



News Letter

Vol. XV, No. 1 January-Febr. 2005

What participants want for TESOL-Italy

by Beth Ann Boyle

The seminar participants have given TESOL-Italy some fascinating information on what they found beneficial and useful about last October's seminar entitled 'Reflective Teaching', and what they would like to see for TESOL-Italy 05. This information has contributed to the decision on our seminar's title and subtitles and is reported below.

Participants were generally pleased with the range and relevance of the topics: 77% felt the quality ranged between good and excellent. A slight shift in focus was however requested for next year: thus 'A Fresh Start'.

The area of greatest interest for next year is a fundamental one—the English language. Desire has been shown to attend talks and workshops on such areas as linguistics, the spoken language, phonetics, translation, and different varieties of English. In second place, participants would like realistic suggestions and materials to use in their classrooms everyday and in particular on how to use drama or music with students, how to teach grammar, and how to develop practical classroom strategies. In third place we have another significant issue – teaching in the Italian school system from elementary through high school: the reform, continuity, textbooks, and networking with other teachers. In fourth place and closely linked to the first two is a continuing curiosity to discover more about different approaches (old and new) and related methodology. Many other areas regarding teaching are also of concern but to a lesser degree than in the past (e.g. technology, multimedia and e-

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An interview with Michael Lewis

by Stefano Mochi

Michael Lewis is the author of The Lexical Approach and The English Verb and co-author of various student texts, among which Business English and Practical Techniques for Language Teaching. He has lectured extensively on language teaching and methodology all over Europe and participated, as a plenary speaker, in Tesol-Italy 2004 National Convention in Rome, where Stefano Mochi interviewed him.

I: Mr Lewis, in your book The Lexical Approach you wrote that, to improve speaking skills, students should also be encouraged to produce 'pidgin' English. That is to say, if they don't know the words they want to use, they can be stimulated to 'derive' them from their knowledge of their first language. In what way do you think this strategy can improve their productive skills in speaking?

Lewis: I don't think it improves them. I think there is a terrific emphasis on avoiding mistakes from native teachers. But you can't learn a language without making mistakes. So if you can only say correct things you will sit at the desk silent forever. I think students need to be encouraged to be confident to try out stuff.

I: And it doesn't matter if they make mistakes.

Lewis: They are going to make mistakes.

Advanced learners are going to make mistakes. It's the whole psychology of coming at it the wrong way - if you can't say something correctly don't say anything at all. That just strikes me as crazy.

I: That's because especially in Italy there's an overemphasis on correcting mistakes and this sometimes prevents students from producing language because they feel scared or have lost their confidence.

IMPORTANTE: A TUTTIGLI ISCRITTI TESOLITALY

**Attenzione: Modifica data di convocazione
E' convocata**

**L'ASSEMBLEA GENERALE DEI SOCI
per il giorno 11 marzo 2005 alle ore 23
in prima convocazione
e per il giorno 13 marzo 2005 alle ore 9,00
in seconda convocazione**

**presso l'Aula Magna del Liceo Scientifico
"C.Cavour",**

**via Vittorino da Feltre 3, Roma,
per l'approvazione del rendiconto 2004
e del preventivo finanziario ed economico 2005.**

**A seguire si svolgerà l'assemblea annuale del
COMITATO NAZIONALE**

**In conformità con quanto previsto dall'articolo 7 dello
Statuto dell'Associazione**

Lewis: Absolutely. I agree completely and I also agree with your view that this is a particular problem in Italy.

I: An interesting question you asked at the very beginning of our talk was: 'Why doesn't input turn into

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TESOL Italy membership dues for the year 2005: ordinary members: •25,00; students under 30 and SSIS students: •15,00; supporters, schools, universities, agencies:

• 80,00 (including subscription to English Teaching Forum).

Subscription to English Teaching Forum (4 yearly issues): • 15,00.

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DTP Claudio Giacinti

TESOL-Italy's mission is to develop the expertise of those involved in teaching English to speakers of other languages, and to foster professional growth and active participation in language teaching. Its mission includes promoting community understanding of the role of language in a progressively changing environment while respecting individuals' language rights.

