



News Letter

Vol. XXI, No. 4, September-October 2011

From the editor

Dear TESOLers,

As new editor of TESOL Italy's newsletter, I'm delighted to greet you at this time of the year when we are getting closer to our **36th Annual Convention**, to be held in Rome (**November 13 and 14**). We are already absorbed by the organization of a promising conference with over 75 Italian and international speakers. As already mentioned in the May - July newsletter, the special issues that will be addressed there are :

Content through language;

Identity and Diversity;

Primary Language Education;

Motivation in Language Learning.

In addition to that, an extensive teaching materials and software exhibition, as well as inviting cultural and social events, will be organized.

In the meanwhile, the different suggestions from the contributors in this issue of the newsletter are 'food for thought' for us as a professional association of language teachers. The prefix '*re*' runs through all the articles ranging from Stephenson's *rereading* of Dylan's song *The Times They Are a-Changin'* to Morbiducci's proposal of translation as *recreation* and *rewriting*, from Tatuksi's *re-powering* of narrative to the 'Special education website *resources*' selected by La Torre. Furthermore, *reusable* 'learning objects' are Lopriore's *buzz word* of the day.

But the *renewal* in this issue is that some more articles come from a variety of experiences and backgrounds: the 'voices' from Greece, Palermo and Siracusa open up views on what is going on in the wide world of TESOL.

In a nutshell, I'm trying to 'treasure the old and challenge the new', 'to cross borders and 'to multiply TESOL voices, just to *re-trieve* three meaningful past Conventions' titles.

Mark your calendars now and save the dates: **November 18 and 19!**

Hope to see you.

Daniela Cuccurullo



Food for thought

From TESOL publications
by Franca Ricci Stephenson



What changes in schools?

The Times They Are a-Changin' Bob Dylan sang in 1964. And the changes he was singing of were for the better, for individuals and society at large. About 50 years later we now witness changes for the worse for nearly everyone, nearly everywhere. In Italy budget cuts to education have created great difficulties in schools: more students in each class and even not enough desks and chairs in some classrooms; very little money to pay for substitute teachers, significant reduction of support teachers for handicapped children. Just to mention some of the effects of the cuts.

If we take a look at the United States, things don't seem to be much better. Reading through on-line journals advertised on TESOL publications, such as "*eSchoolNews*" and "*EducationNext*", we realize that the economic crisis is hitting education as well as other fields of society. Everyone admits that good quality education is essential for the future of young generations, but quality education means well-paid and well-trained teachers, and this inevitably means a lot of money. And so it happens that even the "No Child Left Behind program" is being strongly criticised as it "*pushed schools to get more students over a low performance bar. They provided few incentives to accelerate the academic growth of students at the top.*"

A heated debate has already started among possible candidates for next year's election, about the amount of money needed, who and how will plan choices in education. Some people (?) are even asking that the U.S. Department of Education be dismantled altogether, in favour of local agencies. (Does it sound familiar? Does it ring a bell?)

It's against this background, at a time of fear of the unknown when certainties are shaken, that even well-established practices are questioned. Let's take, as an example, the challenge of dealing with students with different academic levels and mixed abilities in the same class. In Italy and in the States teachers have been dealing with such challenge in different ways at different times. And for many years the tendency has been to favour heterogeneous classes, not because it was considered politically correct, but because research and studies have demonstrated that in a mixed environment children learn better. Now all this is being questioned in favour of homogeneous classes. In "Education Next" Michael J. Petrilli, Executive Editor of "Education Next" states¹ that schools should push all kids to achieve their full potential, organizing classrooms in "ability groups", forgetting the ideal of keeping classes academically, racially and socioeconomically diverse.

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2) students under 30 and SSIS students: • 15,00;

3) supportes, schools, universities, agencies: • 60,00

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TESOL Italy Newsletter

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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 instruction, 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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Upcoming in the next issue
Dossier on the 2011 SpellEvent in Rome
Teachers' feedback and reflections



Buzz-words

Lucilla Lopriore

* * * * *

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:

Learning Objects

Since the advent of the Internet, the use of on-line resources has become increasingly common in both distance and classroom education and in teacher-training settings. The advancement of e-learning is transforming the traditional classroom environment into a blended learning format, but advances in technology have also determined a paradigm shift in the way people learn. This shift has inevitably affected the choice of syllabi organisation and of the learning tasks meant to facilitate and sustain learning in contexts where most of the time the learners are studying on their own. Learning objects (LOs) are the result of research studies developed within the area of on-line learning; they are perceived by several scholars as the 'cutting-edge teaching tool' in the 21st century (Wiley, 2000; Cramer, 2007; Sakurai & Donelson, 2011).

