workload in terms of quantity but not content. It is also important that students have time set aside for extracurricular activities.
- to bear in mind that some learning may not yet be fixed in a dyslexic student’s memory.
- to use the terminology consistently (without using synonyms).
- to introduce one new element at a time.
- to repeat the most important concepts several times both within the same lesson and between a lesson and the next one.
- to bear in mind that a dyslexic learner will be unlikely to be able to recall grammar rules and repeat them by heart.
- to bear in mind that mnemonic study should not be induced or demanded.
- to pay attention to the graphic aspect of the paper materials proposed
- to provide, before the lesson, an outline or map of what will be discussed in class.
- to teach how to build and use mind and/or concept maps (see par. 4.8.7).
- to collaborate with the family to ensure that the latter can help the child in planning work at home.
- to implement teamwork with colleagues from other disciplines.
- to encourage language departments to work together to ensure that they have the same approach to grammar, use grammatical terms consistently and make explicit links between similar linguistic features.
- to avoid overlapping of language tests with tests of other subjects.
- in collaboration with parents, to pay attention to diary management, especially with younger children.
Extension Material 4.7 - Ten rules to follow for the good foreign language teacher

In 1970, the psycholinguist Denis Girard (cited in Gabrieli and Gabrieli, 2008) drafted a set of rules for the good English teacher:

**Teacher qualities**

- He/She explains clearly.
- He/She makes his/her students work
- He/She makes his/her course interesting
- He/She insists on the spoken language
- He/She shows great patience
- He/She uses a communicative approach
- He/She shows the same interest in all his students
- He/She teaches good pronunciation
- He/She speaks good English
- He/She makes all the students participate

...... and especially

“the best way to tell the children what to do is to demonstrate it!”

Of course, this decalogue applies to teachers of all languages!
4.8 Strategies, methods and approaches to teaching/learning a foreign language

Recent research in cognitive science has resulted in a greater recognition of the importance of affective, socio-cultural and psychological factors in foreign language learning. The learner and their unique characteristics (learning style, interests, needs,) assume a central role in the teaching/learning process, in line with an affective-humanistic approach.

Within the class, the teacher will face different cognitive styles so he/she must take account of the fact that there is not only one approach. No single strategy works for all, neither for teaching nor learning, but there are different strategies to suit different situations. Therefore, it is not superfluous to repeat that not a single method, but multiple methods are to be used (Gabrieli & Gabrieli, p. 18).

For this reason we are now going to list a number of possible approaches to be adopted where appropriate in the class context.

4.8.1 The multisensory approach

Sending different information to the brain through various sensory channels (visual, auditory, tactile, kinaesthetic, etc.) facilitates the storing and retrieving of information and the learning process itself. Proposing multisensory activities makes the process of teaching-learning particularly effective, especially in the case of students with dyslexia, as well as with any immigrant students who may have little competence in the language of instruction, and with whom verbal language use only should be avoided, in order to avoid fatigue, frustration and demotivation.

In particular, movement is of great importance in learning in general and in learning languages in particular. The brain is originally a motor and perceptual organ, whose areas have undergone what Dehaene (2009) defines as “neuronal recycling” and have been re-functioned for purposes different from those for which they were developed.

Associating language to movement, thus associating a linguistic element and its significance to an action, leads to a broader, “multidimensional” and therefore more stable mental representation of it.

As we read in Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia (2006), “The brain that acts is first and foremost a brain that understands.” [Translated from Italian by the authors]
4.8.2. Total Physical Response (TPR)

Developed in the late 1960s by James J. Asher, TPR bases the learning of a foreign language on the total involvement (both physical and psychological) of learners, trying to make the learning of a new language as similar as possible to the acquisition of the mother tongue.

TPR uses simple verbal instructions (commands) to introduce elements and language patterns. For example, the teacher gives a command, associating it with the corresponding movement, and the student must respond physically, by making the appropriate action - “Stand up”: the teacher stands up and asks the student to stand up, etc.

The student should respond immediately, without analysing the action.

After repeated activities of this sort, students are ultimately able to create their own commands and instruct each other to move around the room performing certain actions. This approach, which is normally used with very young children, may also be effective with adults at beginner competence level and with students with dyslexia, because it trains listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition without requiring an effort of oral production. Also, this approach creates a relatively stress-free environment where students are free to copy each other if they are unsure what a particular command means.

This approach is particularly suitable for beginners, like all such approaches that are mostly based on the oral use of language, as it encourages an early sense of achievement and builds confidence. However there are limitations to the use of TPR as it only really lends itself to language items that can be easily matched with actions. The introduction of written language will extend vocabulary and build on the groundwork established by an active approach such as TPR.

