

INTER - DISCIPLINARY BLOGOSPHERE TUNE FOR SECONDARY LEARNERS

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Abstract

This work presents an activity that demonstrates how a foreign language teacher can encourage secondary learners to go beyond whatever level they have reached by giving them opportunities to develop background knowledge and to reflect and notice how the English language works through songs and blogs. The results of this research show that this method is both motivating and stimulating for secondary learners because it is presented in a manner that is interesting and challenging and weaves together different subjects studied in the curriculum in order to improve cognitive intake. Through selected songs, the learners will see language as an holistic experience and will be engaged in both receptive and productive activities. In addition, they will learn to conceptualise all aspects of language and develop a blend of linguistic, communicative and intercultural awareness skills, and know-how that will enrich their personality and enhance their ability to continue language learning. This activity will open them to new cultural experiences and knowledge of historical and contemporary problems in the world.

In this paper the song examined is *What I've Done* by Linkin Park and the following steps and methodology is applied : **Thinking about songs: 1. Looking at the song - 2. Responding to the song - 3. Reflection on the language of the lyrics - 4. Creation of a blogosphere** - students share information, help each other with the language and content and develop technical and creative skills. **5. Curriculum link** - there is a rich curriculum link to other subjects such as History, Geography, Social Science, Religion, Economics, Political Science, Computer Science, Art History, Languages; so that the topics could be conceptualised by the learners.

This song activity is a very stimulating way to activate discussion and gives secondary learners the possibility of cross-cultural considerations and a possibility to express opinions. Furthermore, it also encourages CLIL - Content Language Integrated Learning. This research has revealed that this activity builds and improves their level of the English language and cognitive intake in many disciplines. Furthermore, it also builds a cohesive and a cooperative attitude that is fundamental in the teaching and learning process in order to foster their desire and willingness for collaborative and constructive learning within the classroom community. The learners will become more responsible and autonomous for their own learning and will develop interest in contemporary problems, world issues, new experiences, other ideas, societies and cultures. This project has proven to be the root to successful teaching and learning where effective and dynamic communication becomes a lifelong learning and training process.

Keywords

autonomous, abilities, assessment, blogosphere, blogs, community, chat, cultural awareness, CLIL, curriculum links, collaborative, communication, constructive, creative, discourse, discussion, evaluation, English, feedback, forum, framework, grammar, ICT, interdisciplinary, knowledge, learner, learner-centred, lifelong learning, language, lyrics, moodle, methodology, peer, productive, reflection, research, receptive, songs, secondary learners, social networks, self-evaluation, scaffolding, task, technology, text types, transfer, weblogs

1. INTRODUCTION

This moodle^[1] blogs forum course which is called blogosphere was designed for a group of secondary students (ERICA^[2] programme) of ITCG Oriani in Faenza, Italy. It was created to build a sense of community which enhances my face to face course by exposing and linking secondary learners to new technological innovation and new forms of communication. Social networks are gaining popularity among secondary learners and blogs is perhaps the most explosive social network. Therefore, it is fundamental that secondary schools provide such self-expression spaces for learners to create a virtual community and

discuss different issues, share ideas and opinions and help each other in the learning process of the English language. The virtual language student blogosphere lab was created to raise awareness of our multicultural society by promoting genuine interaction, acceptance of differences, and authentic communication. Learners will build opinions and stimulate critical thinking on important issues and will apply all the necessary learning strategies. This blogosphere includes different text types and a variety of topics along with the possibility to link and surf to different sites. However, in this paper I will focus on one text type which is songs and will examine the topic of World issues in the past and in the present. In this moodle blogs forum students can chat; therefore, practice spontaneous dialogues and can hold discussions in the moodle blogs forum that require planned/unplanned writing. This blogosphere includes receptive and productive tasks such as: speaking/listening, reading /writing as well as language and cultural reflection. Research studies demonstrate that using the learner's everyday experience of the English language can enhance their learning and make learning a language more pleasurable.

2. COURSE METHODOLOGY AND FEATURES

2.1 The Importance of Classroom Community Dynamics and Interaction in a Learner- Centred Blogosphere Environment

If there is a strong sense of belonging, feeling of influence, Integration, fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection then all learners will successfully work individually, in groups, in pairs and as a whole community within the classroom and in the moodle blogosphere.

