

MR/SJG

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Melanie [REDACTED]
EFL Gazette

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Dear Melanie,

I enclose a piece, that among other things, suggests a massive new readership for the EFL Gazette!

I think we talked about an article of this sort two months ago and you said you were not sure where it might fit among the forthcoming issues. You said you'd decide after reading it.

Here it is.

Yours warmly,

Mario

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Letting students behind the scenes

By Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims

I am in search of exercises that allow students to break out of the natural box that teacher role-play locks them into. This article is a request for more ideas in this area.

In most teachers' lives there are times when they let their professional mask drop and show students how they really feel. On day three of a two week course I was asked by my DOS to leave a happy beginners' group and take over a group of grumpy advanced students. I marched into the grumpy group and told them openly that I did not want to leave the beginners and felt bad about teaching them. I completely abandoned the normal "teacher-OKness role-play". Each person in that group then expressed their frustrations (they were all 'refugees' from other courses). Our 45 minute indignation meeting cleared the air wonderfully and the course that followed was a good one.

Staffroom discussions in the class

Another way of inviting students behind the scenes is to stage a technical-teacher-teacher discussion in front of students. At the Cambridge Eurocentre Katie Plumb and Paul Davis disagreed about how to explain the forms that express futurity in English. They decided to spend 15 minutes discussing their different points of view in front of Katie's class. Katie writes that when, after the discussion, she asked them to clarify what she and Paul had said: "I was amazed that they had picked up on almost everything".

Using the Gazette

If you share a trade journal with your students, you are clearly opening the door and inviting them into your professional world. Last term I gave a group of intermediate students a copy each of the Gazette and asked them, for homework, to pick an article that appealed to them and to come to the next class ready to report on it. They did the exercise with enthusiasm and clearly many of them found Gazette articles about far-flung lands exotic and romantic!

Using letters addressed to the school

I gave my class a florid Slav letter to the school, asking for a free place, and heaping Russian praise on the establishment! They read it and then were asked to respond to the letter in role as the school principal.

A feast of different management styles emerged in their letters! In this exercise they were going behind the school's administrative scenes and finding out a bit more about the place they had been learning in over the previous two months. A lot of people like being invited into areas that are usually out-of-bounds.

Getting students to prepare materials

A major, behind-the-scenes teacher activity is preparing material for lessons. As Sheelagh Deller suggests in *Lessons from the Learner* students in class A can very usefully be asked to prepare material for you to use in class B. Here's an example: take this passage into an upper-intermediate class and ask them to edit it so it makes sense:

"In most teachers' lives there are times when they let their professional mask rise and show students how they really squeal....."

Then give them another passage and ask them to introduce meaning and sound errors so that you then have passages that a lower intermediate class can edit. Class A has prepared your lesson material for class B and spent some time enjoying being on your side of the fence. Arguably Class A have done a more useful language exercise than Class B will do, as messing up a straight text interestingly is a quite sophisticated language exercise.

When have you let students behind the scenes?

Teachers go and visit old students in their home countries. Teachers fall in love with students. Teachers invite a whole class group to their homes for a party. Obviously these are major ways of breaking out from behind a professional mask. Are there other ways, major and minor, that you have come across or used in your own work? If so, why not share them with other Gazette readers?