LOs are any entity, digital or non-digital, which can be used, re-used or referenced during technology supported learning (Wiley, 2000). LOs are self-contained, web-based learning units which use multimedia formats to present various types of interactive learning activity experiences (ASTD & Smartforce 2002; Cramer 2007). The term 'learning object' derives from 'object-oriented programming'; it describes an object that is designed to facilitate learning and it can be categorised by using metadata. This categorisation enables users to access and reuse objects as needed. Using LOs makes on-line learning more cost effective (Calhoun & Wooten, 2003) since LOs enable and facilitate the use of educational content online (McGreal, 2004).

LOs are a new way of thinking about learning content. Traditionally, content is delivered in a several hour's chunk, but LOs are much smaller units of learning, they are intended to help learners understand a narrow topic, a short part of a process or a specific technique rather than a whole class, a unit or a course (Cramer 2007). Completing an LO can take as

little time as one minute and should not take longer than 20 minutes. LOs are self-contained as each learning object can be taken independently. They are reusable - a single learning object may be used in multiple context for multiple purposes; they can be grouped into larger collections of content, including traditional course structures; they are linked with metadata - every learning object has descriptive information allowing it to be easily found by a search (Beck, 2008). Because of their availability on-line, students and teachers can access them at any time. Teachers and students can also create their own flexible learning paths using LOs as they decide what they need to learn or teach next.

LOs are digital instructional units that can be combined to create a variety of learning experiences (ASTD & Smartforce 2002; Cramer 2007; McGreal 2004). Because LOs are organized and tagged with metadata, they can be retrieved by multiple users, such as learners or instructors, allowing LOs to be reused for different purposes. Learners might access an LO outside of the classroom environment in order to learn or practice a very specific area of study. Instructors might use an LO to introduce a new topic or follow-up a classroom activity. LOs are also defined Reusable Learning Objects (RLOs) because they have the ability to display on multiple platforms, in many formats and languages, using different technologies, without requiring developers to rebuild the learning unit. The idea behind RLOs is for designers to use these chunks to assemble larger units of instruction and for learners to retrieve these reusable chunks in order to construct knowledge and perform tasks, as well as to achieve designated learning objectives.

Since LOs are small learning units, they consist of 4 components: an objective, a brief explanation of the target topic or skill, an interactive learning activity that allows learners to interact with a computer-based activity and a form of assessment to provide learners with instant feedback (Sakurai & Donelson, 2011).

While a growing number of governments all around the world are investing large amounts of money on the development and implementation of LOS and associated technologies, a number of concerns have been raised about them. The adoption and use of LOs have been criticised particularly because there have been no in-depth studies of the pedagogical consequences of these systems and ways of thinking, and no examinations of their epistemological and ideological implications (Friesen, 2004).

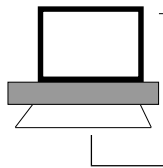
Friesen (2004, in Maceviciute & Wilson, 2008) identifies three problems with the concept of LOs:

- The definition of *learning object* that is "too broad to be useful, since under this definition anything may be a learning object". How can two such different notions stay together?
- Since those involved in the production of standards for e-learning adopt "a position of neutrality towards the pedagogic process", how can a learning object "be dissociated from the process of learning" in this way?
- "the mechanistic systems modeling involved in the systematic production of learning objects is far from the messy, real life, social nature of the educational process". How can LOs take into account spoken language practice, as for example, in the case of language learning?

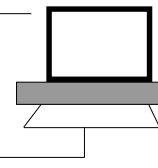
As Friesen himself concludes:

(continued on p.12)

Web Watch



Using the Internet for special education



by Esterina La Torre



What happens when you find a class in which there is a student who needs special education? Does your class include a child with Autism and you want to know something more about this problem? Have you got dyslexic students and you don't know what to do? What can we do as EFL teachers? We very often feel professionally unprepared to teach the diversity for a number of reasons; sometimes we think it is not our task, there is a teacher appointed for the purpose and we have all the rest of the students to take care of. That's not the case, because we can learn a lot about the different problems, we can discover excellent tools and offer a valid support thanks to some useful sites where we can find information, resources, and ideas that can be accessed when needed. Moreover, a lot of this material is great for EFL lessons.