2.2 The Autonomous Learner- Role of the Teacher in a Learner- Based Teaching Syllabus^[3]

Both teacher and learner are active participants in this community learning process and contribute and share opinions, ideas feelings and personal experience. The teacher should apply a taxonomy^[4] so that it is possible to identify the cognitive skills that learners should practice in a lesson. They should not be a transmission teacher but a helper and resource that provides scaffolding^[5] support when needed and at other times a monitor of the work the learners are producing. It is the duty of a teacher to provide the learners with the right learning strategies by helping learners to conceptualise by creating mind maps and concept maps. Furthermore, a teacher should be motivated and interested in nurturing learners to be more motivated and autonomous. Some possible ways include the following:

- Adopt a positive attitude towards the learners by giving them plenty of encouragement for their efforts; making them understand that errors are a natural feature of the learning process.
- Make instructional decisions and planned learning opportunities by providing the learners with meaningful, relevant, and interesting tasks.
- Involve the learners in the negotiation of themes to be discussed in class (initiate discussion thread/topic) so that they are more actively involved in the classroom process and activities.
- Help learners use all new technology such as ICT, multimedia sources and concordance programs as instruments that enrich their individual intake.
- Set up dialogues in which learners reorganize their existing state of knowledge. Learners already know a great deal and they also have the ability to extend their knowledge of the world.
- Give responsibility to learners by having them work on individual and group research projects.
- Make the learners aware of self-appraisal, self-correction, peer-correction, peer-evaluation and self-evaluation through presentation and discussion sessions.
- Encourage pride in achievement by allowing learners to display their work in the collaborative moodle platform of the school so that others can view and learn from their experience.
- Provide a balance between communicative tasks and reflection on the language. Satisfy field -dependent and field independent learners and give the learners opportunities to notice how language works on their own.
- Minimise teacher talking time (TTT) and encouraging student talking time (STT) and narrow the traditional gap between the teacher and the learner.
- Develop an assessment plan in order to provide evidence of learning. Assessment should be continuous and provide evidence of growth toward the learning goals.
- Provide learners with feedback and learners should provide the teacher with feedback regarding teaching methods and syllabus.
- Promote in - action and on- action reflection both for teaching and for learning.

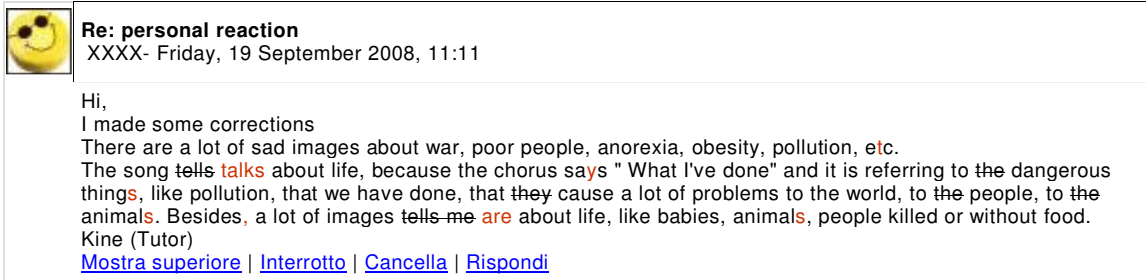


Fig.1. Example of peer help and corrections

2.3 Task- Based Learning Framework Approach

Tasks can have a variety of starting points. They may draw on learners' own input, e.g. personal experience, general / world knowledge, or intellectual challenge; they may be based on authentic and rich but comprehensible input of written text, recordings of spoken data, or visual data; they could be activities like games, demonstrations or interviews or the combination of several of these. The important thing is that while doing tasks, learners are meaning what they say, and focusing on meaning. They will process and use the exposure to exchange meanings for a real purpose. They are free to use whatever language forms they want. The games they play, the problems they solve, the experiences they share may or may not be things that they will do in real life, but their use of language, because it is purposeful and real, will replicate features of language use outside the classroom.^[6]

Even in this blogosphere, the task-based approach is an interesting framework because it looks at language as an holistic experience. The learners are not obliged to use only pre-taught language like in the PPP method , but can use whatever language they need to achieve a real outcome. They are encouraged to continuously negotiate meaning, manage interactions and apply strategies that prevent communication from breaking down. This framework provides a good balance between fluency and accuracy.

