TESOL italy

NewsLetter

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LANGUAGE FLOWS

by Marina Morbiducci

If time flies, language flows. Whereas the notion of flying evokes a kind of vertical ascent, and somehow a diversion from the concrete reality of the world, the idea of flowing not only represents a sort of horizontal crossing and therefore a full contact with life, but it also implies a sense of time and of stance in the world. A river does flow, carrying a sense of fusion between the two elements: the element of earth mixing with and embracing the element of water, so that the two principles of life and substance, of mutability and permanence, do meet, just like clay is moulded into a bodily shape. If we agree with Zygmunt Bauman's[1] idea of the liquid essence of our present existential condition, the sense of flux and fluidity conveyed by the verb "flow" cannot but be felt deeply ingrained in our present texture. "Panta rei", then, everything flows, but particularly language flows nowadays.

It is in this light that we can interpret the title of TESOL-Italy's 2010 convention, to be held in Rome on Nov. 19-20, "LANGUAGE FLOWS": the fluidity of language running through our lives can bring vital lymph to our minds, and convey a positive feeling of constant change which might eventually rejuvenate our energies worn out by consumption and by lack of perspective for the future. The daily routine in the life of a teacher, the adverse conditions in which s/he is forced to act nowadays, must be counterbalanced by a tangible project of advancement. It is, therefore, with the wish of infusing a spirit of freshness and energy, dynamism and changeability, movement and innovation, that we would like to welcome once more the teachers of English who will want to renew their trust in TESOL-Italy and share with us the annual occasion for teacher development. Under the umbrella title of "Lan-

(continued on p.8)

Food for thought

From TESOL publications

CLIL in the Italian school: old and new problems

by Franca Ricci Stephenson

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) has been studied and experimented for more than two decades now. The CLIL approach sees language as an integral part of the educational process. It is considered an effective tool to motivate students, and to prepare Europe's future generations for multilingualism and multiculturalism by using different European languages as the medium of communication to learn different non-linguistic subjects at school.

Great progress has been made in developing teaching strategies to effectively integrate language and content instruction, and teachers throughout Europe have been sharing best practices at school. Problems seem to have developed mainly in countries where English is not a second language. It is quite obvious that in English-speaking countries the CLIL approach can be adopted without the basic difficulties existing in countries where English is a foreign language. However, in such countries, as in the USA and Canada, there is growing interest in bilingual education which suggests the same integrated approach as CLIL does. TESOL in the USA has a bilingual education interest section, *Bilingual Basics,* which offers a newsletter with a wide variety of articles: http://www.tesol.orgs_tesol/seccss.asp? CID=303&DID=1808, (pages available only to members).

The core problem of integrating language and content, i.e. defining clearly linguistic and non linguistic objectives so as to be able to assess them adequately, was addressed as far back as 1993 in a very interesting article by Deborah J. Short in TESOL Quarterly1. Ms. Short considered the issue of assessment as being unresolved. She wrote that neither traditional language tests nor content achievement tests are adequate, and that the difficulty with assessment centers on isolating the language features from the content objectives, so that one does not negatively influence the other. To put the problem in the right perspective she recommended using alternative assessment, such as interviews and portfolio.

We know that we can assess only what we teach, therefore setting the right objectives in CLIL, as in bilingual *"Fatto salvo quanto stabilito specificamente per il percorso del liceo linguistico, nel quinto anno è previsto l'insegnamento, in lingua straniera, di una disciplina non linguistica (CLIL) compresa nell'area delle attività e degli insegnamenti obbligatori per tutti gli*

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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 instructuion, 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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From the Editor

Good news from the groups.

L' Aquila and its (former) inhabitants have been in the media limelight for almost a year now. Many of the problems caused by the earthquake are far from being solved, but life goes on and much effort is being made by the people in L'Aquila to bring life back to normal. The process of normalization has involved schools, laying a heavy responsibility on the teachers who are dealing with displaced students or, anyway, with students whose lives have to some extent been affected by the earthquake and its aftermath. In this difficult condition a group of more than fifty EFL teachers have responded to TESOL Italy's initiative to start a training course, and have highlighted their needs and those of their students in a focus group. The whole project - called "L'Aquila action" and devised by TESOL Italy with the support of the American Embassy - is articulated in weekly seminars of language improvement and several seminars on different issues related to ELT. In addition to this, Dr. Janet Zadina, Assistant Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience/Educational Neuroscience at Tulane University School of Medicine, New Orleans, LA, has volunteered to give a lecture on "Using Brain Research to Enhance and Energize Language Instruction: The Multiple Pathways Model".
Among the most important problems related to their work, the teachers of L'Aquila mentioned the issue of "continuity", the need of mutual support and the necessity to exchange experiences, as in a wounded town like L'Aquila the opportunity to meet colleagues is even more welcome than in other places.