<http://www.tes.co.uk/sen-teaching-resources/> It is n.1 in the world with about 100.000 resources, you can log in and look for resources in the

section "Teaching Resources", then you can save what you like, you'll find wonderful lessons to be used with students and to face different problems but you'll also discover a useful section about using whiteboards (**<http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/Interactive-Whiteboard-Tools-from-TES-English-6113478/>**), as well as literature lessons.

<http://www.senteacher.org/Links/> If you need ready materials to use in class SEN Teacher provides cost-free teaching & learning resources for students with special needs and learning disabilities. Many resources are useful for primary and secondary students, too. All the resources available or listed are free for use in schools, colleges and at home.

<http://specialed.freeyellow.com/> One of the most complete sites is "The Special Education Home Page" that organizes a huge variety of resources and web pages into one; here you can find all the answers to your questions about disabilities and education.

<http://teachinglearnerswithmultipleneeds.blogspot.com/2011/07/free-switch-activities-for-learners.html>

<http://www.hiyah.net/software.html>

These are sites where you can find a variety of resources, from basic to advanced level. The programs are completely free and easily installed / uninstalled. The Download versions are made to run on Microsoft Windows compatible operating systems.

<http://www.bridges4kids.org/IEP.html#top> On "Bridges for kids" you can understand a variety of diagnoses, you can read about critical education issues, you can get involved in advocating for people with disabilities, you can access material and share ideas and lessons with other professionals working with someone with I/DD.

<http://www.k12academics.com/disorders-disabilities> K12 Academics has established itself in the education community by creating influential and valuable information for teachers, students, parents & districts officials involved in the K-12 education system. K12 Academics is committed to excellence, development and enlightenment.

<http://www.lite.iwarp.com/horizon.htm> LITE: Literacy Information and Technology in Education is a website where you'll find Assistive Technology that includes the enhancement of capabilities for independence, removal of barriers to performance, encouraging a sense of community and inclusion with others.

http://www.dmoz.org/Reference/Education/Special_Education/Schools/ DMOZ | Open Directory Project. Since the beginning in the 1980s the Open Directory Project has been the largest, most comprehensive human-edited directory of the Web. It is constructed and maintained by a passionate, global community of volunteer editors.

Translation in Love

TRANSLATION AS RE-CREATION

by Marina Morbiducci

We are all indebted to André Levefere for coining, as early as 1977, in his *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig*, the term of “translation” as “recreation” and then “rewriting”. It is an undisputable truth that there is a lot of creativity in the act of translation, in accordance with the legitimate claim for originality inherent in any act of writing.

Going back to the *ancient querelle* also conceptualized by Schleiermacher back in the 19th century, and then subsequently in more recent years (see for all: Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility*, 1995, 2nd edition 2008) pointed out by Lawrence Venuti with his “foreignization” vs. “domestication” bipolarity, the controversy whether we should – as translators – construct a reader-oriented version rather than an author-oriented text, that is, accommodate the readers' understanding rather than respecting the authors' original intention – seems, I dare say, by now completely overcome.

In the case of our students any form of translation is definitely above all translator's oriented: the translator is the first user and beneficiary of his own creation, and cares very little for its impact on the audience constituted by other individuals. It is a purely narcissistic act of self-expression and, in its taking shape, a lot of pleasure is gained (see, for example, the lyrics or songs which populate the pages of the students' diaries, or the letters or digital postings our kids are regularly exchanging within their social network tribes .I'm obviously talking of non-professional translators, since for the ones who practice translation as a way of earning a living, obviously the reader's response can be crucial (in order to be entrusted with another translation later on). But that's another matter.

Our young potential translators, using translation at their own pleasure, for their own pure enjoyment, have understood a lot, and quite in depth, about the intrinsic value of translation. With them, we teachers can dare a lot, too. First of all, let's keep in mind that they do not like easy or banal things; second, that they like to discover, find out facts (or texts) by themselves, trying their steps and textual paths autonomously; third, that the more challenging a text is, the more enjoyment they get. This is my personal opinion and experience - having taught translation at school and university for several years by now - and luckily enough I can provide evidence of what I've just said from outstanding sources: for example, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson assumed that in poetry (the kind of text that mostly represents the artistic “poietic” act of composition, and, therefore, the textual genre that most resembles the creativity of translation) “a set of relationships get mapped onto a level of diversity in us that we don't ordinarily have access to. [...] We can give to each other in poetry the access to a set of relationships in the other person and in the world that we are not usually conscious of in ourselves. So we need poetry as knowledge about the world and about ourselves, because of this

mapping from complexity to complexity”. (Cited by Mary Catherine Bateson, *Our Own Metaphor: a personal account of a conference on the effects of conscious purpose on human adaptation*, 1972

from such view, we can easily infer how translation can be “the art of integrative cognition” par excellence, to paraphrase Varadaraja V. Raman (*Varadaraja V. Raman, Variety of Boundary Crossings*, 2010).