To achieve this TESOL-Italy

- encourages access to and standards for English language instruction, professional preparation, continuing education and student programs;
- links groups to enhance communication among language specialists;
- produces high quality programs, services and products
- promotes advocacy to further the profession.

TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) Italy

TESOL-Italy, an affiliate of TESOL International, founded by Mary Finocchiaro, is a non-profit organization of teachers of English in Italy. Its purposes are to stimulate professional development, to disseminate information about research, books and other materials related to English, and strengthen instruction and research.

TESOL-Italy organizes a national convention every year.

Members receive *TESOL-Italy Newsletter* and *Perspectives*, the academic journal of the association.

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Food for thought



From TESOL publications

Franca Ricci Stephenson



About reading comprehension....and school in Italy

The latest changes in Italian secondary school organization, have just been published on the website of our Ministry of Education, and I have been tempted to report about the countless articles and letters flooding the newspapers and the net with a chorus of disapproving comments. I have been tempted as well to write about our opposition to the reform in general and to the latest changes in particular. But from this column I try to suggest *Food from Thought from TESOL Publications*, so I have chosen, instead, to bring to the foreground an interesting article by He Ji Sheng1.: **A cognitive model for teaching reading comprehension.** The article appeared on the October 2000 issue of English Teaching Forum and places reading at the center of debate. Why?

He Ji Sheng mentions the influence reading has on listening, speaking, writing, and even translating, and his theory sounds like a real blessing if we look at the not distant future and realize that—to mention only one small example of the reform—students will receive 2 hours per week of English instruction in each of the 5 (4 + 1) years of Liceo Scientifico. A cut of nearly 40% of the teaching/learning time for English language, which will leave time to develop, at the most, reading comprehension skills. Enhanced reading skills which will eventually and hopefully have a positive influence on listening, speaking and writing abilities. Definitely we will have no time to work on anything but reading comprehension!

The article reminds us that “reading is the process of recognition, interpretation, and perception of written or printed material. Comprehension is the understanding of the meaning of the written material and covers the conscious strategies that lead to understanding. The process of reading deals with language forms, while

comprehension, the end product, deals with language content.” Reading is a process of communication from the writer to the reader, while comprehension is a process of negotiation between the reader and the writer. The reader receives information from the author of a written text at different levels. At the surface level he/she meets the denotative meaning—the meaning given in the dictionary—, and the connotative meaning, which “is the communicative value of an expression by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely denotative meaning”.

At a deeper level, the reader receives information from contextual meaning—the meaning expressed by a sentence associated with its context—, and from pragmatic meaning, which is communicated in the feelings and attitudes of the writer. Understanding pragmatic meaning implies the ability to go beyond the linguistic system and reach the functional level.

Teaching reading comprehension should focus not only on the surface structure level of comprehension, but also aim at comprehension of the deep structure level. As teachers of EFL we should never lose sight of the fact that RC includes, besides linguistic recognition, cognitive understanding as well, and tends to be affected by the reader’s evaluation and appreciation. Without evaluation and appreciation comprehension is incomplete.

These are the preliminary considerations from which He Ji Sheng moves to attempt defining a cognitive model for teaching RC which might help teachers be more effective. He describes a cognitive model adapted from Wallen’s and Barrett’s taxonomies which can be applied to students of different levels and needs. The basic steps used in the

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Oh Captain, my Captain!