Meanwhile a new group has been formed in Palermo and is already active. Tesol Italy welcomes the new group and its coordinator, Ninfa Pagano, and looks forward to hearing more good news from other places in Italy.

Buzz-words

Lucilla Lopriore

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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:
Continuity

"There are many occasions when there is a lack of appreciation of what children have achieved at a previous stage, at home or at school. There are also occasions where teachers learn to deal with new situations at the expense of the children they teach. There are situations when teachers are critical of what happened previously, and miss the strengths of the past experience." (Dean 1988)

"When I was at primary school my teacher was interested in my ideas; now, no one knows if you've got any ideas" (A twelve-year old)

In the last few years the term "continuity" has more and more frequently emerged in Italian educational contexts, almost always connected to the notion of 'vertical curriculum', i.e. a curriculum where teachers would take into account the development and progression of their learners in time through the design of specific longitudinal subject syllabi. Why are teachers and schools interested in continuity and in vertical curricula design? There are several reasons to that: the school system has been designed in separate compartments – both in terms of teacher education and of curricula - with hardly no provision of effective communication from one school level to the following, effective documentation of individual learners' progression and achievement is missing, and both teachers and parents are very seldom aware of contents and organisation of each school level. In the case of English, factors such as the extension of the language curriculum from the first year of primary to university, the overall reduction of the total number of contact hours, the learners' poor results after thirteen years of English, all require special attention to the possible 'leaks' in the system and highlight the need of a longitudinal curriculum. Proposals for an earlier start of language learning may not be the solution, as "An early start by itself . . . guarantees nothing; it needs to be accompanied minimally by good teaching, by a supportive environment and by continuity from one year to the next". (Edelenbos et al.2006: 147)

But what is continuity? When we talk about continuity in learning and in teaching, we think of it in terms of continuity of contents, approaches, methodology, attitudes, teaching styles, classroom discourse, assessment and evaluation, as well as in terms of communication among teachers, between teachers and learners, between and across the school levels from home to school and viceversa.

What may impede continuity? Several are the factors that may conjure against continuity: teachers' lack of attention to their learners' needs, to their learning styles, to their previous knowledge and competence, but also teachers', learners' and parents' different assumptions about teaching and learning processes, lack of contacts with colleagues, families and other schools, and, sometimes, teachers' defensive attitudes.

What might favour continuity? Sharing long term objectives, developing common approaches, working on joint school projects, establishing meaningful contacts and partnerships among different school levels, valuing previous experiences and local knowledge, developing and sharing assessment procedures and internal certifications, and using learning portfolios.

Building significant language learning pathways across school levels is a real challenge for teachers the main difficulty lying in the lack of 'whole school' policies. What is still missing is a keen awareness of progression and differentiation as children move from one level to another, a common language for teachers to discuss and analyse their teaching and their learners' achievement and a teacher education experience across levels. For progress in learning to be maintained, for learners to make sense of their learning experience and make it a meaningful one, for teachers to share objectives and build upon results, continuity should be sustained and fostered all through the educational experience.

In this respect, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, with its levels of competence and its descriptors, is a fundamental resource for schools, teachers, families and learners since it includes both horizontal and vertical dimensions, facilitates the definition of partial objectives and the recognition of uneven profiles and of partial competencies.

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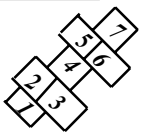

HOPSCOTCH

Resources for primary school teachers

This section is dedicated to primary school teachers. It will address issues that are of interest for teaching English to young learners.

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Interactive White Boards, e-books, learning environments and learning to learn English in Primary School

by Claudia Valentini

"Learning to learn" is an umbrella term for a wide variety of activities designed to develop learning strategies. It is primarily concerned with processes of learning and aims to focus pupils' attention on HOW they learn in addition to WHAT they learn.