This new art of integration urges us to accept difference – hence another language - embracing discourses and practices of integration freed from the aprioristic and robotic logic of a forced integration. In very practical terms, through the playful dynamic of translating a text, the two participants – the author and the translator - take part in a genuine “integrative event”. A strong case, relevant to integrative discourse, and in my opinion also applicable to translation, has been made by James P. Carse (*Finite and Infinite Games: a vision of life as play and possibility*, 1994).

Michael Cronin, for instance, as a translation studies theorist, has repeatedly insisted on the beneficial potentialities of the “game theory” to be detected inside the translational activity, with pedagogic outcomes, too (Michael Cronin, “Game Theory and Translation” in Mona Baker, *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, 1998). On the occasion of the ESSE conference held in Turin in August 2010, I specifically made the point – how convincingly for the audience I don't know – of the intrinsic pedagogic potential within experimental texts with learners of all ages. But this is another matter, too, which needs more space; for the time being, let me just finish quoting one of American poet Denise Levertov's titles: For *A Muse Meant* (in a letter to her also modified by Robert Creeley, her colleague poet, as “For a Muse Meant”): it could be easily translated, reproducing the morphemic deconstruction: “Per Un Diverti Mento”, also readable: “in order to enjoy, I can even tell a lie” (where the morpheme “ment” becomes a simple present verbal form...).

WORDS & WORLDS



Tesol Italy's 36th Annual National Convention
Rome, November 18-19

THEMES

Content through Language
Identity and Diversity
Primary Language Education
Motivation in Language Learning

NEWS from the Groups

THE FIRST TESOL-Italy DAY in SICILY

TESOL-Italy local group, Palermo

Palermo, 23-09-2011

Liceo Statale G.A. DE COSMI

by Ninfa Pagano

Coordinator TESOL-Italy local group, Palermo

On September 23, 2011 the first **TESOL-Italy DAY** took place in Palermo at Liceo Statale “De Cosmi”. The whole activity was organised as follows:

8,30 Registration; Book Exhibition

9,30 First Session: *Discourse and Ideology*, prof.ssa Eleonora Chiavetta, Università di Palermo;

10,30 Coffee Break; Book Exhibition

11,00 Second Session: *Teaching Law through Shakespeare*, prof. Stefano Mochi, TESOL-Italy President

12,00 Third Session: *The Use of Wikis in collaborative writing*, dott. Enrico Grazzi, Università Roma Tre

13,00 Lunch Break; Book Exhibition

14,30-15,30 workshops.

The activities were addressed to English teachers but also, for the first time, to teachers of non-linguistic subjects, interested in future CLIL projects. All participants - about 50 teachers – attended the plenary sessions in the morning, while in the afternoon they were divided into two groups for different workshops: one on literature (prof.ssa Eleonora Chiavetta) and the other on the use of wikis (prof. Enrico Grazzi). Before the morning sessions started the headmaster of Liceo Statale De Cosmi, prof. Fabio Grasso, greeted the participants and held a short welcoming speech, expressing his hope that this kind of initiative might be repeated in the future; he stressed the fact that the local TESOL-Italy group of Palermo can totally rely on him and that the school is open to other similar future organizations.

Only TESOL-Italy members were entitled to take part in the TESOL-Italy Day: that meant, of course, an increase in subscriptions. Three publishing houses were also there for the book exhibition: Longman, Oxford University Press and Zanichelli, which kindly offered provided for the coffee break and the lunch break.

What my school colleagues and I found amazing was not only the high number of participants – who had to subscribe to TESOL-Italy in order to attend the whole seminar – but the high level of interest, enthusiasm and curiosity that all participants showed all through the activities, especially teachers of non-linguistic subjects (CLIL teachers) who have never been much accustomed to teacher training courses and who on such an occasion got the chance to keep updated and to refresh language as well.

Before we approached the end of the whole day, most teachers asked me if other similar initiatives had already been planned for the next weeks and months and they expressed the wish to repeat this experience as soon as possible. Which we will certainly do ...

