

● Establish a relaxed, non-judgemental atmosphere, where students feel confident enough to let go and not to worry that their every move is being scrutinised for errors. This means attending to what they are trying to express rather than concentrating on the imperfect way they may express it.

● Frame activities by creating constraints. Paradoxically, the constraints also act as supportive scaffolding for students. In this way

● both the scope of the content and the language required are both restricted. By limiting what they are asked to write, for example, students are relieved of the pressure to write about everything.

● Ensure that the students' work is 'published' in some way. This could be by simply keeping a large notice board for displaying students' work. Other ways would include giving students a project for publishing work in a simple ring binder, or as part of a class magazine. Almost certainly, there will be students able and willing to set up a class website where work can be published. Performances, where students read or perform their work for other classes or even the whole school, are another way of making public what they have done. The effects on students' confidence of making public what they have written is of inestimable value.

● Encourage students to discuss their work together in a frank but friendly manner. We get good ideas by bouncing them off other people (Johnson, 2010). Help them establish an atmosphere where criticism is possible without causing offence. This implies creating a 'storied class' (Wajnryb, 2003) - a co-operative learning community.

● Explain regularly how important accurate observation is, and encourage 'noticing' things. Encourage them to collect data which may be used later: pictures, games, DVDs, videos, websites, books and magazines... Students also need to be encouraged to be curious and to follow up with 'research' - looking for more information, whether in books, on the internet or by asking other people.

● Do not try to do too much. Take it easy. And be kind to yourself (Casanave and Sosa, 2007). Try introducing small changes over a period of time. And allow time for activities and for talking about them. Johnson (2010) among many others talks about the need for the slow burn of hunches and ideas.

● Make it clear that what they do in the classroom is only the tip of the iceberg. To get real benefit from these activities, they need to do a lot of work outside class hours. Most of what we learn, we do not learn in class.

● Do the activities regularly in order to get the best effects. Maybe once a week is a sensible frequency. If you leave too long between sessions, you have to keep going back to square one. That is a waste of time and energy.

● Be a role model. This means working with the students, not simply telling them to do things. This is especially true for reading and writing activities. If they see you are reading, or writing, they will be more likely to engage in these activities themselves.

● Never underestimate your students. Their capacity for creativity will astound you, if you can help them unlock it.

● Make sure you offer a varied diet - of inputs, of processes and of products (Maley, 1999). This diversity helps to promote an atmosphere of 'expectancy' (I wonder what will happen today?), rather than the feeling of 'expectation' (Here we go again. Unit 4...).

This issue is only for English Teachers to get more ideas on how to teach English

so often you find
that the students
you're trying to
inspire
are the ones that
end up inspiring you

"we are not
"just"
teachers
we ARE the
managers of the
world's greatest
resource:
children"

The Best Teachers Teach From The Heart Not From Book

● As a teacher, apply the four golden principles: acknowledge, listen, challenge, support. Acknowledge the individuality of students who make up the class group by showing that you value what they bring to the group. Learn to listen carefully and without pre-judgements to what they say or try to say. Make sure that you provide the right level of challenge in what you ask them to do. And offer support to them while they struggle to meet that challenge. It sounds easy but of course, it is not.



● My intention here is not to provide a set of over-ready activities but rather to suggest some principles which can be used to develop various forms of creativity.

Use heuristics at all levels

By 'all levels' I mean that many of these heuristics (and others not mentioned here for reasons of space) can be used for teacher decisions, for developing materials, for varying classroom routines, and for devising student activities. It will be for the teacher to decide exactly how a given heuristic is applied.

A heuristic is a kind of 'rule of thumb'. Rather than applying a formula with a pre-determined outcome (an algorithm), heuristics work by trying things to see how they work out. The 'suck it and see' principle. Here are some examples of heuristics to try:

● Do the opposite. This has been extensively described by John Fanselow (1987, 2010). Essentially, it involves observing the routines and activities we consciously or unconsciously follow, doing the opposite and then observing what happens. Examples would be: if you always stand up to teach, sit down; if you teach from the front of the class, teach from the back; if you usually talk a lot, try silence.

● Reverse the order. Here you would do things backwards. For example: in dictation, instead of giving out the text at the end, you would give it out at the beginning, allow students to read it then take it away, then give the dictation; if you normally read texts from beginning to end, try reading them starting at the end; if you normally set homework after a lesson, try setting it before; if you usually give a grammar rule, asking them to find examples, try giving examples and asking them to derive the rule.

● Expand (or reduce) something. For example, increase (or decrease) the length of a text in various ways; increase (or decrease) the time allotted to a task; increase the number of questions on a text; increase (or decrease) the number of times you do a particular activity. (Maley's books, Short and Sweet [1994, 1996] suggest 12 different generic procedures, including this one, to develop more interesting activities/materials.)