TPR is based on two assumptions:

1. Comprehension always precedes production.
2. There is a “silent period” (see Extension Material 4.2.) which should be respected in order to avoid frustrations. Similarly to what happens in the acquisition of the L1, oral production will only take place after the internalisation of linguistic elements and patterns.

Following the discovery of “mirror neurons” (see Extension Material 4.8), and the subsequent revaluation of the motor system, it has been possible to give theoretical support to this methodology of teaching/learning. Motor involvement (acting intentionally in a context), through the activation of mirror neurons contributes to making mnestic traces (relating to memory in general and in particular to procedural memory) more stable, not only in the person who performs the action, but also in those who observe it.

For more information about TPR, consult the website: www.tpr-world.com.
Extension Material 4.8 - The discovery of motor neurons

Everything began in the laboratory, with a monkey, a scientist and a banana. Like many breakthrough discoveries, even that of the mirror neurons has been entirely accidental.

In the early 1990s, a group of researchers at the University of Parma, coordinated by neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti, was studying neuronal activation in the brain of a monkey during the act of grabbing a banana. During a break, one of the researchers took a banana and ate it. Computers still connected to the monkey’s brain recorded the same brain activity as was observed when the animal was actually peeling the banana. It was initially considered an error, but subsequent measurements led to the same results. It was therefore evident that certain neurons are activated not only when an individual actually performs an action, but also when the subject sees the performance of the same action by someone else.

These neurons, thanks to noninvasive techniques of brain imaging, were later discovered in the human brain too.

It appears that these neurons are fundamental not only to understanding what the action is that is taking place, but also to understanding the intention or purpose behind the action. They provide the basis for the mechanisms of imitation and play a fundamental role in all learning processes.

Mirror neurons have also been found in Broca’s area of the brain, a region vital to the processing of language. This led to the proposal that these neurons play an important role in the acquisition of the mother tongue and in communication in general, and that their function can (should!) be ‘exploited’ in teaching-learning of foreign languages, especially in the case of students with dyslexia. Teaching strategies broadly based on sensory and motor activity, on imitation, on emotional participation, on contextualized input and on the anticipation of the intentions of an action, can take advantage of specific neural mechanisms, and encourage the storage of what has been learnt in the long-term memory.

4.8.3 Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning (CL) is an educational movement which includes a set of teaching/learning methods based on cooperation between learners and is aimed not only at developing specific disciplinary competences but also at social-relational competences often neglected by traditional approaches. CL favours using students’ resources, rather than those of the teacher. It attaches great importance to student-student relationships enabling learners to learn from each other, to acquire different and wider viewpoints, share feelings, ideas, concerns and aspirations, and
to improve self-perception. Cooperation and the effort of managing interpersonal relationships have positive effects on cognitive development (since interaction generates greater cognitive complexity and therefore implies an increase in intellectual activity), on the ability to manage group relations and conflicts, on the motivation to learn and therefore on learning itself.

Cooperative activities can also be used as a “compensatory instrument” for students with dyslexia, or for multilingual students who have not yet developed adequate competence in the language of instruction or in the language to be learnt.

Example of a Cooperative Learning activity

‘Folded value line’ is just one example of a cooperative learning activity which could be used in the language classroom. An issue is raised which is likely to generate differing opinions, for example, the use of animals for scientific experimentation. The teacher finds out (through a show of hands) who is strongly for and who is strongly against. The students then physically position themselves (according to their own opinion) on the value line where one end means strong support and the other end means strong opposition.

The students firstly talk to the person next to them and share their (presumably similar) views and reasons for these views. One pair then joins another pair and they exchange their ideas. The pairs will probably refer back to their first conversation which will help them practise summarising skills.

Then the line is divided in half. The two halves become 2 parallel lines of students facing each other. So in a class of 24, the line would be divided between persons 12 and 13. Person 1 would speak to Person 13, Person 2 to Person 14 etc. Students now have the opportunity to talk to someone whose opinion is different from their own.

After this, 1 or 2 students could be selected to summarise the different views they had heard or they could be asked to orally represent a viewpoint that greatly differed from their own, thus encouraging them to appreciate different viewpoints.

[Source: Jane Joritz-Nakagawa on ‘Spencer Kagan’s Cooperative Learning Structures’ http://www.jalt.org/pansig/PGL2/HTML/Nakagawa.htm]

4.8.4 Format Approach

The Format Approach, developed by the American psychologist Bruner in 1975, is an approach that uses events that repeat themselves in a similar manner within the school day in order to practise and repeat communicative acts. In this way, learners can share experiences, exchange objects, perform daily gestures etc., always combining the words with actions and/or concrete objects. It will require many repetitions before
students will be able to extract words from the context, ‘fix’ the meaning and include the words in their acquired vocabulary.