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CLIL: CLIL-TOWARDS AN INNOVATIVE SCHOOL

NAPLES, OCTOBER 5th 2011

by Letizia Cinganotto

An International Conference on CLIL took place in Naples on 5th October 2011. It was organized by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research, in cooperation with the Universities of Naples and it was aimed at launching the great innovation of CLIL which will be part of the Italian Secondary School curriculum, according to the ongoing Secondary School Reform. In particular, starting from next school year, CLIL will be introduced in the third year of “Licei Linguistici”, while all the other “Licei” and “Istituti tecnici” will start teaching CLIL in the fifth year from 2014-15.

The Conference was addressed to School principals, teachers and trainers, in order to illustrate the theoretical framework and the great potential of CLIL, together with some of the most important European experiences in the field.

Among the speakers there were the three most famous world experts and researchers on CLIL: **David Marsh**, **Maria Jesus Frigols** and **Peeter Mehisto**. Their contribution was particularly effective, as they showed some examples of interactive CLIL lessons performed at school. They were very successful, as the audience could realize how CLIL is being actually implemented in some European Countries, with a lot of benefits for both teachers and students.

Also Representatives from the Ministry of Education, University and Research took part in the conference: Dr. Luciano Chiappetta (Direttore Generale Direzione Generale per il personale scolastico - MIUR) and Dr. Maurizio Piscitelli (Dirigente Uff. VI D.G. per il personale scolastico - MIUR). They illustrated the upcoming teacher-training plan on CLIL which will be organized by the Ministry in cooperation with ANSAS (Indire) and carried out by the Italian Universities, according to a particular learning path and professional profile defined by a group of experts in the field. The Coordinator of this group, Ispettrice

(continued on p.9)

Zwolle Unlimited - A Storytelling Festival

by Prof. Dr. Donna TATSUKI
Kobe City University of Foreign Studies

From the 1st to 5th of June the streets of Zwolle, NL filled with participants in Zwolle Unlimited Waterval Storytelling Festival. This ancient town, surrounded by canals, provided storytelling venues in libraries, churches, courtrooms, tents and piazzas to hundreds of tellers of all ages from every corner of the world. Zwolle is the perfect host town since it was the first Dutch school to adopt storytelling into its mainstream school curriculum (the city of Gouda was the second). At the festival I was interviewed about my research (how literary texts are being used in teaching English as foreign language throughout the world) for the Dutch magazine 'Vertel eens', article by Katja Hansma, www.verteleens.eu, info@verteleens.eu.

Recently, in the areas of business and sociology people are realising the power of narrative, being a persuasive tool to connect people. In order to find a creative solution, a facilitator is wise to start by telling a story that somehow covers the major theme they have to grapple with. Storytelling is persuasive: when a group of fifty people are listening to a story, they are all going to identify and personally engage with the story in terms of their own story—they make a connection with the scene and the content and the point that is trying to be put across. In sociology, storytelling is being used as a tool to enable people to go through the recover process after disasters like earthquakes and tsunamis. They need to tell their stories, they need to somehow work through their experiences and through the telling discover their own coping strategies and come to creative solutions.

Storytelling is greatly important in education. Through stories children are building core structures in their mind and fill this with pictures. So they are not just memorising and reciting which I think is a waste of time. They are absorbing the contents and in their own ways of rebuilding and retelling the story ... that is one part: memory is becoming more efficient. Certainly they are learning vocabulary in their native language and I assume this will help with learning a foreign language.

Although I happily attended story sessions offered by the many professional performers, I was most delighted to watch and listen to the school age tellers.

The students ranged in age from 11 to 16. The youngest told 5 to 10 minute folk and fairy stories alone, captivating their audiences with their earnestness, energy, and expressiveness. The high school group created a moving 20 minute multimedia presentation incorporating dance, song and drama in response to watching interviews with WW I veterans.

I had an opportunity to watch several student story tellers and speak to them and their teachers. There were several things that impressed me about these young people and their performances. The intensity of their concentration while in the midst of the telling and the resulting engagement with the audience was powerful to observe. I was also struck by the feat of memory and hours of preparation that each telling represents. I chatted with the students about their creative process and could see that along with developing research skills, each teller was building their own internal repertoire of discourse structures that can be reused and recycled in endless permutations. What these young people are learning to do today will reappear in many guises throughout their professional and personal lives. As I congratulated their teachers for their role in guiding and nurturing these performers we all agreed that this is what education is all about.

