

Practise what you preach

Marjorie Rosenberg
demonstrates the teaching
of content through process.

A question which comes up repeatedly in teacher training is how to convey content dealing with methodology to students by means of using the latest methodological trends to teach it. This is one of the questions that my colleagues and I have been concerned with at the Pädagogische Akademie – Hasnerplatz (a teacher training college) in Graz, Austria. The idea was to make students familiar with the latest pedagogical trends by teaching them these topics through activities designed to brush up their own English, a form of 'English as the medium of instruction'.

Starter questions

The students were in the first year at the college and enrolled in different programmes, including certification for primary schools as well as English or maths for middle school teacher certification. These different levels, interests and professional needs provided us with a challenge. Questions which arose in planning the course included:

- How can we find topics of interest for all groups?
- Which topics should we focus on?
- How can we encourage students to speak?
- How can we encourage them to research topics outside the classroom?

- What pedagogical methods can we use to convey the information we would like them to acquire?

Mind-maps

My groups began by making mind-maps about themselves. They wrote their names in the middle and then key words and phrases around the centre point. Then they exchanged mind-maps with a partner and interviewed each other. When the interviews were finished, we discussed the uses of mind-mapping, both in the classroom and as a self-study tool. The point was to show them how they could easily create visual aids for themselves or their future students and how they could interest others and encourage them to ask questions by just giving them some key words and phrases.

Adjective attribution

We then moved on to adjectives describing people. In order to make this lesson fun, we used one of Jim Wingate's psychological games. In this activity, the students have to attribute adjectives to different animals and decide which of these animals are their favourites. They then find out that the animals they have chosen reflect their own views of themselves, how others see them and how they really want to be. The students found the activity to be fun and helpful for learning a lot of new and useful vocabulary.

Multisensory approaches

Every group consists of students with different learning styles, so we included visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities. In our experience multisensory teaching is the best way to reach all the learners in our classrooms. With this in mind, we began a lesson by putting strips of paper on the wall, which described characteristics of teachers (eg patient, good at explaining things). The students had to walk around, read them and then try to remember them in pairs. This used all the senses as they were moving (kinaesthetic), speaking (auditory) and trying to recall what they had seen (visual). They were then given a sheet with all the statements and had to rank

them in order of importance. This brought in the emotional element and in the discussions which followed, the students practised language for expressing opinions. As the topic was both personal and emotional, the students responded by speaking freely and making use of the language they had learned.

Students began to become aware of their various approaches to learning

This lesson also included a listening comprehension and a general brainstorming session on what they thought teachers should and shouldn't do. This raised many issues from their own schooldays and they began to see that what one of them might have liked in a teacher was exactly what another student found to be problematic. They began to become aware of their own differences and their various approaches to learning.

In addition to a standard listening comprehension, we added a running dictation, again a multi-sensory activity, which fosters cooperation between pairs. The two texts used for this were descriptions of an English teacher and a science teacher. The two teachers had very different approaches to teaching, and the students were asked to identify the characteristics which defined them and to decide which of the two they themselves would have preferred and why.

Reinforcing learning

The students were then given the chance to work with the adjectives they had just learned in order to reinforce their learning. First they were given cards with the words on them and had to divide them into groups: words they knew, words they thought they knew, and words that were new to them. After going through the vocabulary, the students were put into pairs and given buttons and a sheet of paper with the words on them in

a grid pattern. In pairs, they took turns to call out an adjective and cover it with a button. They were not able to see the adjectives that their partner had already covered, but had to remember them and choose different ones. Some structured learners were able to discern patterns used by their partners and were able to call out words without repeating any that their partner had said. Other, more random thinkers, repeated words quite early on and had to start again.

Emotion

After using kinaesthetic, auditory and visual ways to learn words, we assigned the words to people the students knew in order to bring in the emotional element. A large dice was used as a speaking prompt. It was rolled to different people in the class and, depending on the number rolled, the student had to answer with the corresponding number of adjectives. With odd numbers, they had to name negative aspects of other people and with even numbers, positive ones. To make the game more difficult, they were not allowed to repeat adjectives other students had used, so they had to listen to each other in order to be aware of what had already been said. They found it challenging but fun, and immediately came up with other ideas for using the activity.

Visual memory

In order to encourage visual memory, the students were shown an overhead transparency with information about the role of a teacher. They had to look at it for a short time and then write down as much as they could remember. This developed into a discussion about the purpose of education. The students were given a list to put into order and then compare with a partner. They soon discovered that although they were studying the same subjects at the same institution, they actually had very different ideas about the purpose of education; many of them found this to be an eye opener.

