

**Borszéki Judit<sup>10</sup>: Activities that have worked well in teaching ESP**

*"If students do not learn the way we teach, then let us teach the way they learn." (Kenneth Dunn)*

**Abstract**

The author has been teaching the ESP subject *English for Law Enforcement* introduced at the Faculty of Law Enforcement of the National University of Public Service (the Police College before 2012) since 2008. The aim of the paper is to share her experience on what she sees as the greatest challenges in her own teaching context, namely engaging students in learning activities and thus facilitating their retention of knowledge. The challenges are described in terms of 'lessons learnt from the learners', followed by a description of her attempts to address them (the activities that have worked well) and the reasons behind the related phenomena as explained by the experts. The elements of Content and Language Integrated Learning and Task Based Language Teaching applicable in teaching English for Special Purposes (ESP) are given special emphasis.

**Introduction**

As most students choosing English as a foreign language have already passed a B2 level state accredited language examination by the time they begin their studies at the Faculty of Law Enforcement of the National University of Public Service, instead of teaching general English an ESP subject *English for Law Enforcement* could be introduced in 2009 – an unprecedented development in law enforcement higher education in Hungary. The name of this ESP subject reflects the fact that the language groups are comprised of students with various specialisations (such as economic crime, financial and criminal investigation, border policing, public order, traffic policing, customs, corrections, disaster management, private security and migration) and its overall aim is to enable students to communicate with foreign colleagues in a professional context (work, e.g. joint operations and investigation, training, conferences etc.) by developing their language skills, with special emphasis on law enforcement terminology. A five-year period is sufficient to draw conclusions about the techniques that were efficient and those which did not work so well through the teaching of this new subject. The aim of this paper is to share the experience I obtained on what I see as the greatest challenges in my own teaching context, namely engaging students in learning activities and thus facilitating their retention of knowledge. These observations have been gained through working with the students, so I decided to structure the ideas around the 'lessons learnt from the learners'; the challenges occurring, the attempts to address them and the reasons behind these phenomena as explained by the experts. The activities listed below have been tried in classroom situations and most of them were (or are going to be) published in the textbooks I have compiled for students, entitled *Crime and Justice*, *Traffic Policing* and *Migration and Asylum*. Teachers learn not only from learners but also from each other so my English teaching colleagues might have come across most (if not all) of these ideas. I learnt them at EFL conferences, workshops and from resource books and I suppose it is always useful to be reminded of techniques, even if they are familiar, to see how these procedures may be adapted in an ESP context.

**Lesson 1**

**Students like matching exercises and gap-filing.**

**Rationale:** Educational theory has increasingly relied on the findings of neurobiology. We have ever greater knowledge of how our brain 'likes its information', that for our

<sup>10</sup> Faculty of Law Enforcement of the National University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary



brain information itself is meaningless, and that it instinctively searches for meaning through patterning, i.e. finding relationships between separate pieces of information (Caine and Caine). Similarly, it has an innate desire to revert to well-known forms, following assumptions based on previous experience. (Lotto)

**Activity types:**

Matching, comparing, ordering, sorting, ranking and categorising items, unscrambling letters, words, filling in gaps: missing letters in words, unfinished sentences, reconstructing missing parts of truncated texts, 'double' dictation, cloze tests etc.

**Sample activities:** (Within the given limits of this paper I can only provide the instructions to the activities. Grids, etc. needed for the tasks are on the presentation slides.)

Try to match the headlines (there are two extra!) with the pictures and work out the stories behind them. Then get a story from your teacher. Read it, memorise it and (without saying the headline) retell it to at least two other people, who will need to point out the correct headline and photo.

Match the dominoes to make collocations and put them in the grid. The first two have been done for you.

Sort these pieces of information under the appropriate international organisation. (Europol, Interpol, OLAF, FRONTEX)

Student A Read the story from a victim. Remember the typical elements involved in Trafficking in Human Beings you have read about in the previous texts and make notes of them in the box on the right. Some letters of the words are given. Tell your story to your partner. How many similar points can you find?

Double dictation: Student A: Read out the parts of the text you have to Student B and fill in the missing parts (s)he is going to dictate to you.

**Lesson 2**

Students are eager to solve puzzles and play games. That is what we use when we ask them to predict the content of a given text<sup>11</sup>. Also, most students prefer to work in pairs or groups.

**Rationale:** The brain is curious and is attracted to novelty (Caine and Caine) and enjoys a challenge. When facing tasks that are too difficult, a lack of control creates cognitive frustration and blocks thinking, whereas realistic challenges can be motivating. The only activity that 'celebrates' uncertainty is playing games, where it is accepted that the player might experiment and make mistakes. (Lotto) The importance of games in language teaching is well-known and I think including them in ESP textbooks (even in the ones based on 'serious' academic content) is essential. In fact, instead of 'rewarding' the students with puzzles and games taken from supplementary 'games books', these activities should be built into the various phases of the learning process. People comprehend more effectively when their needs for social interaction and relationships are engaged.