This approach is normally used with children in preschool and early elementary/primary school. However, it can also be useful with older children, especially those with dyslexia and those from multilingual backgrounds who are still learning the language of the classroom.

Interesting material tied to Format Approach activities (especially narrative format) is available in several languages at the following site: http://www.hocus-lotus.edu/default_eng.asp

**An example of the Format Approach**

In “Scaffolding Children’s Talk and Learning”, Carol Read provides an example of the Format Approach. The example focuses on teaching children to talk about the weather. The children are encouraged to go to the window and look at the weather. This routine takes place regularly before the morning break. The teacher asks the children what the weather is like and uses flashcards to present different types of weather. She then asks questions such as “Is it sunny?” and the children respond with “Yes” or “No”. She then asks additional questions such as whether the children will need their coats and whether they will be able to play outside. The routine is frequently repeated but with additional elements and with the children gradually taking more ownership of the conversation. Over time, the flashcards will no longer be required and the children may themselves initiate the question about the weather. Refer to the link below to read the dialogue that took place between the teacher and the children.

http://www.carolread.com/articles/s talk and learning.pdf [Last accessed 21/12/2013]

**4.8.5 Storytelling**

This approach involves the use of narrative and employs multisensory channels. The teacher tells short stories sequentially, using different languages (iconic, pictorial, mimic-gestural, dramatic) and different media. He/she connects to the imaginary world of learners and this is therefore particularly attractive not only for children and teenagers, but also for adults, provided that the content of the story is chosen on the basis of the interests, experiences and needs of the learners.

For an example of story-telling, Janice Dykes uses the story of Bitika, a Madagascan lemur. The narrative contains a lot of repetitive sequences and these enable the children to understand the content. The children are encouraged to join in with the story and to use different gestures which reinforce the vocabulary. They then work in small groups on a paragraph of the story and learn it by heart, using gestures. Next they perform their paragraph to the class. The children work with the teacher on a text based on the Bitika text and they suggest different animal words. Finally the children are given a scaffolded version of the text and complete the
blanks with words of their own choice.

(To read more about the Madagascar project and see examples of the scaffolding: http://www.school-portal.co.uk/GroupDownloadFile.asp?GroupId=1207708&ResourceId=4489109 [Last accessed 5/11/2013])

On Reflection Task 4.3

- Can you think of a story you have successfully used in teaching? If so, can you describe it?
- Can you analyse the features of the lesson that made it successful?

4.8.6 Ludic Approach

The purpose of the Ludic Approach is to stimulate learning, offering the student funny, playful, non-anxiety-inducing activities which can sustain and increase motivation. Playful activities create a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere in the classroom and, although they often do not constitute real games, lead to the total involvement of the student. Indeed, recreational activity requires an involvement not only at a cognitive level but also at a linguistic, sensory-motor and emotional one. When the child is playing, they are pushed to “do things”, building, manipulating and making something in a practical way. This is a privileged way to perceive and learn by activating all the child’s own senses. Besides, games usually involve “challenges” which normally lead children to have fun, allowing them to fully enjoy the activity and fostering an implicit type of learning. This can be particularly useful in the case of students with dyslexia.

In addition, if there are multilingual pupils in the class who are still developing in the language of instruction, the motivational push of playful activities can help overcome any language barriers that may arise due to a lack of linguistic competence.

The Common European Framework of Reference of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2009, p. 55) recognises the importance of Ludic Activities in foreign language learning. Of course it is important that these tasks are simple to execute and involve abundant use of oral language.

Moreover, recreational activities can foster the development of intercultural competence, bringing the learner, in a simple and natural way, into contact with elements of other cultures in a cooperative context.

Ojeda describes a game “¿Qué es...?” (“What is ..?”) in which learners are put into pairs and write a ‘What is...?’ type question on a piece of paper and then fold the paper over. They swap their pieces of paper and each writes an answer on the folded paper without seeing the question. They then open the paper and read their questions and answers out loud and choose the one that they prefer. They then join other pairs and together choose their favourite combinations which are written on the board for the class to see and enjoy. They may decide to go for the ones which make grammatical sense or are the most amusing or most creative or they may opt for the most absurd. When Ojeda tried out this game, one of the examples generated was:

“¿Qué es español?” “Es la nariz de un elefante”

“What is Spanish?” It is the nose of an elephant” (page 55).

On Reflection Task 4.4

- Can you think of a ludic game you have successfully used in class?
- Can you search the web and find a ludic game that you think would work well with your students?

4.8.7 The use of mind maps and concept maps

The teacher can facilitate the understanding of concepts and learning content to be explained in class by using visual aids, such as PowerPoint files or maps (mind maps or concept maps). They capture the attention of students, facilitating understanding of new concepts and information.