Food for thought

by Franca Ricci Stephenson
(continued from p.1)

The author admits that “differentiated instruction” would be an excellent solution to the problem, he explains that in “differentiated instruction” *one teacher instructs a diverse group of kids, but manages to reach each one at precisely the appropriate level. The idea, according to Carol Tomlinson of the University of Virginia (UVA), is to “shake up what goes on in the classroom so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn.” Ideally, instruction is customized at the individual student level. Every child receives a unique curriculum that meets that individual’s exact needs. A teacher might even make specialized homework assignments, or provide the specific one-on-one help that a particular kid requires.*”

However, “differentiated instruction” is difficult to implement and confusing for many teachers, as it requires “extensive planning and training,” not to mention good organization and creativity; so this approach needs lots of extra resources. Far more than authorities are willing to provide.

“The Times They Are a-changing” indeed, aren’t they?

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PERSPECTIVES

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VOICES from The WORLD of TESOL

The following are a few thoughts we have received from **Christine Dowse** (English teacher at Liceo Scientifico Statale 'E. Fermi' Sciacca, AG)

TESOL-Italy members' opinions are welcome

THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK

(Perfect Imperfection or Imperfect Perfection?)

In the beginning was the word and the word was the CEFR. Since its introduction into language assessment and standards, language teachers have been able to plan lessons and courses that are aimed at reaching certain goals within certain age/time limits knowing that anywhere in Europe, and further away, others will be doing just the same. In a time of job mobility when nobody is certain they will be born, live and die in the same place, language skills and competences are fundamental requirements for people who wish to enter the job market and have more, and better, opportunities of finding work. Language certification has become part and parcel of these requirements. I often tell my pupils that if there are two candidates for a job, both with the same qualifications and both with a working knowledge of English, the job will go to the candidate who can give proof of his/her language skills by providing certification.

I have taught pupils taking examinations for various recognised boards and as a teacher I can say that each board has its strong points and its weaknesses. No examination is 'easier' than others as some people would have you believe; they are just different.

Teachers should, in my opinion, be able to choose the board they believe is more in line with their syllabus so as to take advantage of classroom time and activities to supplement any PON or POF courses. If lessons and courses are both attuned to the examinations it is possible to obtain really excellent results and climb further up the scale. A number of years ago the format of certification was so far from the kind of activities the pupils were used to doing in class that

(continued to p.9)

Social Psychology and ELT – THE HALO EFFECT

by **Nick Michelioudakis**

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TESOL Greece

How important is one's handwriting? Hardly at all you might say, especially today when most people use a computer. Yet research shows otherwise. In a revealing experiment, a number of exam scripts were copied twice – once in good handwriting and once in bad handwriting. They were then passed on to two groups of examiners who were told to mark them and were specifically instructed to mark for content. Amazingly, the neatly-written scripts got significantly higher marks than the others (Sutherland 1992). Why did such a thing happen? The answer is that very often when we have to assess someone (or something) and this person has a salient, positive feature, the latter colours our judgment, so we tend to make all kind of positive attributions about this person, judgments which are at best only marginally related to the quality which stands out. This is called the 'Halo Effect'.

An experiment: One would expect the scientific world to be less susceptible to such an effect. Not so. In 1982, two psychologists decided to try out an interesting experiment. They selected 12 well-known journals of psychology and to each one they sent an article to be considered for publication. These articles are routinely checked by two authorities on the particular field as well as the editor. The results: in 8 out of the 12 cases the articles were deemed unworthy of publication. Out of 16 'evaluators' and 8 editors who (presumably) read them, not a single one had a different view. Well, one might say, not all articles submitted are up to par. This is true, only in this case these particular articles had been published by the very same journals, under the same title only a few months previously! The only thing the two psychologists had changed were the names of the authors (eminent university professors) to imaginary ones and their affiliations (originally such prestigious universities as Harvard or Princeton) to non-existent (and by definition obscure) ones! Well, you might think, at least 4 of the articles were thought to be good. Not quite. In 3 out of the 4 cases someone simply realised that they had published this material before... (Sutherland, 1992)

Why did such a thing happen? The answer is probably that journals like the above are probably inundated with submissions from academics on the make who are anxious to add yet another entry to their CV. It is equally likely that many of these articles are run-of-the-mill, with little to recommend them. This being so, it makes sense for the 'evaluators' to resort to 'shortcuts' (Cialdini 2001) – rather than scrutinize each script, they look at the name of the writer first. If s/he is a famous professor from an Ivy-League University, then the article is more likely to be worthy of publication. But if we start thinking like this, then an amazing change happens: as Sutherland (1992) points out, when faced with a piece of work by an established writer, we tend to look for its positive aspects, while if the writer's name rings no bells then we start looking for flaws!