by Lucilla Lopriore

Raramente alcune morti lasciano così fortemente il segno. Altrettanto raramente incontriamo persone in cui si intrecciano segni di grandezza intellettuale, di studio appassionato e appassionante, insieme alla rarissima capacità di trasmettere e suscitare curiosità, di fornire strumenti di lettura della vita e del suo specchio, la letteratura, e di creare allo stesso tempo un legame unico con chi ha la ventura di incrociarle. Agostino Lombardo, geniale anglista e americanista, uno tra i più grandi studiosi e traduttori shakespeariani, si è spento la notte del 24 gennaio, riaccendendo in tutti i suoi allievi, ma anche in chi aveva letto i suoi libri o avuto la fortuna di ascoltarne la voce in convegni o seminari, fortissime emozioni e commoventi ricordi. Perché di una sua peculiare qualità chi come noi svolge il mestiere di insegnante, dovrebbe serbare ricordo: quella sottile qualità che vanamente vorremmo avere con i nostri studenti, che ci è difficile definire perché impalpabile, che nessun corso di aggiornamento ci potrà mai dare, ma che sappiamo riconoscere all’istante quando i nostri Maestri riescono a ‘toccarci dentro’. Proprio come quei maestri di cui ci ha parlato George Steiner nel suo ultimo libro, Agostino Lombardo aveva questa qualità, riusciva nelle sue lezioni a prenderci ‘per incantamento’ trascinandoci nelle verità e nel gusto della letteratura creando allo stesso tempo un rapporto unico con ciascuno di noi.

Fui ‘fulminata sulla via di Damasco’ quando nel 1968, al mio primo anno di università a La Sapienza, grazie a un’amica, andai ad ascoltare Lombardo in aula 3. Un’ora di lezione e decisi all’istante di abbandonare gli studi di Farmacia (!) e di iscrivermi a Lingue. Da allora quanti incontri, quanti incantamenti, quante lezioni di vita come nel rovente 1968 quando gruppi di studenti spalancando la porta dell’aula invitavano Lombardo a interrompere la lezione. Poche parole coerenti con il suo rigore di vita militante bastavano a fare desistere chiunque e la lezione ricominciava.

Ci seguiva tutti anche nelle nostre vicende personali, negli anni, nelle scelte di vita chiamandoci personalmente a casa per offrirci opportunità di lavoro, intuendo e facendoci intuire le nostre possibilità, o sostenendoci anche in lavori diversi, non accademici come fu, nel mio e in alcuni altri casi, il teatro. Sempre attento e curioso ascoltatore delle nostre narrazioni con quel guizzo di ironia negli occhi e nella voce che tradiva la sua approvazione, il riconoscimento dei propri tratti che i padri a volte intuiscono nei figli. Gli anni passavano, si alternavano nuove generazioni di allievi e io ho continuato ad andarlo a trovare per il piacere di conversare con lui, mantenendo intatto quel filo che ha legato le nostre vite alla sua. Perché alcuni di noi si sono portati dentro, pur se per strade diverse, parte del gran Lombardo.

Grazie, professore,
Lucilla Lopriore

Translation in love Or, On "Mis-Translation"

by Marina Morbiducci

"*Relatato all'attendenza c'è una marca?*": these are the actual words I heard addressed to me at the end of the course on "Translation" I held at University of Malta. Having spent there some good four years, by now, I think I know what problems are connected to the codeswitch passage from English into Italian for these students: in the island-country where Maltese and English are the two official languages [and where Italian is, for the majority of the population, the third one – primarily acquired through so called "spontaneous learning" and certainly "oral" or rather "multi-mass-mediated" way, therefore with little ground for the written, active and reflective modalities of language apprehension the interference of English is particularly conspicuous and significant. Obviously, such an attitude of adaptation of one linguistic body to the mould of the imperialising model is quite natural in an area subjected for centuries to influences from "abroad"; to reinforce the behaviour of assimilation, we can add that even in areas with a stronger autochthonous linguistic tradition we witness a generalized trend of anglicisation; notwithstanding that, the local learners show terrific sponge-like powers of absorption and transformation, in an I dare say - "economic" way: maximum results with minimum effort. We are all immersed in an environment of global 'hybridation', therefore we should not react with strictness or rigidity in front of the spreading phenomenon of what I'd call "mis-translation" (as in the case above quoted) but with a genuine attitude of research, analysing the event, inquiring on the behaviour, asking ourselves questions, discovering our stretching capacities: what is the span of flexibility we can afford and tolerate, what are the risks and benefits, what is the price and what are the prizes? More often than not, these "mix-linguistic" (if you allow me another neologism) resources open the path to reflection and revision: sometimes for their hilarious effects and

funny creativity, conversely, some other times, for their exuberant and simplistic display of lack of linguistic discipline or for excess of superficial presumption (after all, any language must have its own rules). I'm sure all my colleagues, Italian teachers of English, can easily guess where "relatato" and "attendenza" and "marca" come from and stand for: but what, if the addressees of this sentence were not Italian, therefore unable to grasp and confine the borrowings with similar confidence? They are solid examples of the in-between nature of mis-translation, a sort of "intermediary" stage in the coming to shape that the text-to-be translation always represents.