2.4 Variety of Texts Types & Topics

The learners are exposed to a variety of rich and authentic cultural content. The written and recorded texts are taken from a variety of sources in the English-speaking world. The audio texts found in this learning blogosphere unit include monologues, dialogues, interviews, radio programmes, documentaries, films and songs that convey meaning through personal accounts and anecdotes as well as factual information. While the written genres feature newspaper articles, magazine articles, advertisements, literary extracts, websites, emails, letters, diaries, blogs; etc. Spoken text types include: public announcements and instructions; public speeches, lectures, presentations; entertainment (movies, songs); news broadcasts; public debates and discussions; telephone conversations; interviews; inter-personal dialogues and conversations such as chat, stories in conversation (narrative, anecdote, exemplum and recount). Attention is also given to the varieties of English. The topics chosen in this blogosphere are up-to-date themes that are both motivating and stimulating for teenagers attending secondary school because they are presented in a manner that is interesting and challenging for young learners.



Fig.2. Different text types

2.4 Importance of Cultural Awareness

“Cultural awareness is the term they use to describe sensitivity to the impact of culturally - induced behaviour on language use and communication. Cross-cultural looks at different countries life and institutions, beliefs, and values, as well as everyday attitudes and feelings conveyed not only by language,

but by paralinguistic features such as dress, gesture, facial expression, stance, and movement.^[7] Learners are exposed to activities that deal with both cognitive and affective aspects of cultural awareness for example: recognizing cultural images and symbols, working with cultural products, examining patterns of everyday life, examining cultural behaviour, examining patterns of communication, exploring values and attitudes.

3. CONTENT FEATURES FOR MOODLE SONG BLOGS FORUM


3.1 Thinking about Songs

Is one of the activities that students are exposed to in this blogosphere.

Thinking about songs: 1. Looking at the song - What people, places and events are mentioned? What do you notice about the music? (fast, slow, catchy, dull) 2. Responding to the song- What is your personal reaction to the lyrics? Why do you think the artist wrote this song? What clues do you find to suggest this? For what audience was the song written? What does the song tell you about life? 3. Reflection on the language of the lyrics: look for words that co-occur with a particular pattern, lexical chunks, multi-word expression, grammar structures. This song activity really reflects teenagers' interest in English-language songs and their lyrics. Although at times the language structure could be unconventional, it is a very stimulating way for discussion. It also highlights cultural features and interesting themes that give the possibility of cross-cultural discussions and opinions.

Discussione	Iniziato da	Repliche	Ultimo messaggio
Thinking About Songs	 Di Serio M.C.	63	Sat, 20 Sep 2008, 11:01
Linkin Park – What I've Done	 Di Serio M.C.	57	Sat, 20 Sep 2008, 10:26

Fig.3. Thinking of songs- moodle blogs forum



Lyrics and video of song - *What I've Done* - Linkin Park
 Di Serio M.C. - Friday, 19 September 2008, 09:41

Listen to the lyrics and watch the video
www.youtube.com

<p>"What I've Done" In this farewell There's no blood There's no alibi 'Cause I've drawn regret From the truth Of a thousand lies [Pre-Chorus:] So let mercy come And wash away What I've done [Chorus:] I'll face myself To cross out what I've become Erase myself</p>	<p>And let go of what I've done Put to rest What you thought of me While I clean this slate With the hands of uncertainty [Pre-Chorus] [Chorus] For what I've done I start again And whatever pain may come Today this ends I'm forgiving what I've done!!! [Chorus]</p> <p>What I've Done Forgiving What I've Done</p>
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Fig.4. Reflection on Lyrics and video

3.2 Warm-up Phase

This phase is important because it raises their awareness of the topic and activates their language and cultural knowledge of the topic. (activate schemata) The input they receive will also help to arouse curiosity and to motivate the learners to want to discover more on the topic.



