First day activity – Teacher’s notes

First day activity: English and Me

**Topic:** Learner narratives; learner histories; motivation and expectations
**Activity type:** First classes; speaking; reflection; writing
**Level:** A2 +
**Time:** 1h
**Language focus:** Question formation; Quantifiers; Vocabulary related to languages and learning.
**Suggested procedure:** Class groupwork and milling activity; Follow-up writing as homework

### Stage 1: Groupwork (10-15 mins)

Organise students into small groups (of 3 if possible). Ask them to compare their ideas about learning English in the past, present and future, using the prompt in each section. Check that students understand what the prompts refer to by giving one of two examples from the first section, e.g.

**Teachers?** – What were your teachers like at school? Strict, easy-going? Interesting? etc.

**Extra classes?** – Did you ever do any extra English classes? Where? How long for? etc.

Move around the groups to monitor and provide relevant language as needed.

### Stage 2: Open class discussion (10 mins)

Ask one ‘spokesperson’ from each group to explain what they have found in common from their discussion. Use these examples to invite other students to contribute? e.g.

- How many of you also had this experience at school? What was different?
- Are you all interested in X in the future? Why / Why not?
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Stage 3: Language focus (10 mins)

Explain to the group that they are going to conduct a survey of the students in their group. To do this, they need to write questions based on their discussion. Explain that good survey questions are either Yes/No questions or have short, quantifiable answers, like a number. Provide a couple of examples to illustrate, e.g.

- How many years have you been studying English?
- Were your teachers at school native speakers of English?

Ask students to write at least 2 questions per section (Past, Present, Future). If there are 3 students in a group, they can choose one section each.

Move around the class, monitoring the questions students are writing, both for the language and for the type of question (not too open-ended).

Stage 4: Milling activity (10-15 mins)

Students use their prepared questions to ask as many other members of the group as possible, making a note of their answers.

Stage 5: Groupwork (10 mins)

Students return to their groups and work together to summarise the results of their mini-survey. They can use the sentence stems provided in ex. 4 of the worksheet. It might be necessary to tell students that they can use these phrases more than once, and they do not have to use all of them!

Stage 6: Open class (10 mins)

Ask a (different) spokesperson from each group to make a ‘report’ on their findings. After each group has finished their presentation, ask the others if they asked similar questions and if they had similar results.
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Ask for feedback on the findings: does it sound right? Do they agree with this assessment?

Stage 7: Written homework

Ask students to write their personal narratives of learning English. This should be at least three paragraphs: one each for past, present and future. It is useful to explain that there is no word limit for this, let students write as much (or as little) as they want.

Stage 8: Follow-up – variation 1

Once you have collected and corrected the students’ written work, you can select some interesting, representative or controversial observations for discussion in the next class. In the past, these have included the following:

- My teachers were not native and they had a very bad pronunciation.
- I went to extra English classes, which meant that classes in school were very easy and very boring for me.
- I’m studying English because it’s necessary. If I could choose, I would learn another Language, like Italian.
- In the future I need to prove I have a B2 level in order to pass my degree.

Stage 8: Follow-up – variation 2

Focussing on students’ language-learning histories. Take extracts (from the section on the past) from learners’ written work from other classes and distribute it among your students.

In small groups, ask them to read & summarise the text to their partners, and then decide which of the narratives they identify with most.

Here is a selection of extracts (names changed) from some of my ex-students:
A.
I've studied English for a lot of years. I began when I was 12, in primary school, but I think English and me, or other languages in general, aren't good friends. When I began to study English, all was easy. Grammar, regular and irregular verbs but when the time passed it has become more and more difficult. I believed that English was very important. For that reason, when I arrived to the University in 1993, I continued to study English. But I had to do a big effort to learn it. I've already done the third level twice and I've begun, also twice, the fourth level, but I've never finished them. Why? I'm not sure, but I know that when I stop to study English for some years I lose all I've learnt. I have a lot of problems with the listening, speaking and vocabulary. I know if I make an effort I can save my grammar, but I need to work hard and work more.

Pilar, 4K 2012

B.
I didn’t learn English at school. When I was a child the most usual thing was studying French. On 2003 I travelled to Brazil where I met my cousin, who has been living there for 50 years. In a little journey we did together, I realised that both liked the same music, but there was a little difference: he knew all lyrics while I didn’t understand anything. So I thought that sometimes I should study English.

When I took my retirement, five years ago, I decided to study English. ‘Jau-du-iu-du’ (How do you do?) ‘Aidonnou, aidonnou…’ (I don’t know) were pieces of some lyrics of sixties songs that I reminded – without understanding his mean- and I amazed when, in my first course, I noticed that it was an important key in the grammar structure. Knowing it helped me very much.

Joan 4B 2010

C.
I've been studying English for a long time. But English has had many different shapes and proportions for me along this time.

At the beginning English was a sweet monster called Morgan with a few happy friends, who always talked about colours, numbers and the objects in my classroom. It was my first contact with English. Then English took different names and shapes: a foolish professor, the two English friend’s adventures. But one course, to my surprise, English wasn’t adventures and characters any more and became boring exercises titled Present Simple, Present Continuous, Present Perfect and a long ETC. Later, other faces of English were more enjoyable. English has meant travelling all around Europe, visiting my girlfriend (nowadays ex) in London when she was living there, or a well paid job in Berlin.

Guillem, 4I, 2013
D.
I remember how boring was to study English at school. It was easy but the classes were monotonous and the teachers were too serious. In any case, I learned a lot, more than here, where the classrooms are full of students and the teacher is in a hurry because he wants to finish the course program.

I would have studied abroad in the UK or the USA like the rest of my friends but my parents, who had enough money for it, preferred that I was at home to take care to my little brother because they were always busy. Finally, in my late thirties, I went to Uk to study English. It was marvellous.

Dolores, 4K 2010

E.
Learning English, in my opinion, is like the beginning of an important race, so it would not be very strange to find someone looking like Usain Bolt. But, obviously this is not my case. Our way (English and me) is to reach all the preparation stages to become as competitive an athlete as possible.

READY, STEADY, GO! The first shouts. The start of something new. It was one of the first phrases that I learned. My primary teacher was very fond of sports, so just entering the classroom he was already shouting these three motivating words. This period of my English history has my classmates' laughter as its soundtrack. I cannot be sure that all of them learnt as much as they could, but the happy atmosphere the teacher wanted to create is the second image that comes into my mind when I think of this period.

Judith Adv 1 E 2011

F.
When I was young I hated English. Yes, it's true. The reason was easy: nobody told me how important English was. In my school we learned English with the same interest that we learned Latin, Greek or History, as a curiosity. Superfluous subjects. For us the main subjects were maths, geography, biology…the kind of subjects we thought would be important for our future. And also, our teacher was really boring, doing all the classes without games, songs or useful exercises. Obviously my marks were very bad. And at the university, more or less the same story…

Nowadays I’m still paying for that mistake. During the last 25 years I’ve had the opportunity to change this point of view but I never did it. Losing my job has been the catalyst to understand that learning English is not optional in my life, it must be an obligation

Christian 4J 2012