Imagine, for instance, a Japanese friend reading the incipital sentence: would "marca" be understood – as it was meant by the speaker – as "grade", or would it rather be interpreted as "brand"? Would a German learner perceive with equal shivering disappointment the application of the Italian past participle suffix ("ato") to the English verb "relate"? Or would a Spanish person register the misused lexical ending "enza" stuck onto the verb "attend", capturing the shade of antique taste given to the word (after all, in Maltese "il-carrozza" means "car")? In other terms, in this splendid melting (or "malting") pot of idioms, linguists enjoy the luxury of navigation with full wind, and have stimuli for what really counts for their trade, that is, not so much to establish the boundaries between right and wrong, standard or deviance, tolerance or unacceptability, but rather to enter the interstice of difference and exploit it.

We can all have a good laugh at the ever-increasing worldwide circulation of gags such as: on the menu of a Swiss restaurant, - "Our wines leave you nothing to hope for"; - or outside a Hong Kong tailor shop, "Ladies may have a fit upstairs", or in Rhodes "Order your summers suit. Because is big rush we will execute customers in strict rotation". Fair enough, after the laughter, and the enjoyment for the clumsy transformations, we can track down the process of misappropriation and through it appreciate and evaluate, to our advantage, the beneficial intermediary role of mistranslation. The translator should always make of a failure success.

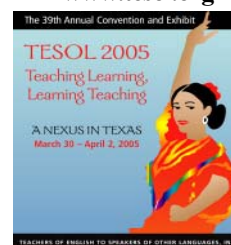
Save the Date

March

3 – 5, 2005. Council of International Schools ESL & Mother Tongue Conference, "Many Languages, One Message: Equal Rights to the Curriculum". Rome, Italy.
Contact: Patricia Mertin:
mertin@isd.edu.dc or mcarder@vis.ac.at
21 – 26, 2005. British Council Seminar "Minding the Gap: Intercultural Approaches to ELT." Sorrento
www.britishcouncil.org/seminars-english-0461

March 30 – April 2, 2005. The 39th Annual Convention in San Antonio, Texas USA. (TESOL 2005)

www.tesol.org



April

5 – 9, 2005. 39th IATEFL Annual Conference. Cardiff, UK
www.iatefl.org
11-16, 2005. Consultant Intercultural Communication seminar course, "Intercultural Communication: Diversity in Practice". Amsterdam, The Netherlands
www.cic-amsterdam.com

May

19 – 21, 2005. The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) international conference, "Language Assessment in a Multilingual Context: Attaining Standards, Sustaining Diversity," Berlin, Germany.
www.alte.org
21, 2005. Third Ohio, Kentucky, and Indian TESOL Regional ESL Conference.
www.hcsc.org

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The deadline for submitting articles for the March April issue is March 20.



Buzz-words

Lucilla Lopriore

* * * * *

Buzz word: 'a word or phrase that people in a particular group start to use a lot because they think it is important'

Buzz-word of the day: Task/s

* * * * *

In chapter 7 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: *Learning, teaching, assessment (1998, 2001)*, 'Tasks and their role in language teaching', tasks are defined as "...a feature of everyday life in the personal, public, educational or occupational domains. Task accomplishment by an individual involves the strategic activation of specific competencies in order to carry out a set of purposeful actions in a particular domain with a clearly defined goal and a specific outcome".

The definition of the nature of tasks and of their distinguishing features and roles have been central in the debate among Second Language Acquisition researchers as well as in the work of foreign language teachers and textbook writers. SLA researchers, mostly interested in analysing learners' language samples, have specifically investigated task design and the way tasks determine how learners structure their interlanguage. Textbook writers are mostly concerned with ways of constructing language courses based upon the use of tasks, while language teachers are interested in developing tasks that help learners learn (i.e. produce language that will stay with them and will be later used in meaningful ways and contexts).

