CREATING INTERESTING EXERCISES, AND MAKING BORING EXERCISES INTERESTING

What IS 'interest' (in the context of classroom activity)?

It's very difficult to define. It's easiest to do so so by results, or symptoms of interest in the classroom: attention is <u>voluntary</u> + the learner is <u>involved in doing the task</u> + there is <u>enjoyment</u>

In this workshop I'll be looking at activities that provide practice in spelling, vocabulary and grammar, and exploring ways of increasing interest without an inordinate amount of preparation: 'tweaking' rather than creating.

Spelling

We can teach a spelling rule, and then provide students with examples to learn, followed by a dictation:

1. nation
2. prevention
3. intention
4. reaction
5. distraction

6. intervention
7. conception
8. eviction
9. direction
10. instruction

Or: we can give a spelling rule and invite students in groups to think of as many examples as they can:

e.g. *ti* or *ci* = /ʃ/

Then use these as the basis for a dictation.

Why the rise in interest?

- Clear, achievable task

- Open-ended

- Collaboration

- Full participation

- 'Empowerment'

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Vocabulary (1)

afraid of	dolphin	disabled	therapy
touch	wind	twice	connection
competition	snow	swim	lie down
muscles	international	freezing	

We can ask learners to make up a sentence contextualizing each word

Or we can ask them to do any of the following:

- Make a sentence contextualizing two words
- Make a true sentence from a word
- Make an obviously false sentence
- Make a negative sentence
- Make up a story including them all

Why the rise in interest?

- Challenge through using higher-order thinking skills:
- convergent (logical, critical)
- divergent (creative, 'lateral')

Some examples of convergent (critical) thinking

connecting	evaluating truth/falsehood
prioritizing	identifying inclusion / exclusion
classifying	detecting contradictions or tautologies
identifying causality / lack of causality	identifying logical necessity

Some examples of divergent thinking

Creative thinking:

associations	answers to a question
solutions to a problem	questions to an answer

Lateral thinking:

thinking of unusual or original solutions to problems

looking at things from an unconventional angle

'breaking rules'

Vocabulary (2)

jealous	apathetic	excited	afraid
disappointed	hurt	sad	tense
happy	angry	doubtful	
amused	relaxed	confident	

We can do a matching exercise

1.angry	a. unhappy and angry because someone has something you want
2.sad	b. feeling pleasure or satisfaction
3.jealous	c. lacking interest or energy
4.confident	d. having a strong feeling against someone or something that makes you want to shout or hurt them
5.tense	e. unhappy or sorry
6.doubtful	f. nervous, anxious, unable to relax
7.apathetic	g. uncertain about something
8.happy	h. sure or trusting

Or a sentence completion exercise:

1. I felt angry because…_____
2. I felt sad although…_____
3. I felt jealous when …_____
4. I felt confident so …_____
5. I felt tense although …_____
6. I felt doubtful because …_____
7. I felt apathetic so …_____
8. I felt happy when …_____

Why the rise in interest?

- Logical relations (cause/result/opposition)
- Personalization
- Specific and concrete rather than general and abstract
- Open-ended
- (Deeper thinking about the target items, and more 'quantity' of engagement with them)

Grammar (1): Present perfect

We can do a closed-ended sentence completion exercise:

Write sentences using the present perfect

Lina can't find her key; (lose).

Peter weighed 80 kilos before, now he weighs 60; (be on a diet).

Mark and Dana are delighted; (pass the test).

Becky won't be playing today; (break her leg).

Sam will be late; (have an accident).

We aren't going on holiday after all;(change plans).

Or we can 'mutilate the textbook': delete the cue verb phrase, and allow students to invent their own endings.

What has happened?

Peter can't find his key.

Lina weighed 80 kilos before, now she weighs 60.

Mark and Dan are delighted.

Becky won't be playing today.

Sam will be late.

We aren't going on holiday after all.

Why the rise in interest?

- Open-ended:
    - creativity
    - originality
    - humour
- More participation
- More focus on real situations
- Critical thinking: causality, justification
- (More 'quantity' of engagement with the target feature)

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Grammar (2): *There is/are* + prepositions

Make sentences with *there is / there are* about the picture

Ideas

- Say sentences about the picture using the target feature

- Achieve a set number of sentences (20? 30?)

- Say as many sentences as you can in limited time (one minute/ two minutes)

Why the rise in interest?

- Open-ended

- Full participation

- Task (clearly defined,achievable goal - outcome)

- Game-like challenge

- task + constraints (rules)

To summarize

Interest in doing a classroom activity can be identified in terms of its outcomes:

- voluntary attention

- enjoyment

- active involvement in doing the activity

Some key features that are likely to produce boredom

- Form-focused exercises

- Closed-ended exercises

- Low participation ('IRF': activating one member of the class at a time)

Features that are not necessarily conducive to interest

- interesting topic

- (information-gap-based) communication

- real-world relevance or 'authenticity'

Features that are conducive to interest

1: Activation

- Activate students in some kind of (even minimal) <u>production</u> rather than just reception
- Activate <u>most class members</u> simultaneously

2. Empowerment

- Students initiate examples, materials, solutions, questions…
- Teacher bases further work on these

3. Open-endedness

- Invite a <u>large number</u> of 'right' responses
- Encourage <u>original, unusual</u> responses
- Be willing to <u>mutilate the textbook</u>

4. Tasks

- Provide for <u>a clear outcome</u> as the task goal
- Make sure this goal is obviously easily <u>achievable</u>
- Have a <u>feedback stage</u> at the end

5. HOTS

- Minimalize the use of LOTS (simple 'recall-based') exercises: closed-ended matching, gapfills, m/c
- Use tasks that get learners to use HOTS: think critically or creatively
    - Ask them to connect, contrast, classify, criticize, prioritize, identify causes / results, invent, problem-solve, innovate…

6. Personal relevance

- Get students to apply the target items to <u>themselves</u> …
- …or to the <u>real world as they know it</u> (experiences, true / false statements, cultural differences…)

7. Game-like features

Transform into a game by adding an <u>artificial constraint</u> to a task (time limit, not allowed to look, competition, guessing)