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Repeat article
concept with
new examples

The Growth of an EFL Idea

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Methodology grows like a vast climbing vine with different people changing, modifying and expanding on a given initial idea. The process is startlingly social and communal. Let me offer you an example.

eg: using dictation

Initial idea

Each student is given several small pieces of paper. The task is to write letters to other people in the group. Each letter is signed and delivered as soon as it has been written. The students write and deliver answers to the letters they have received. The teacher joins in the exercise as a full participant. The exercise lasts between 20 and 40 minutes. I learnt this exercise from Kris Markowski in Paris. I later heard that the same exercise is used in groups to allow reflective one-to-one communication towards the end of a therapy week or week-end.

Reactive idea 1

Mike Gradwell did the exercise above and found his students in ESIEE, Paris, wanted to have their letters corrected.

Mike, after the writing stage, asked the students to negotiate with each other which letters could be pooled for correction and which should remain private to their writers and addressees.

The "public" letters were then stuck up round the walls and communally corrected. Of course students at the same time had some interesting, personal reading to do.

Reactive idea 2

A colleague in German adult education was worried about marginal members of her group when she heard the initial idea. She was maternally concerned about el coronel que no tiene a quien le escriba! Her modification was to ask each student to write a signed letter without addressee. The letters were all laid out on a central table and each student took one and answered it. In this way everybody got a letter to set them going.

Reactive idea 3

When I presented Markowski's initial idea to a group of Belgians who teach languages to the unemployed, some leapt up and transformed the exercise into written role-play. Students took on business roles and wrote each other letters (e.g. letters of complaint in role.)

By writing a short article reporting on the above exercise proliferation, I am relatively sure that I am setting the ball rolling further. If you come up with further student letter writing ideas why don't you send them to Aula so that Markowski's tree can grow some more, and publicly?

This is a thrillingly exciting time for the development of language teaching ideas, and Spain is one of the hot-spots in Europe.