But what exactly are tasks and in which way are they different from 'exercises' and 'activities'?

Rod Ellis (2003: 4-5) illustrates some of the most well known studies of task-based learning and makes a distinction between tasks that can be performed without using language, such as 'painting a fence', and tasks that require language, such as booking

a flight. To Ellis, 'tasks' are "activities that call for primarily meaning-focused language use. In contrast, 'exercises' are activities that call for primarily form-focused language use" (Ellis, 2003:3). Even if the main purpose in both tasks and exercises is to learn a language, it is the way this purpose is achieved that makes the difference.

In order to better understand the role and function of tasks, it is important to take into consideration and reflect upon different variables occurring in tasks, such as the reasons for using a task, the role participants play, the degree of task authenticity, the cognitive processes activated and the results expected from the tasks.

Are tasks being devised to simply 'convey' a message or to produce correct language usage? Are participants real language users or as in 'exercises', are they only required to 'show' their learning? Where is the learner's main focus when performing a task? Is it on the use of the language or the accuracy of their performance? What about the definition of 'real-world' tasks? Does it exclude tasks such as 'describing a picture' or 'spotting the differences', which are often encountered in language courses? These tasks, if not authentic, have the advantage of triggering language performances closely related to the real world (Skehan, 1996a). When devising a task, what should the balance between the complexity of reasoning required from the learner and the language expected be? How much do teachers use the outcome of a task as indicators of learners' performance? To conclude, the following can be identified as criterial features for tasks that might help teachers develop meaningful tasks (Ellis, 2003:9):

1. A task is a plan for learner activity.
2. A task engages learners in using language pragmatically rather than displaying language.
3. A task should engage learners in real-world activities or that reflect processes of language use occurring in real communication.
4. A task enhances learners' cognitive processes.
5. The non-linguistic outcome of a task is the goal of the activity and serves as a means for determining the task completion.

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Food for thought

(continued from p.3)

model cover

1. Literal comprehension activities

which include recognition or recall of: a) details, b) topic sentences and main ideas, c) sequence, d) descriptions, e) cause and effect relationship

2. Inferential comprehension training,

with tasks such as inferring: a) supporting details, b) the main idea, c) consequences, d) cause and effect relationships, e) character traits, f) figurative language,

3. Evaluation,

with tasks aimed at stimulating students' judgements about the content of a reading passage. **4. Appreciation,** dealing with the psychological and aesthetic impact of the reading selection, and including both knowledge of, and emotional responses to, literary techniques, forms, styles, and structures.

Mr. Sheng argues that the model has both theoretical and practical values, being applicable to various skill levels, and meeting different needs. It can be used in teaching literal meaning and concrete facts, or deep structure meaning and literature appreciation; it can be used to help students comprehend the text from different perspectives and to understand the implications of the content. It enables students to analyze and summarize the text as well as to distinguish arguments from supporting details. It improves students' organizational skills and self expression.

I find the article interesting and clear. It has helped me to reorganize objectives of reading comprehension in my classes, and I plan to share it with my colleagues in the English Department and Consiglio di Classe, in view of the cut in teaching time that lies ahead of us. Maybe some teachers, inspired by their incomparable love for the subject they teach, will find planning and setting objectives unnecessary. Even a brilliant teacher and successful writer, Paola Mastrocola, considers planning and setting objectives, and following teacher training courses useless for teachers (as she hints in her recently-published book *La scuola spiegata al mio cane*). Maybe she believes that teaching implies nothing more than mastering a discipline in order to teach it effectively. However, let me stress

here, once more, the relevance of studying and reflecting on new and old pedagogical principles, and the crucial importance of carefully planning how to best help our students to learn.. It is sad that criticism of some negative aspects of our school should come in terms of defending the past, when teaching often was improvised. It is surprising that an intelligent and sensitive writer, like Paola Mastrocola is, should write to express a devastating critique of teacher training. What can we oppose to such positions? Perhaps we can remind Ms. Mastrocola and all of us of the old proverb "don't throw the baby out with the bathwater".