Mind maps have a radial structure of a hierarchical-associative kind. There is a core idea in the centre to which other first level elements are connected. First level ideas may in their turn be linked to other second level ideas and so on. They are particularly useful for representing non-linear reasoning.

Concept maps are more useful for representing concepts or ideas that evolve with the passing of time. They are usually tree shaped.

It is preferable for the students to create the maps themselves, so as to make their learning deeper and more meaningful. However, the workload they have to face at home does not always allow them the time to create maps themselves for all topics of study. Therefore, the use by students of visual material presented in class can be reassuring to children (and parents!) because it allows them ready access to material they can use at home to study from for tests; note, however, that this may reduce the effectiveness of the material by making the student’s involvement in their learning less active.

For this reason, the teacher should, as often as possible, prompt students
to create customised maps. To create a map, the first thing to do is to select the most important information within a text. Unfortunately, this is not an easy task especially for those who have trouble in decoding. Teachers may have noticed that if they ask students to underline the important information in a text they often underline almost everything or very little at all.

Extension Material 4.9 (see below) contains some useful tips that the teacher may give students to help them in the construction of mind or concept maps.
Extension Material 4.9 - How to construct a map

Maps can be useful to you:

**At school:**
- to help you follow and learn the lesson better
- to help you keep the thread when you have to present a topic
- to help you retrieve specific vocabulary
- to make things easier for you in tests

**At home:**
- to memorise
- to revise

1. Look at any images accompanying the text and the related captions. These can be useful to get a general idea of the topic the text deals with.
2. Read the titles of the chapters and paragraphs, to get a rather more precise idea of the topic. This will make comprehension easier later on.
3. Don’t read the text but go to the end of the chapter or paragraph where some questions on the main topics of the text are usually listed.
4. Read the first question.
5. Take a highlighter and, scanning through the text, find and highlight the answer to this question.
6. Find the key idea within the text you have highlighted. To find it, think which word, group of words, or image acts as a prompt to remind you of the answer you found.
7. Take a pencil and write or draw the key words and/or images in the margin of the text.
8. Read the second question at the end of the text and proceed in the same way.
9. At the end you will have all the key words listed in the text margin and starting from these you can begin to build the map.
10. Choose the type of map you prefer and find the easiest to use (mind map or concept map)

This is the “concept map”. It is more useful to represent topics/concepts that involve a temporal evolution. It will seem like a lot of work for you at first, but if you do it each time, straight after your teacher’s explanation of the topic, you will reach the exam/test day already knowing nearly everything, and revision will be quick and easy.

http://www.biologycorner.com/worksheets/introduction_conceptmap.html
4.8.8 Test and evaluation

In the phases of test and evaluation, it is important that the teacher keeps to the following guidelines:

• Evaluate the content more than the formal aspects.
• Consider mainly what students know and not what they don’t know.
• Supply a copy of the tests for successive reflection and awareness of possible mistakes.
• Avoid open questions requiring an answer written in the FL.
• Allow the use of necessary compensatory tools (maps, tables, digital dictionaries etc.) during tests.

If the test is orientated towards comprehension of a text in the foreign language or towards the acquisition of content in the foreign language, it is necessary to:

• Allow written answers in the language of instruction
• Supply multiple-choice test items
• Supply True/False test items
4.9 Practical Recommendations

4.9.1 Recommendations for primary/elementary school

Teaching a foreign language (FL) in primary/elementary school is a complex task, especially when the class contains foreign pupils who are still acquiring skills in the language of instruction.

The teaching activity is more effective if based on a ludic, multisensory approach to linguistic learning (see par. 4.8.1). Where the class contains pupils with dyslexia, an approach that involves the senses, movement, images, mime, singing etc. becomes essential, since it takes advantage of the child’s joy and motivation in learning, and fosters implicit learning.

It is also very important to place special focus on oral use of language, especially if the pupils have not had the opportunity at infant school to come into contact with the language to be learnt even in the form of nursery rhymes, songs, games etc.

Introducing the written form of the language should generally be avoided at least until the children have acquired minimum vocabulary and the ability to produce simple everyday phrases. Also, especially in the course of the first year, it is important not to request written use of the FL until the pupils have acquired adequate skills at the level of decoding, comprehension and written production in the language used in the educational context (that is, the mother tongue for autochthonous learners, or L2 for immigrant children).

This does not mean that the written channel is to be excluded. As Daloiso (2009) writes, “The written form does offer the pupil a further possibility of anchorage on which to play for memorising” (p. 41). However it should not be demanded at primary school level. It is essential to focus on oral communication as much as possible as this will permit the implicit acquisition of both vocabulary and some basic elements of grammar.

