

# The Violin Effect



**A Handbook for Beginner Teachers**

**Excerpts from this book can be rightfully quoted.**

**The questionnaires in Part II are photocopiable for classroom use only.**

**Scientific Coordinator: Associate Professor Dorin Chira, Ph.D.**

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**The Violin Effect : A Handbook for Beginner Teachers /**

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## About the Author



**Cătălina Cocan** has been teaching English at kindergarten, primary and secondary school level in/around Cluj-Napoca, Romania since 2004. That's her job.

She has been tricking kids into learning English at her very own smallish school since 2014. That's her teaching experiment.

She is a book reader, not a book writer, but she had to write a book as proof of teaching expertise in 2018.

She did her best, but the result is nowhere near applied methodology (as a matter of fact, it is closer to storytelling).

She was tickled pink to realize that her scientific coordinator, Associate Professor Dorin Chira (distinguished and dear faculty teacher), endorsed such naive, but honest attempts at spreading the word that the teaching business can still be attractive.

The first reader of this book, dearest fellow teacher Alina Jiman, advised for the distribution of this material to faculty students who are considering becoming teachers.

As a result, this book of stories sprinkled with teaching tips and tricks is offered **free of charge** (with the full financial support of Colourful English) to people interested in the teaching profession (as sympathizers or rookies).

(Any royalties that may have got into Cătălina's pocket she would have spent on stickers anyway.)



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## **To the Reader**

Books of stories are meant to be read more than once.

*The Violin Effect* is a book of stories.

There are three layers of meaning for you to discover: Lifelines, Recovery, Catalyst.

The *first* time you read it, it will be an autobiography - Lifelines.

It will probably take no longer than an afternoon to notice the difference between our life experiences and perspectives on teaching.

You can write down your ideas on the Lifelines pages.

Put the book aside for a while.

The *second* time you read it, allow it to be a therapeutic book – Recovery.

As such, it discloses moments of confusion and failure in teaching, alongside attempts at finding the way out.

You can write down your ideas on the Recovery pages.

Put the book aside for a while.

If you wish, you can read it again, for a *third* time, as a motivational book - Catalyst.

You get to choose when, how or why to read it – it is your very own choice.

You can write down your ideas on the Catalyst pages.

Put the book aside for a while.

When you feel like it, come back to the ideas you have kept to yourself while reading.

Take them in, let them simmer, allow them to merge with your life experiences.

They are probably the beginning of your very own book of stories.

## Acknowledgements

This book couldn't have been written without the valuable input of my son, Gabriel, who has surreptitiously been co-authoring most of what I have written or presented in the last 12 years. As a child, he gave me the best possible advice on how to change my work so that the result should be short, playful and memorable – if it managed to keep a child entertained, it would do the same for any compliant adult. As a teenager, he is one of my advisors on what to do next, so I owe him a debt of gratitude.

Whenever I need help (because I feel that my creativity is plummeting), I just need Dana. She will turn the house upside down (making me wish that creativity could be organized in boxes and labeled accordingly), and she will succeed in handcrafting that ladybird that I still have no idea how to make for tomorrow's class. She could use the scissors to get an ovalish shape – in the middle of the big piece of fabric I had been saving for a drama show curtain – then she would add some drops of black paint. She could ravage the garden for two or three well-chosen flower petals (and a few other trinkets that she just happened to bump into - they will come in handy for one of her many other secret projects) which she could glue on a piece of paper and then embellish with who-knows-what. Better still, she could get the idea of opening the fridge and sharpening her pencil a few times (everyone knows that, mathematically speaking, half a tomato plus some pencil nibs into the veggie skin equals a ladybird). After cutting (...open, surgeon-like) my beloved curtain, filling the living room with garden utensils or butchering the tomato on the kitchen table, the first instinct of my beautiful 7-year old young lady will be moving along with her daily responsibilities (*I haven't practised my piano today!*), leaving the tedious to whoever is more interested in the mundane than in Chopin. I am happily aware that, besides lots of grumpy cleanliness, she is also bringing so much colour in my life... I find it hard to imagine writing one more page or going to one more conference without her toothless smile to the left/to the right/in front of/behind me.

I am also thankful to Călin (for giving me the presents of Gabriel and Dana and for a thousand more vivid life moments to remember together in toothless old age...).

My dear family members have spoiled me while writing this book by doing all the chores left undone by a daughter-daughter-in-law-wife-mother-teacher who had a

book to write. Whenever I phased out of real life, they chipped in cooking, taking the kids out for a walk, learning together for Gabriel's Physics test or being there to put their hands together for Dana's rehearsals of the latest moves learnt in her gymnastics class. Ecaterina, Valer, Valeriu, I am forever in your debt.

Voichița has shown me that a life spent among students and teachers is a life worth living. I trust that she is happy for me, again, just like she used to be when she was with us. We are keeping her safe in our hearts.

My sincerest thoughts of gratitude are meant for Associate Professor Dorin Chira Ph.D. for painstakingly proofreading my work and giving me invaluable input. His professional guidance and strong belief in what I had to say is one of the main reasons this book is in your hands.

Like puzzle pieces make up an image, the following people are parts of this book: Moș Petrică, Mama Mina, Moș Valer, Mama Lenuța (dear grandpas and grannies...), Mircea, Soazig, Andrei, Emmanuelle, Alina, Dorin, Mihai, Iulia, Dorin, Livia, Alexandra, Nicolae, Augusta, Livia, Adrian, Matei, Anastasia, Mihaela, Mihai, Teodora, Laurențiu, Laurenția, Ana, Teofil, Costi, Cătălina, Dragoș, Rareș, Mișu, Nico, Marius, Anda, Alma, Dan, Ramona, Andrei, Teodora, Flaviu, Teodora, Victor, Irina, Nadia, Dragos, David, Laura, Bogdi, Lucia, Dana, Li, Cami, Maria, Adelina, Monica, Adina, Mircea, Laura, Cami, Paul, Luci, Raluca, Mihaela, Teo, Cristiana, Mariana, Narcisa, Anda, Măriuca, Cosmin, Dan, Simona, Dragoș, Alina, Andreea, Georgiana, Diana, Constantin, Bughi, Cosmin, Maria, Andrei, Mihai, Andrei... The accomplishment of this list will probably take a few more hours of your reading time, so I have decided to stop here. Take my word for it: whoever is (still) not on the list, takes up a good amount space in my heart (how could I have included the names of *all* my students in 15 years of teaching?)

Each contribution (however big or small) of these beloved people was a necessary ingredient in the baking of this cake (*Watch out, this book is not edible! Not yet, anyway. Who knows what I may come up with in the second edition, with Anca's help?*)

Many thanks go to the authors whose books I have been reading over the years. I haven't always been able to track down an idea to its original author (take, for instance, the *bee-in-the-classroom* inspirational lesson in part III,

which describes what can happen in any classroom in the world: past, present or future, thus priceless in any teaching environment.



I will make sure to include the acknowledgment of the rightful author in any of the subsequent editions of this book (*What's wrong with plurals? Thinking big has always been the hallmark of teachers, as maxi-motivators.*)

Most of the ideas that you are about to read have been born within *a reading lifestyle* which has developed organically in my very busy day-to-day life: I needed the realm of stories to take shelter in/ hide away from everything that was or just seemed too difficult to handle without the proper perspective. Reading my way out of every labyrinth, i.e. constantly reading whatever lay in my hand (literature, psychology, religion, children books, home appliances manuals...) gave me an ease of juggling apparently inconsistent ideas which may seem awkward at first. Dabbling into various sides of human knowledge (while mastering none) would do this to you, take my word for it!

Finally, I want to thank each and every reader of this book for the time he/she is planning to spend in *reading conversation* with me. I am here, my head sticking out of every page (my tongue sticking out, too, at times)! For this very reason, my kind suggestion is to give up on adulthood and enter this collection of stories like a child would: no expectations, no regrets. If nothing more, you will have had a good laugh at everything that is included in this (to my best knowledge) first *autobiographical, therapeutic* and *motivational* book meant for teachers.

## Foreword

*Iulia is my friend, a caregiver for both children and adults.*

*She is a nurse, a nun and a former violin player. An overachiever, you may say.*

*Unfortunately, the chords on her violin have snapped and she does not have any intention of replacing them.*

*This true story tells you why.*

*Iulia's violin teacher was strict, with a penchant for competitions. Willing to take his gifted students all the way to mastery, he would be as severe in maintaining discipline as needed. Because - everyone knows this – gifted students are lazy and they need a spur. No need to mention finger bruises (brought about by candid use of the fiddlestick). Just like in gymnastics, the methods used in teaching music at high levels are unquestionable, since good results are achieved.*

*At the end of eight years (equalling an eternity) painfully spent close to her instrument, Iulia, the young musician, received a standing ovation. She had succeeded in performing spotlessly in front of a music-loving crowd.*

*After elegantly bowing in front of the audience, she went backstage with her violin.*

*Carefully, painstakingly, unremorsefully, she snapped the violin chords, one by one.*

*She promised herself never to play the violin again.*

*The violin teacher has succeeded.*

*Has his student succeeded?*

Too many times, overachievers are forced to overachieve. And quite frankly, overambitious adults are to blame, since they mistake their own motivation for the motivation of the young people they work with. Most of these adults sincerely believe that what the youngsters need is constant pushing towards the achievement of goals.

However, it is the firm belief of the author of this paper that caring adults should be trying to kindle genuine motivation in their youngsters instead.

This book makes an attempt at describing the way motivation works towards ensuring student success – not only external success, but also internal student satisfaction in

their own learning. Such lifelong motivation for learning new things - akin to intellectual curiosity, akin to the concept of *flow* - is the kind of drive that never completely ceases throughout someone's life, although it may register ups and downs or change focus with the passing of time.

As a newly qualified teacher, the author of this paper has felt the need of a deep approach to teaching which would ensure that the foundation of the student-teacher relationship would be strong enough to last them throughout the school years (and beyond them) and to establish *flow* onset in the classroom (and beyond it).

Since what we learn stays with us if we manage to link the new notions to the ones we had before, the book is playfully built as a theatre performance.

The theoretical background based on the works of renown psychologists (I. What the Stage Directors Say) follows the path of the author's personal research (II. Intermezzo), finally allowing for the unfolding of the creative performance (III. Show in Progress). In other words, the ideas on how motivation is essential for memorable learning (Part I) are put to test in questionnaires (Part II) whose results clearly pinpoint to ways of fostering motivation through creative teaching (Part III).

Please note that drama vocabulary has been used throughout this paper, in order to link the ideas under discussion to already known drama words. Since we tend to retain better the ideas that we can link with our previous experience, drama vocabulary (written in brackets and *graphically emphasized*) accompanies the statements in this paper, hopefully making the necessary brain connections needed for memorization by the dear newly qualified teachers to whom it is meant (more information about the *whys* and *hows* of the very last idea will be found in the following chapter).

## **The Author's Motivation**

Considering Iulia's teacher, there is a harshness about the situation that prompts us to dislike him as soon as we hear about his methods for teaching. He has only succeeded in teaching his student how to play the violin, being unable to teach her how to stay motivated. However, it is the firm belief of the author of this book that, given the well-thought guidance from a more experienced peer, the violin teacher could have seen things from a different perspective and could *really* have succeeded.

Therefore, this endeavour is meant to give guidelines on how to foster motivation in students: rather than the final word on the matter, it is a collection of ideas for teachers to use creatively.

Metaphorically, it is a bunch of theatrical props that every stage director can decide how to use in order to accomplish his purpose: he will take some props and change their place on the drama stage (even though this can mean that they need to be upside down!), while some props will be left out entirely (perhaps waiting to be part of the next drama show).

This little book is specifically meant for newly qualified teachers who are looking for ideas to help them overcome the first years of teaching (in all honesty, the author of this paper feels that her teaching life is constantly showing her that, in some respects, she will be a newly qualified teacher forever...)

In order to ensure that this piece of writing will have a warm *je ne sais quoi* that could be conveyed to younger, more energetic peers (in order to lure them into a few more years – or, perhaps, even a lifetime - of happy teaching), the author of this paper has decided to stop calling herself both impersonally (“the author of this paper”) or writerly-royally (“we”). Instead, she chose to use her very own name alongside with whatever variations of the 1st person singular personal pronoun are needed from a grammatical point of view.

## I. What the Stage Directors Say

The guiding force behind all our voluntary actions. (*Main Character*)

The statement above seems to be common to all the authors (*Stage Directors*) whose work will be quoted below. These authors' takes on motivation emphasize various aspects (*Scripts*) which finally boil down to this very short definition.

However, there are valuable supplementary aspects (*Supporting Characters*) to be taken into account if we are planning to have a holistic view of motivation that could help us turn theory into practice (*Conflict*), for the love and to the benefit of teachers and students alike (*Message*).

The definitions below, while sharing some common ground, all emphasize various aspects of motivation. Please note that the following pages will be taking into account the work of several authors, as they are quoted in Pânișoară, G. and I.O. Pânișoară (2005) *Motivarea eficientă; ghid practic*. Iași: Polirom. Since tracking down the actual books of these highly acclaimed writers on motivation can prove to be quite a burdensome (time-consuming and high-budget) task, my translation has been used throughout this chapter.

According to the compendium on motivation exquisitely written by Pânișoară and Pânișoară, the definitions of motivation can be split into three categories, each of these referring to some common aspects (only partially taken into account by the other categories).

For clarity's sake, I have decided to give *names* to the definition groups. While the use of numbers or letters would probably have its own benefits in a scientific endeavour, we should not forget the aim of this paper (to give fresh, easy to memorize ideas to newly qualified teachers). Therefore, the definitions are written in groups whose names suggest clear progress towards a beautiful end (Caterpillar, Chrysalis, Butterfly).

Caterpillar:

”Motivation is what energizes, gives direction and sustains a certain behaviour.”

”Motivation refers to the interior factors that stimulate, maintain and channel behaviour to a given end.”

”Motivation refers to the dynamics of behavior, the process of beginning, sustaining and directing of the activities of the organism.”

(Pânișoară, G. and I.O. Pânișoară 2005: 16-17)

Chrysalis:

“Motivation refers to the influences that govern the beginning, directing, intensity and persistence of behaviour.”

“Motivation represents persistent effort being guided to the accomplishment of a goal.”

(Pânișoară, G. and I.O. Pânișoară 2005: 17)

Butterfly:

”Motivation corresponds to a modification of the organism that sets it in motion until that modification ceases to exist.”

”Motivation is the first chronological element of behaviour, being the element that sets the organism in motion, persisting until the reduction of the tension.”

(Pânișoară, G. and I.O. Pânișoară 2005: 19)

No butterfly can spread its wings without being a caterpillar and a chrysalis first. *Mutatis mutandis*, each group of definitions has its own meanings to juxtapose in an ever-growing understanding of motivation, as follows (Pânișoară, G. and I.O. Pânișoară 2005: 17- 19):

- a. motivation initializes, energizes and stimulates, directs and channels, sustains and maintains behaviour in a dynamic process
- b. there are guiding forces inside us that foster motivation
- c. the goal of motivation-driven behaviour is the satisfaction of a need
- d. motivation is the guiding force behind our actions

## 1.1. Motivation – The MetaStory



A MetaStory is *the* story, a *grandpa* kind of story, to which all the other possible stories are somehow connected. I believe that what I do in the classroom is mostly connected to the side of motivation brought about by the wave of humanistic teaching (very roughly put, humanistic teaching is the kind of endeavour which strives to really take into account the person who is learning or teaching in the classroom, together with his/her wishes, dreams, sorrows and hopes).

Describing myself humanistically-wise, I should tell your that I am a passionate reader. Give me books to read and a pizza under the door from time to time and watch what happens - I read like crazy, feeling ecstatic for hours on end. I keep reading books and (without leaving aside the rightful catharsis), try to find a way for the ideas showcased by the respective authors to be seen from a motivational perspective. Waddling in these applied ideas, there is the danger of believing that anything can fit into the motivation box. This is why the firm ground of theory is paramount: I come back to good old (or new) views on motivation once in a while, for a clearer insight or just to make sure I am still on the right path.

The author whose work is mostly taken into consideration in this chapter is Joachim Appel, one of my most beloved authors of books meant for teachers.

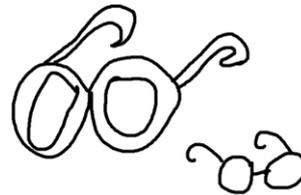
Although Gertrude Moskowitz, Carl Rogers, Augusto Cury and Allan Mc Lean have all had their contribution (especially in the shaping of the questions I imagined to ask Joachim Appel in the following pages), I have decided to base my theoretical

research on only *one* piece of work (I clearly remember the influence *Diary of a Language Teacher* has had on me when I was a newly qualified teacher).

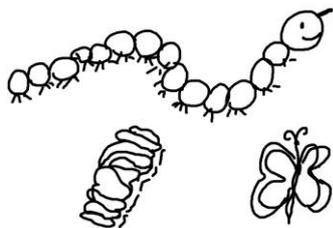
I have spent quite a lot of time looking for a similarly honest book about teaching (describing failure alongside success, with seemingly comparable ease), but I just couldn't find it. So, I decided to write it myself.

Consequently, I will be taking into account Joachim Appel's ideas that have stayed with me long after reading his book, wise words to go back to again and again.

Under the alias of C.C. (having only written part of the book in your hands so far, so being unable to boast with page numbers written in brackets), I will be asking naïve or pertinent questions – thrilled at the self-given opportunity of rubbing shoulders with the Stage Director of my teaching.



Your only responsibility during this chapter will be to grab a place on the comfy couch and to make sure that you have a warm blanket, a cup of tea and some popcorn at hand's reach.



I believe it is not difficult to remember last chapter's butterflies gently spreading their wings after being caterpillars and chrysalises. In the world inhabited by my lovely Joachim Appel (affectionately referred to as J.A. throughout the following pages, boasting with quotations from *Diary of a Language Teacher*), butterflies fill the air; their wings encompass the wind and the colours of the rainbow, while telling the *sotto voce* story of flying. Each of them is unlike the others and each of them only lives for a day...

In full words, "It is desirable for a class to have in the course of a school year at least one classroom experience that is unlike the others and unique." (J.A., 57)

The butterfly experience, a motivational experience to remember forever, no matter what kind of wrapping the teacher decides to use in order to offer it, as a lovely present, to his/her students. (C.C.)

"In the field of language teaching, Method A is the logical contradiction of Method B: if the assumptions from which A claims to be derived are correct, then B cannot work, and vice versa. Yet one colleague is getting excellent results with A and another is getting comparable results with B. How is this possible?" (Stevick's paradox, as quoted in J.A., 132)

Teacher creativity is probably the key to the solving of Stevick's paradox, together with the idea that student intelligence is multifaceted, so that it can meet teacher intelligence halfway. Speaking about teachers and students, any cunning advice, dear J.A.? (C.C.)

"Educational questions, especially the relationship between student and teachers, are foundations for the teaching of any subject." (J.A., xiii)

Now you're talking! Do you think it also applies to the teaching and learning of my dear English language? (C.C.)

"Language teaching at school must therefore be considered in conjunction with them. If personal relations in the classroom are not healthy, teaching quickly becomes an empty ritual because there is no chance of it being effective in classes that are unruly, apathetic or hostile. [...]" (J.A., xiii)

Do you have any recipe for turning the unruly, apathetic or hostile into motivated students? (C.C.)

"Teaching school children is more than the attainment of language objectives. [...] Our hidden agenda need not be about imposing our will on classes, at least not

exclusively. If there is educational significance to everything a teacher does, this significance can be negative as well as positive. I found, for instance, that changing what on the surface looked like almost irrelevant details (a gesture, a reaction, a tone of voice, a word chosen as an example) did affect the overall picture of what I was doing and that positive details had a cumulative effect, sometimes resulting in a change for the better.” (J.A., xiii-xiv)

In other words, you’re talking about taking care of the teacher-student relationship, so that academic progress can also flourish? (C.C.)

”Any innovation that becomes effective in education is in some way bound up with teachers’ and students’ biographies.” (J.A., xv)

Could my dear teaching aprons be considered such an innovation? They are not new as teaching props; however, what is new is the concept of making teaching aprons with the students in mind (different fabrics accept sewing without thinking twice or retreat from it, causing the needle to slide – mirroring student acceptance or refusal of teaching). What happens when I grow tired of making and using teaching aprons in class, having learnt the life lessons sewing has brought to me?

”Open forms of teaching have a greater chance of success when used by an experienced teacher who can fall back on routine if more experimental forms should fail. At the same time, it is the inexperienced teacher who is more likely to innovate – for the very reason that he/she has not established a routine yet. However, innovation in the early stages of a teaching career often adds to insecurity, and attempts at it can be fraught and abandoned too early. ” (J.A., xv)

Could you be more specific, please? (C.C.)

” If classroom interaction is dominated by the teacher it runs the risk of not involving students anymore and therefore of being irrelevant to them.” (J.A, xv)

OK, that's a hard pill to swallow...On second thought, I could make some teaching aprons for students to use in free or guided (I'm still here, you know!) classroom interaction. What do you think?

"Time and time again I heard and read in students' evaluation how positive they had found a phase in which they got individual attention and had, if only for a few moments, the opportunity not to speak about the text but about themselves." (J.A., 20)

What if I cannot do my teaching the way you are suggesting? It is tempting to hide away the flaws and only showcase what went well...(C.C.)