Notes

1) He Jio Sheng was a Ph.D. candidate at National University of Singapore in 2000

Interview with Michael Lewis

(continued from p.1)

intake?" My question is: 'why doesn't intake always turn into output?' I mean, sometimes students 'take in' but do not produce what they have taken in.

Lewis: Because it takes time. Real language is only used when you are emotionally involved. You have to be anxious or amused or whatever. So you don't just produce language because somebody asks you to. You produce language because you have got something to say, to express what you feel. And if you have got the resources but you haven't got the motivations then you won't say it. Maybe I should say something very simple: I don't believe we can teach languages.

We know languages can be learnt because a lot of people have learnt them, and we know that languages are also taught because a lot of people claim to teach them. But we have never seen a one-to-one relationship. So I think the only thing you can do is try to maximise the chance of input going in and then try to create the environment.

I: In your talk you also said that it is wrong to separate grammar from vocabulary. Does this mean that grammar and vocabulary feed on each other?

Lewis: They do, inevitably. If you go to

a country where they have a very grammatical syllabus - Germany being the obvious example - people still learn English. Why is that? The answer is, presumably, when they are doing grammar exercises they are also learning vocabulary from grammar exercises. The fact of the matter is that you can't separate the two, but the obvious thing is that language teaching frequently tries to separate them. Why is it trying to do that? The whole point is that they belong together.

I: This also means that it is possible to speak a language without grammar but it is impossible to speak a language without words.

Lewis: Absolutely. I gave an analogy to your colleagues earlier when I said ... many of us have bought a picture and then gone out and bought a frame for it. But not many of us have bought a frame and then gone out to find a picture to put in it. Grammar - structure - is actually the frame, isn't it? So, it seems very odd to put all the emphasis on the frame and not on the picture. Or I mean, if we put that in the jargon of my book, language consists of grammaticalized lexis not lexicalized grammar. The picture is what matters, the lexis is what matters. Steven Krashen has got a wonderful phrase when he says 'when students travel they do not carry grammar books, the carry dictionaries'. Because they know they need the words for this. They don't go around thinking 'I need the present perfect' or 'I need the subjunctive'.

I: A final question, Mr Lewis. Do you think that it is possible for foreign language learners to achieve the same level of proficiency in vocabulary as native speakers do?

Lewis: They can get very close. They'll never probably get it completely because, for example, I've got a certain amount of language at my disposal which goes back to my early childhood: nursery rhymes and things like that. I know no adult who came to it as a second language learner has, however good he or she is. Unless, perhaps, as a child he picked them up.

I: Thank you very much, Mr Lewis.



NEWS from THE GROUPS

News from Veneto

by Annalera Guazzieri

The Veneto Branch of TESOL-Italy has promoted a series of initiatives aimed at the training of foreign language teachers. Two of these were carried out with the collaboration of the Foreign Language Unit of the SSIS Veneto, thanks to the enthusiasm of its coordinator, prof. Carmel Mary Coonan. The first one was a workshop on the value of reflective teaching, run by internationally known professor of Teacher Education, Donald Freeman. The workshop was attended by a number of mentor teachers, teacher trainees and teaching practice supervisors. A good opportunity to look at the same thing (the learning-teaching process) from different view points!

The second event focussed on the Reform. Inspector Renato Anò and Principal Margherita Gentile opened the session giving us useful insights, respectively on how to re-design foreign language curricula in the scuola media and what is in store for the training of nursery and primary foreign language teachers. The event included a practical workshop where school teachers presented their own experience.

The three articles which follow can only partially testify to the quality of the professional effort many teachers are dedicating in this transitional period as they try to comply with the innovations of the reform.

Notes

1) Due to lack of space we can publish only one of the articles in this issue. The others (by Diana Rossato, primary school teacher and teacher trainer and by Daniela Millini, scuola media teacher) will be published in the next issues

CHI HA PAURA DEL PORTFOLIO? WHO IS AFRAID OF THE "big bad" PORTFOLIO?