Important people Di Serio M.C. - Wednesday, 17 September 2008, 08:57

What important people do you see in this video?
What do you know about them?



here are some useful links to sites where you can find information about famous people shown in Linkin Park's video:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/john_f.kennedy
- http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1979
- <http://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro>
- <http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents>

Fig.5. Thinking of songs-important people (warm- up)

3.3 Receptive and Productive Abilities

“Writing creates a world of things; talking creates a world of happening.”^[8] In this blogosphere, chat can be called the “world of words.” An important element to consider is the time factor. The words that are being processed in a chat are being decided as they are being understood. So the processing conditions result in certain common facilitating features that include: simplification, ellipsis and parataxis, formulaic expressions, and fillers. Compensation features include self correction, false starts, repetition and rephrasing. Therefore, all these features can help secondary learners to notice how discourse works and to sound natural in their use of the foreign language. As mentioned previously, the production of discourse in real time can impose pressures, but can also allow freedom which will allow learners to explore how language can be made to work while improving their fluency in producing utterances and interactive skills for real-life purposes. In spoken interaction, both speaker and listener have to be good communicators of meaning. Firstly, as Widdowson states we have “information routines” where speakers organize what they want to communicate in typical patterns that carry a typical kind of message and deal with recurring cognitive problems. These information routines can be either expository or evaluative. Secondly, there is the negotiation of meaning which involves “interaction routines” that are not so much based on information content but on management of interactions that look at the sequences of turns that occur in typical kinds of interactions that are organized in a characteristic way such as: service encounters, telephone conversations, interviews, casual encounters, conversations at parties, conversations around a dinner table, radio or television interviews etc.. In addition, learners must also learn to use strategies of communication that can prevent communication from breaking down such as achievement strategies: guessing, paraphrasing and cooperative strategies and reduction strategies such as avoidance. Furthermore, we can categorize discourse in this blogosphere as following 1. planned/unplanned, 2. socially structured/less socially structured, 3. aided by writing/unaided by writing, 4. less reciprocal (one-way)/more reciprocal (two-way). Learners practice different activities such as: establishing and maintaining social relationships, expressing reactions, seeking and giving information, learning or teaching how to make or do something, problem-solving, discussing ideas and analysing the discourse of blogs to explore useful speaking functions. Learners focus on different ways of reading such as: skimming that teaches the technique to get the gist of the text, scanning that teaches the learner to look for specific items. In addition, they learn the SQ3R method for intensive reading- survey, question, read, recall, revise, and lastly the pleasure and really amusing moment for extensive reading. During listening tasks the learners practice the following strategies in order to improve listening skills: listen to general gist, listen for detail, inference, or listen for speakers attitudes and opinions. Learners are asked to learn to grasp and interpret meaning and at times to read between the lines.



09:29 FRANCESCA: Guys! Have you seen the Linkin Park video - What I've Done!



09:29 ELEONORA: Yeah!! I saw it....



09:30 STEFANIA: Really??.me too.









-  09:30 FRANCESCA: The singer is too cool! *_*
-  09:30 STEFANIA: It was very shocking..
-  09:31 ANNALISA: ..so it's not funny like Happy Feet....=.=
-  09:31 STEFANIA: Mmm..I agree with you!
-  09:34 STEFANIA: Ok.....let's stop joking now..talk about real things.
-  09:36 ANNALISA: Yes, sorry...I'm ironic. However I agree with you...
-  09:37 STEFANIA: Er....there are very strong images in that video..don't you think??

Fig.6. Chat - spontaneous dialogue

 **Re: Historical events** XXXXX - Wednesday, 17 September 2008, 12:07

The first historical event shown in Linkin Park's video is the release of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, in 1945. It's an impressive scene, and the explosion of the bomb is synchronized to the beginning of the electric guitar part, so that images and sounds have a harder impact on the viewer and emphasize the cruel brutality of the event.

Connected to the same theme, some pictures of the nuclear experiments conducted in the Nevada White Desert, better known as Area 51, can be seen later in the video. There are also scenes of war and bombings, such as the Vietnam War and the Iraq war.


Linkin Park show us with this video the insanity of mankind that endlessly causes death and destruction...and it's our fault.

[Mostra superiore](#) | [Interrotto](#) | [Cancella](#) | [Rispondi](#)

Fig.7. Forum - planned discussion

3.4 Vocabulary and Language Reflection

It is useful for learners to keep a notebook in their blogosphere where they record new vocabulary. They should divide the vocabulary words into specific topics; creating word maps so that they can remember them for life. Michael Lewis argues that "language does not consist of vocabulary and structures but of different kinds of lexical items that are socially sanctioned and independent units of meaning."⁹ The learners examine four different categories of the lexical framework: words, polywords, collocations or word partnerships, institutionalised utterances or fixed expressions, sentence frames or heads. They explore that language is made up of prefabricated chunks used both in written and in spoken language that express something specific and that is loaded with communicative meaning. When learners meet a new word, they are encourage to guess the meaning in context or use a monolingual dictionary rather than a bilingual one. They exploit vocabulary in a text by analysing and identifying chunks of one kind such as: discourse makers, verb and noun, prepositional phrase, noun and noun combinations, etc. They also look for synonyms and sometimes use a concordance program to reflect on how some words are collocated and their use. The same approach is used for exploiting and exploring grammar structures such as tense and voice that are functional to a specific text and context. In this text, focus is given to the Present Perfect Simple tense and its use in this song.