"There is no point in painting pictures of school practice in which students and teachers are busy accentuating the positive and pinning humanistic posters on the wall. Reality, at least mine, was different. If innovation in the classroom is to be effective and if new ideas are to reach the grassroots level, this reality, especially its more burdensome aspects, has to be taken into consideration. [...] Indeed, I often get the impression that methodology is presented as if only ideally behaved classes existed." (J.A., 21)

Well, I don't have ideally behaved classes...and it's not always easy to teach my English classes... I do my best, however, to hide things under the rug and prepare sparkling classes when I know that someone is going to observe my teaching work. I guess it is a conservation tactic in the profession. Should I be ashamed of sometimes putting on a show? (C.C.)

"Being real with regard to one's emotions entails risks. This is true for students as well as for teachers. It is one thing taking such a risk on a one-to-one basis. Taking them in front of a group [...] is another. There are plausible reasons for teachers wanting to wear masks. Indeed, it looks as if many teachers shy away from the immense strain it involves if you care at all about what you're doing – probably not because they lack responsibility but rather because they can only bear so much exposure, vulnerability and emotional strain. It almost seems like a natural defence mechanism." (J.A., 51)

*However...*

”It is an annoying thought that good lessons are, in a way, ‘wasted’ on those who do not need them, i.e. inspectors, supervisors, etc. and, for reasons of time and unwritten rules of the profession, not accessible to those who do need them.” (J.A., 28)

*Touché!* All right, I will try to be as honest as possible throughout this book. I understand that it wouldn’t help beginner teachers in any way if I presented a fairy-tale version of my teaching life. No whitewashing. How about losing face in front of younger, more energetic, enthusiastic peers if I presented a no-frills version of my teaching? (C.C.)

”Teaching young people is often loaded with emotions. Humour – not irony or cynicism – is often the best way of coping with emotionally charged situations.” (J.A., 36)

A fun book about naked teaching, is this what you are implying? Choosing to talk about both the good and bad parts of my teaching while reliving the experience from the standpoint of seasoned teacher humour? (C.C.)

”Reports about therapy conducted within the framework of humanistic psychology frequently refer to moments of freedom and choice.” (J.A., 54)

Is that a *Yes* to my last question? (C.C.)

”You could create your own thoughts.” (J.A., 115)

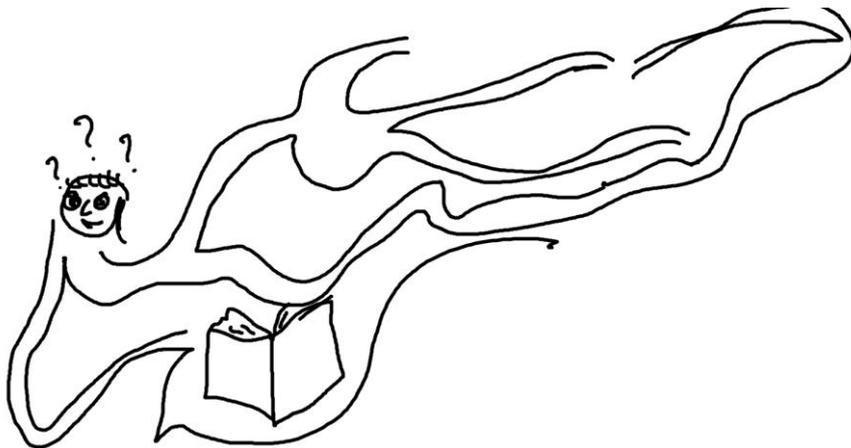
”Good for busy teachers” (J.A., 65)

## 1.2. Motivation in Learning – the Applied Story

No vivid dialogue like the one in the chapter you have just finished reading can go unnoticed. Although not always voiced out loud, such a dialogue always happens between the reader and the author of a book. Ideas from the books we read stay with us or leave us for a while, only to come back in another shape or wearing other clothes...

In time, I have grown to believe that, just like distinguished Professor Joachim Appel, I have something to say, a contribution to make to this rather tolerant realm of motivation.

My mental images on *the art of enthusiasm* (also known as *motivation*) have been inside me for too long...In Maya Angelou's words, *there is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you* (motivational-wise, I would clearly adjust the tone of this quotation - and, most assuredly, also the name of the book it comes from: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* - to their lighter quotation-book adapted variant: *Stories grow inside you until they are ready to show off in front of people.* (*When in a Labyrinth, Tell a Story*))

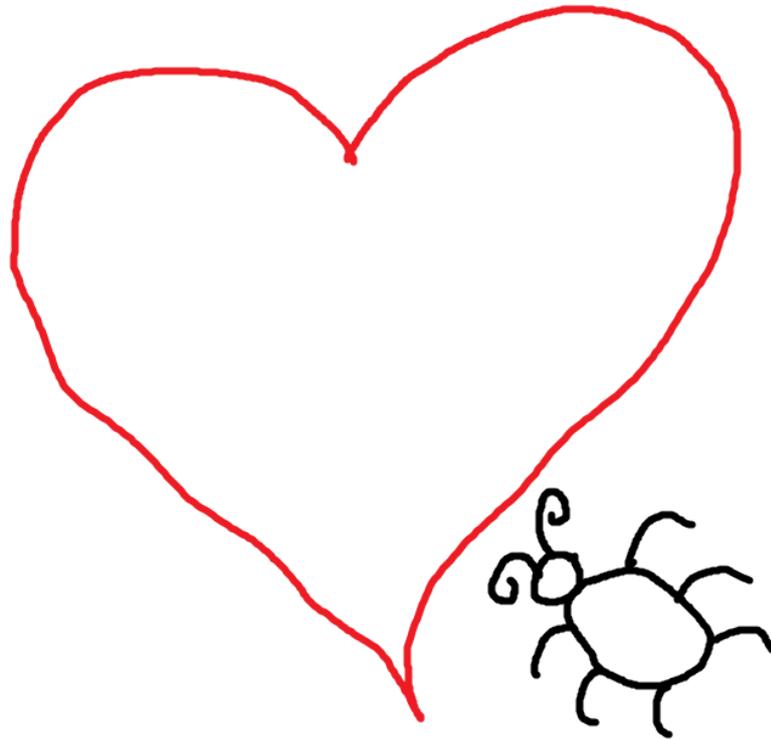


It is my personal research which sometimes coincides with some of the research I have been able to read *before and after* developing my own perspective on things. My ideas may not be so well worded as other distinguished people's opinions, or in an easy-to-read-and-understand circular/triangular/trapezoidal shape conveying meaning; they are, however, ready-to-use ideas.

Thinking about the creative processes, this is an example of how putting together other people's ideas can lead to something fresh which hasn't actually been there in the first place. And finding freshness in everyday teaching – honestly, it *doesn't* actually happen every single day, but probably on a weekly/monthly basis - it is what keeps me ticking as a teacher (i.e. a lifelong learner, self-motivator and motivator of others).

### 1.2.1. Attracting preparatory grade students (while staying alive)

As far as internal and external motivation is concerned, I have been able to coin a way of graphically representing them both in my classes with preparatory grade: the *heart-and-bug* activity.



Aside thought - while you are hopefully wondering how on Earth a *bug* could possibly be rubbing shoulders with a *heart* -: preparatory grade, in my humble perspective, is a rough number of twenty-six to thirty-one 6 year-olds placed in a few square feet of classroom, admittedly to be educated by a taller individual (more or less of the same age). The prospect of an English class with preparatory grade in September, October and the better part of November is a heavy load to carry, since the teacher (the taller individual stated above) is supposed to lead a boisterous crew always willing to point out their ideas by screaming, always fighting over pencil sharpeners, buttons or hairs (*It is mine! Give it back!*) ... also, sadly, bypassing motivational theories, careful only to ensure that relay-peeing is followed closely throughout the whole class...



I clearly remember the birthtime of the *heart-and-bug* activity – a simple board drawing of an attractive heart (for the names of the good students) and a loathsome bug (for the names of the not-so-good students). The heart and the bug have an all-encompassing *yin-yang* relationship, i.e. everyone is in, somewhere, to begin with; leaving *yin* gets you inside *yang* and the other way round; at the end of the class, some students get more stickers, while, regrettably and tearfully, others lose them (only to take better care of their behaviour during the next English class)...

Noise filling my ears (and shame burning my cheeks, in the aftermath of hearing the candid words of a respectful student, "Tell them to stop yelling. My ears hurt."), I turned to the board, praying to the Teacher of Teachers for guidance and the heavenly ability of not screaming my head off - as it would hurt poor Maria's ears even more, while failing to bring too much more positive contribution to class - except a few seconds' stiff, reproachful silence.

Aside thought, again: most of us are familiar with stories of teachers who lash out at poor students. While it would sound professional to voice firm disagreement and even abhorrence at such humiliating behaviour (to the student and to the teacher alike), I cannot stop thinking that, given the right amount of stress and disobedience on the part of our otherwise dear students, most advocates of positive parenting/teaching would do the same as (if not worse than) the poor individuals making the news...

In my experience, keeping a not-so-teacherly angry looks away from the students was only possible by using the *heart-and-bug* idea or by playing *Împăratul tăcerii* for a good five-minute teaching break or, better still, by coining my *prep grade song* (sung at the top of the teacher's voice the first time – a trick for letting out a *forte* without noticeably screaming to the poor 6 year olds who know no better):

### ***Clasa Pregătitoare Song***

*Clasa pregătitoare, clasa pregătitoare*

*Cei mai cumiși, cei mai cumiși*

*Se așează în băncuțe*

*Și-și închid de tot gurița*

*Chiar acum, chiar acum.*

*Din băncuță, din băncuță,*

*Ascultăm, ascultăm.*

*Suntem azi școlari,*

*Noi am crescut mari*

*Nu vorbim, nu vorbim.*

*Haide, Edi (Marc sau Victor)*

*Repetăm, repetăm:*

*Suntem mici școlari (nu grădinițari!)*

*Am crescut, am crescut.*



While realizing that this song is clearly about themselves (with the right amount of practice, any student name can fit into stanza 3, verse 1), my students were happy to

play the echo in the right tune (*Brother Jack*) - finally, after the second or third *encore* of this motivational masterpiece, they also fulfilled the requirements of the song.

A tired *Eureka* on the part of the teacher: let the *heart* fill with names (Sorry, *buggy!* You have caught no one, eventually!), let the stickers flow!

### 1.2.2. The peace and quiet of primary school life

Primary school works like magic.

After preparatory grade students have got the hang of school life – together with the tips and tricks attached to each of their teachers, they become, year by year, a more and more rewarding group to work with.

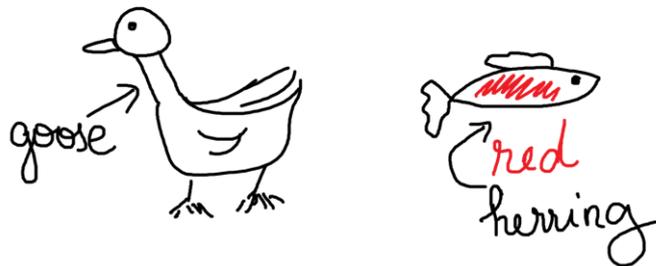
To be precise, most students in grades 1 up to 4 manage to keep silent when they see my hand up in the air (going down *5,4,3,2,1*, *zip up your lips*, all the way from noise to silence), read texts and do role-play, prepare little projects to present in front of their peers, and are hardworking enough to have their homework ready (proving the kind of effort needed for the winning of a beautiful sticker).

My primary school students are, on the whole, miraculously easy to handle (knowing that they were once prep grade students), provided that they know what to expect from the teacher (rules, regulations and consequences - both for paying respect to the rules and for bypassing them).

My English classes only boast with two rules, spoken out loud at the beginning of each school year (grades 1 to 2), remembered and filled-in with more details or shades of meaning (grades 3 to 4).

In primary school classes, we use quite a lot mother tongue whenever we mean *business* (like designing or writing down the *house rules*). At the beginning of my teaching career, I used to feel ashamed for being unable to find the right easy English words to the *desideratum* of the immersion-into-the-foreign-language method. In recent years, I have finally understood that in order for my students to be motivated lifelong learners (please be so kind as to remember Iulia's story), they need to feel at home with whatever happens in their school life. In other words, the comfort of mother tongue cannot be surpassed at this age by any other playful skill their teacher can showcase – however, please note that the amount of mother tongue use is bound to suffer rightful fluctuations throughout each English class, as well as throughout the school year or primary school as a whole.

There are two big rules in my English classes and most of the little rules that my students think about (individually, then in pairs, then in smaller groups and finally in the biggest group possible – the whole class) fall into these two categories: Be Organized (have your things handy, including your homework and your reading book) and Be Respectful (when *Teacher* talks to you, please listen; when you talk, we will listen to you, provided that your ideas are not a wild goose chase, a red herring or playing for time).



The aforementioned rules in place, classes can begin.

You probably wouldn't believe me if I told you that almost every English class that I teach to any group of students follows the same steps (honestly, despite the different ages of my students and the various teaching material we need to process, the classes look very much similar). The moments when I use mother tongue tend to get thinner and thinner as the amount of routines grows, but the routines are different to each grade level and sometimes to each grade, i.e. 4A and 4B will not always have similar routines.

Upon entering the classroom, I expect my students to stand up. Even my preparatory grade students. Not because I am so in love with being noticed, but because I clearly want them to realize – by physical movement – that recess is over and we are going to begin the English class. Some of my students will be arranging books and copybooks on their desk (and, yes, also telling their friends about who-knows-what which is extremely important to them) - in this case, I just wait, with one of my hands up and the other one's index on my lips. If it still doesn't work (*one of those*

teaching days – when nothing goes according to the plan), I let out a faint hissing/hushing sound (made up of consonants only...)



that most of my respectful students tend to repeat at a higher volume, directing it towards their disrespectful peers (the words *respectful* and *disrespectful* are to be taken loosely, since I believe that the age characteristics of most of my dear students should not be mistaken for doing something cheeky on purpose – exceptions applying, though). Next, I greet them with a fresh "Hello, everyone!" ("Hello, students!" has never agreed with me, since I feel that it lends itself too much to our roles in school. Although I haven't had the courage of allowing my students to call me by the first name – not yet, anyway – and they still call me *Teacher*, I try to avoid calling them *students*, because, in my opinion, the word clearly showing school relationship also casts light on the kind of employer-employee/boss-subordinate relationship which I am trying to avoid. We are people of the world, brought together by life and, ideally, blood brothers in lifelong learning.) I direct a soft "Hello, Andrada/Petru/Larisa" to whoever is still not within earshot and then I smile a little "Have a seat, please."

Next, I kindly ask my students to show me their textbook, copybook and reading book, while saying *Present!* upon hearing their names. I do not always take roll in the right alphabetical order: I sometimes go backwards and/or I use my Math skills to skip every second or third student, coming back to him/her after a while – I have grown to take roll in this way because, otherwise, the students who know their place

in the class roll will have a hint as to how much *out of teacher's reach* they are and, consequently will have so much unrestricted fun until I get to their name...

Checking the homework and placing stickers in the notebooks or on the students' uniform (wherever they wish) is done, with grades 1 and 2 while singing some songs that almost everyone is good at (since they are repetitive and, even if you were absent the day we first introduced that song, you can still join in quite easily: BINGO (There was a farmer); 5 little monkeys; Sunday, Monday; January, February, March; Open, shut them). Grades 3 and 4 are already seasoned and wise and can bring a reading book to school (borrowed from the American Corner at Octavian Goga Library for as little as a 10 RON library card lasting for 5 years); they are kindly asked to flick through the book while keeping silent and receiving beautiful stickers for their homework. In the not-so-rare cases in which a student tells me that he/she could not finish the homework (a family celebration, a piano lesson, a football match with dad or something else having gone into the way of finishing the homework), I use my coloured pen (red or, better still, green) to mark the amount of space needed for the completion of the homework by next time when we meet. This way, my students trust me as a caring individual (who knows that no homework can be finished while everyone else is singing *Happy birthday!* to loving greatgrandpa, *Moş Petrică*, who has just reached his 90th year of life, God bless him!).



My students also know the rule of making sure that the homework gets done by next time (I do not allow too much time for the completion of the homework for at least two reasons: on the one hand, my students may not link correctly the new and old info, since the old one has not been made active by proper exercise – i.e. the homework; on the other hand, if too much time flies away, I may forget who still owes to show me part of the homework.)

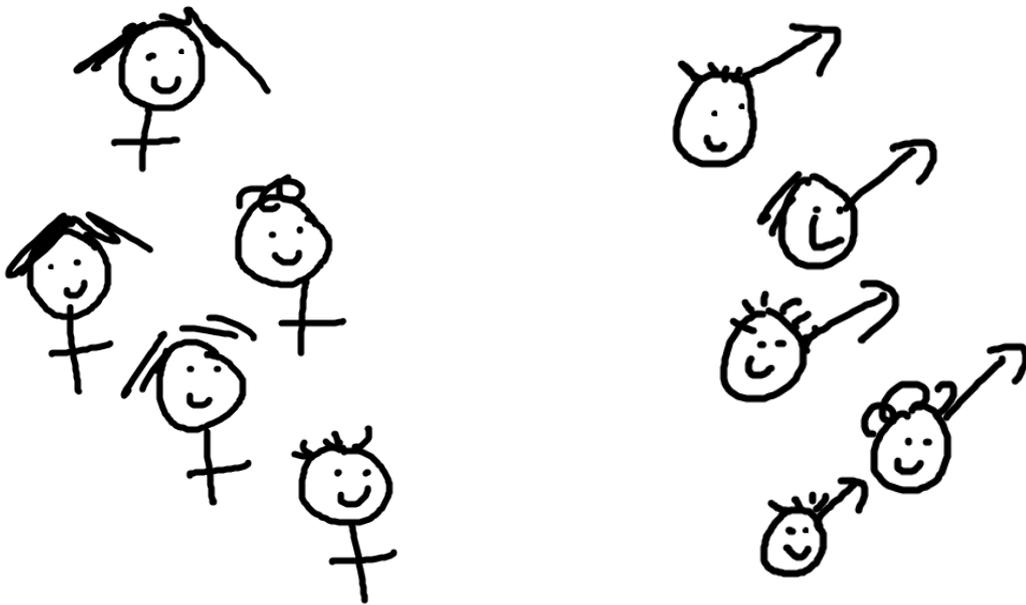
After checking the homework, we begin the new lesson. Most of the times, I use classical music as the background to the unravelling of the traditional kind of teaching too many times illegitimately banned out of the classroom; I love traditional teaching because I believe that it gives both my students and myself the kind of acceptable routine which is needed at the first stages of school life. We do break routine from time to time, but we normally go back quite easily to what we know is the expected flow of a lesson.

As an aside (*"Another one??" you may be asking. "Another one, indeed!" I will be smilingly retorting*), I prefer to leave the innovative methods of teaching to highschool teachers, who will benefit from the rough practice my students have grown used to do in my English classes, so that their English knowledge and/or language abilities are trustworthy and can be further built on.

Lesson. Choral repetition. Individual doing of exercises, pair checking, whole-class checking, explaining the homework, writing the homework on the board, saying "Goodbye, see you next time, have a lovely weekend." and not setting a foot out of the classroom till I hear the greetings back.

### 1.2.3. Preteen magic

My preteens (most teachers would call them *secondary school students*) wait for me to arrive with the key. Not necessarily the key to wisdom, lifelong learning or life as such. Just the key. In my school, teachers are the people with the class roll and the key to the door. They wait for me on the corridor, sometimes spread like bread crumbs under a table, other times like a symphony in coordination, boys on one row, girls on the other row (*yeah, right, wishful thinking...*)

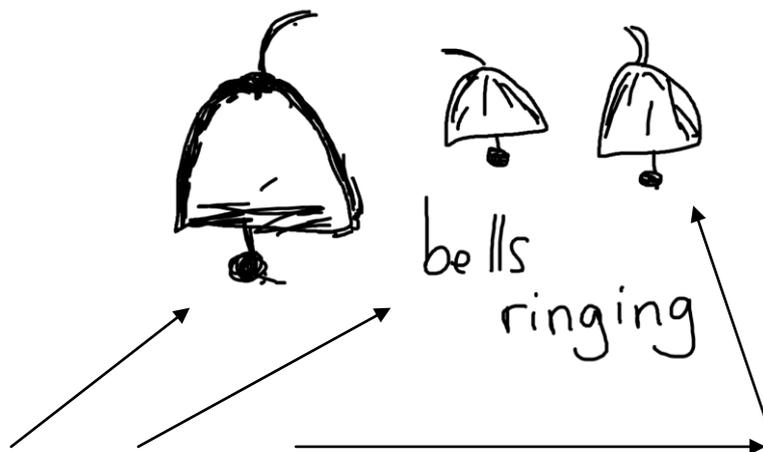


I told you that my classes look dangerously similar to one another and I am going to prove this to you. I cannot ask my preteens to stand up – like I do with my primary school kids, since the former ones already stand up on the corridor. But I do not enter the classroom until they have noticed that there is someone in front of the door, signalled as a teacher by the class roll and the much-coveted (during recess) door key. I look some of them in the eye until everyone has finished talking about who-knows-what (*does it ring a bell?*) Then, I unlock the door and I kindly ask them to go in, by softly and respectfully uttering the words: *Ladies..* and *Gentlemen...*with the accompanying words suiting my one-like-no-other teaching day: *Young ladies / Beautiful ladies / Extremely nice ladies* or *Handsome gentlemen / Unusually silent gentlemen / Well-bred gentlemen*. While I am almost sure that 99 per cent of my 5th

grade boys have no idea what *well-bred* actually means, they never ask. I guess they just feel good knowing, by gut feeling, that it must be something respectful, since my attitude is never a hilarious one, but a *trend-setting* one for mutual respect.