<sup>11</sup> In this paper by 'text' I mean both reading and audio corpora.



meaning through  
(Caine and Caine).  
options based on

scrambling letters,  
missing parts of

instructions to the

the stories behind  
the headline)  
line and photo.

have been done

n. (Europol,

l in Trafficking in  
n in the box on the  
any similar points

3 and fill in the

**what we use**  
**Also, most**

enjoys a challenge.  
stration and blocks  
that 'celebrates'  
eriment and make  
d I think including  
s essential. In fact,  
lementary 'games  
ng process. People  
ships are engaged.

(Caine and Caine) Also, this type of work can assist in meeting the challenges posed by mixed-ability groups and is often built on split information, activating the brain's desire to fill in the blanks.

**Activity types:** predicting text content from words, images and related examples (case studies), word searches, puzzles, guessing games, charades, taboo, information gap and jigsaw activities, role plays and simulations.

**Sample activities:**

Exercise a) You are going to read about six cases which UK Customs dealt with. In which of these do you think the authorities had to take measures?

Exercise b) Read extracts from "A Customs guide for travellers entering the UK" to check your answers. Write the letter of the case next to the regulation which you think applies.

Watch the video without sound. Guess what the voiceover is about. In pairs try to write a text to go with the images (your teacher is going to stop the clip from time to time.), then compare your solution with that of another pair.

Exercise a) Look at the word cloud made from a text about the Schengen area and write 5 statements you think it includes.

Exercise b) Read the text and check to see if you can identify your statements.

In pairs, play 'noughts and crosses'. You need to say a correct sentence with the word in the cell (used with the meaning it had in this unit) to put your sign on it. The player with three signs in a line (↑←↖) scores a point.

Double puzzle: Unscramble each of the clue words.

Copy the letters in the numbered cells to other cells with the same number to reconstruct the final message.

Try to decipher the secret message to learn something important about shoplifters. Student A: look at the grid below. Student B: go to page ... to find the same sentence in a different puzzle. Help each other to discover each word.

In groups of three, appoint a messenger to go and read the text the teacher is going to provide. This needs to be memorised, section by section, and, when they return, they should dictate the chunks of text to their group, within the 5 minutes allowed. The group with the most accurate text wins!

Work in groups of four. Read your passage about the diamond robbery and work together to answer the questions. Find the names of these objects in the text and tell the others how they are related to the story.

Role play: Visa applicants

About two thirds of the students are *visa applicants*. They get a card each. They come from the countries described on the cards and have various destinations. The remaining third are *staff* at



Hungarian consulates, who have to tell the applicants if it is the Hungarian consulate they should turn to or not.

In groups of three, students pick 3 or 4 (large) photos, 3 (everyday) objects from the piles prepared by the teacher before the lesson and get a card each with different sets of vocabulary items. They have to make up a story which includes all of these elements. When ready, each group pastes their photos on the board and presents their story, pointing to the photos and holding up the objects when they appear in the sequence of events. Members of another group have to check if they have included all of the vocabulary items. After the presentations the class votes for what they think is the most imaginative story.

### Lesson 3

**We should use the power of the visual more frequently as it is efficient in raising interest and aids the retention of knowledge.**

**Rationale:** As we know, the left hemisphere of our brain is in charge of sequential, analytical and logical thought. The right hemisphere is said to be 'artistic'; more related to emotions, interpreting spatial and visual stimuli; it is nonlinear, intuitive and holistic. We also know that powerful learning is enhanced by rich emotional experiences, guided and moderated by higher order functions. Perception and retention of information is at its most efficient when both hemispheres are involved. Remembering the content of a text is easier if it is linked to or represented through spatial terms and images.

We must also keep in mind that students who have just started their studies in higher education are members of Generation Z (young people born 1995-2009), the first generation that has never experienced the pre-internet world and has been exposed to computer technology and mobile communication from a very young age; whose cognitive disposition therefore is different from that of most of their teachers (Coyle, Hood and Marsh). In a network society, external symbolic storage systems (ESS) are being transformed by the appearance of (computer) screens and their increased use instead of book pages. Parts or the whole of these screen surfaces function as windows opening into real and/or virtual worlds (Komenszi) where images play a key role in transferring information.

**Activity types:** introducing new topics with the help of pictures, sharing information learnt from infographics, anticipating content from word clouds or images, producing text with images as clues, guessing details of a picture before seeing it, making mind maps, summarising a text in graphic organisers (charts etc.), preference of authentic video clips to audio recordings for listening comprehension, students preparing Power Point presentations on ESP topics, built on slides that present images rather than large amounts of text.

#### Sample activities:

Look at the photos. Quickly write down the first words that come to mind.  
When and where do you think they were taken? What do they tell you about migration?

Exercise a) The Commission identified three main pillars of the Common Immigration Policy for Europe in 2008. Which pillar do you think the various sections of the previous text illustrate? Write their names in the boxes provided. Match the content of each pillar by connecting each with the correct box. What details do you think they involve?