This 'new goal' is empowering students to become autonomous learners. This happens most effectively when we integrate students' needs and motivations, also by the use of digital media and interactive tools, when we help students to understand their own learning process, and allow them to take charge of their own learning from the very start.

This understanding is linked to the knowledge of the current learning theories, for example that of Gardner's 'multiple intelligences', Sternberg's 'cognitive styles' and metacognitive approaches gathered from the Italian researcher Cornoldi (1992). It takes into account that different learners have different ways of learning and different preferences regarding activities and learning materials.

The Interactive White Board (IWB) and e-books, windows on the internet, aim to develop pupils' self-awareness and gradually lead them to the conscious development of their own learning strategies, so they can become more effective and independent learners.

The IWB classroom can be seen as one of the learning environments best suited to catering for a learning-to-learn perspective because it can be considered:

1. an authentic learning environment, in which the use of language can be purposeful and natural;
2. an environment able to provide a variety of media that combine reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in an integrated manner;
3. a tool that shifts the control of the learning process to the students who can decide the pace and the learning path to follow in an almost autonomous way.

It's the use of another medium, the use of another tool, the teaching for new generations in which English and Internet are fundamental; digital natives and digital teachers are learning to learn together. All these features can be observed during the ICT Lab sessions, but also in a "normal" classroom equipped with an IWB and other personal media, such as e-books and notebooks. It's a suitable learning environment for an advanced use of cognitive, linguistic and technology skills in an integrated manner: learning to learn.

How do we organize a learning-to-learn environment with an IWB and e-books? We can observe children working in pairs and in small groups, following tasks that come from their practical engagement in the IWB environment and in the interface of the IWB to the online world, speaking meaningfully, producing functionally based linguistic outcomes and writing accordingly. This kind of link can be used to reinforce conceptual development, and to learn to use linguistic sets such as colours, size, and concepts like shape, time and so on in a meaningful way.

The transfer of skills and reinforcement of concepts between different areas of the curriculum, between English language, other subjects and through the seamless use of interactive and online media, helps children to "learn how to learn". This includes thinking strategies, such as comparing, classifying, predicting, problem solving and hypothesising, as well as study skills, such as making and understanding maps and hypertexts.

The IWB and e-book based lessons can complement classroom activities by building an interactive use of English through the managing of English-speaking software within the in-built tools of the IWB. They also provide access to different kinds of texts, children's literature and digital storytelling fostered by the actual e-book readers, not to mention the countless online resources that can be accessed by the whole class or by groups of students within the IWB presentation interface.

These experiences integrate the students' mother tongue and English, and become day by day activities that stimulate various areas of cognitive challenge and build a positive and active classroom climate.

USEFUL SITES

Activboarding http://activboarding.blogspot.com/
BroadLearn http://www.broadlearn.com/
IWB themes can aid learning http://www.articlealley.com/article_1337171_22.html
IWB resources http://www.amphi.com/departments/technology/whiteboard/lessonplans.html
Tech ELT blog http://www.ihes.com/bcn/tt/eltblog/blog/labels/Interactive whiteboards.html
The teacher's corner IWB http://www.teachers-corner.co.uk/interactive-whiteboard/
The whiteboard blog http://www.whiteboardblog.co.uk/

WebWatch

by Beth Ann Boyle

ABOUT SPELLING

Students all over the world are engaged in learning how to spell in English. Even though there are many spelling rules which lead us to correctly write most English words, we all experience some difficulty at times. Sometimes we mispell words that we often use in speaking or we mispronounce words that we have only seen in the written form. The following sites will bring you and your students a step closer to "enjoying" English spelling and pronunciation.
First of all it's impossible to talk about spelling without talking about Spelling Bees, competitions aiming at identifying top spellers. The Scripps National Spelling Bee study site at:
http://myspellit.com/index.html
was created in cooperation with Merriam-Webster and it contains word lists and activities to sharpen spelling skills.

http://www.visualthesaurus.com/bee/
goes to a spelling bee site. You or your students can immediately accept its challenge and participate in a computer-adaptive spelling activity. The activity involves listening to words and then typing them on-line. Immediate feedback is given on whether it has been correctly spelled or not. Synonyms for the words are provided on the right hand side of the page and this makes it especially useful for revising or learning new vocabulary. The first word given is easy and if typed in correctly, it is followed by another word which is more difficult. It is possible to continue even after making many mistakes and hints are provided if that should happen. This site provides a bit of fun and whoever thought spelling could be fun?