It is important that, from the very beginning, children are trained in the pronunciation of sounds in the new language (as already mentioned in paragraph 4.3.1) and are encouraged to understand the importance of pronouncing words correctly so as to avoid misunderstandings. Exercises and games aimed at helping the pupils form correspondence between their perception of new sounds and the articulatory movements necessary for their reproduction will therefore be useful.

Approaches to be considered when teaching languages in elementary/primary school, especially in classes containing plurilingual pupils and/or pupils with dyslexia are Total Physical Response (see par. 4.8.2), Format Approach, Storytelling and all the playful techniques, examples of which can be found at par. 4.9.5. It should be emphasised that these techniques and approaches are considered effective for all students, in that they guarantee a teaching action appropriate to all learning styles, and are therefore inclusive.
4.9.2. Recommendations for lower secondary school

The recommendations suggested for teaching FLs in elementary school are also valid for the lower/middle level of secondary school.

However it is necessary to bear in mind that this phase introduces maturational changes that affect the implicit memory, which consequently plays a less important role in language learning.

In this phase, then, it can be useful to supplement learning activities orientated to implicit learning with an explicit reflection on the grammar of the language.

It is of course important that teaching is based on content which will keep the students’ motivation high so it should be related to their interests, needs and experiences.

When the class contains students with dyslexia and/or multilingual students, it is especially important to use multisensory activities (see par. 4.8.1 and 4.9.5) as well as cooperative activities (see par. 4.8.3 and 4.9.5).

The latter may be particularly effective at the relational level too, in that they create a situation in which students must collaborate to reach a common goal. In this way, they are driven to feel responsible, value everyone’s contribution and support each other by reciprocally compensating for possible weak points.

Cooperative techniques, generally orientated to an oral use of language and to the development of communicative competence can, if well planned, be particularly motivating and effective.

4.9.3 Recommendations for upper secondary school

The recommendations made for lower secondary school are also valid for upper secondary school. Teaching activities must be motivating, involve students in a multisensory and global way, include elements of play and be primarily focused on the oral use of language and the development of communicative skills.

Implicit learning should prevail as much as possible, though it can be useful to supplement it with explicit explanations especially concerning grammar. This is especially important for dyslexic learners who may find it harder to extract grammar rules that are embedded in implicit learning. In this phase of schooling, more attention will be devoted to written language and students will be expected to read literary texts or texts containing cultural information. In the case of students with dyslexia, it is then useful for the teacher to introduce the use of cognitive maps (see par. 4.8.), both as a tool to use in class to explain and facilitate comprehension of new content and as a strategy the students can use autonomously in home study.

To reach this latter goal, it will be important for the teacher to explain to
the students how to construct personalised maps, supplying them with the suggestions presented in Extension Material 4.9.

4.9.4 Dyslexia-friendly text

In the choice of textbook or in the preparation of paper materials to hand to their dyslexic pupils, the teacher must pay attention to the typeface, design layout and paper used, so as to avoid additional barriers for those who are already having difficulty decoding.

The type of font used must:

- be sans serif
- have very clear upper and lower case letters
- clearly differentiate letters that are mirrored (b, d, p, q) or graphically similar (a, e, o, t, f)
- have a font size of 12-14 typographical points.

PRINTING IN UPPER CASE should not be used for more than 5 consecutive lines, as the readability level will then drop significantly. The reasons are as follows:

- capital letters, that are useful for marking the beginning of the sentence, are lost
- readability depends on being used to a certain type of character and most printed material use lower case letters
- the characters are less differentiated from each other: since they are all upper case, there is no shape contrast, as there are no multiple adjacent edges at the top and bottom of each word (see example below).

Shape SHAPE

Layout must follow the following criteria:

- ensure that the line length is around 13 cm (60-70 characters).
- use 1.5 line spacing.
- ensure that text is left justified with a ragged right edge.
- don’t divide a word between the end of one line and the start of the next. This can cause great problems for people with dyslexia as they may end up with two separate words which do not belong to their mental lexicon.
- subdivide the text into short paragraphs, separated by a blank space.
- leave wide margins framing the printed area, as they are useful for transcribing key words, taking notes etc.
- use bold type and not underlining to highlight important parts of the text.
- use listed points instead of dense blocks of text.
- include the parts of the text you wish to emphasise in boxes.
The paper used must be:
- not white, but of a very soft pastel colour
- opaque and not glossy
- weighing at least 80-90 g/m².