Use the constraints principle

The idea here is to impose tight constraints on whatever activity is involved. For example:

● Limit the number of words students have to write - as in mini-sagas, where a story has to be told in just 50 words.

● Limit the amount of time allowed to complete a task - as when students are given exactly one minute to give instructions.

● Limit the amount of materials - as in a construction task where each group is given just four file cards, ten paperclips and two elastic bands with which to build a structure and write instructions on how to construct it.

Inspirational learning environment

Take a trip to our school and you'll find classroom environments that inspire adults and children alike. Not only is the children's work displayed creatively, but there is a range of learning prompts to inspire and support all pupils. We want to encourage our children to discover new texts, genres and authors, so our reading areas are inviting, well resourced and highly organised. Pupils can choose from an exciting array of reading material: newspapers, classic texts, reference books as well as the children's own published stories are just some examples of what book corners might offer.

Drama to engage and inspire

The use of drama is such a powerful tool. Taking the lead from our drama specialist, all teaching staff use a range of techniques to promote the exploration of characters, situations and historical events. This process expands the pupils' imaginations, and provides them with the ideas they need to give their writing that extra spark and flair.

Rigorous teaching of spelling and phonics

In the infants, phonics is streamed, so all children can benefit from tailored teaching, making maximum progress as a result. All phonics and spelling activities are fun, multi sensory and as physical possible, the aim being to meet all learning styles in the class. In the juniors, we try to make homework lists as personalised to the child as possible to ensure that the spelling patterns stick in a meaningful way.

Grammar concepts taught creatively

Grammar cannot be taught as a stand alone activity. What's the point of that? Children begin to understand grammar concepts, and start to apply them in their own writing, when they start to read with a writer's mind. Punctuation rules and techniques are drawn from shared texts; texts which the children have already been immersed in and have a good understanding of. Exploring these, and embedding them creatively is how the learning takes place.

Peer and self assessment

What child doesn't love marking somebody else's work? With a clear marking key, success criteria and purpose in mind, children set about assessing either their own, or a partner's piece of writing. Modelled through the teacher's own formative marking, pupils know what the expectations are. They are well trained in searching for successful examples of the learning intention, articulating their responses to the work, checking the writing matches any targets and giving constructive feedback. Seeing the children learn from each other in this way is hugely positive; you know you've done your job well. Anna Warren is the English subject leader and the year 6 teacher at Holy Trinity and St Silas School, London.

Use the random principle

This is essentially using biosociation - putting two or more things together that do not belong together and finding connections. For example:

● Students work in pairs - all the As write ten adjectives each on slips of paper, all the Bs write ten nouns. The slips are put in two boxes. Students take turns to draw a slip from each box, making an unusual combination, e.g. a broken birthday. When they have ten new phrases they combine them into a text.

● Students are given pictures of five people taken at random from magazines. They then have to write a story involving all five characters.

Use the association principle

This involves using evocative stimuli for students to react to. For example:

● Students listen to a sequence of sounds, then describe their feelings or tell a story suggested by the sounds.

● Students are given a set of character descriptions and a set of fragments of dialogue - they match the characters with what they might have said.

● Students are all given a natural object (a stone, a leaf, etc.). They then write a text as if they were their object.

● Drawing on their own experience, students choose a taste, a smell, or a sound which brings back particular memories.

Use the withholding-information principle

This involves only offering part of the information needed to complete a task. Jigsaw listening/reading are examples of this. Other examples would be:

● A text is cut up into short fragments. Each student has one fragment. They have to reconstitute the text without showing their fragments to others. (The same can be done with a picture.)

● A picture is flashed on the screen for just a second. Students must try to recall it.

Use the divergent thinking principle

The core idea here is to find as many different uses as possible for a particular thing or ways of carrying out a task. For example:

● Teachers find alternative ways to do some of their routine tasks: set homework (Painter, 2003), take the register, give instructions, arrange the seating, do dictations (Davis and Rinvolucri, 1988), etc.

● Students find as many uses for a common object (e.g. a comb) as possible.

● Students have to find as many different ways of spending a given sum of money as possible.