Another on-line spelling bee site can be found at:
http://www.timesspellingbee.co.uk/. It provides spelling games which are perhaps more useful than the previous site mentioned. The minibees are classified by age group therefore some are easier and more appropriate for EFL students. There are also different thematic areas; this month's theme is Science, so many words have to do with that theme.
On the BBC's learning site,
http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/ks2bitesize/english/spelling_grammar/spelling/play.shtml,
you can find a little on-line prefix/suffix activity for children.

Youtube is another valuable resource because it offers quite a few videos on spelling bees. Some are serious and some are quite funny. So I suggest you take a look at it and then send your students to the site.
Now if you are interested in how the spelling system actually works, you can find a few rules at:
http://www.englishclub.com/writing/spelling.htm.

Another site that addresses spelling vs. Sound issues is
http://www.ozreadandspell.com.au/home.htm.
This site has a kind of power point presentation about the letters in the alphabet and their sounds. The video explains vowels, consonants and how different consonant clusters are produced. Beginning EFL students shouldn't watch it without a teacher's assistance, but they would find it useful to hear letters and words and see them in print at the same time. The first part of the video is appropraite for beginners while the second part is a bit more complex as it deals with the history of English spelling. It is not necessary to watch the video from beginning to end because you can select portions to watch by clicking on the subtitles of the main sections (sounds, letters, words, spelling and reading clues) at the top of the page.
And if you are looking for a few new ideas for teaching spelling you can check out
www.onestopenglish.com,
the Macmillian site, and enter "spelling" into the search bar to come up with some practical classroom ideas.
Finally it is interesting to know that there is an organisation, the Spelling Society (since 1908), that is trying to change what it considers to be an out-of-date and impractical spelling system. If you look at
http://www.spellingsociety.org/
you will find out about their position and about some of their efforts towards sensitising the public to their position.

An article entitled "the Challenge of Spelling in English" by Eran Williams can be found in the English Teaching forum on-line at:
http://exchanges.state.gov/englishteaching/forum/archives/docs/08-46-3-b.pdf.
It talks about spelling bees and spelling reforms; it also gives suggestions on how and why to teach spelling in the classroom.
After looking at the sites listed above, you will find that "English spelling" is more interesting than you had imagined at first, and hopefully, you might find yourself sharing this information with your students.

Save the Date

by Letizia Corbucci

March

9th Lend. **La valutazione degli apprendimenti.** Firenze.Website www.lend.it

12th – 14th ***TESOL Spain.*** *Building Bridges: New Competences in the EFL Classroom.* ***Location: Universitat de Lleida, Campus de Cappont, Edifici Polivalent. E-mail convention2010@tesol-spain.org. Web site http://www.tesol-spain.org/convention2010.***

13th- 14th ***TESOL Greece.*** *Living and Learning in a Brave New World.* ***Location: Hellenic American Union, Athens, Attika, Greece. E-mail chair@tesolgreece.org. Web site http://www.tesolgreece.org.***

17th ***Lend.*** *Digital Teaching & Digital Learning: Digitally or digitally.* ***Location: Ass. Cult. Italo Britannica, Bologna. Website www.lend.it***

24th- 27th ***TESOL 2010 Convention.*** *Re-Imagine.* ***Location: Boston Convention and Exhibition Center Boston, Massachusetts USA. For further information please go to http://www.tesol.org***

April

15th – 17ìth ***TESOL-Ukraine National Conference.*** *English Learning in the Context of the Long-life Education.* ***Location: Rivne State University for the Humanities, Ukraine. E-mail tesol-ukraine@list.ru.***

29th- 1st South Central Association for Language Learning Technology. *Foreign Language Teaching, Learning & Technology: A Changing Climate.* ***Location: Arlington Resort Hotel, Hot Springs, Arkansas. Web site http://www.socallt.org.***

May

7th – 8th 2nd International ELT Conference, Maltepe University. Location: Istanbul, Turkey. E-mail elt@maltepe.edu.tr.