By Beatrice Vallini
Primary school teacher Venezia
TESOL group

"Maestra, ma lo sai che a me il lavoro del portafoglio mi è piaciuto proprio tanto?"
"E sapresti dirmi, in particolare, cosa ti è piaciuto di più?"

"Progettare il contenitore e costruirlo; e poi ho scoperto che avevo tanto da scrivere nell' <I CAN> e invece non pensavo..."

You could have heard such chunks of

dialogues in my fifth year primary class during a warm sunny day in May towards the end of the last school year, while we were working on a portfolio project, consisting of the following 3 sections:

A Passport, created by the children themselves, after having observed a real passport and having discussed its function
A self-assessment Section, called "I CAN", where the students, after a brainstorming activity, freely wrote down all the communicative functions they could use in English

A Dossier for all the materials they had collected.

Students especially enjoyed making the container for the dossier. The container was actually a painted and decorated pizza box and a particular section of the dossier was dedicated to the "instructions" to make such a container.

This portfolio project was highly motivating for those boys and girls, who were about to move on to a new type of school (Scuola Media) and who actually didn't know whether to be happy or worried about it.

So, why then are many teachers, now working in many schools in groups and commissions to create this new assessment tool for the reform, overwhelmed by pessimism? We spend hours discussing, without coming to any positive conclusions. Personally I think that teachers are perhaps afraid of being asked to complete another boring and, forgive me if I say so, useless register: In my school teachers have to update a class register, a teacher register, a register for the "pedagogic team (équipe pedagogica)" and last but not least a register for optional activities every day! Who can blame us, if we feel under stress??

Our daily routine is a little too busy with bureaucratic commitments (consigli di interclasse, scrutini, collegi) and most of us consider the Portfolio as a "personal task" to be organized and filled in completely by each teacher for each of his/her students! you must have heard this rumour:

DOES THIS SCHOOL ACTUALLY NEED ANOTHER NEW ASSESSMENT TOOL? I have no answers to this question, but since that bright May morning I have been wondering if we could at last put to one side that "I HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING BY MYSELF" SINDROME and let our students take the lead in the evaluation process. They love having their own "portafogli", perhaps just because at last they have the chance to decide themselves what value to attribute to their own learning, how they want to use it and how to make it public!



FOR A HANDFUL OF SAND

For some unconsciously apprehensive reasons, reading in La Stampa of July 10th, 2004, the exhaustive article by Marco Belpoliti entitled "Domani è un altro DISASTRO", I was immediately impressed by the insightful complexity of its point of view and at the same time compelled by the power of its argumentation; as a reaction, I soon cut out the whole page of the newspaper, and, by mere instinct, kept it in store. I don't know why, but somehow I foresaw that its content would have been of use for future intertextual references. Unfortunately, I could not have been more clairvoyant.

The issue raised by Belpoliti on that occasion was inspired by the art exhibition then held in Paris at the Cartier Foundation under the supervision of architect and philosopher Paul Virilio, whose pivotal idea was that "ce qui arrive" - "the accident" - is nowadays substituting our perception of the texture of future and of time, in general. Examples of cataclysms and massive disasters, parts of destroyed objects, videos and images of catastrophic events were all on show: questionable taste, one might argue; but honestly, rather than a macabre procession of traumatic phenomena already transpired in the past it really sounded like a premonitory admonition for the future. The message was, so to speak, that in our highly technological era where everything is made possible and soon after made real, and where acceleration is the essence of reality, we experience a sort of "continuous apocalypse" in which nothing but shocking disasters can stop us. We become aware of the importance of land only when earthquakes shake it; of the existence of water only when oceans swallow villages and populations; of electric energy only during blackouts; of nuclear power only after atomic explosions. Our vision is so blurred that we believe we can control the world, imposing our laws: therefore, we interpret the "accident", or "incident", as an exception; whereas, according to Virilio, it is the only rule. What is suggested here is not so much a catastrophic view of life, but rather a humbler one, where the human being ceases to be so arrogant and realizes that the looking glass mirroring his own image has broken into pieces. Simplicity, integrity, essentiality; in this universe we are all like grains of sand; and as Blake ingeniously put it, let us see "a world in a grain of sand".