ANSWER KEY TO THE LAST EIS PAGE ACTIVITIES (DATED DECEMBER 12, 2016)

Answers: Capital Letters: Exercise (1) 1. Correct 2. "The Death of the Hired Man" 3. English 4. Labour Day 5. Dad 6. What's 7. Wednesday 8. Vancouver Island University 9. Correct 10. Simon Fraser University Exercise 2 1. Canada 2. Vancouver Island University, UBC 3. Dad 4. Rocky Mountains 5. Aunt Angela 6. World War 7. Correct 8. Psychology, History 9. Pearson College 10. Correct

Answers: Commas 1. Although I liked what you wrote about caring for your pet rat, I have a suggestion you might want to consider. 2. Ever since you asked my opinion about the soccer field battle, I've been mulling the situation over, trying to determine a logical consequence. 3. I don't usually give unsolicited advice, but this seems to me to be a special case. 4. I wouldn't ordinarily presume to tell you how to behave, but I'm concerned. 5. Check for accuracy, spelling, and punctuation before sending your e-mail. 6. It was Coach Tom who came up with the idea of recruiting players from other schools. 7. When returning items that don't fit, please remember to return them within 20 days of your purchase. 8. My teacher, who was talking to all of us, said, "If everyone passes this test, we'll all get a free period." 9. "I didn't see the falling star," Jane said, "but I sure wish I had." 10. Melissa bought a new graduation dress, and she wore it to the graduation ceremony.

Answers: Quotation Marks: 1. He read an article called "Finding Answers on the Internet" to the group, and then he turned to the class and said, "Do you believe that?" 2. "You must listen to her!" the lawyer shouted. "She wrote an article called 'Legal Practice in B.C.' about courts. She knows her stuff." 3. "Did you really believe that another day of waiting would make it easier to give that speech?" asked her friend. "It is still called 'The Hazards of Not Preparing for Public Speaking', and it is still the most popular speech in the text called Speeches for Notoriety."

Answers: Semicolons: 1. Eating healthy helps you lose weight; staying fit keeps you healthy. 2. I'll need to do the following today: take out the trash; pay my hydro bill; water my plants; and shop for groceries. 3. My dog hates dog food; he loves eating my dinner.

Answers: Colons: 1) B 2) A 1. a 2. b 3. b

Answers: Apostrophes: 1. We've been working on David's car for days. We have been working for more than one day on the car David owns. 2. Today's leftovers will go to Iris' dogs. The leftovers that belong to today will go to the dogs that belong to Iris. 3. Most dogs' breath is smelly. The breath that belongs to most dogs is smelly. 4. They're ready to clean Phyllis' mom's bedrooms. They are ready to clean more than one of the bedrooms that belong to the mom of Phyllis. 5. Here's a long list of students' complaints about Monday's meeting. Here is a long list of the complaints that came from (or belong to) the students about the meeting that was on Monday (belonging to Monday).

Answers: Semicolons: 1. Eating healthy helps you lose weight; staying fit keeps you healthy. 2. I'll need to do the following today: take out the trash; pay my hydro bill; water my plants; and shop for groceries.

10 creative ways to teach English that deliver outstanding results

Immersion activities

How can children access stories, poems and other texts if their minds and imaginations are not fully engaged? We have found that immersing children in a range of creative activities before reading the text means that they are fully prepared, and excited, about the reading journey ahead of them. Through painting, music composition, a film project, in role drama or sculpture, the kids have had a chance to share vocabulary, ideas and concepts which gives their reading fresh meaning and purpose.

Clear purpose

What's the point of reading and writing anything if you don't know why you're doing it? We aim to provide children with a clear purpose to all reading, and especially writing tasks. Whether it's an invitation to the headteacher to attend a class assembly, an email to an author or an article for a school newspaper, our children know why the quality of their writing matters: because there will be a real audience for their published work.

Professional publishing

One effective way of valuing children's work as well as providing a real incentive, is to plan for a range of ways to publish their writing. Recent examples include a whole school bookmaking project. Following a whole school inset on bookbinding techniques, every class published their own shared book; one example being an anthology of short spooky stories composed by year 6. Their stories were mounted on handmade paper, accompanied with each child's art work (lino cut style prints on metallic paper) with a dramatic paper cut out front cover. The effort the children put into their work was immense, and the results were stunning as a result. The anthology has been enjoyed by parents and other pupils and the children's pride in their work is clear to see.



Meaningful planning

Where possible, learning in English is linked with subjects within the creative curriculum we follow: the international primary curriculum (IPC). Well in advance of teaching, teachers collaborate and share their ideas for planning through a mind mapping process. Meaningful, creative activities are planned for, ensuring that all staff members know exactly what the children will be learning and why.

Focused on strategies

The teaching of reading is not easy. As children's fluency in reading increases, it's hard to know what reading skills need to be taught, and when. We ensure that specific reading strategies are modelled explicitly to the class; this provides children with a holistic bank of skills to draw upon. This could include scanning a text, making an inference, predicting or creating a mental image. Our teachers use 'think aloud' statements to model to the children how these skills are used, and how they can help them become better readers. These strategies are then shared as a class, and then assessed in follow up guided reading activities.