 **Reflection on language** di [Di Serio M.C.](#) - Tuesday, 16 September 2008, 11:42

Why do they use the present perfect in this song?

AFFIRMATIVE	NEGATIVE	QUESTION
I have done	I have not done	Have I done?
You have done	You have not done	Have you done?
He has done	He has not done	Has he done?
She has done	She has not done	Has she done?
It has done	It has not done	Has it done?
We have done	We have not done	Have we done?
You have done	You have not done	Have you done?


They have done	They have not done	Have they done?
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Fig.8. Reflection on language –grammar chart



Re: Reflection on language
XXXX - Wednesday, 17 September 2008, 11:28

I think they use the present perfect because those facts began in the past and they continue also in the present.
I agree with what they have written, because most of those facts are not finished or have effects in the present.
What I've done - What we have done!!!!
Have done All we are saying is Give Peace a Chance!
[Mostra superiore](#) | [Interrotto](#) | [Cancella](#) | [Rispondi](#)



Re: Reflection on language
Di Serio M.C.Friday, 19 September 2008, 10:20

Good example!
Mary
[Mostra superiore](#) | [Interrotto](#) | [Cancella](#) | [Rispondi](#)

Fig.9. Reflection on language – interaction student/teacher

3.5 Research Project - Create a Blog

Learners are asked to consolidate the topic language by preparing a weblog using Blogger, Wordpress or Netlog as a homework assignment. This activity really makes learners more responsible for their own language learning. Learners are asked to prepare this work individually or in pairs. This activity is a great way to practise and consolidate all language areas and build their creative and technical skills. The learners present their work and then interaction follows where they solicit information and opinions from their peers. Creating their own language blog really motivates the learners and challenges them to do a good job.

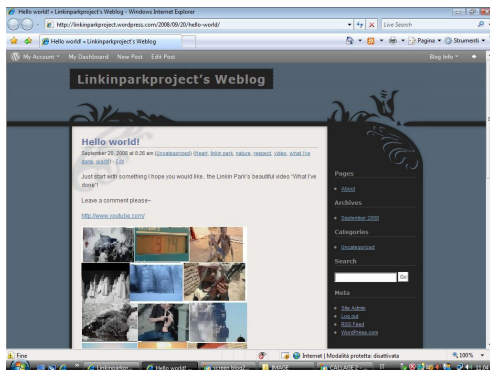



Fig.10. Learner Weblog

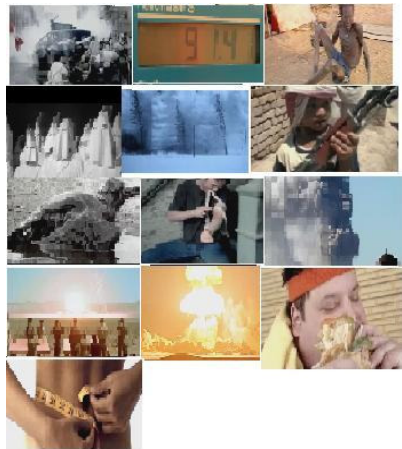
4. CURRICULUM LINKS – INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECT AND CONTENT INTEGRATED LANGUAGE LEARNING

The song of Linkin Park – *What I've Done* motivates and encourages learning across the curriculum. It looks at many different issues and could be linked to many subjects studied in secondary schools such as History, Science, Economics, Art History, Religion, etc.. In this song, there is natural areas for integration and development of thematic learning experience. In addition, with this activity, language is integrated into the broad curriculum and is seen in real-life situations. This research has shown that this activity gives learners a stimulating experience and a well-rounded transfer of knowledge. This enables learners to use their critical and creative thinking and enhance their knowledge of the world.