Still not convinced? Here is another example. In the mid-70s, someone sent a book to no less than 27 different publishers and literary agents. No marks for guessing what happened. All 27 rejected it. Yet this book ('Steps' by Kosinsky) had actually been published in 1969 and had won the American National Book Award! All that had been changed was the title and the name of the writer. What is more remarkable is that one of the publishers who rejected the 'new book' was 'Random House' – the ones who had published the original one! (ibid.)

Lest you should think that this phenomenon is restricted to the world of books and publishing, here are some more examples to show you just how widespread it is: good-looking people are universally thought to be friendlier, more intelligent and more humorous, tall people are thought to have all kind of leadership qualities,

(continued to p.10)

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

by Letizia Cinganotto

(continued from p.6)

Gisella Langè (Ispettrice Tecnica Lingue Straniere – USR Lombardia – MIUR), speaker at the conference, pointed out some of the most innovative aspects of the Secondary School Reform on CLIL, which will be soon specified by a Ministry Decree.

Among the other speakers there were some of the most famous national and international experts on CLIL: **Carmel Mary Coonan**, from Ca' Foscari University, dealt with the professional profile of a CLIL teacher; **Teresina Barbero** from Turin University, talked about the delicate topic of assessment and evaluation on CLIL; **Anna De Meo**, from Napoli Orientale University, showed some interesting experiences on blended CLIL carried out in some of her academic courses; **Franca Orletti**, from Roma Tre University, dealt with the discourse and interaction analysis in a CLIL lesson; **Raffaella Carro**, from ANSAS (Indire), concentrated on some examples, strategies, tools and repository of online CLIL; **Linda Rossi Holden**, from Modena and Reggio Emilia University depicted the most important features of a project on CLIL “CLIL in action” carried out within a agreement signed by the Ministry of Education and ENI; **Letizia Cinganotto**, from the Ministry of Education, dealt with a project “E-CLIL”, carried out and financed by the Ministry, aiming at experimenting modules of “digital CLIL” in a few Italian schools during this school year, anticipating the Reform. Representatives from all the Universities of Naples took part in the Conference and enjoyed the launching of this innovative project.

The Conference was really successful and was attended by about 300 teachers, trainers and principals. This figure is particularly meaningful as it avows that Italian teachers are sensitive to innovation and to CLIL.

“Teaching English is human. Teaching CLIL is divine?” (Jeremy Harmer) Maybe not, but you never know.

THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK

by Christine Dowse

(continued from p.8)

they were often shocked the first time they were asked to do a mock test. There has been a great improvement in text books catering for examinations and the Internet provides remarkable resources. However, just when everything seems ‘perfect’ we run into trouble.

Why do Italian Universities choose to accept one board rather than another? (I am making reference to all examinations that test the five language skills). Surely B1 is B1 in any country or with any *recognised* board? (I say *recognised* because I wish to underline that the Italian Ministry *recognises* more than examining board.

Is this the whole idea of having a CEFR? Are Italian Universities applying an Orwellian philosophy?

All B1s are equal, but some are more equal than others!!

(I use B1 as an example but obviously I am referring to any level of the CEFR).

I can accept, to a certain extent, that a University may not accept certification taken more than two years before application, although most certificates are for life, however, I do not accept that after managing to climb the scale from A1 to C1 over a number of years, pupils applying to University come back and say that what they have achieved means nothing to the University of their choice. Why should pupils, at this stage, be forced to repeat a level they already have with a different examining board which means forking out another fee on top of what they have already paid?

Is this not discrimination?

The standardization of language levels is of fundamental value and allows teachers to gauge their pupils’ progress. In this day and age of INVALSI tests, the CEFR has provided uniformity between north and south, west and east, something which is lacking in other subjects. Why can there not be a ‘CEFR’ in maths or science?

In conclusion, if we are to really believe in the perfection of the CEFR should

Universities not respect its principles and should the Ministry not give guidelines regarding ‘*recognised*’ examining boards?

**To contributors**

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The deadline for submitting articles for the 2011 November-December issue is November 30th



THE HALO EFFECT

by Nick Michelioudakis

(continued from p.8)

they are clearly favoured in job interviews and make more money than people like me who are slightly challenged in the vertical dimension, and, of course, men of a high social status are judged as more attractive by women... (Brehm, Kassin & Fein 2002).

