

Focus on the learner essay sample

[War, Intelligence](#)



The students attending the pre-intermediate English language course at International House are mostly Italian¹. The age range is quite varied (early twenties to late sixties) and they are all very highly motivated and passionate about learning the language². Most of the students come from a strong cultural background and have a scholastic knowledge of English, having learnt the language at school as part of the compulsory curriculum. Those who don't, have at least 1 to 2 years experience of learning the language and a number of them have already attended the course taught by CELTA trainees in previous years. As for learning styles there is a core group of retired teachers (mainly Italian and Latin) who I perceive to have a strong linguistic approach.

This also emerges from the interviews we had with them on our first day of training: the majority of students highlighted their strengths in English as reading and writing. Most of them also enjoy visual arts (during class interviews there was a high percentage of students who listed going to art exhibitions as a hobby). The size of the room and the number of students attending class³ makes it difficult to have a more kinesthetic approach even though a good number of them are passionate about dancing, sports and regularly pursue these hobbies.

The students are involved in class activities and there are a few risk-takers who regularly intervene making lessons very enjoyable and making us teachers feel like we are contributing to their learning. As the course has evolved I have also noticed that many of those who appeared shy at the beginning are now more confident and ask questions for further clarification.

With regards to the skills they want to develop, an overwhelming majority have expressed the desire to improve their understanding and communication in English and have listed these as their main aims in English language learning.

It is difficult to assess their feedback on the lessons at this stage, as they have not been asked this question directly. However, the fact that they clap their hands at the end of certain sessions (not mine, unfortunately) is indicative of the fact that they are enjoying the lessons and the activities. Except for one student from Peru and one, who only recently joined, from Russia this seems to be confirmed by the high number of students who regularly attend classes Usually around 12 to 15 students J. Wingate, “Multiple Intelligences”, in English Teaching Professional Alexandra Smit – Focus on the Learner CELTA IH Rome Spring 2010

The essay recommended as pre-reading for this⁵ section is a useful tool to identify and analyse the types of errors and mistakes that are quite common for native Italian speakers. Below is a table which lists those I have found to be most frequent:

I have previously mentioned that students, during class interviews, have stated their skills’ abilities in English to be stronger in reading and writing. However a number of mistakes and errors made during speaking practice were replicated in the written piece of homework that students handed to us. Given this and the students’ desire to be able to speak better I would recommend having strong focus on productive skills during lessons. As for receptive skills, I have noticed that listening seems to be the skill that

students struggle mostly with. It could be due to the fact that they might have been less exposed to English as spoken by native speakers⁷: they have difficulties with the stress timing of language and the understanding of weak forms⁸. Reading comprehension is the skill students are most successful in although they sometimes have difficulty with vocabulary if this is unfamiliar.

The error type I have chosen to focus on is the one regarding subject/object omission: one of the errors that I have found to be widespread amongst the students. The activity chosen is from Move Ahead Level 1, Macmillan and the activity is 9. 1 – “Wow!”. I would put pictures of the natural wonders of the world used in the activity as well as others on the board and then would proceed to run it as illustrated by the resource book encouraging students to describe the places using phrases such as ‘it is the highest mountain in the world’, ‘it is on the river Zimbezi’, etc. I would use this activity, even though it is an elementary one, as I believe the class would benefit from further drilling and practice to avoid making this kind of error.

For the skills activity I have chosen a listening activity from New English File , Pre Intermediate, OUP, (section 3 -Listening 5. 1 CD 2 track 20). It contains 5 different conversations which take place at a party during which people who meet for the first time say the wrong things. The first task of the activity would be to identify the names of the people involved in each conversation. For the second task I would ask students to write down the ‘wrong things’ said during these conversations, pausing the CD after each conversation to enable students to write down their answers.

I would then ask them to compare answers with their partners and listen to the script again to check and then have a plenary feedback session. I've attached a script of the conversation at the end of this assignment. The reason I have chosen this kind of activity is because I believe that students would benefit from further exposure to native speaking and because of their aim to have a greater understanding. In order to teach in compulsory education schools you need to have a particular degree or diploma only obtainable in Italy which means that foreign languages are mostly taught by Italian native speakers

Bibliography

A. Duguid, "Italian Speakers", in M. Swan and B. Smith, *Learner English: A Teacher's Guide To Interference And Other Problems*, 2002 (1987), CUP

J. Wingate, "Multiple Intelligences", in *English Teaching Professional*, from: <http://celta.wikispaces.com/file/view/Wingate.pdf>