 Curriculum Links Di Serio M.C. - Friday, 19 September 2008, 08:23



[History](#)



[Economics](#)
[Religion](#)
[Sciences](#)



[Art History](#)
[Computer Science](#)
[Languages](#)

Fig.11. Curriculum links

5. FEEDBACK /ASSESSMENT PLAN & REMEDIAL

There is a continuous informal assessment plan, to provide evidence of learning, where feedback is given to all task achievements once they are completed. In addition, it is fundamental to prize the learners for their efforts and to provide feedback on the form and content of the learner’s language. In addition, it is very important that learners give feedback on the teacher and the programme so that necessary syllabus changes can be made and so that the teacher can grow as well in this learning process.





Aggiungi un nuovo argomento			
Discussione	Iniziato da	Repliche	Ultimo messaggio
Student Evaluation	 d.m.c.	63	xxxxx Fri, 19 Sep 2008, 11:26
Teacher Evaluation	 d.m.c.	58	xxxxx Fri, 19 Sep 2008, 11:23
Syllabus Evaluation	 d.m.c.	43	xxxxx Fri, 19 Sep 2008, 11:22

Fig.12. Feedback


6. SOS LANGUAGE HELP SPACE

This help space is available to all students who need help in learning the English language. It is conducted by a Senior English Teacher along with a group of student tutors.

 **SOS language help space** Di Serio M.C. - Tuesday, 23 September 2008, 09:07


Hi students
 Welcome to the language help space!
 A place where you can ask any questions regarding the English Language.

We are here to help you! [Cancella](#) | [Rispondi](#)

 **Re: sos language help space Di Serio M.C.** XXXX - Tuesday, 23 September 2008, 10:00

Can I really ask anything about the English Language??
GOOD! Present and past perfect cause me a lot of problems! I think this is because in Italian there aren't verb tenses like these. Or not? * _ *
 I'm not able to understand the uses of these tenses, the present perfect simple and continuous, the past perfect simple and continuous, aaah O_o
 SOS space, help me!

[Mostra superiore](#) | [Interrotto](#) | [Cancella](#) | [Rispondi](#)

 **Re: sos language help space Di Serio M.C.** - Tuesday, 23 September 2008, 10:12

Hello student, Here are links with grammar explanations and exercises that should help you understand these tenses. Good Luck!

[present perfect simple](#) [past perfect simple](#)
[present perfect continuous](#) [past perfect continuous](#)

Let me know!

[Mostra superiore](#) | [Interrotto](#) | [Cancella](#) | [Rispondi](#)

Fig.13. Sos help space

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that the blend of technology and songs is one of the keys to unlocking language learning because they are both an important part of the youth culture sphere. Furthermore, a dynamic and communicative classroom community is the root to successful teaching and learning where effective communication becomes a lifelong learning and training process.

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Web- Sites

Moodle <http://moodle.org>

Into the blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs

<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere>

ITCG A. Oriani Faenza www.itcgoriani.it

Centre for Information on Language, Teaching and Research www.clit.org.uk

Forum for Across the Curriculum Teaching www.factworld.info

Centro Linguistico Unibo (cliro) Alfacert E-learning <http://alfacert.cliro.unibo.it/moodle/index.php>

Wordpress www.wordpress.com

Blogger www.blogger.com

Youtube www.youtube.com

Netlog www.netlog.com

Wikipedia www.wikipedia.com

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NOTES

^[1] Moodle is a course management system (CMS) – a free open source software package designed using sound pedagogical principles, to help educators create effective online learning communities.

^[2] ERICA (Educazione alla Relazione Interculturale nella Comunicazione Aziendale) www.itcgoriani.it

^[3] Wright, T. (1988). *Roles of Teachers & Learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 49-124 (section two).

^[4] Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation.

^[5] Vygotsky's theory describes the assistance a teacher gives learners to help them safely take risks and reach higher goals than would be possible alone.

^[6] Willis, J. (1996). *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching* . Oxford: Heinemann, (chapter 6: A flexible framework for task-based learning, p.54).

^[7] Tomalin, B., Stempleski, S. (1993). *Cultural Awareness*. Oxford: Oxford university Press, p. 5.

^[8] Halliday, M.A.K. (1989). *Spoken and written language*. Oxford: Oxford university Press, p.93.

^[9] Lewis, M. (1996). *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching* . Oxford: Heinemann, (chapter 2: Implications of a lexical view of language, p.10).