They were also given two metaphors to read and discuss. This encouraged them to begin to build up their own vocabulary, as well as to make them aware of metaphorical writing and its use in the classroom.

Song

The next lesson began with a song used as listening comprehension. A skeleton text was written on the board and the students listened to a CD. They then filled in the missing words to reconstruct the entire song. They examined the differences between different types of listening comprehension and how they can be enhanced through the addition of melody and rhythm. This was an activity that was later rated by all groups as both fun and useful.

Analysis in action

At this point we decided that the students were ready to go on to more methodological topics and we planned a lesson on multi-sensory teaching. The students had been getting a great deal of the course content through their five senses, so we now felt it was time to bring the process to the fore and explain to them how we had been teaching them and the advantages of using the different senses in the classroom.

We introduced an action story and acted it out with the class. The students tried it out several times, first only doing the actions and listening to the teacher, then just listening and visualising their movements, and finally

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reconstructing the text and the movements and doing it themselves. The next step was to work in groups to create their own action story. They quickly saw that they needed actions which were clear and could easily be done by the entire class. When they finished their stories, they taught them to the others. Afterwards, the entire process was analysed and the students were told to think about *when* learning takes place. They had to define the elements that made the lesson

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interesting for them and to find out what they could do to help their future pupils learn more easily and with enthusiasm.

The learning environment

That lesson led naturally into the creation of posters dealing with the proper environment for learning. The students were given paper and markers and told to create a poster for themselves. They then compared their posters to a page dealing with this topic in the book *Joyful Fluency* by Lynn Dhority and Eric Jensen. The different types of posters produced and the discussions which followed emphasised again the variety of learning styles within the class.

The idea of environmental preferences was then introduced and students had the chance to fill out a survey taken from April Bowie's *Style Quest*. They again discovered that there was no one right way to do something but that everyone did things in the way that felt most comfortable.

Self-esteem

The end of the semester brought us to the topic of self-esteem. Throughout the preceding weeks, the students had been encouraged to speak English, and mistakes were not corrected in front of other students. They were told that they were learning, and there was a positive atmosphere in the classroom. As a native speaker of English, I also made a point of only speaking English with them in all situations outside of the classroom in order to make English the natural language of communication. By encouraging students who had been afraid to speak, we were able to begin building up their self-esteem. We began this lesson with a questionnaire in which they had to talk about things they were good at. We then had a

general discussion about their talents and found things that they could teach each other (juggling, dancing, etc).

To bring in a kinaesthetic element, we then taped cards to students' backs and they wrote positive adjectives about each other on the cards. They greatly enjoyed this activity and for me one of the most surprising elements was that one group insisted that I take part as well, demonstrating that students like the idea of giving instructors feedback when they can.

As we also encourage proficiency in the four skills, the students were put into groups and given texts to read from *Manage Your Mind* by Gillian Butler and Tony Hope. After reading the texts, they were instructed to make mind-maps on the board and explain their texts to the other groups. It was satisfying for me to see how they had learned to group ideas together, pull the gist out of a complicated text, find the key points and then explain the text to the rest of the group.

Presentations

The end of the semester also dealt with preparing the students to give presentations in front of the group. As this is a difficult point to teach, we showed them several cartoons on the OHP demonstrating things we shouldn't do. The groups then brainstormed the dos and don'ts of presenting and discussed their own experiences of being on the receiving end of good and bad presentations throughout their scholastic careers.



When looking through the evaluations done by the students during the semester, it became clear that certain activities appealed more to some groups than to others. This makes perfect sense as those studying to be teachers in middle schools major in two main subjects and will be teaching children of 10–15, whereas those who are studying to be primary school teachers study all subjects and will be teaching children from 6–10.

There were also differences in the group studying English and those studying maths. The English group found certain exercises to be helpful for their own vocabulary and for their other

studies, while the maths group didn't need English as such. However, they were very enthusiastic about the topics and the majority of them found the lessons to be fun and useful as well. Interestingly, some of the activities that the maths group claimed they didn't enjoy in high school (running dictation, for example) were activities which were done with great enthusiasm, proving once again that negatively-anchored activities can be turned into positive experiences. Most of the groups gave the games and songs the best grades. As they began to realise that being directly involved in their own learning process made content easier to learn, they were able to discover for themselves the importance of teaching content through process. **ETp**

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