***A*ugust**

25th - 28th ***Lend.*** *Humanism in Language Teaching.* ***Location: Portonovo. Email: Portonovo2010@lend.it .***

September

9th – 11th 43rd Annual Meeting of the British Association for Applied Linguistics. **Applied Linguistics: Global and Local.** Location: University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland. E-mail r.millar@abdn.ac.uk. Web site http://www.baal.org.uk/confs.htm.

Tesol Italy Groups

Si raccomanda a tutti i colleghi impegnati o che intendono impegnarsi nella costituzione di un gruppo provinciale TESOL di inviare all'Executive Committee la seguente documentazione:

1. Elenco nominativo degli iscritti (minimo cinque), con allegata fotocopia della ricevuta del relativo versamento sul c/c postale n. 15774003 intestato ad Associazione TESOL-Italy, Via Boncompagni 2, 00187 ROMA.

2. Verbale dell'assemblea costitutiva del gruppo da cui risultino l'elezione e il nome di un Coordinatore.

3. Programma delle attività che il gruppo intende svolgere nel corso dell'anno.

4. L'Executive Committee, preso atto della documentazione prodotta dal gruppo, si riunisce per deliberarne il riconoscimento ed invia successivamente il testo della delibera al Coordinatore.

Il Coordinatore del gruppo TESOL-Italy rappresenta a tutti gli effetti l'Associazione nell'ambito della provincia in cui il gruppo svolge la sua attività ed è tenuto a presentare una relazione annuale in sede di National Committee.I membri del Consiglio di Presidenza e la Segreteria di TESOL-Italy sono a disposizione per qualsiasi eventuale richiesta di ulteriori informazioni.

La collega incaricata dall'Executive Committee del coordinamento nazionale dei gruppi è Maria Luisa Cerbone (e-mail: **marialuisacerbone@katamail.com***).*

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The deadline for submitting articles for the 2010 March-April issue is April 10th

WEB2- Everyone can participate

by Valentina Dodge

File hosting, file converting – another drop in the ocean?

In this issue we look at file sharing and how to receive large files or data from our learners or alternatively, return them. In the process, files may also need to have their formats changed, so we discover how to do this conversion. As teachers are increasingly dealing with large file sizes and a range of file formats, there are luckily new online tools emerging to save the day. Here are some to make life easier!

Sending large files

If you are using a virtual learning environment or a wiki you probably don't need to send or receive large learner files as these are usually uploaded automatically to a forum or a wiki page. However, there may be file size restrictions or learners may be working on collaborative projects where they have created lots of content they want to share with you or each other without first creating a virtual learning space.

Sharing online

Here are three tools for teachers who are tired of cluttered inboxes, or assignments that have gone astray.

- http://drop.io/
- http://posterous.com/
- http://www.mediafire.com/

If you are always using different computers or are worried about running out of storage you will be delighted to share files in this way. It has all the fun of dropping into one of the islands in the Indian Ocean (that's where the .io after "drop" comes from!). Water and islands always cancel out worry, it's also a nice metaphor for the in/out function of file sharing.

Why use these tools?

Learners can use these tools for submitting their homework and there'll be no more "I left my assignment at home" or a lost exercise book.

With Drop.io you can drop something off for others to collect.

- It gives you copious and free online storage for collaborative projects – just what is needed for sharing photos, documents, videos, slides, etc.
- The "comment" function lets them share their thoughts on each other's work.
- You can create a private drop box for each learner, where they can place a digital copy of their work. Your own feedback can go into it
- It is possible to send a tiny URL to a file rather than the file itself.

Posterous is slightly different. Its creators say "Posterous is the dead simple way to put anything online using email. We love sharing thoughts, photos, audio, and files with our friends and family, but we didn't like how hard it was... so we made a better way. "

To start a Posterous account, all you need to do is send an email to post@posterous.com. Your account will be set up. Whatever you put in this email becomes the first post for your new blog. You can send an mp3, photo or video directly and then it can be shared anywhere. With a bonus? If you email multiple photos, they will be converted into a lovely photo gallery. If you email a YouTube video URL it will be automatically embedded.

MediaFire is loved by millions because it has unlimited uploads, unlimited downloads, and unlimited storage! There is no sign up required and it offers RSS file feeds.