Applications in the field of teaching: If we can create for ourselves this 'aura' of the competent/charismatic/special teacher, then we are halfway towards winning the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of our students. Here are some ideas:

Friendliness: When I ask my students to describe the best teacher they know, they almost invariably mention someone possessing this quality. When I try to probe deeper to see what it is about their method that is so special, my students are often stumped. It is because attitude is such a salient feature that it colours the students' perception of the teacher both as an individual and as a professional (for research on this very theme, see Alberson, Frey & Gregg 2004, p. 8)

First impressions: Teachers often 'save' their best techniques for later – a big mistake in my view. By using your favourite materials/techniques early on, you create a positive impression in the students' minds which will pre-dispose them favourably towards all your subsequent lessons. The tendency of first impressions to 'stick' has been demonstrated again and again (Fine 2005)

Professionalism: Little details like being prepared, giving an outline of your lesson in advance, revising what you did the previous time, showing students that there is a continuity in your sessions – all these create an impression of 'professionalism' and they are more observable than, say, a profound activity sequence (Lewis & Hill 1992). The point is that once you have acquired a reputation as a 'true professional', this reputation precedes you and everything you do will then be seen in this light!

Success: Unfortunately perhaps, teachers too are judged by results. This is particularly true in the case of 1-1 les-

sons. Consequently, there is a lot to be said for 'blowing your own trumpet'. This will create an expectation of success which boosts the students' confidence and acts like a self-fulfilling prophecy (Dornyei 2001).

Titles: As the above experiment clearly demonstrates, titles like 'MSc', 'PhD' etc. never fail to impress people about your competence – so if you have them, flaunt them! (On how effective this 'aura' can be, see also Goldstein, Martin & Cialdini 2007). Similarly, if you happen to work for a prestigious institution, then mention it to your students.

Looks: At the cost of repeating myself, the importance of being good-looking can hardly be exaggerated. Not only does this quality affect the 'marks' one gets in virtually all other fields, but there is evidence that this positive predisposition of others actually elicits all kind of positive behaviours from them (Aronson 1999). The moral is clear: it pays to work on your appearance!

What about ELT? So, what about our field? Are there any elements which can create a 'Halo Effect'? Yes, there are - two of them: a) Your passport and b) your accent. Let me explain. I believe that if would-be employers receive 2 identical CVs, one from a native speaker and another from a Greek teacher, there are many cases when only the former will be short-listed. I believe that if two Greek EFL teachers go through an interview and one of them has a native-like accent while the other one does not, then the former is far more likely to be hired, even if the latter has better qualifications/more experience. And I am certain that (*ceteris paribus*) native speakers are on average better paid when it comes to private lessons. Now, I do not have any hard evidence for all this, but I am prepared to bet good money that all

WORDS & WORLDS



Tesol Italy's 36th Annual National Convention

Rome, November 18-19

SUBTHEMES

Content through Language

Identity and Diversity

Primary Language Education

Motivation in Language Learning

3 hypotheses are true. Anyone for research?

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REQUISITI PER IL RICONOSCIMENTO

Si raccomanda a tutti i colleghi impegnati o che intendono impegnarsi nella costituzione di un gruppo provinciale TESOL-Italy 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 scolastico.
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.

Le colleghe incaricate dall'Executive Committee del coordinamento nazionale dei gruppi sono **Simonetta Romano** (e-mail: simonetta.romano@infinito.it – tel. 06/6390532) e **Paola Mirti** (e-mail: paola.mirti@tin.it)

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Buzz-words

Lucilla Lopriore

(continued from p.3)

Perhaps, most importantly for e-learning content and standardization, it is important to recognize that objects and infrastructures for learning cannot simultaneously be both pedagogically neutral and pedagogically valuable. Developers and designers will have to recognize and choose relevant (and probably differing) pedagogical positions, or risk pedagogical irrelevance. (Friesen, 2004, p. 66)

The adoption and use of LOs for language learning can certainly have advantages linked to the instant accessibility of the sources and to the adaptability of the different components of the LOs, but as for its effectiveness in language learning contexts, there are several pedagogical concerns mainly about the way they are being currently used without a sound communicative approach framework and about the difficulty in enhancing forms of spoken interaction ((Sakurai & Donelson, 2011). In a Web-based course, the learner-interface interaction can have a tremendous bearing on students learning

the content [...]; consequently, instructors need to consider the impact that Web-based technology will have on learning when designing Web-based courses. (Thurmond & Wambach, 2004)

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