My preteens open their copybooks at the homework and their reading books at the last page read. One of them also makes sure to connect all the cables to the laptop and find a playlist of soothing music which would last us throughout the whole class. I walk around, correcting things here or there, marking the parts of the homework that still need to be finished for next time (everyone can have a *Moş Petrică* at home to sing *Happy Birthday!* to instead of polishing the fourth grammar exercise for English tomorrow!)

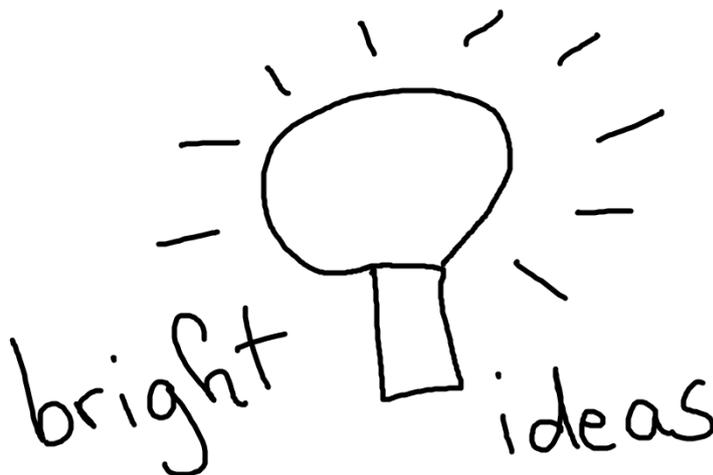
*Lesson. Choral repetition. Individual doing of exercises, pair checking, whole-class checking, explaining the homework, writing the homework on the board, saying "Goodbye, see you next time, have a lovely weekend." and not setting a foot out of the classroom till I hear the greetings back.*



Lots of bells ringing, I hope.

(Oh, well, sometimes I do set a foot out of the classroom even though I do not hear the greeting back. I just cannot be so stiff as not to understand the need to flee to the schoolyard to meet the beloved one who has barely escaped the Physics teacher trying to explain the workings of the windlass again and again... Love is all around!)

#### 1.2.4. Miscellanea.



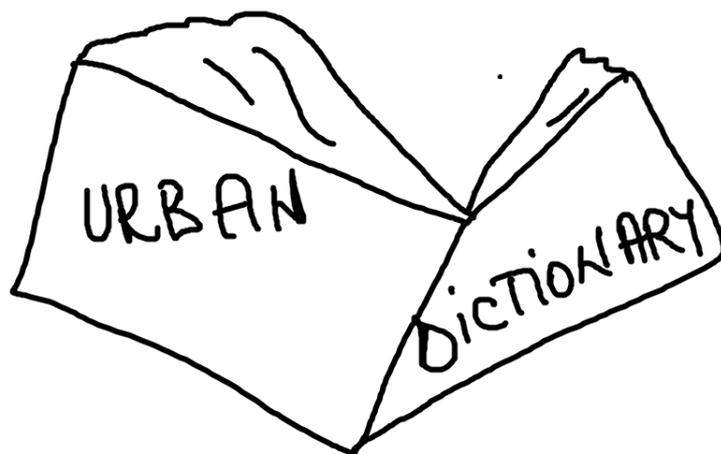
Please take the following ideas with you wherever you feel they fit:

1. Make your students curious (example: write something in phonemic script and keep on using this way of communicating whenever you need your students to pay really good attention to what you want to convey)
2. Vary the pace of your lessons (kind advice: leave lively activities to the end of the class – in my experience, a hectic group of students is rather difficult to *mild* back during the same class).
3. Use the very clean, still wet board, to notice who is doing what in the classroom. Your students will begin to think you *do* have that third eye on the back of your head (and, if you keep the secret, some of your more-than-acceptable-kinesthetic students may hopefully put you in the *uncanny, risky, better not mess with* box. Which is not bad, given that they are supposed to work with you for a while!)
4. Use personalisation. Write about your students in the flesh and blood: don't think twice - just upgrade the barren *Present Perfect* lesson title to a fresh *Patricia has just tied one of her shoe laces* – the full development of the story being visible to you on the wet board (as explained in the absolutely fantastic activity that I have previously described)

5. Don't be afraid to pat, hug or kiss your very young students after they have shown you that they are okay with this kind of human touch. As a rule of thumb, I never hug those students who have not hugged me first (since I know for a fact that getting into a child's life in this way can only be done with a *Repondez, s'il vous plaît!* two-arms tight invitation around my waist). Attachment-based learning still qualifies as one of the best motivational tools in human education (I could bet you love English or Music or Chemistry because you had something special for your respective teacher!)

6. Nobody is born creative. However, if you can bypass that very human desire to avoid mistakes (clearly linked to life conservation!), you can get to something new and beautiful. It could just spring out of a mixture of old ideas you have read about, but it will be your very own. Bottom line, trying out anything new can lead to failure, but courage in doing so is the prerequisite of becoming mind-blowingly creative.

7. Your students are more intelligent than you. (*No offence. Just the voice of experience.*) Learn from them whenever they offer to give you insight into anything that you are not only unfamiliar with but also lacking the time to look up in the (urban) dictionary.



## II.

### Intermezzo



This part of the paper is dedicated to the questionnaires in which students of various ages and English language background at *Alexandru Vaida-Voevod* Secondary School in Cluj-Napoca have self-assessed their motivation for learning English. The research was carried out during the school years 2017/2018 and 2018/2019.

Before the questionnaires were applied to the students, I had some presumptions that needed proving right or wrong (in order to prevent the unintentional onset of slumber amongst readership – which happens very often when theoretical issues are focused on – the aforementioned presumptions have been embedded in the following grammar lesson *with a twist*).

*Rephrase exercise:* A student's thought can change the world. ESSENTIAL

*Key:* Students' opinions are essential for beneficial changes.

*Multiple choice exercise:*

In order to get good results, students ..... understand where their motivation lies and what can be done to improve it.

a. should      b. don't need to      c. are unlikely to      d. might

*Key:* a.

*Cloze:*

No matter ....1.....a teacher teaches her lesson, a motivated student can still get very good results.

.....2....., a teaching style that takes into account the multiple intelligences theory could be extremely beneficial for everyone involved in learning (and teaching!).

*Key:* 1. how; 2. however

*The right verbal form:*

(To think) about motivation in detail, we could (to get) to the conclusion that it (to influence) by factors such as age, learning style(s), adult or peer encouragement and other emotional factors.

*Key:* 1. thinking; b. get; is influenced

As far as the feedback part of the questionnaire is concerned, it will work as magic...

...*if and only if* the teacher accepts being challenged, being scolded for not playing enough, being told that he/she could do (way!) better.

...*provided* he/she accepts constantly changing plans and filling in the Observation table grid in her beginning-of-the-semester teaching plans.

...*supposing* he/she is willing to get input on how to change a beginning-of-the-year monologue into a better-thought, motivational speech to make a lasting first impression on most students.

Therefore, the rationale behind the student questionnaires was (besides proving the veridicity of the teacher's ideas) making a move towards changing the old Romanian system of addressing students from a teacher-centered monologue into an audience-mindful speech.

Please note that the terms *monologue* and *speech* have not been used as synonyms; on the one hand, the monologue is delivered as such, regardless of how the audience is affected by the ideas conveyed; on the other hand, the speech makes it a priority to take into account the feelings of the people in the room, as shown on their faces and body language (including yawning - so ubiquitous in classroom texts orally delivered by the teacher - which tells a perceptive, genuinely caring teacher that it is high time

he/she chose words differently or made more eye contact or simply ended the speech on a memorable punch line...)

Here we go: changing the world of teaching in progress.

Introductory monologue:

*“Good morning, pupils!*

*Ten hut!*

*I will be your teacher  
for the next school year,  
whether you like it or not.*

*I will be telling you what to do and you will have little opportunity to disagree.*

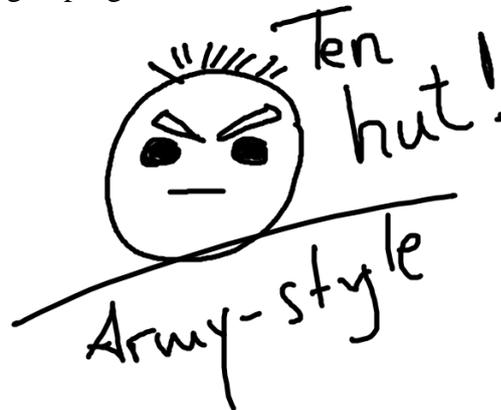
*I will be Leader of the English class..*

*You will need to obey the rules of the English class or you will take the consequences.*

*You will have to follow strict guidelines.*

*Your voice is not to be heard unless otherwise specified.*

*At ease.”*



I question whether anyone, on either side of this monologue, could genuinely enjoy the experience.

Too many times, this is the way school is perceived by students and teachers alike.

To the average student, it may look like a kind of military camp where he/she needs to go because the rules of society do not allow for much variation.

To the average teacher, it may look like a kind of chaotic place devoid of any rules which involves a great amount of stress (making and enforcing rules) and little satisfaction.

I have seen this kind of student and this kind of teacher.

On second thought, I plead guilty. I have *been* both.

As a student, I clearly remember the inability of voicing my own opinions, as I needed to remember correctly other people's expert views on various matters. Clearly, by the standards of school in the late 90s, I have been a good student, masterfully hiding my true inquisitive self behind acceptable school behaviour.

During the last 15 years, I have tried to be the best possible variant of myself as a professional working with children. In all honesty, I have been unable to escape the school standards that my teachers were following in the late 90s, and I still consider my teaching style tributary to traditional methods of teaching. However, I do realize that my students cannot be taught in the same way that was, for lack of a better word, *en vogue* when their teachers were secondary school students.

I believe that the best way to understand how student learning takes place is to step back into the students' shoes and have a look at the world from their perspective.

Which leads us to the natural need for improvement of the monologue above.

The resulting speech casts light on where the motivational emphases should lie. In my opinion, the following changes would be beneficial to everyone, teacher and students alike.

Introductory motivational speech:



*"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen!*

*Welcome to the show!*

*I will be your host for the next school year and I will do my best to give you the most rewarding learning experience I can.*

*I know a lot of things, but I confess I do not know everything. At the end of each semester, you will have the opportunity to give me ideas on how to improve our learning experience. I may also need your help turning thoughts into practice.*

*I am in charge of English learning, but, since no language is learnt in a void, we can touch upon various issues that are of importance to you by using the English language.*

*My class is supposed to be a place of freedom and wellbeing -I want everyone (including myself) to feel secure, respected and valued. This is why we decide together on a set of rules of behaviour and class preparation at the beginning of the first semester.*

*However, since this is not exactly my very own learning experience, your ideas matter. Consequently, a list of additions to the set of rules will be available for you to fill in throughout the first semester; if most people involved in our English learning adventure (including myself) decide on certain changes to our set of rules, they will be put to practice beginning with the second semester.*

*Let the adventure begin!"*

While the text above is indicative of ideas worth to be tried out in the classroom, no one can claim that it will work like magic, because of the differences in student outlook on their learning experience. No matter how much teaching experience someone has, she cannot know exactly how her students feel at a certain moment in their learning life. This is why student questionnaires are needed, since the generation gap prevents the teacher from fully understanding his/her students.

In order to build a clearcut perspective on how motivated / unmotivated my students are at a given moment in their school life, I have decided to build a semi-structured questionnaire (open and closed items).

There have been three kinds of groups of students taken into account:

- A. primary school students who have been working with me for at least two school years in a row - 50 questionnaires
- B. secondary school students (the same restriction applying) – 28 questionnaires
- C. students who have never worked with me before (the questionnaire for this group has an adapted length - since it also takes into account the students' earlier experience of learning English) – 61 questionnaires

Please note that all of the approximately 150 students have been allowed to answer the questions in any language they felt proper (from my experience, the most ambitious older students almost never fall back on mother tongue – even though they are fully aware of being clumsy at times, though more happily than painfully so; my shy students - who are very much afraid of making mistakes in English - would probably feel less constrained to word their ideas if there were a possibility to use Romanian in the questionnaire).

Rewording the ideas above, since this paper is meant to be a proof of my *expertise* in teaching English to any student, I honestly cannot deem anyone unworthy, by rejecting his/her answers in Romanian. *Empathically-wise*, you, too, would feel the blatant injustice done by your imaginary bilingual boss who would reject your contribution in one of the two languages he/she is capable of understanding, no matter what explanation he/she may come up with.

No matter what language my students decided to use, I was trying to see for a fact how far away from the reality I was (most of the times, teachers entertain a glowing sense of knowing everything, of even being aware of what their students think... )

While pleading guilty indeed of a certain 6th sense in the teaching job, I have taken up the challenge to see the extent to which the renown generation gap still applies.

The questionnaires below have been graphically adapted so that they should fit either one or two double-sided pages (most teachers try to make both ends meet with little gimmicks like this).

A. Questionnaire for primary school students .....

*Chestionar pentru elevii de ciclu primar*

Dear student,

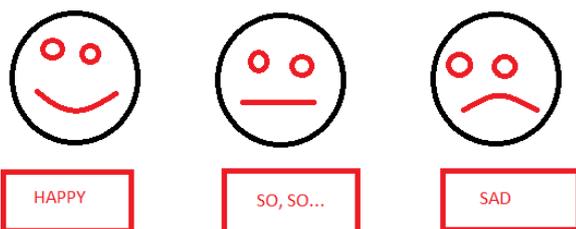
Please write your name, then circle the correct answer(s).

*Dragul meu/Draga mea,*

*Te rog să îți scrii numele, apoi să încercuiești răspunsurile care ți se potrivesc:*

1. How do you normally feel in the English class? (Circle, please.)

*Cum te simți, de obicei, la ora de limba engleză? Încercuiește, te rog.*



2. Who helps you learn English? *Cine te ajută să înveți limba engleză?*

a. Mum or Dad or someone else in my family *Mama, tata sau un alt membru al familiei*

b. my teacher *profesoara mea*

c. my friends *prietenii mei*

3. Why do you learn English? *De ce înveți limba engleză?*

a. I like it *Îmi place*

b. It is important *E importantă*

c. I have no choice *Nu am de ales*

4. How do you learn English best? *Cum înveți cel mai bine la limba engleză?*

a. I read texts *Citesc texte*

b. I listen to music or I watch movies *Ascult muzică sau mă uit la filme*

c. I speak to my friends *Vorbesc cu prietenii mei*

d. I write texts *Scriu texte*

5. What do you like best about learning English? *Care e partea ta preferată din învățarea limbii engleze?*

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

6. What do you hate about learning English? *Ce urăști referitor la învățarea limbii engleze?*

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

7. What would you change about learning English? *Ce ai schimba referitor la învățarea limbii engleze?*

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

8. Please draw an image that shows the place of English in your life (on a separate piece of paper). *Te rog să desenezi o imagine care să arate locul limbii engleze în viața ta, pe o altă foaie de hârtie*

Thank you.

Love, Teacher

B. Questionnaire for secondary school students .....

Dear student,

This questionnaire is helping your English teacher become a better professional.



Feel free to give him/her ideas on how to change his/her teaching, so that you can benefit more from every lesson.

Please circle the answer(s) that correspond to how you actually feel about learning English.

You don't need to write your name, but, if you really want to sign your ideas, you can use the top-right part of this piece of paper.

*Dragul meu/Draga mea,*

*Acest chestionar î/o ajută pe profesorul tău/ profesoara ta de engleză să devină un specialist mai bun. Ești liber/liberă să îi dai idei despre cum să își modifice stilul de predare, astfel încât tu să poți beneficia mai mult din fiecare lecție. Te rog să încercuiești răspunsul/răspunsurile care corespund sentimentelor tale referitoare la învățarea limbii engleze. Nu ești obligat să îți scrii numele, însă, dacă vrei să îți semnezi munca, poți folosi partea din dreapta sus a acestei foi de hârtie.*

1. How do you learn best in the English class? *Cum înveți cel mai bine la ora de engleză?*

- a. by listening to music, recorded dialogues etc. *Ascultând muzică, dialoguri înregistrate etc.*
- b. by watching someone do a task in English or by watching a short movie *Privind cum cineva rezolvă o sarcină de lucru în engleză sau privind un filmuleț*
- c. by moving my body or by moving around the classroom *Mișcându-mi corpul sau mișcându-mă prin clasă*
- d. another answer (please specify) *Un alt răspuns (specifică, te rog)*

.....  
.....

2. Who has a great influence upon your learning English? *Cine are o influență mare asupra învățării limbii engleze de către tine?*

- a. my parents or other members of my family *părinții mei sau alți membri ai familiei mele*
- b. my teachers at school *profesorii mei de la școală*
- c. my friends / professionals whom I find inspiring *prietenii mei/alți profesioniști care mă inspiră*
- d. another answer (please specify) *Un alt răspuns (specifică, te rog)*

.....  
.....

3. What makes you want to learn English? *Ce te face să dorești să înveți limba engleză?*

- a. everybody can use it nowadays *(toată lumea o folosește)*
- b. it will be important in my future job *va fi importantă pentru serviciul meu*
- c. I use it whenever I travel abroad *o folosesc când călătoresc în străinătate*
- d. another answer (please specify) *Un alt răspuns (specifică, te rog)*

.....  
.....

4. What is your favourite way of learning English (or any other language)?

*Care e felul tău preferat de a învăța limba engleză sau alte limbi străine?*

- a. by reading texts, articles, blog entries or books *(citind texte, articole, bloguri sau cărți)*
- b. by listening to spoken texts – for example, radio shows - or music *(ascultând texte vorbite – de exemplu, emisiuni radio - sau muzică)*
- c. by speaking in various contexts and to various people *(vorbind în contexte diferite și cu oameni diferiți)*
- d. by writing texts about myself or which are useful in everyday life *(scriind texte despre mine sau care îmi sunt folosite în viața de zi cu zi)*
- e. by doing something else with English instructions (fixing my broken computer, learning how to draw a dragon, handcrafting new objects out of drinking straws etc.) *(Făcând alte activități cu instrucțiuni în limba engleză –*

*reparându-mi calculatorul, învățând cum să desenez un dragon, confecționând obiecte noi din paie de băut suc etc.)*

f. another answer (please specify) *Un alt răspuns (specifică, te rog)*

.....

5. What was the best part about your English learning experience so far?

*(Care a fost cea mai plăcută parte referitoare la învățarea limbii engleze de până acum?)*

.....  
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6. What was the worst part about your English learning experience so far?

*(Care a fost cea mai dificilă parte referitoare la învățarea limbii engleze de până acum?)*

.....  
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.....  
.....

7. If you could change anything about your English class, what would it be and how exactly would you change it? *Dacă ai putea schimba orice referitor la ora de limba engleză, ce ar fi și cum anume ai schimba?*

.....  
.....  
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.....  
.....

8. Please draw something that shows the place of English in your life.

*Desenează o imagine care să arate locul limbii engleze în viața ta.*

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to draw an illustration showing the role of English in their life.

Thank you for your time and effort!

Lots of love, Teacher

C. Questionnaire for new secondary school students .....

Dear student,

This questionnaire is helping your new English teacher become a better professional. ☺

Feel free to give him/her ideas on how to change his/her teaching, so that you can benefit more from every lesson.

Please circle the answer(s) that correspond to how you actually feel about learning English.

You don't need to write your name, but, if you really want to sign your ideas, you can use the top-right part of this piece of paper.

*Dragul meu/Draga mea,*

*Acest chestionar îl/o ajută pe noul tău profesor/noua ta profesoară ta de engleză să devină un specialist mai bun. Ești liber/liberă să îi dai idei despre cum să își modifice stilul de predare, astfel încât tu să poți beneficia mai mult din fiecare lecție. Te rog să încercuiești răspunsul/răspunsurile care corespund sentimentelor tale referitoare la învățarea limbii engleze. Nu ești obligat să îți scrii numele, însă, dacă vrei să îți semnezi munca, poți folosi partea din dreapta sus a acestei foi de hârtie.*

1. How do you learn best in the English class? *Cum înveți cel mai bine la ora de engleză?*

e. by listening to music, recorded dialogues etc. *Ascultând muzică, dialoguri înregistrate etc.*

f. by watching someone do a task in English or by watching a short movie *Privind cum cineva rezolvă o sarcină de lucru în engleză sau privind un filmuleț*

g. by moving my body or by moving around the classroom *Mișcându-mi corpul sau mișcându-mă prin clasă*

h. another answer (please specify) *Un alt răspuns (specifică, te rog)*

.....  
.....

2. Who has a great influence upon your learning English? *Cine are o influență mare asupra învățării limbii engleze de către tine?*

- e. my parents or other members of my family *părinții mei sau alți membri ai familiei mele*
- f. my teachers at school *profesorii mei de la școală*
- g. my friends / professionals whom I find inspiring *prietenii mei/alți profesioniști care mă inspiră*
- h. another answer (please specify) *Un alt răspuns (specifică, te rog)*

.....  
.....

3. What makes you want to learn English? *Ce te face să dorești să înveți limba engleză?*

- e. everybody can use it nowadays *(toată lumea o folosește)*
- f. it will be important in my future job *va fi importantă pentru serviciul meu*
- g. I use it whenever I travel abroad *o folosesc când călătoresc în străinătate*
- h. another answer (please specify) *Un alt răspuns (specifică, te rog)*

.....  
.....