Exercise b) Copy 5 details (below) of each concept/ pillar content next to it.



Read the second part of the text and fill in the chart to summarise it.

Look at the collage below and on page 62. Where do you think the photos could have been taken? Name the elements of trafficking in human beings they illustrate.

Choose 20 words from the previous exercises and write a story of about 200 words, to which these photos will be the illustration.

The documentary you are going to watch is about 'ghost' people in the UK. Who do you think they are? These are snapshots of people from the documentary. Try to guess who they are and their stories.

Before you watch: Look at the pictures and decide their order to make up a story. Share your story with a partner.

#### Lesson 4

**Following the strict PPP procedure when teaching an ESP subject results in students losing interest and therefore needs to be modified.**

This being the most important and complex lesson, I feel I need to elaborate on it. In the first textbook I compiled I followed the procedure usually found in EFL books; every unit has the same sections, corresponding to the PPP procedure such as:

PRESENTATION	A) READING AND VOCABULARY
	B) LISTENING (mainly video material)
PRACTICE	C) VOCABULARY PRACTICE
	D) GLOSSARY (grid for bilingual dictionary of terminology to be filled in by the student)
PRODUCTION	E) SPEAKING
	F) WRITING

Obviously, sections A) and B) are meant to present terminology related to the topic of the unit in authentic contexts through making the students work with written and audio texts. Although I applied many of the activities mentioned previously to engage students as much as possible and to avoid them being confined to the use of receptive skills, I regularly had to face the following problems:

1. Following the principle of using authentic (= not adapted) texts, we find that this often results in students having to read or listen to corpora beyond their language proficiency level. Even if I urge them to concentrate only on the main points of the content and terminology, many of them become frustrated.
2. These texts were not meant for educational purposes, therefore they are less 'cost-effective' than those in EFL books; you often need to deal with a lengthy text to be able to present a limited number of lexical items in an appropriate context. In other words, you need too much input to achieve a relatively small amount of output.



3. The above issues often result in cognitive overload for the students and the problem that the Presentation phase will last too long as compared with the other two phases, where we can focus on the target vocabulary.

**Rationale:** Of course, these challenges can be overcome by providing supplementary activities to facilitate understanding and to give students a sense of achievement as often as possible. When looking for ways of making the Presentation phase more engaging for students, the most promising solutions I found were those offered by two approaches that are not entirely new (both have been developed and widely applied over the past few decades) but still provoke a lot of discussion in EFL methodology. Both are based on constructivist, learner-centred theories, which rely on experiential learning, i.e. the learners being active participants in the acquisition of knowledge and skills by using complex cognitive processes and focusing on language acquisition as opposed to language learning. They support the principle of 'learning as you use, use as you learn' instead of 'learn now for use later' (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh : 10) and the activities they consider efficient show many similarities.

#### **CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning)**

I have recently heard CLIL referred to as 'ESP for kids' (Anderson), and, although some experts make clear distinctions between these concepts, they do have common elements, such as being content-driven, teaching not *in* but *with* and *through* a foreign language (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh: 3), language learning contextualized by subject-matter content etc. The teaching situation described in the introduction to this paper is, in many aspects, very near to CLIL at a secondary school. English for Law Enforcement is not a curricular subject taught only in L2, but, because of the way e.g. the border policing students' curriculum is organised, they study a lot of professional content in English first and only later in Hungarian when studying a specialised subject.

Urging teachers to organise and distribute new content very carefully is of major importance in CLIL and shows the special attention this approach pays to the cognitive processes. (Dale and Tanner) One of its basic principles is creating equilibrium between content cognitive demand and language cognitive demand and ensuring that only one of these is high during any individual learning activity (Ting). Therefore, because the simplification of content cannot always be used to achieve this balance, a careful selection of lower or higher order thinking skills needed for a particular activity is essential, something which should also be noted when teaching ESP.

#### **Task-based language teaching (TBLT)**

According to Ellis (2013), TBLT can be considered to be a type of communicative language teaching (CLT). He considers what he calls the strong form of CLT as synonymous with TBLT, as it involves using tasks as the basis for the design of a course, whereas in a weak form of CLT tasks serve as the means of implementing the free production stage in a PPP sequence and, therefore this structural approach should be called *task-supported* (TSLT) and not *task-based* language teaching.

Various experts define 'task' differently: as 'a piece of classroom work' (Nunan), 'an activity' (Willis) or 'a workplan' (Ellis 2003). The common criterion of tasks they usually agree on is the requirement that learners use the language pragmatically (e.g. by including some kind of 'gap'), that is, they focus on meaning while mobilizing their linguistic resources in order to express that meaning. Thus, they use the target language for a communicative purpose (the '*aim*' of the task) in order to achieve an '*outcome*', which is non-linguistic. Tasks can engage productive or receptive as well as oral or written skills and also various cognitive processes. In TBLT they do not only contribute to the learners' fluency but also serve as a means of building on and adding to existing knowledge (Ellis