Contents
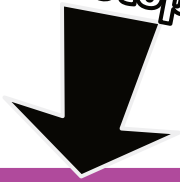
SMART Communication
ELT Textbooks

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2. SMART CHECK!

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4. DWAYNE'S WORLD

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7. LET'S MASTER!

From the Editor

Welcome to another exciting issue of the newsletter! We have some very practical and relevant ideas for language learning classrooms for you to read, wherever you may be teaching. And with the summer break approaching, I hope that you all have some nice plans to take another well-deserved break from teaching.

If you are new to *The Grapevine*, please also feel free to follow it on YouTube, LinkedIn and Facebook to be a closer part of what we are doing together.

And good luck with finishing up your classes this semester/term everyone. Please remember how important your hard work and creative ideas are for your students!

Robert Stroud (TUG Editor)

Feel free to e-mail me. You can also find me on LinkedIn, ResearchGate and Academia.

Feature Article:
Teaching Project Management through Creating SDGs Lesson Plans

Marc Jones,
Toyo University

Teaching Goal

At my university, my students are very good at speaking English but not always as strong as they could be with control of grammatical accuracy or selecting appropriate vocabulary. Additionally, because my students are in their first year, many of them struggle with managing a demanding university-level workload. This being the case, I wondered how to tackle these two problems.

My university department (the Department of Global Innovation Studies), is focused on linking curricula to the SDGs. I therefore thought it would be useful for the students to create Open Educational Resources in the form of downloadable lesson plans as a way to put into practice some principles of productivity and project management that I would provide in short CLIL lectures. This also gets the students to consolidate their applied knowledge of the SDGs from other classes and provide this in an easily understood way to high school learners or other university-level learners with lower English proficiency. Furthermore, the English use would be authentic, and allow for a broader outlook than students may typically consider in their learning, because the resources would be provided on the internet for anybody in the world to download, use and make adjustments to.

Approach

Over the initial two iterations of this course, students produced several lesson plans about the SDGs (available HERE). The courses were run over a single quarter (eight weeks, meeting twice a week except for the final week, which was only once). Students formed groups according to the SDGs that they were interested in working on. Interests were indicated by students placing a virtual sticky note next to their top three choices of SDG on a Google Jamboard. This tool was used because the university uses Google Workspace and this tool is free and easily linked to Google Classroom.

After groups were decided, by teacher and student negotiation depending upon preliminary group sizes, students managed their own projects through small scrum meetings, modelled by the teacher. Other principles of project management and productivity taught over the 15 lessons include Getting things done by David Allen, The 7 habits of highly effective people by Stephen Covey, Flow by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, Deep Work by Cal Newport, and Grit by Angela Duckworth, as well as Bullet Journalling. Students took notes and were assessed by means of quizzes every three or four lessons, with multiple choice questions and short answer questions on the productivity methods taught, and short reflections on how well or badly the productivity methods and project management were working for them.

I did not grade the SDGs projects, and this was made clear from the beginning; the project was purely a vehicle for students to put into practice the project management skills and productivity techniques they had been taught. By using quizzes and reflections as assessments, more care could be taken over use of the project management skills and productivity techniques. I taught the students notetaking techniques related to lectures in the previous semester, so this course allowed further consolidation of notetaking, too.

In the first iteration of the course, the students were essentially inventing the task outcome based upon what they had seen in the materials provided to them in courses by me, as their teacher for six lessons a week, or their previous teachers. Therefore, some of the work is structured like the activities in ordinary textbooks. This is not necessarily an advantage nor a disadvantage: both teachers and learners are usually familiar with textbooks, so navigating the materials is not difficult, although there is

also scope to be somewhat more adventurous in the possibilities of the activities to offer in the materials.

Instead of students writing up long texts or producing their own video texts, which could be incredibly time consuming and frustrating for them if the quality of the outcome were not as they imagined, I advised them to choose links to texts that were available on the internet, or to use texts which were available to be used as derivative products or under fair-use.

A particular example of this would be the project on fast fashion by Rabia, Hina and Keina. The students used YouTube clips well and have incorporated gap fills which could also be exploited as very short reading activities leading to speaking activities about various aspects of fast fashion. Because of the large number of discussion questions, this provides teachers with the scope of setting up several different discussions running concurrently, or a larger discussion changing topics over time. Additionally, because the students chose the questions, and they are near peers of the type of learners the materials are aimed toward, the discussions are more likely to be interesting and fruitful in classrooms where the materials are used.

Pros and Cons

I was delighted with the project work that the students produced, which showed that they had decided to take utmost pride in their work despite it not being assessed directly for academic credit. Additionally, students appreciated that there were ways to improve their workload management, and there were frequent discussions about the pros and cons of Bullet Journals as opposed to simpler to-do lists or more detailed Gantt charts. These classroom and corridor discussions in themselves allowed me a certain degree of formative assessment and helped me to decided how to, or whether to tweak the course lesson-by-lesson.

One disadvantage was my oversight in the curriculum design: nearly all of the initial theories and techniques used in the first iteration of the curriculum were created by men.

After reading a blog post by Katherine Firth, I decided to add examples from Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Gilbert (2006, 2015) and Melissa Gregg (2018). Further steps that I intend to take are to investigate the work on productivity and project management by people of colour and also by people working in the global south. This should hopefully ensure that the course is relevant and provides a wide range of views on the topics of productivity and project management.

In short, I was very pleased with how students over the first two iterations of the course took on the challenge of improving their own workload management more effectively and how they engaged with course content. It was not a perfect course in either iteration, but the feedback I received from students was positive and many students are still putting the skills and techniques from this course into practice in other courses taught by myself and other colleagues.

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How to Publish a Teaching Article

Please follow the guidelines to submit an article to the newsletter:

Content:

Ideas that help ESL/EFL university teachers around the world improve their craft are warmly welcome. Some topic suggestions are: online teaching, student motivation, classroom management and teaching material design.

Language of Submission:

All articles will need to be submitted in English.

Length of Submission:

Ideally, articles should be longer than 500 words and no more than 1500 words.

Editing:

Please check your spelling/grammar carefully as it cannot be corrected for you (and the article may not be published).

Citations:

Citations/research data are not necessary. If you do want to include some, please keep them to a minimum.

How to Submit:

Submit your article by completing the boxes in the template and sending this file directly to robertstroud@hosei.ac.jp.