4. What is your favourite way of learning English (or any other language)?

*Care e felul tău preferat de a învăța limba engleză sau alte limbi străine?*

- f. by reading texts, articles, blog entries or books *(citind texte, articole, bloguri sau cărți)*
- g. by listening to spoken texts – for example, radio shows - or music *(ascultând texte vorbite – de exemplu, emisiuni radio - sau muzică)*
- h. by speaking in various contexts and to various people *(vorbind în contexte diferite și cu oameni diferiți)*
- i. by writing texts about myself or which are useful in everyday life *(scriind texte despre mine sau care îmi sunt folosite în viața de zi cu zi)*
- j. by doing something else with English instructions (fixing my broken computer, learning how to draw a dragon, handcrafting new objects out of drinking straws etc.) *(Făcând alte activități cu instrucțiuni în limba engleză –*

*reparându-mi calculatorul, învățând cum să desenez un dragon, confecționând obiecte noi din paie de băut suc etc.)*

f. another answer (please specify) *Un alt răspuns (specifică, te rog)*

.....

5. How have you felt in your English classes so far?

*Cum te-ai simțit la orele de limba engleză de până acum?*

.....  
.....  
.....

6. What do you think the explanation is?

*Care crezi că este explicația pentru acest lucru?*

.....  
.....  
.....

7. In your opinion, what makes an English teacher good or very good?

*Care e părerea ta: care sunt caracteristicile care fac ca un profesor de limba engleză să fie bun sau foarte bun?*

.....  
.....  
.....

8. What was the best part about your English learning experience so far?

*(Care a fost cea mai plăcută parte referitoare la învățarea limbii engleze de până acum?)*

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

9. What was the worst part about your English learning experience so far?  
(Care a fost cea mai dificilă parte referitoare la învățarea limbii engleze de până acum?)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

10. If you could change anything about your English class, what would it be and how exactly would you change it? Dacă ai putea schimba orice referitor la ora de limba engleză, ce ar fi și cum anume ai schimba?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

11. Please use the empty space on this piece of paper to draw something that shows the place of English in your life. Te rog să desenezi o imagine care să arate locul limbii engleze în viața ta.



Thank you for your time and effort.

Your new teacher

Cătălina's suppositions:

Each of the three models of questionnaire takes into account the students' favourite way of learning out of three variants – in order to establish the percentage of visual/auditory/kinesthetic learners.

My estimation is that primary school students would be mainly kinesthetic learners, then (percentage-wise) visual and finally auditory. I am backing up this idea with the fact that primary school students are not very far away from moments in their life when they perceived the world through all the senses (with a prevalence of the touch and the smell in the early months of life, then sight and hearing).

As far as secondary school students are concerned, I believe that kinesthetic learners are not so many (I daresay less than half the percentage of primary school students who have identified their prevalent learning style as kinesthetic), since the visual and the auditory have probably taken over the kinesthetic way of learning. This belief is also supported by the way students perceive the world, which is no longer predominantly through touch and smell, but rather through sight and hearing.

I also expect mixed-types of learning styles, in any possible variations, with a crushing predominance of the kinesthetic way of learning in primary school.

I believe that what will come up in student answers to the questionnaires would be the opportunity of incentives – rewards (stickers, stamps, the colourful apron, the playful clown - for the younger students; creative writing or storytelling – for the older students), internal and external motivation, high stimulus and low stimulus (probably tied to external and internal motivation, respectively), the role of curiosity, individual and social learning, and the importance of the attachment for the teacher as a person in learning English throughout the school years and beyond them.

The interpretation of the questionnaires:

*Reality check:* I know from experience that the interpretation of most questionnaires is supposed to be organized in beautiful layout types (line graphs, bar graphs, histograms, pie charts or Cartesian graphs). I have been able to use some of these *beauties* throughout my teaching life, being rather successful at it – while also entertaining the thought that such endeavour is worthless to the sharpening of my teaching skills or to the growth of my empathy for the students.

However, this paper is not about showing off, actually it is anything *but* showing off (if you are curious enough to read on, you will bump into detailed descriptions of various *failures and recoveries from failures* in part III). Vulnerability in the teaching profession tends to be something that most teachers desperately try to avoid, because they feel that it would impact on their career as a *worst case scenario*. Well, take my word for it, being vulnerable will backfire at times, but it will also ensure that you never become a rigid mask in front of your students or co-workers (and, even more, in front of *yourself*). Realizing that you are not the best teacher in the world (not even the best teacher *you yourself* can be!) is not an easy pill to swallow. Being vulnerable is all about honesty in front of yourself and in front of other people – and good things will spring from it, eventually.

*Vulnerability check:* I am not fond of line graphs, bar graphs, histograms, pie charts, not even (strange as it may sound...) Cartesian graphs.

Without further ado, I'm gonna break it to you (*gonna* is here as part of a short poem –please re-read aloud the sentence before the brackets): I am *not* planning on organizing a chart to show you my findings.

Of course, I owe you a detailed explanation for this breach (just another one of many!) of the rules for writing a scientific paper.

The essential explanation is that I have painstakingly read *every* student answer to *every* question and I have taken my time to enjoy *each and every* student drawing showing his/her relationship to my dear English. I assure you that I will keep a vivid

*note to self* and improve my teaching style according to my students' ideas. (However, any cluster of changes is bound to happen in due time, not all at once - as rapidly replacing twenty things in a month - or even a full school year - would be both artificial for myself and puzzling for my students.)

Knowing from experience that *my* students' answers are extremely important to *myself*, I just cannot help but wondering what improvement to any other (newly qualified or g'oldie) teacher these answers could mean. Blunt as it may sound, none at all (because other teachers have other students and different work environments).

Therefore, please allow me (once in a lifetime!) to leave you out of some parts of my teaching life: knowing that I am sharing some things only with my students will hopefully make you curious enough to listen to *your* students' voices, to find out what *they* think about *their* school life and *their* experience learning English with *you*.

Take the liberty to change the questionnaires in any way you feel proper, so that the answers should be relevant and helpful to you. ( Please drop me a line as soon as you have read your students' answers – I promise not to ask you anything in particular about your findings, as long as you tell me that they have proven useful for you and your students.)

In my situation, the questionnaires have proven essential for making a point of how important it is for my students *not* to go unnoticed. They cherished being asked what they wanted, being allowed to make small decisions as to how they would like their English lessons to change (so that everything should fit better into their young inquisitive minds).

I confess that I was actually not very much concerned about my students' VAK learning styles (since my eclectic lessons most of the times fall into so many categories of attracting student attention that no one gets left out).

Nevertheless, there were two questions in particular that I was really eager to know the answers of:

- a. "What makes a good teacher?"
- b. "What would you like to change about learning English?"

a. According to my students, a good teacher would be *good, calm*, not just *intelligent*, but also *wise, fun, respectful, attentive* to student needs, *fair* to everyone, *energetic*, a *well-prepared* professional able to give *clear explanations* and also capable of *teaching through play* while *caring* for the students.

b. Whatever my students wanted me to change is the core of Part III in this book. I could have given you an overview of what you will be reading, but I know from experience that if I have managed to stir your curiosity by not saying too much, you will keep on reading.

There will be a *Thank you!* note for your reading effort at the end of *The Violin Effect* (just before the Bibliography/Webography).

Yes, I know, you need to read a lot until you reach the end of the book...

That's why I have decided to give you a little something right now.

Turn the page and meet our graphic artists! Enjoy!

## Meet our graphic artists



Gabriel  
Logo designer



Dana  
Book illustrator



### **III. Show in Progress**

#### **1. I am here. Look at me!**

Time and time again, my students have made it quite clear in their end-of-the-semester feedback forms (written *off the cuff* and unsigned, on a piece of paper ripped from the copybook) that what they find rewarding in my English classes is the fact that I take them into consideration as human beings, not only as students.

Trying to remember what they like doing in their free time (social websites playing a great part in this respect!) and using these pieces of information whenever the right moment comes in the lesson has proven to be unforgettable.

Everything seems to be connected to teaching the whole individual and taking into account his/her life; it is my firm belief that teaching something that is memorable over the years never happens in a void.

This is why I have taken up the idea that the lesson can be built around what is really happening at the moment.

For creativity's sake, we can imagine ways of using the unexpected in teaching. For example, how can we use in our teaching the fact that a noisy bee has just entered the classroom through the window?

At primary school level, this can equal a throng of teaching opportunities:

- reviewing names of insects and other animals,
- going over motion verbs (fly, run, jump, climb etc.),
- teaching/revising Present Tense Continuous,
- making connections to other school subjects such as Science and Arts (drawing some insect body parts, naming them, possibly also adding some more insect parts in a creative drawing of a very new kind of insect – unknown to anyone else except the artist), Biology (a CLIL lesson fragment about the difference between an insect and a spider) or P.E. (movement games using the Total Physical Response technique: Buzz

like a bee, lift up one arm slowly like an elephant's trunk, then jump like a frog three times.)



At secondary school level, the visiting insect can give more ideas apart from the ones specified above which could still be used, taking into account not only the level of the students, but also their need for a short fun break in whatever they have been learning before the bee has buzzed its way in):

- the review of modal verbs (what may/can/must be done in this situation)
- a problem to debate in groups before or after the problem has been taken care of (How should we get rid of it, so that we are safe and the insect unharmed?/ What do we decide to do if we cannot fulfil both wishes – our safety and the life of the insect?/How do you feel about the way in which we have managed to get rid of the problem?).

Gentle reminder – if the teacher insists on debating the issue before fixing everything, there may be a lot of mother tongue use, since (it is my firm belief, supported by repeated experience both as a teacher and as a foreign language learner/ mother tongue constant user), whatever feels urgent tends to tingle that part of the brain encompassing mother tongue; in situations in which there is a matter that needs to be quickly attended to, foreign language use seems to be abnormally fancy and artificial, as compared to mother tongue.

Other creative and easy-to-find props for a lesson in progress are the students themselves, given that there is good classroom relationship that prevents them from feeling singled out in an uncomfortable way.

Examples:

- using individual students' activity in teaching/revising Present Tense Continuous (Look what is happening in the classroom! Roxi is sharpening her blue pencil. What else is happening? Flaviu is smiling a big smile. What else is happening?– chain story of things which are happening right now)

-using a specific student's hair colour to begin talking about people's appearance using the '-ed' structure

(Simona is black-haired and blue-eyed. Who else is blue-eyed in the classroom? Andrei. Is Andrei black-haired and blue-eyed? No, he is blond-haired and blue-eyed. Who else is blond-haired?)

There is a beginning-of-the-class activity I love doing with my students from time to time. Relying on the fact that most of them are clueless about what we are going to study, I only write on the board the initials of the words in the title of the new lesson. After hushing my two or three students who have had the curiosity to flick through the textbook before class, I ask them all to tell me whatever comes to their mind that begins with the letters written on the board. After this brainstorming step of my beginning-of-the class activity, I try to build a story (using the words given by my students and crossing them out as soon as I have been able to use them in an off-the-cuff speech).

This activity has lots of benefits: it shows the students that you are taking their ideas into account while building the beginning of your lesson; it showcases you, as a real person (stammering, unable to find the right word, but still not giving up trying to find the right logical connection between words, *Dada-style*); it is an energetic activity that relies on laughter as anti-depressant; finally, it helps students understand that, at least in their English class with Cătălina, *creative* and *crazy* are almost synonyms.

Since nothing tends to stay in my brain for longer than a few minutes if I do not find a story to link it with, I am taking the liberty of imagining that you are the same. Here you are, an example of this teaching prop embedded in a story:

I was planning to teach the lesson Dreams and Worries to my 7th graders (HighFlyer Upper Intermediate, 1999). So, I wrote D and W on the board and asked for their contribution. I do not remember exactly what they told me, but I will just imagine I do, by writing the first words coming to my mind:

**D – dog, drama, desire, doom, dragon, door, dad, drive, doughnut, dessert;**

**W – walnut, walrus, warrior, wait, whatever, wrong, went.**

Please remember that the story you will come up with does not have to be *extremely* logical – it should just be understandable and fun. (As an aside thought, most of my students no longer recognize Spike and Tyke as the dog and the puppy featuring in the cartoons starring Tom and Jerry, but, well, yes, there must be a part of the story that nourishes the child within any teacher (despite the generation gap). And Cătălina is a fully-grown...child, so Spike and Tyke are here to stay!)



*Once upon a time, there was a little dog eating a big walrus. This was a warrior dog, as you can imagine, and he was not waiting for anything to go wrong - our warrior dog was not waiting for any drama in his life; since doom can happen any minute in anybody's life, it is a good idea to eat dessert first (He just said whatever! to everyone who tried to stop him from fulfilling his desire to eat doughnuts and dragons alike) But his dad (we can call him Spike) was a special kind of person and the little dog (we can call him Tyke) had a close bond with his dad. So, when Spike slammed open the door, Tyke quickly let go of the walrus (he had plenty of experience pretending not to be eating walruses) and candidly moved on towards the bowl of walnuts that dad had been asking him to eat whenever he felt the urge of gobbling up goblins or warriors or dwarves.*

*While dreaming about going back to his walrus, Tyke was also extremely worried that this could be his very last walrus...*

q.e.d. We have reached the end of this story - a logical hint to the D and W words on the board. The lesson about Dreams and Worries can now begin.

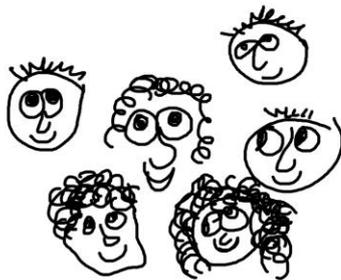
## 2. I am creative - I love stories

There is something uncanny about why stories are so well-loved. It could be childhood remembrance of warm moments in a parent's arms, or it could be the feeling of lovely mischief brought about by pretending to sleep while listening to the soft voice of a loved person. Even to this day (when I am seasoned and wise...), I still cannot fully understand the lure that stories bring into my life. I just seem to be unable to let them unfold without being there - happy for the good people in the story and intrigued by the negative characters...

I have recently realized that I cannot bring focus and meaning to my classroom unless I accept and bring myself as a person (alongside with one of my other *personae*, that of a teacher). This is the very reason that stories have a say in my teaching life. If I could simmer everything that I am to just a little something, what I would end up with would be a story. Hence, stories have a safe and warm place in my English classes.

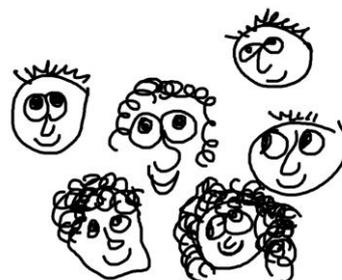
In other words, stories fill my classes: they give a background to grammar points, offer a fun environment for new vocabulary items, or sometimes fix something which is broken (therapeutic stories) or project future perspectives (guided vision - imagination stories within a given scaffolding).

Sometimes, there are *true* life stories, with real people



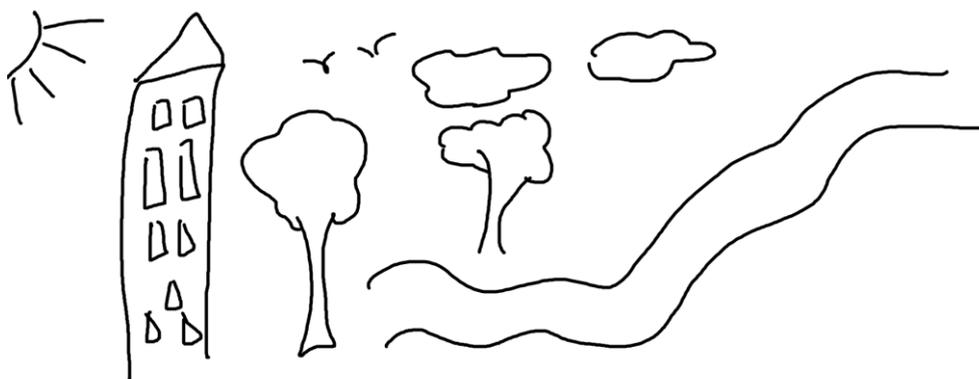
(the kind of stories that bring about my students' insight into real life).

Other times, there are *partly true* life stories, in which



there is a little something which has actually been there (but which has been transformed to fit my teaching purpose: be this purpose the use of modal verbs throughout the story or just a good old listening exercise without any electronic devices – which would definitely increase my *Teacher Talking Time*, but for a good cause.) Finally, there are stories which have been *fully invented*, partly to fulfil a teaching purpose and partly to ensure that my students see me as a normal individual who models most people’s need to create. (As a matter of fact, although my students know about this tripartition of stories in my classroom, most of them begin smiling their disbelief whenever they hear that they are in for a *true* story. I guess they have become so used to made-up stories that I just cannot impress them anymore with life stories as such...Which is good, since my take on life is that the loss of imagination would mean the loss of most of what makes us human.)

The following *guided vision story* is based on the breathtaking moment I cherish (and come back to whenever burdensome burnout seems to be lurking in the distance): my second year of teaching offered me the opportunity of taking the best course for NQTs that the British Council was offering at the time (Steps to Success – the pilot course, 2007). However, since I have been unable to find the original story, even in a shortened/modified format, I have had to rely on memory and feeling every time I wanted to use it in one of my classes. I owe a debt of gratitude to one of my very experienced and wonderfully empathic peers, Mrs. Mihaela Lazăr, Steps to Success course trainer at the time. (Despite my best efforts, I just could not find any other author of this guided vision story, so I believe it is safe to express gratitude again to my friend and mentor who must have made it up for the love and sake of beginner teachers.)



*You are lying in the grass outside, close to a small river. It is a warm day and you feel that pleasant warmth in your body as you are lying in the grass. All you can hear is the safe, soft sound of the water flowing nearby and a few birds chirping. You feel free of everything which has ever bothered you – don't think too deeply, just let go of everything and relax your whole body.*

*Take 20 seconds of flexible time, equalling all the time you need, to feel that warmth and relaxation in your body.*

*Slowly, slowly, you feel the energy taking over the calmness. You stand up and you look away. In the distance, you see a castle - rather old, but well kept, the kind of building that gives you a feeling of safety.*

*Take 20 seconds of flexible time, equalling all the time you need, to see the outside of the castle. Imagine as many details as you can, get as colourful as you wish. This is your story or, better still, this is becoming one of your stories.*

*You begin walking the path slowly meandering to the castle...*

*You have arrived in front of the castle and you find an open door. In the ballroom opening in front of your eyes, you see the pictures of the most beautiful moments in your life so far.*

*Take 20 seconds of flexible time, equalling all the time you need, to picture the life moments you cherish; no hurry, you are writing your story, so you can stop right there, in order to re-live the best moments in your life. Whenever you feel that you are ready for a new story, we are going to continue this one.*

*Take 20 seconds of flexible time, equalling all the time you need, to fill your heart with the peacefulness brought about by your vivid life memories which enable you to feel at home with yourself (the main character in all your stories).*

*Raise your eyes from the ballroom door and see the staircase leading you to the next floor. Enter the first room: the door has been opened just for you. In the distance, you can see a golden book on a wooden stand. There is a silver pen next to it – it will magically help you write all the missing words on the page opened just for you. This is the golden book of your future, the silver pen is in your hand, write your story, the story of your future, taking 2 minutes of flexible time, equalling all the time you need.*

*You have finished writing. Place the silver pen close to the golden book, have another look at your words and let your fingers touch some of the letters that you have*

*written on the page. No need to close the book now: it has been opened for you, just for you. You can come back to it whenever you feel like writing another word on the page.*

*Slowly, slowly, step away from the book. Go down the staircase, have another look at the ballroom on your way out. No need to rush, you have plenty of seconds of flexible time, equalling all the time you need.*

*Follow the winding path back to the spot of lush grass, sit back, watch the clear sky and hear the birds peacefully chirping in the distance. The river is flowing close to you and you can smell a delicate scent of flowers, grass and bushes all around you.*

*This is the end of one journey into your future. You can come back to the castle whenever you feel like it, you are the only one who knows the right path...*

*Open your eyes.*

Honesty lurks behind most of my pages, so I just cannot pretend that I am a teacher whose 13 year-old students would understand and take pleasure in the intricate wording of this story. Most of my students do not have the right level of English knowledge to fully take in this (a bit cheesy, I know...) motivational story; however, I just cannot keep my graduating students out of a universe that gives them the comfort of knowing that their future life (with whatever it may have in store for them) can still be tamed by their strong will of succeeding.

In other words, I am not planning on establishing a good relationship *only* with those students who like English and/or are good at it (please note that, from a motivational perspective, the *and/or* is extremely necessary since some students who are good at any school subject, may not enjoy it as much as their teacher would like to think...)

While I am fully aware that using Romanian in my classes may not fall 100% into the *professionally correct box* of teaching English as a Second Language, it feels the right thing to do (so I prepare a Romanian variant of the story whenever my young, boisterous students approach the right age). Usually, this happens after nine years of working together as a group; in the meantime, we have developed firm bonds - not only as students learning English and teacher grading them, but also as *people of the world* (to use wise Willy Wonka's terminology).

Whenever I tell my students the Romanian variant of this story, I take great care to avoid strong motivational words – I believe that items of vocabulary like "power" (*the power is in your hands*), "strength" (*you have the strength to change your life for the better*), "greatness" (*there is greatness in each of us*) could actually backfire – they could be perceived as unnatural or even as a hallmark of the fact that my students are being manipulated into something – even something good. (As an aside, whenever I get the slightest hint that I am being pushed towards something, I stop walking altogether - so I fully understand my nearly adolescent students who try to avoid external *guidance* (understood as *unwanted control*). I just try to establish a realm of *hints of* peacefulness instead, by referring to the senses – what we can hear, what we can see, what we can smell...