### 4.9.5 Examples of practical activities

This section lists a series of activities devised especially for dyslexic pupils but which are appropriate for all types of learners. Many of these activities can be useful for students of different age groups and school grades. For this reason they are listed in this section, along with indications of the age range and didactic goal for which they were created.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N°</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spot the sound</td>
<td>Phonetics/ Phonology</td>
<td>Recognise new sounds</td>
<td>Elementary/primary</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The teacher introduces a new sound and gets the class to listen to it repeatedly. The sound may be produced by the teacher, or a recorded version can be provided (see the links.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The teacher pronounces a series of words. The students have to recognise the words containing the sound just introduced.</td>
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<tr>
<th>N°</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Area</th>
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<th>Age Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Noises and sounds</td>
<td>Phonetics/ Phonology</td>
<td>Memorise and reproduce new sounds</td>
<td>Elementary/primary</td>
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<td>Lower secondary</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The teacher introduces a sound, gets the children to listen to it repeatedly and explains the articulation movements involved.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The teacher asks the pupils to try to reproduce the sound.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>To foster memorisation of the sound, the teacher asks the students to associate it with a noise, an animal noise, an onomatopaeic sound, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The teacher offers the class feedback on the “noise” which most closely resembles the sound introduced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>№</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rainbow writing</td>
<td>Spelling and Vocabulary</td>
<td>Learn/improve spelling in the foreign language; Broaden lexicon</td>
<td>Elementary/primary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The child is given a laminated ‘tram-lines’ sheet and is reminded of a spelling rule/pattern or a tricky word and any memory anchor linked to a target word.
2. The teacher/teaching assistant says the target word that they want the pupil to write (e.g. ‘rain’) and shows them the written word. The teacher and pupil say the letter names and the word out loud (e.g. r-a-i-n, rain).
3. The child repeats the letter names and the word out loud (e.g. r-a-i-n, rain) while writing it on the tram-line.
4. The teacher/TA corrects the spelling as necessary and reinforces the correct spelling with any relevant rules or memory tricks.
5. The child says the word out loud and writes it again. They then write on top of the word four times, using four different-coloured pens.
6. The teacher/TA asks the child to write and say the word again with their eyes closed or to ‘see’ the word in their ‘mind’s eye’ and spell it out loud.

It is important that the pupil uses cursive script to reinforce motor memory. Also, this activity works better if carried out in small groups and in the presence of a TA.
Students with dyslexia often think mainly through images and for this reason mnemo-techniques, which are mainly based on visual memory, may be of great help in study. All mnemo-techniques are based on the fact that what must be visualised in the mind must be an image that is well defined, very colourful and not static. The more paradoxical, exaggerated, fantastic, crazy, comic or “stupid” the action seems, the more it will remain fixed in the memory.

1. The teacher introduces a new word and gets the class to listen to it repeatedly: the word may be produced by the teacher, or a recorded version can be provided (see the links.)
2. The teacher explains the meaning of the word and the pupils must find images to help memorise the word’s meaning and sound.

Here are some examples:

**Example for student of French:**
- Lunettes (glasses) Imagine being at the optician’s or trying on a new pair of glasses whose lenses are in the shape of little half moons (lunettes) that are going through a lunar eclipse.
- Rhume (cold) The best cure to get over a cold is to drink a whole bottle of rum.

**Example for student of Spanish:**
- Caracol (snail) Imagine a snail which instead of having a shell on its back is ‘carrying’ a lump of ‘coal’.

**Example for student of Welsh:**
- Maes (field) Imagine standing in a field and everywhere you look you can see mice dancing about.

Material taken from: Cappa (2005) and adapted for the UK context.
This exercise is useful for helping the student “physically perceive” (Daloiso, 2011) the new language's sounds, so as to notice if their pronunciation is correct or not. The following example relates to students learning English:

1. The teacher introduces a sound, for example the aspirate “h” in English. He/she lets students listen to the sound repeatedly and explains the articulatory movements involved.
2. The teacher asks the pupils to try to reproduce the sound.
3. The teacher asks the students to place a hand in front of their mouth and try to pronounce a series of words like “home”, “hope”, “hot”, etc. He/she will explain that, if the pronunciation of the aspirated consonant is correct, the student will feel a puff of air from the mouth on the palm of the hand. The same thing can be done using a sheet of paper placed in front of the mouth. If the pronunciation of the aspirated consonant is correct, the puff of air will make the paper move forward.
4. Still using a sheet of paper, the teacher may introduce the aspirated occlusive consonants at the start of an English word. In words like “pan” or “pot”, the “p” sound is at the beginning of a word and is followed by a vowel. In cases like this, the “p” sound is always followed by an aspiration. This does not happen in some languages, e.g. Italian.

So, to highlight a possible difference in pronunciation of these sounds with regard to the same consonants in the student’s home language, the teacher can ask students to pronounce English words such as “pan” or “top” followed by words starting with “p” or “t” in their mother tongue. If the pronunciation of the English words is correct, the sheet of paper will move forward when “pan” and “top” are pronounced.