Progetto CLIL scuola primaria

M.Luisa De Giorgi - M.Rosaria Leone

Questa esperienza di ricerca didattica è stata realizzata in due classi terze delle scuole elementari "P.A.Gemelli" e "Muratori" di Torino e aveva come obiettivo la produzione di moduli in lingua inglese per l'acquisizione di contenuti scientifici.

Dopo una prima fase dedicata alla riflessione teorico-metodologica riguardo il CLIL (in collaborazione con IRRE Piemonte) si è passati alla scelta dell'argomento curricolare "Acqua" da svolgere in accordo con il docente di scienze.

Particolare attenzione è stata dedicata alla progettazione dei singoli "steps" e alla modalità organizzativa di tale esperienza che ha previsto: lezioni frontali, a gruppi, individuali e il cooperative learning. Un altro elemento importante da decidere è stata la durata del progetto, stabilita in quattro mesi per un totale di venti ore.

Iniziare il percorso con l'attività di Story telling si è rivelato particolarmente proficuo ed ha suscitato l'interesse e la

motivazione degli alunni, elementi fondamentali nel processo di apprendimento. Successivamente, al fine di rendere "visibile" il concetto di molecola dell'acqua, si è fatto ricorso al gioco dei palloncini che ha permesso di contestualizzare e di veicolare facilmente termini scientifici quali "hydrogen", "oxygen", "atom" e "water molecule".

Per introdurre gli ambienti sono state utilizzate immagini e suoni reali che i bambini dovevano riconoscere e discriminare.

L'acquisizione del "ciclo dell'acqua" implicava operazioni cognitive di alto livello, ma attraverso la storia iniziale, la sua divisione in sequenze, le attività mirate quali schede strutturate e la realizzazione di poster murali, l'obiettivo iniziale è stato raggiunto.

Dal momento che "si impara facendo" la conoscenza degli stati dell'acqua è avvenuta, invece, mediante alcuni esperimenti che hanno consentito di osservare nell'immediato cambiamenti naturali senza ricorrere alla mediazione dell'italiano da parte dell'insegnante.

La valutazione finale del progetto è av-

venuta attraverso un grande "gioco dell'oca" che ha consentito di verificare l'acquisizione degli obiettivi prefissati. Il monitoraggio dell'esperienza, effettuato tramite la compilazione di appositi questionari sia da parte degli insegnanti che da parte degli alunni, ha rivelato l'elevato gradimento per il progetto da parte di questi ultimi.

Agli insegnanti è stato chiesto anche di annotare su un "diario di bordo" le attività svolte, le difficoltà emerse e le strategie messe in atto per superarle.

La riflessione che si può fare a conclusione di questa sperimentazione CLIL, è che gli alunni, attraverso l'apprendimento integrato e nonostante le perplessità iniziali, derivanti dal timore della propria inadeguatezza linguistica, hanno registrato un significativo miglioramento sia dal punto di vista dell'assimilazione dei contenuti che dal punto di vista della competenza linguistica.

Tale esperienza è stata resa possibile anche per la disponibilità del Dirigente scolastico che l'ha sostenuta e grazie alla collaborazione dei colleghi.

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What participants want

(continued from p.1)

learning, multicultural classrooms, literature, students needs, teacher development, assessment, ESP and research). A growing demand for practical workshops/sessions regardless of the subject matter in order to involve participants directly has been put forward by many; more workshops and fewer talks to make a more balanced and productively intense 2-day seminar.

The comparisons between past years' seminars and TESOL-Italy 04 highlight the fact that participants continue to be satisfied with the quality of the program and the topics presented, the scheduling of the sessions, the premises, and the publishers' exhibition. One difference between TESOL-Italy 03 and 04 is that there was a 12% increase in the number of high school teachers attending and an 8% decrease in primary school teachers. A final piece of good news: 90% of those who completed the feedback sheets also look forward to attending our seminar next September in Rome.



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