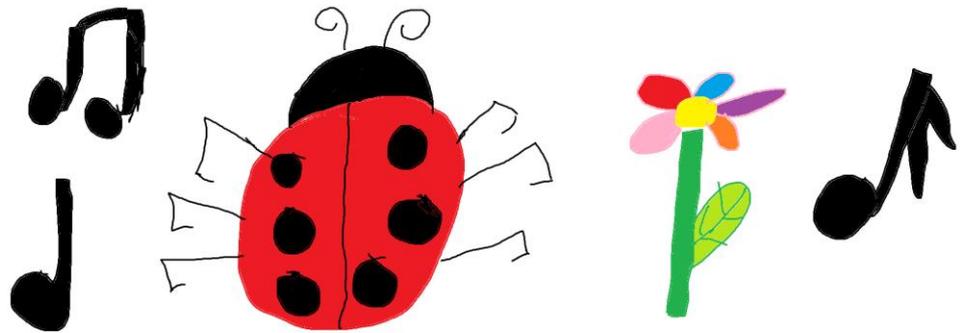
I just cannot forget my beautiful Dorina sitting in the middle row of 8th grade B (off topic: the student names used in this paper only share the initial letter with their real name – I guess I am entitled to do so, since they have become *actors* in this *Story of My Teaching Life* which is unfolding in front of your very eyes).

When we got to the part of the story saying that the castle is a safe place, where nothing can hurt us, there were tears trickling down Dorina's face – even to this day, I do not know if I have made the right choice *not* talking to her afterwards, *not* sussing her out. (Lately, I have been trying to avoid getting into my students' life because I know from experience that some wounds, in the attempt of dressing by an inexperienced individual, can bleed again...

I clearly remember two moments in my school life when I saw a dear student crying at the back of the classroom (Paula) or in the restroom (Ștefana); I just held and cooed them both like I would one of my very own crying children: *You don't need to tell me anything if you don't want to. But you can hug me as hard as you wish and you know where to find me if you want to talk about this.*

### 3. I can draw really well

Funny,  
but  
true:  
I can  
draw  
really  
well  
simply  
because...



I cannot draw.

(By the way, I didn't draw the images above. Dănuța did! )

Actually, I cannot draw like most people can - I do not have the drawing expertise that would make my drawings elaborate, lifelike or even *cathartic*. However, I can happily confess that my board drawings are nice to look at and extremely easy to copy.

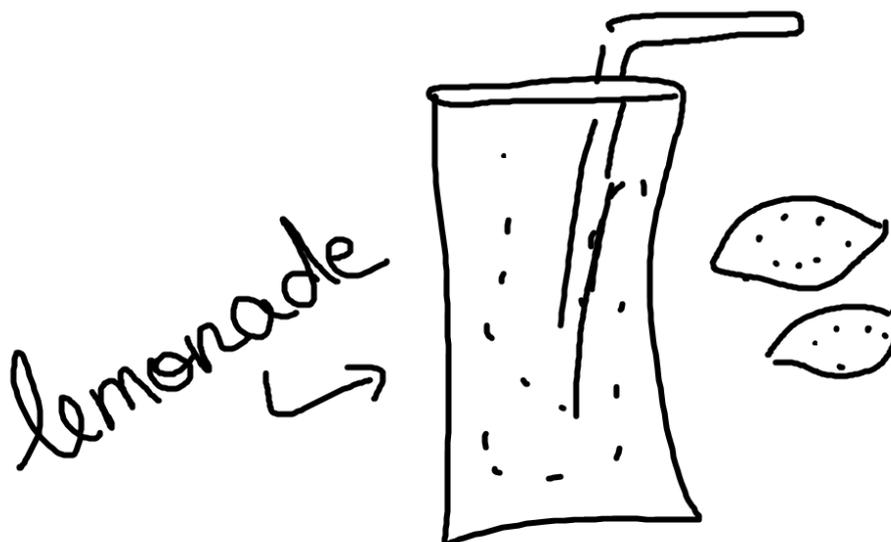
I decided that I needed to step away from the conventions of complex drawing when I realized that my efforts were leading nowhere. In my primary school classes, the dogs drawn on the board tended to look like pigs...



(and my unforgiving first grade students would call this out without thinking twice!

And definitely without raising their hand first!)

*When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.*



Without a trait of remorse, I chose to use child labour in my English classes and I began learning from my two very own kids and my 200 (or so) students at school.

What the drawing lessons (incessantly held by lovely teacher trainers both at breaktime- while at school or at the weekend-while at home) eventually boiled down to was the use of simple geometric shapes as a starting point. Very little modification of those basic shapes was needed in order to draw what needed to be drawn. More ideas about drawing can be found in the literature devoted to simple drawing for teachers, so I began using a drawing copybook for rehearsal before the *show* (i.e. each lesson that required the use of my newly-acquired skills).

You would be amazed at how many things you can draw beginning with basic geometric shapes:

*-simple lines (vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, zigzag)* can add up details to your drawings (if your classroom time is plentiful). Since this hardly ever happens in my teaching, I have taken up the habit of drawing everything as quickly as possible, with as little detail as possible, as long as it is recognizable by my students. I have even coined the term *speed drawing* for something that I simply cannot include in this book, since it is all about movement – you would have to see it with your very eyes to know what I am talking about, so please ask me to show it to you when we meet.

-*circles* become faces (simple lines – eyebrows, mouth - conveying feelings), grannie’s eyeglasses, volleyballs at the beach, bicycle wheels (a few more simple lines and your bike is ready to take out for a ride!), yummy grapes or even a loooooong caterpillar moving its body over a leaf

-*ovals* are some of the most resourceful geometric shapes. The variation with pointed sides can be used to draw a lemon, an inquisitive eye, a cat, a leaf or a fish swimming in a pond. No-frills ovals can be overlain in various positions so that a pear shape eventually comes out – you can use it for a good cause (teacher *fuel* at breaktime, alongside with biscuits) or you can just move on to the next level - a dog or a rabbit happily hopping on your board. (One step leading to the other one – this may ring a bell! Please be as kind to remember that Part I of this paper has featured caterpillars, chrysalides and butterflies. I confess, I have a thing for butterflies, so do allow me to give a name to this kind of drawing by using a freshly coined term: *metamorphic drawing*.)

-*hearts* brought together can become a four-leaved clover or even a beautiful butterfly (*déjà vu?*)

-*rectangles* are really good for drawing a present (or two, or three).

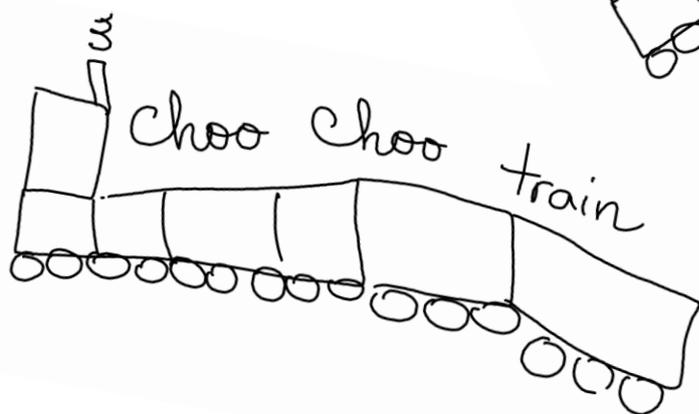
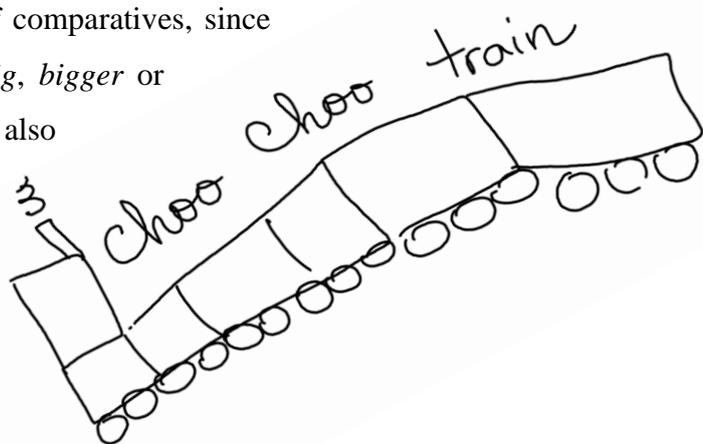
Students can also get a clear idea of comparatives, since

these rectangular presents can be *big*, *bigger* or

*the biggest* of all. And, yes, you can also

build Santa’s means of transport

for your presents



out of some carefully placed rectangles (together with a few circles for the wheels).

(Dear teacher, if you still entertain the idea that Santa's presents and trains are a mismatch, try watching The Polar Express with your kids at school in the last school days before Christmas. I guarantee that your opinion will undergo major changes.)

*-squares* can make up faces of people – for creativity's sake, we need to make changes from time to time. One of my more experienced peers at school constantly gives me precious insight into my job: in her opinion, we need to make a change if we have the slightest hint that we are getting bored with ourselves as teachers (I cannot trick my students into anything if I cannot trick myself first). This could hold true in other life situations, too.

Whenever a teacher is using the board for drawing, it is for a good cause, not exactly for the sake of it – while the time-consuming temptation of elaborate drawing is always lurking behind the board! (However, exquisite board drawing may cathartically take over *one of those days* when nothing seems to be working with any class of students and beautiful drawing can successfully prevent burnout onset.)

Whenever we use stick figures, we use the maximum of teaching opportunities with the shortest of supplies. A full inventory of stick figures can be found in Andrew Wright's *1000 Pictures for Teachers to Copy* that I have found to be a real eye-opener on easy, beginner drawings in my class. In my opinion, you can begin by drawing the members of the family as stick figures – it is easier than it sounds, since the length of the *stick* (the backbone of each character) can be an easy hint as to who you are referring to (child or adult), while the tilting possibilities of the stick would shed light either on the healthy teenager or on poor grannie's backache.

The use of colours in board drawing is not always for decorative purposes.

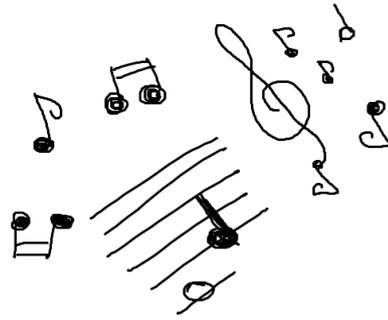
While Easter Bunny's basket (full of eggs) just cannot be short of a rainbow,



working with the place prepositions would require the consistent use of two colours: one for the main object in the picture and the other one for the second object - *on*, *under*, *between*, *in front of* or *behind* the first one.

#### 4. I love music

I am not Iulia's alter ego. Nobody has ever forced me to play music, but it's a fact that music has always played a part in my life. I can think well when I allow my thoughts to flow against a music background (even the writing of this paper is tributary to so many types of music that you finally have at least *one* good reason why it is so eclectic).



My students love it, too, and have asked for it in the questionnaires. Their wish is my command, given that I also get into *flow* more easily while listening to music. One more very important detail: my most boisterous students just cannot do their thing with lovely music in the background!

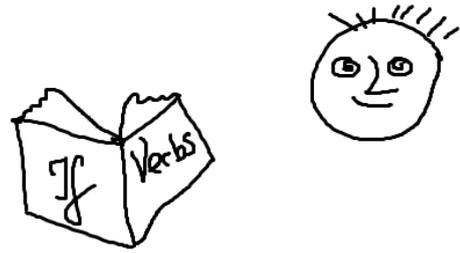
The way we see it, music is our replacement of slippers in the classroom – it enables us to feel at home within a space that is not always as warm as we (students and teachers alike) would like it to be.

We have begun by playing the kind of instrumental music which is meant to help students focus on the lesson being taught (a little cheesy and very difficult to prove, I know), then we got to choose from among smooth jazz, slow rock ballads, Disney instrumental soundtracks, Christmas carols and other music types that I would have never thought of, had it not been for my students' ideas.

Even though my coming to class wearing a laptop to my right and a test-and-corrected-copybook bag to my left would make me look dangerously close to a donkey fetching water to the master, it is definitely worth it.

## 5. Grammar games

I clearly remember my first years of teaching, with grammar hovering over my lessons like an eagle choosing its next victim...I had grown used to consider grammar the one and only important part of any English class since it was the main



reason I had entered the Faculty of Letters (i.e. I was good at grammar! - side note: I no longer consider myself a distinguished grammar user, since I know for a fact that I do make mistakes. However, the English I am trying to use in my classes is getting fresher by the day, given that I am continuously – and enthusiastically - reading contemporary literature and trying to mind the seductive use of grammar and language by book authors who are native speakers).

It was not easy to change the perspective that grammar is top of the class; in all honesty, I still lead very traditional grammar classes with my advanced students (please note that in a secondary school the word *advanced* has other shades of meaning than in the Common European Framework Scale!). The only good change I have been able to make to those quite boring (but necessary) classes is the limited amount of time I am challenging my students to pay attention (we have decided that 10 minutes are acceptable for everyone: a well-organized teacher can manage to get his/her points across, while a kind student can refrain from doing anything else for 10 minutes).



There are not many games I play with my students, rather variations of a few activities which have proven easy to use again and again with very little preparation.

a. Tic Tac Toe: this very easy game (introduced as a teaching tool in the Steps to Success 2007 pilot course) works well with whatever comes in packs of at least 9 (because there are 9 places to fill in a Tic Tac Toe grid);

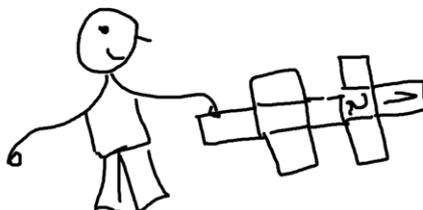
depending on the age of my students, we can use numbers, colours, days of the week, months of the year, any other new vocabulary items which are thematically linked, verbs (forms 1,2,3 of irregular verbs), adjective comparison or verb tenses with given input (such as *recently, usually, right now*)

(yes, yes, you're right: this Tic Tac Toe grid can be cheeky:  
*it gets the better part of your board work!*)

b.

This/That/These/Those:

we place a few pieces of chalk on the floor (one piece and a pile of pieces of chalk close to the leader of the game, one more piece and one



more pile of pieces of chalk far away from the leader of the game. In order for this game to reach all the students (even those at the back of the classroom), the four categories of chalk can be four different colours. The leader of the game begins by pointing to *this* piece of blue chalk, *these* pieces of pink chalk, *that* piece of yellow chalk and *those* pieces of green chalk, then eliciting the same answers from his/her classmates in a team contest). This game is extremely beneficial for the leaders of this game – they have no problem correcting their peers (*this* instead of *that*, *these* instead of *those*) and so, they make the first steps towards group leadership; clearly remembering the colours used during the game can do that to any game leader!

c. Long/Longer/The longest: ScoobyDoos can prove extremely helpful in your English class. The preparation will take just a few minutes and you will only need four differently coloured ScoobyDoos and a pair of scissors. The easy steps of the preparation of this activity are the following:

a. cut number 1 – let's say, the yellow ScoobyDoo - really short (still, long enough to have enough material for a knot with the rest of the ScoobyDoos)

b. cut number 2 – red - noticeably longer than the first one

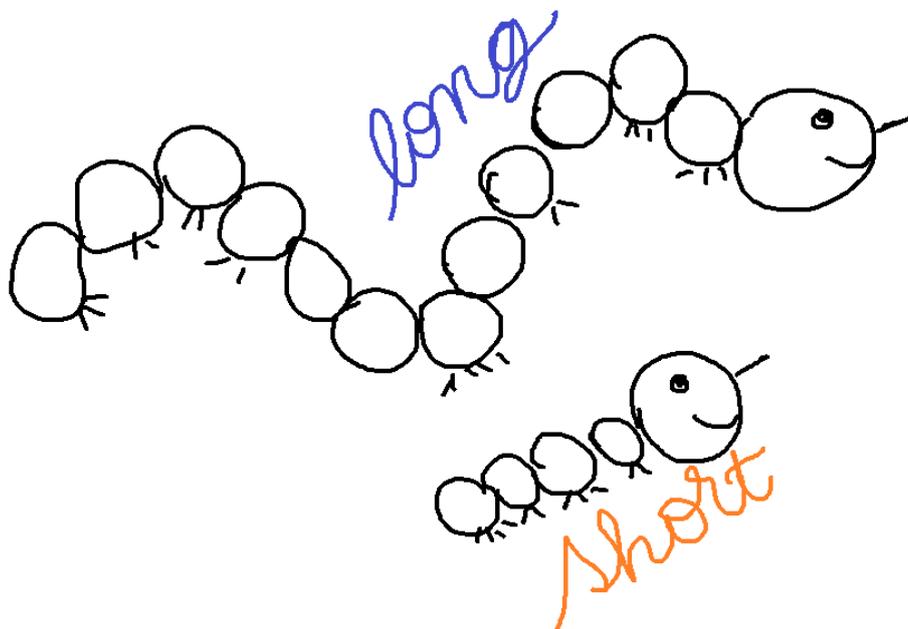
c. cut number 3 – green - way longer than the red one

d. finally, leave number 4 – black - untouched (its full size will mean *the longest* to most students without any strain on the part of the teacher to enforce this idea).

e. place them at an equal starting point and make a knot with all the four ScoobyDoos

f. rehearse only showing numbers 1 and 2 to your students, eliciting the adjectives describing them - *mare* and *mic* will probably be the first words you will hear, kindly followed by *big* and *small* upon remembering the *Open, shut them* song. At the end of five minutes or so of coaxing, you will eventually reach the elegant *short* and *long* words you have expected to hear since the beginning of the activity.

g. show numbers 3 and 4 while your students are gladly echo-ing your *loooong* and *loooooonger*.



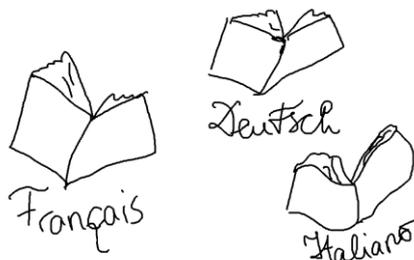
Expect them to be werewolves for at least two more school years whenever the word *long* or its grammatical variants show up in any text. While this will be strenuous for your ears – making you wish you had dumped the ScoobyDoos altogether before they made a mess of your writing desk-, it is good proof that you have managed to teach your students a memorable lesson!

## 6. Teach me something I can use!

Too many times, school and life are parallel alleys. Oops, cat out of the bag!

We, as teachers, are supposed to be preparing students for life by teaching them the right skills for life. However, *skills for life* clearly depend on every teacher's outlook on life: I am fully aware that each school subject has specifications on what to teach (so that the *skills for life* requirement could be met), but I am also of the opinion that most teachers (including myself) have found that they can work well by checking these specifications from time to time (as good teacher guidelines), but mostly by listening to their hearts to establish what could be very important in the students' future life.

My life experience has shown me that  
*one* foreign language is never enough,  
not even on holidays,  
let alone when  
trying to find a job.  
This is why I keep  
learning languages and  
I do so side by side with  
my dear students



(at the moment, we are happy Chinese and German learners, but the perspective is getting more partnerships with institutions which could send teachers of other languages in our school once a week).

Sadly, not many of the other teachers in our school are there for these language classes – as a matter of fact, it is quite funny that the only teachers attending these classes are the ones who are already confident users of other languages than their mother tongue. There must be a part of their brain which is constantly expanding to encompass foreign vocabulary, pronunciation or grammar – I dare say that learning another language can act as a genuine antidepressant or, in extreme cases (like mine) as an addiction (I could dump everything that I am doing for a good Chinese grammar lesson on measure words or third tones read as second tones - when followed by other third tones!)

Apart from using whatever language is necessary in any given environment (an ability which I haven't been able to master so far – and probably would be *wishful thinking* for the rest of my life), I also truly believe that we need to be able to do as many things as possible. Whatever is learnt in childhood tends to stay with us, so that we can easily remember it when we need to; whatever is not learnt in childhood can still be learned in adulthood, but at the expense of leaving aside the fun parts.

I clearly remember Mama Mina, my grannie – when cooking, she would organize the kitchen in such a way that she could let me have a *safe* contribution to whatever she was baking (i.e. without wasting the hard-to-find ingredients in 1980s Romania).



She was also a keen sewing machine user.

I quickly realized that, as a teacher, I cannot cook at school, for a thousand various reasons ranging from cleanliness and health issues to the uncertain result of an hour's work. Also, cooking a meal for the family is the kind of attribution that any person can safely leave to the hands of a merciful grannie without having to stand public retribution.

However, lacking basic sewing skills (being unable to fix a button on one's own shirt and asking around for help) will, in most cases, trigger some raised eyebrows from the onlookers.

Which left me with just one possibility.

*While I do not know a thing about the inside workings of a car engine, I honestly believe that such expertise could come in handy in life.* These are the simple lines I usually tell my ten year-olds who confess never to have touched thread or needle in their life. Skipping the wondering part (*How on earth?*) – so tempting, yet so devoid of any benefit for my students -, we began threading the above-mentioned needles, taking good care of not hurting our fingers too badly throughout this rather strenuous piece of work.

## 6.1. I've never sewn a button, but I can try

Learning new things from scratch is seldom easy for the learner, if one is being true to oneself.

Lifelong learning means willingly stepping out of a universe you know well, a universe whose rules are certain and reliable only to find out that you are no longer in command.

As an aside, this is the main reason why people working in the teaching profession should try learning as many other things as possible – if you find yourself *not* to be an excellent piano player, *nor* a shrewd basketball player, *not even* a fast learner of Chinese, you will probably have second thoughts about pitifully looking at that child for whom your dear English is rocket science (just like piano, basketball or Mandarin Chinese for yourself - an otherwise very distinguished individual).

My sewing experience was born out of burnout.

At the beginning of a European project that was to take its toll out of my good night's sleep for the following three school years, I found myself the teacher I had never wished to become: my sleepless nights (checking emails from the other nine coordinators of this school project) quickly led to lack of proper preparation for my English classes.