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<th>Age Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Perceive sounds physically</td>
<td>Phonetics/Phonology</td>
<td>Reproduce new sounds correctly</td>
<td>Elementary/primary</td>
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<td>Lower secondary</td>
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<td>Upper secondary</td>
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1. The teacher pronounces a word and the pupils must draw the object it represents.
2. The same word may be further described, for example with adjectives: 1) dog; 2) white dog; 3) white dog with a black tail.
3. The teacher may help comprehension by miming if necessary.

This activity can have different variants: for example, for practising prepositions of place, the teacher can describe a picture containing various objects and the students have to draw it. Alternatively, the students could work in pairs. One person in each pair has a picture and they have to describe it to their partner.
This activity uses a multisensory approach and focuses on the memorisation of vocabulary and improving spelling accuracy. This technique will be particularly useful in the case of students with dyslexia.

1. The teacher asks the children to use a material like plasticine to form the object corresponding to the word he/she wants to teach.
2. He/she then asks them to form, still with plasticine, the single letters which make up the word.
3. He/she asks the child to close their eyes and touch the single letters formed, first from left to right, then from right to left, and again from left to right (it is important that the teacher ensures the last time the child touches the letters they do so in the correct direction). This process will help the child to form a mental representation of the written word corresponding to the object.
4. The teacher asks the child to try spelling the word without looking at the letters.

Below is a possible representation of the word ‘Auto’, the Italian word for ‘car’

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<th>Goal</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Form letters and words</td>
<td>Spelling and vocabulary</td>
<td>Learn/improve spelling in the foreign language; Broaden lexicon</td>
<td>Elementary/primary</td>
</tr>
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<td>N°</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td>Written and oral comprehension</td>
<td>Improve oral and written comprehension; Broaden lexicon</td>
<td>Lower and upper secondary school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Divide a class equally into heterogeneous groups, e.g. from a class of 20 students form 4 groups each with 5 students. The teacher chooses a leader for each group. Each group organises itself into a circle seated as far away from the other groups as possible.

The teacher provides a written comprehension activity based on a text describing the everyday habits, preferences and tastes of a successful singer popular with young people.

The teacher divides the text into 5 parts, each relating to one of the following topics:
1. What the singer does on week days;
2. What they do in their free time;
3. What they do at the weekend;
4. What they like to eat/drink/wear;
5. What their tastes are in music/cinema/etc.

Each person in the group receives a different part of the text from the teacher and has time to read it. The teacher ensures that the students concentrate on their own part of the text and do not look at other parts.

All the students who had the same part of the text form a group and discuss the topic among themselves. They get ready to present it to the other members of their original group.

Each student then returns to his own jigsaw group and presents the topic of their own text part to the other group members. The teacher encourages the latter to formulate questions and ask for explanations, and tries to intervene only when necessary, to facilitate interaction.

Finally, the teacher hands all the students a photocopy with a multiple-choice exercise based on the whole text and each student must complete it individually.
If the class includes students with dyslexia, the teacher may find it appropriate (depending on the students’ needs) to exempt them from reading the text, as in phase 2 they will learn the information in their part of the text from their partners. From that moment on they also participate in the activity as described above.

In this case cooperation becomes particularly significant, and if the teacher has adequately worked with the class to create a good inclusive and welcoming atmosphere, the activity should proceed smoothly.

If you prefer not to use a text, the same type of activity may be done by watching a film, a cartoon or video. In this case it will be necessary for the class to have a computer for each jigsaw group at its disposal.

Let’s imagine using a 90 minute video divided into 5 sequences. The first 4 will be 20 minutes each, the last (the final part of the film) will be 10 minutes.

In phase 1 of the activity, groups A, B, C, D will watch film sequences 1, 2, 3, 4 respectively. In phase 2, each expert group component will tell the others about the part of the video they were able to see. In phase 3, each student returns to their own jigsaw group knowing what has happened in the video up to the 80th minute. At this point the teacher asks the students to imagine the ending. The activity could be particularly fun if done, for example, with a thriller movie. Each jigsaw group elaborates its own hypothesis and then everybody watches the last part of the film together.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Words in your mind</td>
<td>Spelling Vocabulary</td>
<td>Improving the skill of creating mental representation of an abstract concept; Learn/improve spelling in the foreign language; Broaden vocabulary</td>
<td>Elementary/primary</td>
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</table>

The “Form letters and words” exercise is a multisensory activity and can be used for working with words/abstract concepts. This exercise will be particularly useful for those dyslexic children who have difficulties with text comprehension and find it hard to create mental representations of words and concepts. Some of them, being visual thinkers, may struggle with abstract words where the meaning is not immediately linked to an image; others, with even greater difficulties in mental representation, may have problems with both abstract and concrete words.