What you need to know

Drop.io creates a random URL such as http://drop.io/X35htlMhT. If the bit at the end is daunting, change it to something more memorable such as http://drop.io/goinggreen. Check out the configuration settings to make it work the way you like. You can password-protect the files too.

Another good idea if you have a blog is to place the drop.io widget onto it. (This simple "upload" widget will allow you to collect files directly from your blog.)

(continued on p.8)

LANGUAGE FLOWS

by Marina Morbiducci

(continued from p.1)

guage flows" we can envisage four sub-themes expanding the main concept of progression:

- Fostering learner progression
- Promoting intercultural communication
- Enhancing new media literacy
- Implementing effective language policies.

But "LANGUAGE FLOWS", thanks to the polymorphous quality of the English words, can also be meant as a compound, where the two juxtaposed terms well identify the sociolinguistic phenomena belonging to the areas of influence of hip hop cultures, youth identities, and policies of language, all of them being contact zones that we would like to explore, too, with the permeability and porosity of our present liquid borders. TESOL-Italy would like to be immersed in the global flux constituted by the English language state-of-the-art at present and – broadly speaking – by linguistic education, and offer substantial buoyancy aids to stay on, if not possibly elevate from, the surface of the troubled waters of the educational system we are experiencing today.

1) Zygmunt Bauman is Professor Emeritus in Sociology at University of Warsaw and Leeds

Food for thought

by Franca Ricci Stephenson

(continued from p.1)

studenti o nell'area degli insegnamenti attivabili dalle istituzioni scolastiche nei limiti del contingente di organico ad esse annualmente assegnato. Tale insegnamento deve essere attivato in ogni caso nei limiti degli organici determinati a legislazione vigente."

And to solve the problem of the linguistic competence of teachers we find the following indication:

"In attesa dell'istituzione di specifiche classi di abilitazione, l'insegnamento di cui al comma 5 è affidato a docenti abilitati in possesso di titolo di specializzazione ovvero a docenti in possesso di titolo di laurea comunitario attestante la competenza disciplinare e che dimostrino la necessaria competenza linguistica in base a criteri definiti da apposito decreto emanato dal Ministro dell'istruzione,dell'università e della ricerca."

How shall we interpret the two above quotations? I understand that the integration of language and content will be subject to the availability — and good will — of teachers of non-linguistic subjects with certified competence in English. Having taught in Italian schools for more than thirty years, I know how difficult it is to find teachers who combine decent linguistic competence in English and the content knowledge of another curricular subject. In other words I understand that the guidelines are : CLIL in our schools? Yes, but if, where and when possibile. Am I being too pessimistic?

1) *Assessing Integrated Language and Content Instruction,* by Deborah J. Short © 1993 Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL). (TESOL Quarterly vol. 27 no. 4 winter 1993)

BUZZ-WORDS

by Lucilla Lopriore

(continued from p.3)

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WEB2- Everyone can participate

by Valentina Dodge

(continued from p.7)

Mediafire free users do not have hot-linking capability and cannot embed their actual files on another website or blog but they can link to their files. When the link is clicked, it will direct to Mediafire's download page.

Filesharing can sometimes be abused so ensure learners are aware of fair use and respecting copyright.

Converting files

Have you ever been stuck when someone sends you a file which you can't open because your machine hasn't got the right software installed? Too embarrassed to send it back with a "please convert to this format" message, were you, so you opted to leave it unopened and asked a colleague for help?!

Well, not any more! If you don't want to or can't download the appropriate software, there are two tools that can come to your rescue. They are just what you need for a quick conversion. And they have lovely names!

http://www.zamzar.com/

http://www.youconvertit.com/

They work differently.

With www.zamzar.com there are five easy steps to follow.

1. Click browse and click browse. Navigate to where the file is on your machine
2. Choose the format you want to convert to
3. Insert an active email address
4. Click 'convert' and wait for the email confirming conversion
5. Open the email and click on the link to retrieve the file in the new format and save it to your machine.

http://www.youconvertit.com/ also offers file storage and allows audio, video images and documents to be converted into an array of formats. It has an online video conversion tool http://youconvertit.com/OnlineVideo.aspx that works directly from a URL and converts to most formats.

Enjoy these wonderful tools and if you can't plan to take your holidays "io" islands this summer to do some fishing then why not start sharing some of your files with a colleague to see how this drop and collect system works in practice.