Logically, students took over teacher in no time (whenever there is no apparent rule of the game - the teaching style being rather chaotic-, the students are always there to instill some good old fun into the chaos: clicking their pens every few seconds, calling on other students throughout the class, only to tell them about their latest score in some obscure computer game...)

Apart from the evident behaviour problems, I got confronted with learning gaps in my students' knowledge of English, as well as with the unsafety of what I should do next (punish them for what I have been unable to stop - nicely, but firmly - , or deciding

that nothing bad has actually happened, smiling together with them at their cute ideas of disrupting my class).

Needless to say, that time of my teaching life was riddled with thoughts of leaving the school system altogether in order to find a more suitable job.

In my opinion, teaching is one of the loneliest jobs in the world: when your classes fail (more or less) because of various reasons, you may be in the ironical situation where your seasoned co-workers put it down to your lack of experience (and tell you not to be gullible enough as to wait for radical improvement in the following five or six school years). Not many of us can muster the courage to admit failure to a more experienced peer, given that the age of experience is not always the age of wisdom in terms of communication.

Casting away the shame, I brought my teaching pangs to the attention of whoever was trustworthy and within earshot (the school psychologist, the school headmistresses, other teachers). I finally got to admit that no teacher should work in isolation and that the help given by a few more experienced peers (who honestly remember dark moments in their own professional life and really care for a younger peer's well-being) is truly invaluable.

That was the moment when I got closer to my friend Diana Buruian. Even to this day, she is the professional I turn to whenever my classroom life seems to be on the awkward side. Her listening ear and sound advice on what to do *now* are some of the main reasons I am still in the teaching profession, courageously writing about my unhappy times (in the hope that these lines will fall into the hands of people who go through similar difficult moments).

More changed for the better when I got the idea that my burnout could be another name for depression. This is when I began looking for ideas on how to tackle depression using some simple tools (that would not take away much time) and I ran into the idea that arts and crafts could help (the constant pressure applied to the tips of the fingers is a way of reenacting brain connections which can prove to be extremely valuable for the person who is depressed).

I began sewing what would probably be my first hem in something like 20 years (good old grannie's sewing tips and tricks had not been lost, but getting back on track is never a walk in the park...). Little by little, a whiteboard bag, a set of teaching aprons, a light colourful backpack and a few other handmade teaching tools came out of my hands.

Burnout was slowly fading away, as my students were growing more and more respectful, more and more hardworking – since my very own hard work for keeping them entertained in class was colourfully making its move into my classroom.

### 6.1.1. Teaching aprons

Even though I may strive to coax you into believing that I am the all-time creator of teaching aprons (*Hurray! Hurray!*), you will soon prove me a liar, as the Internet abounds in patterns you can take into (creative) consideration while sewing teaching aprons.

This matter tearfully aside (you just cannot believe my disappointment upon realizing that other people have had this idea in mind before myself...), I can tell you how I prepare the pieces of fabric needed for a starter teaching apron – which means that, after you have grown used to sewing the basic type, you can sew your own preferences into your very own teaching companions (in my experience, teaching aprons tend to proliferate like a litter of hamsters!).

To begin with, you will need three pieces of fabric (boasting different patterns, for variety's sake) of roughly speaking the following measurements in centimetres: 45/35, 45/35, 45/25. As anybody can see, two pieces of fabric have exactly the same length and width, while the third one is a bit smaller in length, but of the exact width.

In order to understand better what you need to do, I strongly suggest that you start small, i.e. begin with three very small pieces of fabric sewn together in exactly the same way as you would sew the ones of the right size.

The making of this teaching apron will only take 5 simple steps to complete; also, for explanation's sake, please be kind enough to imagine that the pieces of fabric similar in both width and length are *red* and *yellow*, while the third one is *blue* (we should not forget it is Centennial Year in Romania!)

Step 1: hem *blue* on just one of its lengths, then sew it on *red* (unhemmed) on each of their left and right width parts (still unhemmed, exactly like the bottom of the resulting masterpiece)

Step 2: sew *red* (yes, yes, together with *blue* – think about a pregnant mum carrying her baby everywhere!) on *yellow* (*pillowcase* backward sewing: if *red* and *yellow* were books, their front covers, featuring the name of the author, the title and the publishing

house will be facing each other). After sewing three sides, you turn everything inside out and you get the fresh colours on the outside, fully visible now.

Step 3: Hem the last part and there you have your starter apron.

Step 4: You cannot use it, right? You need something to tie it with and there is none such thing there yet. Please take the liberty of finding a piece of ribbon of more or less 180 centimetres and sew it onto the last of your hems, making sure you leave the right amount of ribbon (approximately 65 centimetres) to both sides before sewing it on.

Step 5: Sew all the pockets you may need with simple sewing lines running from top to bottom. Some pockets will be thin and elegant (like some teachers I know and admire), while others will be plump and comfy (like Țumpi, Cătălina's bunny, always eager to get a pat on the back when her owner is not busy writing a book on motivation). The thin pockets will accommodate your writing instruments while the fat ones will be good enough for carrying chalk, finger puppets and who-knows-what other trinkets you may find useful for your lessons.

I believe that teaching aprons are the kind of teaching tools that you either fall in love with at first sight or you never take into consideration again. If you do fall in love with teaching aprons (*Mission accomplished!*), remember that any new teaching apron is a love story, so make sure you design it with the right amount of attention to details that will make you want to use it over and over again.

Detail 1: find soft materials to work with. They will prove easy to fold inside your teaching bag, while also comfortable to place your hands inside (pocket-like) – when you are not writing on the board or correcting your students' work.

Detail 2: sew your teaching apron yourself. Finding a professional seamstress to make it for you is still a possibility, but creating something yourself is priceless. Rest assured, you will run into problems: thread snapping, needle breaking, sore fingers...but, after a few hours' work (the time needed for the completion of the teaching aprons will constantly shrink as your sewing ability increases) you will finally have a great artistic work in front of your eyes.

### 6.1.2. Chameleon bags

Once you know how to sew a teaching apron, you can use the same pillow-case technique to embed your apron onto two other bigger pieces of fabric sewn together.

Remember how you have sewn the *blue* piece of fabric onto the *red* one? You will be doing exactly the same with your apron (it will act as a bigger *blue* piece of fabric in a sequel to the teaching apron story, the Chameleon Bag – registered trademark pending. Just kidding, I would be exhilarated to be able to motivate other teachers into taking up sewing variations of the *chameleon bags* which – *Hear, oh, hear!* – I happily haven't been able to find on any Internet site.)

Your chameleon bag can be used as a carrying tote for your preparatory grade toys or 8th grade tests (or anything else in between). If you run into other uses of teaching aprons/chameleon bags, please drop me a line about this. I would be tickled pink!



## 6.2. I can be a marvellous actor

Teaching Drama goes down a long way, back to my first year of teaching when I was given a group of students who were not deemed gifted enough to make their way into the *real* Drama group of the school.

While taking great care not to hurt their feelings, the teachers have got to the conclusion that Drama is for everyone (however, depending on their respective capabilities, some Drama students can enter competitions while others will just have a good time acting in front of a crowd made up of grannies. Which is nothing short of spine-tinglingly rewarding!)

Drama games and activities abound in the literature devoted to this very special and important side of teaching. In my teaching of Drama or Puppet Shows, as an optional class, I give my students regular voice and pronunciation practice (tongue-twisters really are the best thing since sliced bread!), creativity moments (like writing all the words you can come up with in one minute, then using them all in a story), movement games (towards the end of the class, otherwise I may be unable to stop the hullabaloo!)

I also give my students a funny name to go by in every situation where they need to act as a dramatic group: Sock'n Spoon (the name being coined with the kind influence of the rough materials needed for the completion of my first theatrical experience as a master puppeteer, leading other mentees into the realm of handmade drama). Namely, what we needed were old – but clean – socks and old – but clean – wooden spoons; upon stealing them from mum's sewing desk or kitchen table, these raw materials were subsequently adorned with pieces of fabric, thread, buttons, plastic eyes, depending on the crazy ideas of each of my brave students )

I also prepare scripts for my students, both in English and in Romanian (and also using a mixture of languages).

You are most welcome to have a look at them on [www.creion.weebly.com](http://www.creion.weebly.com) (using them in any of your classes is my wish and command, provided that you give credit to the *Hmmm, Hmmm!* rightful author).

### 6.3. I can be a mini-teacher

*Learning by teaching* and *learning from peers* were two of the teaching methods brought forward by the Erasmus + KA2 European project *Discovering Europe* that I have had the chance (and the burden...) of coordinating between 2014 and 2017.

In the questionnaires included in part II of this paper, my students have kindly asked me to let them do their part, as mini-teachers for their peers. This way, they implied, they could be much more involved into the lesson, since it would be theirs to teach, theirs to take pride in.

We have decided to couple this wish of my students' having the floor (anyway, they are the actors in my Drama classes, so why not?) with the fact that they have asked me to include in my lessons more of what they may actually need in real life (sorry to say, but clearly distinguishing between Present Perfect Simple and Past Tense Simple is getting less and less perceived as a life skill...)

This was the logic behind the mini-project *Teachers for a Day* which went on in the school year 2018 – 2019 and will probably have a longer life, since my students really enjoy it.

Most *Teacher for a Day* lessons follow these steps:

- Greetings from the mini-teachers to their peers
- Short introduction of the topic under discussion
- Lesson development (based on the preparation that the mini-teachers have done without any adult help)
- Positive critical outlook on the lesson (the mini-teachers, then their peers)
- Maxi-teacher's feedback on the whole activity

The topics tackled by the group of teaching students are rather similar in their connectivity to real life: Why Are Languages Important, At the Airport, Getting Around in a New Town, Ordering Food at a Restaurant. While most of these topics have already been touched upon in normal school days, *Teacher for a Day* lessons promise to have a greater percentage of memorability, since the students themselves are the creators of the activities.

## **7. There must be another explanation!**

22nd to 26th October 2018 will probably be one of the signposts in my teaching journey. It is well connected to the way the VAK Model underpins motivated learning, but the story will require the full patience of the reader, since it dwells on many important details, all of them eventually converging in a clearcut point.

Up to this point of my career, the *Școala Altfel* week had been a burdensome, but manageable time, with various duties that did not follow an estimated pattern, consequently causing a certain amount of stress for a teacher whose comfort zone is the classroom (with its written and unwritten rules and regulations).

In a nutshell, I had grown to consider *Școala Altfel* as a time of controllable stress which, seen from the perspective of routine teaching and learning, had clear advantages for everyone involved.

Still, life has a funny way of constantly showing us that we are in a for a surprise...

After seven years of working together as a group, I was a believer in the sturdy connection that my 7<sup>th</sup> graders and myself had managed to establish and keep. We had a nice relationship, trying to be as caring as possible to everyone else under normal circumstances.

Well, *Școala Altfel* has proven to be no normal circumstance, thus eluding the student-teacher relationship categories agreed upon and practised so many times before.

The traditional sewing class on Monday (a “Romanian Centennial” activity) was followed by a museum-and-church-visiting trip on Tuesday and a CPR training activity on Wednesday.

In all honesty, I would not have imagined that my well-bred students would be so difficult to handle for three days in a row.

To be exact, the sewing class on Monday had proven little more except that whatever fine manipulation skills my students have had as primary school students, these had miraculously vanished in the process of growing up... (Mind you, I had known this group of students ever since they were six year-olds and their tremendous energy in primary school almost always obediently allowed guidance towards Arts and Crafts...)

In all honesty, the sightseeing trip on Tuesday was the kind of activity that no teacher would be happy to be observed by a peer... Even to this day, I just cannot say exactly which part made me feel more ashamed: my two students suddenly deciding that running in the church is a possibility (*"You're it!"*) or my eight or so (*What's in a number?*) students whose footsteps could be heard from miles away upon their dramatic entrance in the pizzeria...

Wednesday, with its CPR activity, brought about my sorrowful reluctance to ever again asking a professional (who is not a teacher) to step into our classroom. Not only have my 7<sup>th</sup> graders lost their patience in the middle of the otherwise catchy presentation of the doctor, but they have also decided to act out other parts (than the accepted roles of victim and carer) whenever given the chance to work in groups.

I had been able to keep up appearances for three days. That is, using the kind language that my students have grown used to or smiling to my boisterous crew whenever I felt such facial expression was proper from a teaching stance. However, I finally admitted to the ridiculous situation in which no smile could hide the storm inside me: waves of anger, shame and, even more importantly, disbelief. My well-bred students to do such things... I must have done something wrong myself, so that they have got the message that this would be acceptable behaviour...

I wish I could tell you that we sat in a circle and we discussed everything thoroughly, Mozart in the background...

I wish I could tell you that I have been able to muster the composure needed for elegantly tackling the situation and that I have been an example to any newly qualified teacher needing guidance...

On second thought, I do not know where such continuous veiled behaviour would have led on the part of a normal person after three days of too much (acceptable but still abnormal...) veiled behaviour.

Actually, I wish I had not waited for three days until I...

SCREAMED!



To cover their voices singing along *manele* in the rented bus (Indeed, I will be forever grateful that public transportation was not an option for the activity on Thursday!)

Ditto here. I screamed, then I explained. That I could not understand what was leading them to such behaviour. That I was so disappointed with the previous three days that I could not find any pleasure in the activities. That whatever they were planning to do that day, I was closely watching them and keeping record. Lame, I know, but so true to my naked feelings that it felt like a breath of fresh air. It also seemed to be the right

thing to do from my students' perspective (as they later acknowledged), since I had finally managed to take the lid off the pressure accumulated in three days.

The Thursday activity went like a well-oiled machine: my students seemed to have regained their senses and empathically connected to me in such a way that I began wondering if the three previous nightmare days may have been a figment of my imagination.

The fact is that, upon arrival at the adventure park, my 7<sup>th</sup> graders geared up, climbed, made cautious steps from stop to stop and energetically released their bodies on the zip line. Everything seemed to have fallen into place.

Upon entering the rented bus, they asked me, in low polite voices to please, please, please, take them to such adventure parks again instead of museums...Then it all really fell into place.

Eureka!

Most of my students were kinesthetic learners who must have felt caged in a restricted environment (On Monday: have a sit and move your fingers only; On Tuesday: bus-museum-bus-church-bus-museum-bus-church-bus; On Wednesday: sit and listen, listen some more, listen some more...)

While a vast majority of my students have recognized themselves (from rather clearcut descriptions in a psychology book) as a mixture of learning styles- visual, auditory and kinesthetic (these learning styles being present in various degrees in my students' self-analysis), there definitely was a crushing majority of kinesthetic learners in 7<sup>th</sup> grade C at *Alexandru Vaida-Voevod* Secondary School in the Centennial year.

#### IV. Afterword

This paper has tackled the issue of motivation for (ideally, lifelong) learning that teachers can instill in their students through creative teaching. However, this text is also – perhaps even more so - about openness, vulnerability and motivation in the teaching profession.

Think about it as a pearl, born out of recurring thoughts on how to improve student performance without making young people feel constrained to always perform top notch. Julie's story has a funny way of staying with you, as a teacher, long after you have heard it...

There is a great difference between being taught and learning at your own pace, between being a mere receptacle for knowledge (on the one hand) and the reinventor of the world as we know it (on the other hand). Motivation coupled with intellectual curiosity (intelligence + creativity) will ensure that teachers and students alike will make sense of the tiny universe which is their classroom and meaningfully change it for the better (a memorable example of motivation, intelligence and creativity working together on a maxi scale would be God's creation of the world!).

I daresay that mankind can only thrive as long as there are motivated people making their move. The text in front of your eyes is a way of candidly looking into Cătălina's life experience as a teacher in order to find out what went well, what could still be improved and, finally, what can be given, as *Christmas gift*, to younger peers.

Like any other teaching endeavour, the completion of this paper needed time, effort, hours of reading, writing and editing. In all honesty, it even took courage - the courage of being vulnerable in writing, since *scripta manent*...

It also required energy, willpower and resilience. In other words, motivation.

## V. The Author's Conclusion

Sometimes Cătălina is a good teacher, sometimes she is not.

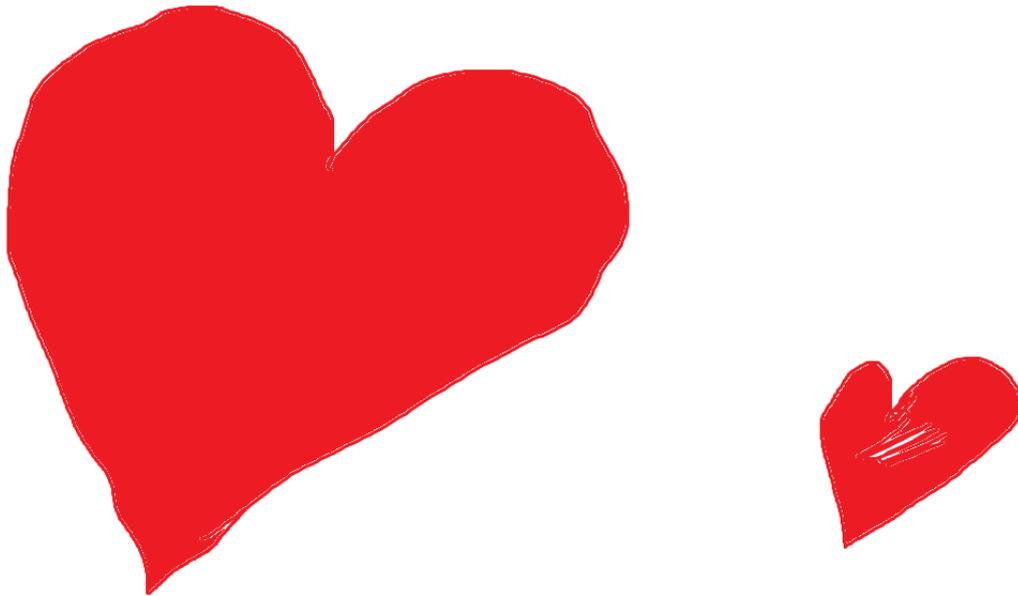
Sometimes she is cheekily boasting with her accomplishments and elegantly smiling to people all around her. Sometimes she is learning life lessons and writing honest articles about what did not go well.

Sometimes her English is a carefully polished gem, sometimes it is the kind of English you'd hear in the street. She cannot write consistently, because she is writing herself and she is far from being consistent. Remember the kinds of music she likes listening to!

She is someone's granddaughter, daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, and friend. Teacher, apron seamstress, avid reader and storyteller, music lover, beginner piano player, Chinese *admirer* (*user* being way too far-fetched), German learner, worst (or best) drawing artist, too (the reader's perspective on the matter determining which adjective will be chosen).

While the lines above are not supposed to be obituary lines (not yet, anyway!), they clearly pinpoint to the elements of the story that Cătălina has been writing for a while. Actually, as anybody can see, this is not just *one* story, but a bunch of stories tied together by something.

Let's call this something love. Or maybe even Love, since Cătălina likes to consider herself first and foremost a child following the Teacher who told people not to stop children from coming to Him.



He also told stories to whoever had ears for hearing.

Given that the sky can be happily (and self-importantly!) reflected in a puddle...

...*The Violin Effect* is Cătălina's book of stories.

Primarily meant for beginner teachers, it eventually wrote itself to become the kind of *legacy* that every storyteller has in mind at one point of his/her life.

## **VI. Appendix**

### **VI.1. Articles**

*Lessons from the Circus. Suggestions for TEFL*

*(RATE Issues 2014)*

*Keywords:* motivation, collaboration, lessons with laughter, games, CPD.

*Abstract:* This paper focuses on the ways in which teachers can gather creative ideas from anywhere. The author is not only a teacher, but also mother of two; since her spare time cannot be fully devoted to her job, she has been trying to find alternative means of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The author feels that going to the circus with her family is an unusual, yet fruitful, way of enriching her teaching experience and finding ideas for improving the motivation of her students.

*You, too, can deliver a sparkling performance!*

Have you noticed that the same children who tearfully beg to go to the circus are not so crazy about coming to school? Can the sparkle of the circus hold the key to the success of your lessons? I definitely think so, and I would like to share with you the lessons that I learned from going to the circus.

*Lesson 1*

A circus performance is well-timed; every part of the show is supposed to fit into a well-defined amount of time (otherwise, circus people would be unable to give you an estimate of the duration of the show).

My lessons, too, should be well-timed, and this does not only apply to every stage of the lesson. From my experience, students tend to respect those teachers who do not waste their time by coming to class late or forgetting about the break.

### *Lesson 2*

There are moments in a circus performance when the collaboration of the crowd is needed (the clown talks to the audience, asks for their opinion and always plays deaf, so that children can get a chance to yell under the loving eyes of the same parents who constantly interdict such behaviour at home). While I do not necessarily think that noise is the watermark of a good English class, I am implying that you should allow your students to help you with the flow of your lessons.

One of the activities that I treasure most was coined with the help of my students who tried to predict the topic of the lesson without any other support than the capital letters of the words which made up the title. This activity has proven to be great fun (especially if I wrote down all the words that my students came up with and then used them – or as many of them as possible - in an off-the-cuff speech leading to the real title). After a while I happily noticed that my students had become less reluctant to speaking without much preparation on a given topic (probably because they had already seen their teacher faltering and sometimes unable to word her ideas properly).