1. The teacher asks the children to form an abstract concept (e.g. change, intelligence, consequence, via, while, now, before, after), using a material like plasticine.
2. He/she then asks them to form, still using plasticine, the individual letters of the word corresponding to the concept.
3. He/she asks the child to close their eyes and touch the single letters formed, first from left to right, then from right to left, and again from left to right (it is important that the teacher ensures the last time the child touches the letters he/she does so in the correct direction). This process will help the child to form a mental representation of the written word corresponding to the object.
4. The teacher asks the child to try spelling the word without looking.
In order to practise pronunciation the teacher may use vocal synthesis software, for example the multilingual vocal synthesis associated with Google Translate. To hear the pronunciation of the desired word all you do is click with the mouse on the lower right icon as indicated in figure 5.1. Not all online dictionaries, however, have associated vocal synthesis.

It is a good idea to remember that Google Translate, like other similar software, can be a great tool to use for the goal just described. It must be used with caution as a translator of complex sentences, despite improvements added to the latest versions; however it can be used simply but effectively as a translator of single words.

Certain continuous or non-continuous voice recognition software may also be useful. “Dragon NaturallySpeaking ©” is an example of the former and Google Chrome is an example of the latter.

These tools may be very useful for improving pronunciation, as demonstrated in the experiment carried out by Sugata Mitra in India in 1999. Prof. Mitra, professor in Educational Technology at the School of Education, Communication and Language Science of the University of Newcastle (UK), elaborated the “Hall in the wall” project. One of the goals of this project was to improve the English pronunciation of Indian children. Playing on their natural curiosity, he placed public computers (kiosks) in various parts of India. These computers could be used to practise the language and were equipped with software for continuous voice recognition. Children were able to “dictate” brief phrases to the computer and check how accurate their pronunciation was. Noticeable improvements were registered within just a few months. For further details please refer to the following link. (http://www.hole-in-the-wall.com/).

The software used by S. Mitra was “Dragon NaturallySpeaking ©”, which is available in various languages but is not free.

There is however less sophisticated but free software that can be used for the same goal. It may be necessary to match vocal synthesis software (the google translator may perform satisfactorily for this goal) to a voice recognition (speech-to-text) software.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Back to the board game</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Broaden lexicon by revising newly learnt words</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher asks for two volunteers to stand with their backs to the board.

The class is divided into two. Half the class works with Volunteer A and half with Volunteer B.

The teacher writes a newly learnt word on the board. The volunteers are not allowed to look at the word.

The class shouts out clues and the volunteers try to guess the word.

The volunteer who correctly guesses the word first scores a point for their team.

NB: You need to know your students quite well and should avoid selecting a student with severe word retrieval difficulties as one of the volunteers (unless they really want to volunteer and will not be upset if they cannot guess the word on the board).

You can do this at all levels. Some nouns and adjectives may be relatively easy to define but it gets interesting when you put up words such as ‘carefully’, ‘thoughtlessness’ or ‘doubt’. It also encourages the class to think about the different parts of speech when they are providing clues.
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<th>Goal</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sentence Auction</td>
<td>Grammar Oral</td>
<td>Encouraging students to recognise errors in their own writing and to learn from each other.</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Collect some examples of mistakes made by students in recent writing activities. (Be sensitive – don’t select ones that are easily identifiable and/or might make someone feel awkward.) Also include a number of sentences with no errors.
2. Divide the class into teams of 4 or 5 students.
3. Ask them to go through the sentences and decide which they think are correct and which contain an error.
4. Tell the students that they have £100 to spend and that the winning team will be the team that buys the most correct sentences.
5. Play the role of the auctioneer – if you have a hammer, all the better! Introduce each sentence and encourage the students to buy it. If more than one team wants to buy it, then they have to bid. The team that offers more money will receive the sentence.
6. Follow this procedure for all the sentences and keep a note of which sentences were bought by which team. Ensure that teams do not spend more than £100!
7. Go through the sentences in turn, generating discussion about possible errors and providing clarification where necessary.
8. Congratulate the winning team.

**Examples of sentences used with a group of Polish students:**

- A wedding in Poland is very important celebration.
- Before leaving home, the young couple is receiving a blessing from their parents.
- On the first day, the ceremony takes place in the bride’s house.
- The young couple is getting married in the church or in the registry office.
References


Links and further reading


Hocus & Lotus http://www.hocus-lotus.edu/default_eng.asp [Last accessed 18/12/2013]


IASCE, Cooperative Learning, www.iasce.net


