ELT Ireland bulletin

No. 4

18th February 2018

IN THIS EDITION

ELT Ireland features (Pages 2-5)

Welcome to our Fourth Bulletin
by Dr. Lou McLaughlin

Keeping you up to Date by Ben Dobbs

ELTChinwag by Jane Seely

Letter from the Editor by Laura O'Grady

IATEFL Report by Tom Le Seelleur

Email us to write for the next ELT Ireland Bulletin!

info.eltireland@gmail.com   @ELTIreland

elt-ireland.com

The Benefits of Using Extended Tasks

by Ian Brangan (Academic Manager Grafton College & Director ActualiseELT**)**

Most of us are familiar with the feeling when the learners seem not to be pulling their weight in class. You thought you were well prepared and the material itself is strong but it is not igniting their interest. At times this can be due to what Scott Thornbury refers to as teaching 'Grammar McNuggets' (over-focus on grammar structure and controlled practice) but, just as commonly, you are taking all the responsibility for the learning process and the students themselves have no autonomy.

If we step back and reflect for a minute it would seem obvious that content generated by the whole class will be more interesting to them than content generated by little old you. They have more of a stake in content they have generated.

Teaching's Magic Dust

Most of us are also familiar with that feeling when a topic really ignites the interest of the class. It's teaching's 'magic dust'. Your magic wand, in this case, is using extended tasks and projects.

Stop! I can hear you say. My classes are in an open enrolment system where I may only have students for a week or two. My classes are short and we don't have the resources for extended tasks. Well, let me assure you, it is not the panacea for all teaching related challenges but it will drastically increase student responsibility for learning and hence their motivation.

My Context

I work in an open enrolment system where learners typically take 20 hours of classes per week, 10 of those with me. For this example, I am going to take my B2 level class. Each week we undertake an extended task/project together. We dedicate a good proportion of those 10 hours to the task (which is built into the curriculum) and they have plenty to do at home too. The proof that it works, for me, is that I rarely have learners who do not take up the challenge. The objective of the project work is to produce extended speaking/writing from students which can then be used by teachers for assessment purposes.

"How can we compile/curate and comment on a developing news story using social media?"

The Task Stimulus

It's important to start with a good stimulus and a driving question. In this case, the big question given to the class was 'How can we compile/curate and comment on a developing news story using social media?' Initially, I introduced the concept of using the Storify website to curate a story by getting the learners to watch a simple 'How to' YouTube video to aggregate a story using social media. This type of video works well in class because it is the type of viewing the learners do themselves at home. Once learners had the idea I asked them to go online and start to choose media news stories which they strongly identified with or found interesting. We spent some time looking at the BBC Learning English website as the news section has excellent learner friendly content on current news stories. We discussed the news stories including the language of titles, headlines, taglines etc. Using a template they analysed the language used in their stories;

Was it personal?
Was it immediate?
Was its storyline objective and well researched
Was it populist and less serious?

The Students' Role

It was now over to the students to start researching stories that interested them online. Having previously looked at example stories together I managed to get learners to choose relatively short, interesting content that they were able to understand themselves. To use storify the content must be in the public domain as on the storify website you can only find publicly shared material. The content can come from search engines like Google, could be a series of tweets or a publically shared Facebook post or a GIF (Graphic Interchange Format), a YouTube Video or a picture from Flickr or Instagram or an image from Getty images or other source which you can add. Storify has a browse feature and I found showing learners real examples of compiled stories was the quickest way to get their creative juices flowing. For homework, learners continue to select social media content on the stories they have chosen and post comments on the articles.

In class we review and edit the previous night's writing using the editing features in Storify. Learners then introduce their material to each other in two groups using the interactive whiteboard (IWB) or if you don't have one in class , by showing each other on their phones or tablets. Learners are encouraged (using simple templates) to listen and ask questions about the material and their comments.

The Teacher's Role

We stop regularly to review how they are using the language and give linguistic feedback. I like to call this 'the language upgrade' which is a clear improvement on their previous attempt.

One of the key aspects of this collaborative approach is the learners have more choice. They decide how they are going to work and what content to work with. In this case they formed two groups and compiled two developing news stories.

Using 21st Century Skills

In this project one of the aims is that the students are learning about using search engines well and distinguishing between serious, well researched content and less serious 'gossipy' new stories. In this example, I particularly like that the students are presenting their work online as they often present orally to their peers. Here they must have the courage to publish their 'edited' work at the end of the week. Storify makes it easy to broadcast to the sources you have used in your story or to other interested parties because you can notify them about the publication of your story. I encouraged students to comment on other students' work.

Reflection

Perhaps the most beneficial part of using extended tasks is the opportunity for reflection. For instance, as a class we discussed the challenges they had faced finding suitable sources. We also discussed what they 'liked' about the task and what we could improve for next time. Inevitably there were some problems getting used to Storify but most of the students found it a valuable tool for learning English.

"Having previously looked at example stories together I managed to get learners to choose relatively short, interesting content that they were able to understand themselves."

Learning highlights: Putting on a mask in the classroom

Pic by google image search labelled for reuse

Using Storify

Storify.com is an interesting and versatile website as long as you remember that the point is to bring together publicly shared information from the internet. It's a new form of storytelling suited to learners who are digitally literate. It involves lots of brainstorming, discussion, editing, and presentation. It allows for diversity and sharing in the classroom. The last time I attempted this task with my students they compiled stories about animal rights issues, the challenges of single parenting and the US elections, among others. [NB: This service is now closed to new users]

Effective Teaching

As a final thought I have found that encouraging students to generate the materials to be worked on in class has meant that they have put in a lot more preparation for the class and thus have a greater stake in its outcome.

Personally, I learn a lot more from my students about their areas of interest than I used to and, of course, they learn a lot more from each other too.

Further Reading:
www.bbclearningenglish.co.uk
www.storify.com
How the use Storify by Leah Miller on Youtube.

ELT
Ireland
bulletin