### *Lesson 3*

Could you imagine the circus without adrenaline and laughter? Well, then, you should not be able to imagine your classes without games. Creating a pleasant classroom atmosphere is clearly a way of increasing the motivation of your students towards learning. (Guilloteaux and Dornyei, 2007)

Since my own language learning had been marked by the grammar translation method, after becoming a teacher I felt that playing games in my classes would be a waste of time at the expense of the more important grammar activities. Nevertheless, as time went by, I found games to be an enjoyable way of real learning; they were not even as time-consuming as I had originally thought. My students were great teacher trainers in this respect; alongside with traditional games for English learners such as Simon Says or House/ Hangman (Watkins, 2014) they really enjoyed playing adapted games (i.e. games they had already known in their mother tongue). I tend to think that a repertoire of 5-7 games was all I needed in order to enter a more playful era of my teaching.

#### *Lesson 4*

Have you ever noticed how cheerfully children show you pictures of themselves in various situations? Those pictures are sometimes proof of praiseworthy behaviour (such as courageously riding a big elephant or unblinkingly holding that dangerous snake at the end of the circus performance).

I realised that my students should also have the chance to show their family and friends a tangible proof of their praiseworthy behaviour at school, other than a good grade (Dornyei and Csizer, 1998): colourful paper cut-outs, stickers or stamps - labels of hard work (in the short run) and motivation boosters (in the long run).

#### *Lesson 5*

Turning to circus performers, what did I learn from them? More than you think!

##### *Smiling is a must!*

To begin with, no one working in a circus can be caught non-smiling at the end of the performance. While acrobats need to be really committed to doing their job properly (since their own life is at stake), they always smile at the end of an act. I have always wondered how circus artists are able to overcome personal bereavement in their lives (it is likely that, at some point in their life, they lose a family member and in a few days' time still need to perform for a living). My conclusion is that smile comes with the trade of entertaining children.

In my own teaching I have noticed that some students tend to replicate my behaviour; i.e. if I smile, they will smile. Is it hypocritical of me to smile when I am not exactly happy? Well, I am no expert, but I feel that smiling probably comes with the trade of teaching students.

##### *Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a must!*

Can acrobats perform their dangerous moves without proper preparation? Is it an option for circus artists to restrict their performance to one or two acrobatic acts that they can do perfectly? As a matter of fact, circus performers use their free time to perfect their moves and learn new tricks.

Need I say more about my need for CPD?

*Finding happiness is a must!*

Circus performers and teachers in some parts of the world are blood brothers in overwork and underpayment. At the end of the day, why do we do it?

I believe that the answer lies in the little happy moments that our jobs can offer: circus artists rejoice in the standing ovation at the end of their performance, while I treasure little moments such as my 6-year-old's kind offer of a damp biscuit at break time or my disruptive graduate student's gift for me – of all his teachers – of a flower at the end of our joint two-year performance.

In conclusion, teaching can be a rewarding experience if you turn it into one of your favourite pastimes. Gathering teaching ideas from virtually anywhere (even from such a non-teaching event as a circus performance) is definitely challenging. However, the courage to trespass well-established borders (such as the idea that CPD is bound to be time-consuming) might lead you to unexpected, yet sparkling, moments in your teaching career.

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*A. În lumea celor nepoliticoși*

De multe ori, m-am întreat de ce am ales să lucrez cu copiii.

Undeva, în depărtările uitate ale copilăriei mele, trebuie să fi auzit vreodată vocea unui om mare care povestea despre alți oameni mari, suspinându-și durerea părăsirii de prieteni sau vreun foileton cu “Mi-a spus...și i-am răspuns...și m-a privit....și s-a încruntat...”. O lectură obligatorie a copilăriei petrecute printre adulți, care elucida multiplele înțelesuri ale unui gest sau variatele grile de lectură ale unei simple afirmații sau negații. O lume de măști, în care un zâmbet putea echivala cu o amenințare...

Sau poate nu a fost nimic din toate acestea. Poate a fost doar o alegere făcută atât de demult încât nu îi mai pot dibui culcușul moale în care a făcut ochi.

Copiii sunt nepoliticoși, confortabil de nepoliticoși. Le iubesc atât zâmbetul, cât și încruntările, franchețea unei relaționări mereu proaspete cu celălalt, marcate de uitarea imediată a răului.

*B. În lumea celor jucăuși*

Am ales să intru în castelul copilăriei prin jocuri și jucării, cu intenția declarată de a fi acceptată ca o prietenă ceva mai mare a locuitorilor de drept.

Marionete de deget sau de mână, penare – mai mici sau mai mari- în formă de adidas, păpușele haioase, cleme colorate, agrafe de birou cu cap de animăluț, șorțul multicolor în care încap cu ușurință creta colorată sau pixurile de corectat caiete...De îndată ce începe anul școlar, îmi aranjez jucăriile și simt că, cel puțin pentru o vreme, vacanța mea poate să se prelungească prin bucuria pe care o dau celor mititei cu care lucrez.

Jocul, miracolul universului celor mici, se hrănește din lumea lui “Cum ar fi dacă...?”; astfel, coarda nu mai este o jucărie pentru ritmat săriturile, ci un dublu microfon (pentru lectura unor texte din manualele noastre); cariocile tip friction așază o față zâmbitoare pe mânuța unui copilaș cuminte și atent (însă o pot șterge de îndată ce micul prinț își pierde interesul, deranjându-și colegii); rășuștele-clemă colorate, purtate pe o banderolă triplă pe încheietura lui *teacher* joacă rolul unui semafor (roșu

– moment de atenție fără întrebări; galben –momentul întrebărilor; verde – moment de grație: cântecel, joc recreativ).

### *C. În lumea celor frumoși*

Intrasem în clasa I pentru prima dată în acest an școlar. Îmi scosesem minunățiile din geanta profesorului-jucăuș și le etalam micilor mei prieteni care zâmbeau, încă neîncrezători.

Ei bine, nu chiar toți îmi zâmbeau. De dedesubtul unei băncuțe mă fixau niște ochișori superbi, dar neiertători, aruncându-și săgețile pe sub bretonul răsfirat care dădea să le invadeze spațiul personal.

Viață. Cu zâmbet sau încruntare. Niciun menajament: copilul din fața mea încă nu învățase ascunderea sentimentelor într-o politețe de circumstanță.

Într-un târziu, am aflat și motivul ascunderii lângă piciorușele altora. Mi-a fost spus direct, cu sprâncenele ridicate și cu o voce care nu încerca să îndulcească spusele prin modulații blânde: “Nu-mi place de tine!”

.....  
.....

Trei luni mai târziu, pe un coridor al aceleiași școli, două brațe slăbuțe mă strâng tare. Mângâi puițul cu părul castaniu și, într-o doară, întreb: “Acum nu te mai ascunzi sub băncuță?” Niciun cuvânt, doar un zâmbet știrb și o clătinare poznașă a capului.

Nici că aș fi avut nevoie de mai mult.

## *The Place of Teaching Aprons in English Language Teaching*

*Valențe, no 3, 2016-2017*

### *Input*

When I started teaching 6 year olds, as a newly qualified teacher, I was taken by surprise. I only had a faint idea of how to keep very young students organized, active and motivated...

### *Innovation*

All that changed when I handcrafted my first inexpensive teaching apron featuring pockets of various sizes and for different purposes. Since then, my collection of handmade teaching aprons has grown little by little, much to the delight of my students and myself.

### *Impact*

At this point of my teaching career, I am the happy teacher constantly wearing an apron at school: I keep my pens, rewards, finger puppets and other materials handy (for instance, I keep my coloured chalk in a special pocket lined with plastic). Most of my very young students are well-organized and prepared for class, because these are the prerequisites of becoming a mini-teacher. The student who wins at the skipping rhyme chanted at the end of the class (i.e. the mini-teacher) gets the chance to help me (i.e. the maxi-teacher) by distributing copybooks, giving rewards or choosing what game to play.

After one year of choosing to use teaching aprons in my classes, I have seen a clear increase in my very young students' motivation for learning English.

Moreover, their hugs and kisses down the corridor tell me that I must have also chosen the shortest path to their hearts.

*Teacher's Survival Pack for Preparatory Grade - short diary of an NQT-*

*Abordări interdisciplinare și transdisciplinare în context european Symposium  
(Pavel Dan Highschool, Câmpia Turzii, 2016)*

*September, 2014* - I love kids. I always have. But thirty-one of them in a Prep Grade, well, that is a bit too much for an NQT\*... Still, I am confident that songs, stories and TPR\*\* will definitely help me get over this.

*June, 2015* - Burnout lurks in the distance. I must do something about it, otherwise the idea of quitting teaching (for good!) seems dangerously appealing... Next year it will be different!

*August, 2015* – Thread, needles, scissors, leftover fabric pieces from various other times of my life when I was fiddling around with the idea of getting artistic. It all boiled down to a teacher's survival pack for Prep Grade.

*September, 2015* – The WOW factor made its way into my Prep classes! I had managed to get my students' attention with the beautiful, colourful, ultimate *Teacher's Apron!*

( However hard I may struggle to present it as innovative, you will soon catch me red-handed. A simple Google search will provide you with tons of ideas on how to turn rough fabrics into wonderful aprons coming in various sizes and featuring shapes, colours and original pockets for keeping your things. So, to be honest, I made my first apron out of an old ironing table cover – the one with flowers and ladybirds - and a bigger piece of tough fabric that was laying around in my house as a result of bad Maths –it was the remains of something than I had needed for the tuning of my garden rocking chair.)

*February, 2016* - I have managed to pimp my teaching some more: one of my good friends (a fabric artist, as it happens) took a look at my handcraft and clearly felt sorry

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\* NQT = Newly Qualified Teacher (in my opinion, a teacher having difficulties adjusting to the challenges of teaching, no matter how long she has been teaching so far)

\*\* TPR = Total Physical Response (a technique in which young learners move around/show items in the classroom/respond to commands by *doing and living out the target language*, not necessarily by speaking it)

for me. She carefully listened to my ideas about what I was trying to achieve and painstakingly created my dream aprons (three of them: one for me – featuring pockets lined with plastic for keeping coloured chalk - and two more for teacher’s helpers: one for any young lady helping me distribute copybooks and another one for any fine gentleman showing me a small green object).

My Cinderella teaching aprons had got reinvented and were finally worthy of the name!

*May, 2016* – I find out about the symposium on modern strategies and innovative teaching, so I decide to showcase my *Teacher’s Apron*, otherwise my little ones in Prep grade could be the only ones aware of its existence (oh, yes, and a few co-workers staring in disbelief as I embark on every working day with my rucksack full of toys, some of them clearly - and intentionally - protruding out of their moving home).

*June, 2016* – Summer holidays lurking in the distance! Thread, needles, scissors, leftover fabrics from various other times of my life when I was fiddling around with the idea of getting artistic. It will all boil down to a teacher’s survival pack for teaching drama to the little ones. Keep in touch!

*Wonderful Romania*  
*Valente, no 4, 2017-2018*

I am a teacher and I am at a loss for words. A word, to be exact. I need a word next to a logo.

Irreplaceable- too long

Extraordinary – too cheesy

Great – too casual

Flashes from my pangs of creating a brand – a one-week-long brand, like a colourful butterfly spreading its gentle wings on the brink of forgetfulness. A brand nevertheless.

Something for our guests at *Alexandru Vaida-Voevod Secondary School* to surreptitiously hide into their hearts and take away from my Europe to their Europe.

Teachers coordinators of European projects are hardly ever supposed to create brands. They are supposed to teach lessons, correct papers, give grades. They are supposed to wear smiles on their faces and hug crying children missing their mums. Children missing their mums – mum and child side by side –Eureka, I have a logo! Solid love whitewashed under the layers of a naïve image.

Now I still need a word. Not too demanding, not too dumb. Not too extraordinary, not too great, not too irreplaceable. Cross out. It should be irreplaceable, highly memorable, like the repeated lyrics of my favourite Voltaj song, *Din toata inima pentru România*.

Heading straight for the heart, while bypassing the brains (American phonology in a song meant for European partners, *un vrai faux-pas...*), this is what I came up with:

It is our deep wish to say it once again:

Romania's awesome, remember 2017!

Your heart is big enough to keep it there forever

This is our gift to you, **Wonderful Romania!**

*Black Keys, White Keys*  
(retrieving a childhood crush for sounds)  
*Valente, no 4, 2017-2018*

Sounds. Spine-tingling sounds. The child within myself is eager to create music and then play it to whoever is within earshot.

From my experience, teachers go through burnout. Tons of times. Actually, I have been able to document how often I get there: two or three months after I stop learning something new. In dark moments of burnout, finding a way to professional happiness seems as far-fetched as learning to play the piano in your late 30s.

Thinking about it, it doesn't seem so far-fetched anymore.

Playing the piano has probably given me the courage to face school life for a few more years.

My piano learning got me close to piano teachers:

- I couldn't find *chemistry* with my first piano teacher; feeling that I would soon lose motivation, I walked away...
- my daughter's teacher is a great teacher. I try to follow suit, but my fingers do have a certain age...
- my most beloved teacher doesn't know me personally, I just chose to follow his DVD lessons and accomplish his advice at my own pace.

Bottom line, piano gave me back my professional life. (The life I had left on stasis after dumping dancing classes, coaxed by the idea that, this way, I would have more time to prepare for my school classes...)

Final word: time can be elastic. It all depends on where your *flow* lies and how much you really want it to be part of your day-to-day life. Your teaching life included.

*Bibliography missing (Life straight ahead)*

*RATE Issues, 2018*

*Key words:* handcrafting, teaching, teacher's apron.

*Cuvinte-cheie:* lucru de mână, predare, șorțul profesorului.

*Abstract*

*Bibliography missing (Life straight ahead)* is about enthusiasm and making choices. It stems from the author's passion for learning foreign languages coupled with her choice of working with school children. It is an attempt at harvesting the genuine mixed feelings of a teacher who has both the burden and the privilege of working with young people.

*Why this Title?*

"Bibliography missing" because young students tend to constantly elude textbook categories, leading you into a world of astonishingly unique entities ("Life straight ahead").

*Why Teaching?*

In all honesty, when I chose teaching as a career, I did not think it would be the job of my dreams; in fact, there have been moments when I pondered the question of leaving the Romanian school system. After carefully considering everything, I arrived to the conclusion that teaching, the way I see it, gives me freedom and allows me to re-live moments of my life as I watch my students grow.

It is about caring for the little ones I have been entrusted with.

It is about choosing not to wear high heels in the classroom, so that I should avoid disturbing the young ones, even if by as little as minor repetitive noises.

It is about choosing to wear strawberry perfume (bought from a children's shop) whenever I go to work, so that I should be accepted into my children's world more easily.

It is about creating and keeping warm memories.

### *Why the Teaching Kit?*

In the Romanian school system, teachers sometimes feel caught inside a net of *Musts* and *Have to's*, ranging from extremely short deadlines for paperwork to the need of tackling (in the nick of time) of difficult student problems that would require the teacher to be part-time social worker and part-time psychologist.

Also, it is one of the jobs in which what you would like to do could be miles apart from what you succeed in doing; most of the times it is so difficult to cope with everything that burdensome thoughts linger with you late at night.

My way out of everything was finding that fabulous sense of the world *not* falling apart if I took some time off being an adult.

### *How?*

It all started on a warm summer day. On a personal note, holidays are a time for clearing up the mind and building a bank of nice thoughts for the school year to come (if you still wonder why teachers are given two months of summer holidays, I will quote one of my more experienced co-workers: "...otherwise, given the amount of stress, we are bound to flunk the beginning-of-the-year mental health test.")

The leftover fabric having resulted from the handcrafting of a cover for a garden chair gave me a little idea: most manual jobs require a special type of outfit, so that the instruments that the worker needs are kept close at hand and the clothes are not stained. My job being partly manual, the thought about keeping the coloured chalk away from my clothes seemed tempting.

The result was my first Teacher's Apron, featuring shiny felt tips that smelled good, happy faces for teaching feelings and the pink flower with special powers (if it happens to arrive on the desk of one of my students, it can miraculously boost English usage instead of mother tongue). Alongside Teacher's Apron, the Student's Apron "I

Love English” begged to come to life - to be worn by hardworking children at the end of the class. When not used, the two aprons fit comfortably inside a little owl bag.

In time, the teaching kit received improvements or readjustments that stayed with it or left it based on how my students felt about teacher’s tools.

The best loved addition appears to be the set of ducklings helpful for teaching a new lesson:

- the red duckling – no talking in ranks, important explanation in progress;
- the yellow duckling- questions are now welcome;
- the green duckling – it is now time for a long-expected game.

My students found it easy to remember the meaning of every little duckling by thinking about traffic lights.

I must admit that the idea of colourful prompts during the lesson was adapted from the classroom traffic lights used by De Gondelier School from The Netherlands (using the Dalton method of teaching), one of our nine partners in the Erasmus + KA2 project *Discovering Europe* (2014-2016).

The way I see it, teaching is all about instilling love and curiosity for learning in the hearts and minds of students. From my experience, this can only be done by fostering genuine care for their wellbeing in your class. Sometimes, touching young lives forever can begin by handcrafting a teacher’s apron on a warm summer day.

*Rugăciune pentru pitici*  
*Valențe, no 4, 2017-2018*

Blând și bun, drag Dumnezeu,  
Tare aș dori să-mi iasă,  
Iute să Te-impresionez,  
Să îți spun o rug-aleasă  
Din cei treispe ani de zile  
De când intru, tot cu Tine,  
Zi de zi în câte-o școală  
(Ori stau la serviciu-afară).  
Zi de zi, un dram de bine  
Și un zâmbet, de la Tine,  
Să duc cu mine mereu,  
Blând și bun, drag Dumnezeu.

Așadar, aș încerca  
Să conving: să-mi dai ceva...  
Hai să-Ți spun ce m-am gândit:  
Multe ai de oferit!  
Din ce știi, nu ești zgârcit.  
Și te rog, așa, sfios,  
Dragă Domn Iisus Hristos  
(În icoană – un pruncuț)  
Să îmi dai ceva micuț:  
Dă-mi lumină liniștită  
Când sunt tare ostenită.  
Mai dă-mi (iar Te rog...)  
Blândețea,  
Că lucrez cu tinerețea,  
Care n-are stare foarte  
Când învață-n școală carte.

Și Tu ești copil și stai  
Cumințel, în brațe. Hai!  
Haide din brățucă jos  
Și-apoi mângâie frumos  
Și pe cei mai curăței,  
Și pe cei mai murdărei,  
Și pe cei ce vor kendame,  
Și pe cei ce nu au mame,  
Și pe cei cu haina veche,  
Și pe cei cu nasul verde...

Te mai rog așa, Iisus,  
Să privești din cer, de sus,  
Și să vezi tot ce muncesc.  
(Iar atunci când eu greșesc,  
Tare mult te rog: fă bine  
Uită-Te mai mult spre mine...)

Așa, dragă Domn Iisuse,  
Toate astea fiind spuse,  
Ține lângă Tine foarte  
Pe toți cei ce-nvață carte.  
Sunt ai Tăi și îi iubești,  
Te rog mult să îi grijești,  
Să-i dospești, să-i crești în Tine  
Dinspre rău înspre mult bine,  
Că așa-am citit demult:  
Pe nimeni n-ai de pierdut.

Și, cu ei în gând, eu spun  
Să le dai ce n-au acum:  
Dă-le minte și putere  
Să învețe cu plăcere

Cât mai multe lucruri bune  
Despre ce este pe lume.

Iar când noaptea lin se lasă  
Peste orișicare casă  
Dă-le, Doamne blând de sus,  
Dragă Domnul meu Iisus,  
Dă-le pace, sănătate,  
Bucurii, zâmbet, de toate,  
Dă-le liniștea Ta multă  
(Pe părinți când îi ascultă)  
Și mai dă-le multe bune:  
Câte sunt pe astă lume,  
Câte sunt în ceruri sus.  
Mulțumesc, bun Domn Iisus.

2018

Așadar, un text despre educație.

Să chemăm în scenă iepurașul.

Nu, nu cel de Paște, ci acela pe care fetița mea l-a primit cadou de ziua ei. Cel care, în scurt timp, a devenit al meu, responsabilitatea mea și dragălășenia mea.

Continuăm strigatul catalogului: pianul.

Pianul primit în dar, cu singura condiție de a fi folosit. Imboldul de care aveam nevoie pentru a învăța, la mijlocul vieții, să cânt la un instrument muzical.

Tocurile!

Au o poveste aparte; o reluăm, în întregime, când se aliniază planetele sau rândurile scrise.

Frăguțele apar, ghidușe, de sub frunzele verde-închis (hmmm, să fie verdele acela închis sau deschis? Tare mi-e că e verde deschis, dar asta e povestea mea, deci să nu vă aud cu povești de-astea, de hipercorectitudine botanică!)

Sunt profesoară și asta îmi ocupă tot timpul. Literalmente. Când nu pregătesc lecții, corectez teste; când am terminat de corectat testele, mă apuc de aranjat drăguțele de *hârtii* (când se va face, oare, un scandal de zile mari, astfel încât să se degreveze profesorii de munca de birou și să se angajeze în școli oameni care să ducă la îndeplinire partea organizatorică, aceea care ne papă meticolos din timpul pe care l-am putea folosi mai bine, cu și pentru elevii noștri? Întreb și eu, de-astea retorice...)

Hai că s-au aliniat rândurile și mi-am spus oful. Să trecem la tocuri.

Într-unul din primii ani de învățământ, am primit sfatul ca, la clasele mari să mă duc rujată și cu tocuri. Să par mai mare printre ei. Am ascultat, cuminte, însă, în scurt timp, mi-am dat seama că, dacă e să fiu respectată, se poate și dacă apar în fața elevilor mei în pantaloni scurți (încă nu am făcut-o, se încadrează la “wishful thinking”). Acum nu mai simt nevoia să fiu luată drept „doamna” (așa cum îmi doream mult la începutul carierei); mi se pare mai *cool* să mă sprijin de un perete în timp ce povestesc cu dragii mei de-a opta despre “I see your true colours.” (Știu, știu: “Madame, ca c’est un vrai faux-pas! Comment osez-vous?”, cu varianta “You’re walking on quick sands, careful with the little buggers!” sau „Dacă îi lași să ți se urce în cap, pe unde mai scoți cămașa?”)

Gata și cu multilingvismul, bifat și asta (Drept că v-am impresionat? Told you!)

Nu îmi iese să o iau pe rând, tehnic, meticulos, metodic, așa că o torn brusc și dintr-o dată, cu linie de la capăt de rând:

-iepurașul m-a învățat că un pui mângâiat zi de zi e un pui care nu mușcă

-de la pian am rămas cu gândul că sunetele rămân în tine mult după ce alții nu le mai aud

-tocuri înalte nu port, din principiu. Vreau să rămân mică.

-folosesc parfumul de frăguțe al fetiței mele când mă duc la școală. Vreau să rămân copil. De-asta mă duc la școală.

Poate o fi dezlânat.../Însă textul l-am gătat!/  
Cu copii, despre copii/Și despre-alte mii și mii.../Gânduri multe ce gândesc/Pe copii când îi iubesc/Și-am încălecat pe-o șarpe/ Și v-am spus poveste-așa!

*Jucării pentru copii*  
(Preuniversitaria Symposium, 2018)

Lucia.

Dacă Lucia mi-ar fi zâmbit, acest text nu ar fi existat.

Intrasem în clasa ei pentru prima dată în urmă cu trei ani, încărcată cu jucăriile din titlu (despre ele, ceva mai încolo... cine nu are răbdare pentru povești cu tâlc, poate sări, cu binecuvântarea autoarei, direct la ultima pagină a acestui text, rândul 7 – numărat de jos în sus). Eram un picuț emoționată, dar și bucuroasă nevoie-mare că am primit o clasă de pitici *de fermecat*, sau, în alte cuvinte, o clasă de puiuți care să se bucure în ritm cu mine că a început o nouă oră de engleză și e rost de joacă.

Pe Lucia nu am văzut-o imediat. De fapt, nu am simțit că ar fi ceva în neregulă în sala de clasă, fiind hiperocupată să-i impresionez pe micii mei elevi, scoțând, pe rând, lucruri din geanta profesorului *creativ* (dacă mă gândesc bine, un cuvânt mai potrivit ar fi *trăznit*, dar e lucrare de simpozion și mi-e că, dacă țin cu dinții de cuvintele alese pe sprânceană pentru a ilustra realitatea frustă din clasa mea, poate nu mai apuc să vă fac și prezentarea PPT suficient de *creativă slash trăznită* încât să fie memorabilă peste ani...)

Revin, cu un rezumat al ideilor principale de mai sus, formulate metodic și folosind metoda învățării prin pași mici. Detalierea sub-metodei de lucru: prin transpoziție didactică, trunchiem realitatea unei povești înzorzonate la firul său roșu, pe sistem întrebare-răspuns. Vom folosi notațiile Î-R pe parcursul întregului rezumat.)

1.       Î: Când?  
          R: În prima oră de limba engleză a clasei I C, acum trei ani de zile.
2.       Î: Unde?  
          R: La Școala Gimnazială „Alexandru Vaida-Voevod”.
3.       Î: Cine?  
          R: Lucia.

4. Î: Cum?

R: Cu jucării din geanta profesorului *creativ*.

5. Î: Ce?

R: Informația lipsește, cu excepția unei scurte menționări, în rândul 2, a faptului că Lucia nu a zâmbit.

Continuăm povestea, cu informațiile lipsă de la subpunctul 5: Lucia nu îmi zâmbea, pentru că nu mă vedea. Cum era să mă vadă, fiind ascunsă *sub băncuță*? Cum era să mă vadă, fiind supărată că, la ora de engleză, în clasă intrase altcineva decât *teacher* a ei de anul trecut?

Motivul lipsei zâmbetului nu l-am dedus eu chiar așa rapid, bine conturat și complet...La început, m-am dus până lângă băncuță, încet, cu pași mici, încercând să nu o iau prin surprindere pe mititica ascunsă lângă picioarele colegilor. Sub pupitru, două brațe slăbuțe înconjurau, *a mângâiere*, picioarele fetei care mă privea necruțător, cu ochisorii căprui ițindu-se de sub bretonul tăiat scurt, ușor asimetric (tipul de asimetrie pe care îl întâlnești des la fetele care nu au răbdare să le mai aștepte pe mami sau pe buni să-și facă vreme să taie drept un bretonel pentru piticuța familiei, folosind foarfeca din bucătărie).

Lucia nu a catadicsit să se așeze în băncuță când am început să vorbesc cu ea. Gestul ei de frondă ar fi fost știrbit prin adecvarea la cerințele didactice. Prin urmare, tot de jos, mi-a adresat câteva vorbe, tare și răspicat.

(Urmează transcrierea dialogului, cu o ușoară patină a timpului în amintirea unei profesoare care lucrează, săptămânal, cu mai bine de 150 de elevi.)

Lucia (ex abrupto): „Nu-mi place de tine!”

Cătălina (microasă): „Am jucării...”

Lucia (neînduplecată): „Nu vreau jucăriile tale...”

Cătălina (împăciuitoare, oferind tentația): „Am mai multe decât am scos până acum din gentuță...”

Lucia (pierzându-și dramul de răbdare): „O vreau înapoi pe *teacher* de anul trecut...”

Cătălina (simțind oportunitatea, merge pe *reflecția sentimentelor*): „Și mie mi-e dor de clasa mea de dinainte...au plecat toți la liceu...”

Lucia (fără a lăsa garda jos, nu spune niciun cuvânt, dar privirea ei se traduce ușor prin „Și de ce-mi spui mie asta?”)

Cătălina (acum sau niciodată): „Și eu sunt tristă....Hei, am o idee!”

(În aparteu: se strânseseră în jurul nostru restul copiilor, ca la urs, tot spunându-i Luciei să iasă de sub bancă, să nu mai stăm toți aplecați...)

Cătălina (dând lovitura de grație): „Ce zici? Mergem, în pauză, să o căutăm pe *teacher* de anul trecut? Să-i spunem că ți-e dor de ea?”

Lucia (cântărindu-și opțiunile, cu privirea ușor îmblânzită, încă pe gânduri dacă ar fi o idee bună să lase garda jos...)

Cătălina (cu atenție să nu distrugă, prin insistență, ce a muncit câteva minute bune): „Te mai gândești până la pauză, apoi îmi spui ce ai hotărât.”

Mă întorc repezitor spre catedră, de teama că atenția acordată Luciei îi va determina și pe alți piticuți să stea pe sub bănci, că deja parcă sună a ceva *fancy*.

În pauză, am căutat-o, chipurile, pe *teacher* în lung și în lat, prin școală (chiar dacă știam sigur că orele colegei mele încep mult mai târziu!). Am profitat, povestindu-i piticuței mele câte-n lună și-n stele și bucurându-mă, (șocată, în ascuns) că imi dăduse chiar mânuța, să ne ținem una de alta de-a lungul scărilor. Ne-am despărțit, cu necazul că nu am găsit-o pe *teacher*, dar cu promisiunea că o mai căutăm și altă dată.

Realizez doar acum că am dat un titlu nepotrivit textului meu. Nu îl mai schimb, la finalul poveștii și vă spun și de ce: mă gândesc că dacă aș fi ales o denumire cum ar fi “Predarea bazată pe atașament, învățarea bazată pe atașament”, aș fi punctat rapid, în mintea cititorilor, categoriile „inovativ”, „ceva de prin străinătate”, „nu m-am gândit la așa ceva, deși cred că folosesc curent această metodă cu copiii de la școala mea”. Aș fi avut, probabil, și o șansă mai mare ca textul meu să fie acceptat la simpozion.

Și atunci, ce avantaje are titlul de acum?

În primul rând, textul meu are șanse mai mari să fie citit de cei oboșiți de cuvintele extrase din mini-vocabularul de termeni de psihopedagogie (Cătălina Cocan, *Compendiu de pregătire pentru gradul II, scris de mână și nepublicat*, 2016).

În al doilea rând, jucăriile chiar sunt prezente în textul meu. Pe ceilalți copii, așa am reușit să îi farmec (da, da, știu, până s-au strâns ca la urs în jurul băncuței Luciei...)

În al treilea rând, titlul acesta mi-e mai drag. Respiră viață.

În ultimul rând, din moment ce nu v-am arătat nicio poză cu vreo jucărie, marșez pe curiozitatea moderatorului de secțiune să vadă de ce e în stare profesoara trăznică (pardon, creativă) care cu o asemenea *bună practică* are de gând să se înființeze la Simpozionul Preuniversitaria 2018, secțiunea “Creativitate și inovație în educație”.

*Rugăciunile învățătorilor  
către Mântuitorul și către Preasfânta Născătoare de Dumnezeu  
(pending publication)*

*Rugăciunea învățătorilor către Mântuitorul*

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Fiul lui Dumnezeu, Învățătorul și Luminătorul lumii, care ne-ai dat copii în grijă, dă-ne înțelepciunea de a-i crește înspre Împărăția Ta. Schimbă, Învățătorule, neștiința noastră în lumină, să folosim bine talanții pe care i-am primit și să auzim și noi, la întoarcerea Ta: “Bine, slugi bune și credincioase, intrați în bucuria Stăpânului vostru!”

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel ce, împreună cu Tatăl și cu Duhul Sfânt, ai creat lumea și i-ai pus reguli, dă-ne nouă înțelepciunea de a ordona haosul din clasele noastre.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel ce ai vindecat bolnavii, dă-ne nouă sănătate trupului și sufletului, să putem lucra lucrurile Tale cu cei încredințați nouă.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel ce ai dăruit mers ologilor, umblă cu noi în toate camerele, sălile de clasă, pe toate coridoarele și în toate curțile școlilor unde Dreapta Ta ne poartă.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, de Care ascultă toată făptura, trimite îngeri de lumină povățuitori în dreapta noastră, în stânga noastră, deasupra noastră, dedesubtul nostru și ne apăra de tot răul, pe noi și pe cei încredințați nouă.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Lumina lumii, dă-ne înțelepciune, luminare și ajutor atunci când puterile noastre s-au împuținat.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel care nu ai condamnat femeia păcătoasă, luminează-ne ochii minții, să vedem, să înțelegem, dar să nu judecăm.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Care Te-ai înconjurat de Apostoli și ucenici, dă-ne nouă în cale prieteni, oameni cu gând și sfat bun.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Care ai venit în lume să vindeci, ajută-ne să lucrăm cu copiii atenți și cu cei cu mintea risipită, cu cei pașnici și cu cei agresivi, cu cei cooperanți și cu cei nepăsători.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel ce, copil fiind, ai uimit învățătorii de lege cu înțelepciunea Ta, dă-ne nouă și copiilor cu care lucrăm cuvânt de înțelepciune.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel ce ai vestit Împărăția lui Dumnezeu oamenilor prin pilde, dă-ne cuvinte potrivite pentru a putea învăța copiii.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel ce ai vorbit din corabie mulțimilor, ajută vocea noastră, turnând în ea atât blândețea, cât și puterea Ta.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel ce ai răsturnat, fără păcat, mesele schimbătorilor de bani din templu, îmbracă în dragostea Ta neputința noastră de a-i iubi mereu blând pe cei încredințați nouă.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel ce ai fost urât de cărturarii de demult, întoarce la bunătate și rugăciune pe toți vrăjmașii noștri, mici și mari, știuți și neștiuți.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel ce Te-ai rugat singur pe Muntele Măslinilor, primește rugăciunea pe care Ți-o aducem fiecare dintre noi, în singurătatea noastră.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Cel ce ai ales ca pe Cruce să fii răstignit, pentru oameni, dă-ne curaj în fața încercărilor noastre.

Doamne Iisuse Hristoase, Fiul lui Dumnezeu, Învățătorul și Luminătorul lumii, care ne-ai dat copii în grijă, dă-ne înțelepciunea de a-i crește înspre Împărăția Ta. Schimbă, Învățătorule, neștiința noastră în lumină, să folosim bine talanții pe care i-am primit și să auzim și noi, la întoarcerea Ta: “Bine, slugi bune și credincioase, intrați în bucuria Stăpânului vostru!”

*Rugăciunea învățătorilor către Preasfânta Născătoare de Dumnezeu*

Preasfântă Născătoare de Dumnezeu, Fecioară Marie, revarsă mila Ta asupra noastră și întinde peste noi Cinstit Acoperământul Tău, să putem lucra bine cu copiii pe care Fiul Tău i-a luat în brațele Sale cele sfinte!

Preasfântă Născătoare de Dumnezeu, Fecioară, Ceea ce fără de pată pe Hristos, Învățătorul lumii, L-ai născut, naște bucuria în sufletele noastre.

Preasfântă Născătoare de Dumnezeu, Fecioară, Ceea ce ai fugit în Egipt, să nu-Ți lași Fiul ucis, binecuvântează fuga noastră de fiecare zi dinspre întuneric înspre lumină.

Preasfântă Născătoare de Dumnezeu, Fecioară, Ceea ce cu durere Ți-ai crezut Fiul pierdut și L-ai regăsit, după trei zile, în templu, găsește copiii pierduți de părinți și de învățători.

Preasfântă Născătoare de Dumnezeu, Fecioară, Ceea ce ai mijlocit înmulțirea vinului la nunta din Cana Galileii, mijlocește și înmulțirea înțelepciunii noastre, a puterilor noastre și a timpului nostru.

Preasfântă Născătoare de Dumnezeu, Fecioară, Ceea ce ai așteptat afară să-L întâlnești pe Fiul tău când vorbea mulțimilor, dă-ne răbdarea de a aștepta împlinirea cererilor noastre spre mântuire.

Preasfântă Născătoare de Dumnezeu, Fecioară, Ceea ce L-ai văzut pe Fiul Tău batjocorit și răstignit, însă Te-ai supus voii Lui, dă-ne smerenie în încercările noastre.

Preasfântă Născătoare de Dumnezeu, Fecioară Marie, revarsă mila Ta asupra noastră și întinde peste noi Cinstit Acoperământul Tău, să putem lucra bine cu copiii pe care Fiul Tău i-a luat în brațele Sale cele sfinte!

## VI.2 Drama texts

Please note that all the texts below – and many more in Romanian - are open resource, available online [www.creion.weebly.com](http://www.creion.weebly.com)

### *Love me salty, love me true*

(based on the story *Sarea-n bucate* by Romanian author Petre Ispirescu)

Down the alleys of the time  
(When the lemon was a lime)  
In a kingdom far below  
The great king wanted to know  
If his subjects loved him so.  
Then he asked and asked around  
And nice answers, well, he found:  
Everybody loved him so  
(Oh, the king's ego did grow!)

Then one day it rang some bells,  
'Let me ask my three damsels.'

"Tell me, Flory, do you care?  
Do you love me to despair?"

*Florence:*

"Daddy, sure I love you so,  
SUGAR as far sweets can go."

*The King:*

"Tell me, Jenny, do you care?  
Do you love me to despair?"

*Jane:*

“HONEY, daddy, is the only  
Sweet enough for my love story.”

*The King:*

I am happy, I am pleased,  
I am almost tickled pink.  
I am cheerful, I feel good,  
Let me hear from other brood:

Well, Elaine, my beautiful  
Honey, sugar, by the spoonful?  
Show your daddy, king of old  
How much love in heart you hold!

*Elaine:*

Oh, daddy, I fear to say  
That no sugar is okay  
And no honey is enough  
To encompass my great love.  
Honestly, beloved father,  
SALT is what I have to offer.

*The King:*

Are you even naming salt?  
Go away, spoiled little brat!  
To the kitchen quickly vanish!  
Love as SALT? Oh, you're so PUNISHED!

Time went by, as light as feathers  
But, between us, all that matters  
Was that sweet Elaine (unruly!)

Kept on loving father truly.  
So when father's birthday came  
Elaine gathered to prepare  
All the goodies in the realm:  
Chicken, onions and ham  
But the food that Elaine brought  
Had a twist: it had no salt.  
(‘Cause she knew, a no-salt dish  
Was as good as paper mush...)  
Therefore, all the food unsalted  
It was sure she would be summoned  
To the angry hungry father  
Who had nice, kind words, to offer:

*The King:*

“How on earth did you cook rice?”

*Elaine:*

“Without salt, to be precise.”

*The King:*

“Salt is good in food, you know.”

*Elaine:*

“SALT, father! I love you so...”

*The King:*

“Oh, Elaine, my dear, my sweet,  
Please forgive the bad old king!  
Quickly come to papa's arms  
Your love needs no more disguise!  
Let me add to rice some salt,  
Your love clearly to behold.

(later)

Sorry, but I have to say

Your food still isn't okay...

*Cătălina:*

I'm Elaine and I don't cook

'Cause I keep writing a book...

Cinderella

(a modified version, featuring one or two mice and a Romanian true-blood prince)

*Ugly Stepsister 1:*

Cinderella, clean the room!

*Ugly Stepsister 2:*

Cinderella, use the broom!

*Ugly Stepsister 1:*

Cinderella, wash my blouse!

*Ugly Stepsister 2:*

Cinderella, catch the mouse!

*Stepmother:*

Cinderella up and down,

Cinderella all around,

How I wish to see the house

Without Cinderella's eyes!

*Stepsisters:*

Oh, no, mummy, don't be mean!

*(silently)*

Without Cindy: house not clean!

*Stepmother:*

Yes, you're right, my little ones.

Cinderella, clean the house!

*Cinderella:*

In a minute I'll be there!

*(silently)*

Oh, I hate this life, I swear...

How can I be everywhere?

*(loudly)*

Coming mother, coming now,

I bring fresh milk from the cow,

I have cooked all that you said,

I have even made your bed.

*Stepmother:*

OK, Cindy, now cool down,  
You will need to sew a gown.  
'Cause we're going to a ball:  
The prince has invited all  
The young ladies in the kingdom  
(He'll no longer be alone:  
A young lady (lovely, fair)  
Will his throne tomorrow share.  
How I wish it were Drizella,  
Anastasia, even Bella...

*Stepsister 1:*

Mother, really, you're so old...

*Stepmother:*

Hey, Drizella, watch your word!

*Stepsister 2:*

Sorry, mummy, but she's right...

*Stepmother:*

Do you think I need to shout?

If the nice prince chooses me

I'll not hide behind a tree!

Mark my words, he may pick me

(He is young and he is free!)

*Cinderella:*

Sweet Godmother, fly or run

Sewing gowns is no great fun...

Sweet Godmother, run or fly

Say "Hello!", don't say "Goodbye!"

*Fairy Godmother:*

Hello, Cindy, here I am.

Can I help you with the hem?

I cannot believe you're sewing...

To the ball you should be going!

Let me give you a nice dress:

Pink and smooth - for a princess.  
Bibbidi, Bobbidi, Bobbidi, Boo  
Here you are, a dress for you.  
Just remember to be back  
By the very stroke of night.  
The prince danced all night with Cindy  
(Well, she was his love from kindy...)  
Then the chime of midnight stroke  
Cindy was, again, flat broke.  
Weeks and weeks after the ball  
The King's subjects toured the hall  
And the streets of town alike  
Up on horseback (not on bike!)  
Till they got to Cindy's house  
Then they stopped - they saw a mouse!  
"Dear young lady, try the shoe,  
(We know it's a little blue,  
But, alas, we met a lady  
And her foot was a bit ... shady)  
Oh, the shoe, please try it on  
'Cause we have searched the entire town...  
The prince's princess can't be found  
Believe us, we HAVE looked around!  
Oh, yes, it fits! Good gracious, yes!  
Oh, come with us, our dear princess!  
*The Prince:*  
Oh, Cindy, come, come to the palace  
The shoe fits perfectly. Look! Balance!  
I'll marry you this very day  
Sooner than you say "Un, doi, trei".  
*Cinderella:*  
I'm not so sure I know your language  
What did you say? Oh, please acknowledge:  
You're coming from Dracula's land

Some smell of blood I may have felt...

*The Prince:*

Don't worry, baby, you're just fine,

It's just a story, not in line

With everything Romanians do.

Oh, marry me, I love you true!

*Cinderella:*

I'll marry you on one condition.

*The Prince:*

What is it baby? Can I question?

*Cinderella:*

At home I have a mouse or two

And, honestly, I love them true.

*The Prince:*

Will you now, baby, marry me?

As easily as "One, two, three"?

*Cinderella:*

Of course, my prince, this very day

Sooner than you say "Un, doi, trei"

*Mary Poppins' Legacy*

“In every job that must be done  
There is an element of fun!”  
Said lovely, dear old Poppins Mary  
And this thought in me I carry  
Every time I work or play  
Or close to the kids I stay.  
Coloured aprons, coloured chalk,  
Very low heels when I walk  
In the classroom, close to kids  
Most of whom are thrilled to bits.  
We sing songs, we laugh, we read  
But beneath this all, indeed,  
There's your hunch (*Oh, hear, oh, hear!*)  
I confess: I'm nowhere near  
Exquisite, great teaching styles  
(You know me, I tell no lies!)  
But I dare say that I'm near  
Most of my kids' hearts (*Hear, oh, hear!*)

*To my Reader*

Thank you for the time you took  
(Out of real life) reading this book!

I have promised a *Thank you* note at the end of Part II, but I definitely did not say anything about it being worded as a short poem.

This is to prove the fact that sometimes you get more than you expect. From your students, too.

Enough reading: now go and do something that counts, like hugging a Prep grade student missing his mum!



Love,  
Cătălina

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