

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS' CREATIVITY WHILE TEACHING ENGLISH FOR OBSTETRICS

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Abstract. *Varna Medical University offers an elective course in English for Obstetrics to students of midwifery. The main goal is to teach basic medical terms in the specific context so that students are adequately prepared for their future profession. But how can the process of teaching and learning English for Obstetrics be made more interesting and creative?*

Foreign language teaching at medical universities takes place primarily in the first and second year of the students' studies. Students of obstetrics also have a 30 contact hour module (elective) of English for midwifery in their first semester at university. For several years now we have been developing materials and expertise that is relevant and meets the needs of these students. The process of teaching and learning English can be focused mainly on typical grammar and vocabulary necessary for students to understand materials in English concerning their speciality. We try to shift the paradigm to a more communicatively oriented teaching and learning so that science and art are blended in a way that motivates the new generation of learners. Teachers of English are lucky in that the context of globalisation generally enhances most students' desire for improving their English language knowledge and skills. The aim of this paper is to share just a few activities we have worked on successfully with the future midwives.

Students of obstetrics are about twenty in number each year with different level of language proficiency. They are usually divided into two groups A2-B1 level and a B1-B2/C1 level. They have two contact hours of English per week. That is why we rely on a homework written assignment to allow them to study individually and do some integrated skills preparation autonomously. Learning and consolidating typical collocations such as *umbilical cord, amniotic fluid, postnatal depression and foetal distress* can be achieved by encouraging learners' creative thinking and helping them to design their own poems, puzzles or wordsearches with the new medical terms. Here are a few activities that help students to be creative and involve them in a more artistic implementation of their knowledge and skills of the English language.

An Activity Related to Listening, Drawing and Speaking

Learning or revising parts of the human body is done in Unit 4 and students are asked to perform the following activity:

Listen to the following description of a baby's face and draw. Then in pairs compare your pictures and point out the differences.

Audioscript

Look at the face of this baby. It is round-shaped. Her name is Alice. Her eyes are big and beautiful but right now she is sleeping in her crib. Her eye-lids are closed. Her eye-lashes are long. She has thin eye-brows, they are barely visible. She has small ears, her cheeks are rosy and her tiny nose looks like a pink button. She has a mouth and lips just like the

petals of a red flower. She's so cute. She's cutting teeth now so she often cries these days. It's so nice to see her calm and sleeping.

This activity seems simple enough but for some of the students whose level of English is not high enough it can be quite challenging. That is why it is important for them to compare and describe their drawings while paying attention to similarities and differences and recycling the language necessary for describing a face. In essence this activity includes **a picture dictation** with a focus on parts of the face and then **an oral description** based on the picture which provides further reinforcement of useful vocabulary and structures.

Activities Related to Reading, Drawing and Speaking

A similar activity can be done extending the same topic from a vocabulary point of view with a focus this time on reading comprehension and speaking. The task may be formulated like this:

Read the short description of the body of a baby boy sitting on a sofa. Draw a picture of the boy and then label the parts of the body mentioned in the text and add as many others as you know. Then describe the picture in your own words.

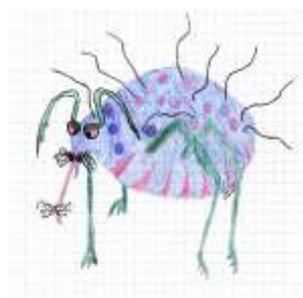
That boy's name is Christo. He is 24 weeks old. Right now he has measles but he will be well soon. He has lovely curly fair hair. His body is strong. Look at his shoulders and arms, his legs and feet. They are plump and pink and so sweet. He likes waving his hands and kicking with his feet a lot. He may become a footballer one day, who knows? He loves sucking his big toes.

When students read this short description they draw and then again compare their drawings generating sentences on similarities and differences. Next they give a brief oral account of their own pictures. Since students come from different learning backgrounds, these activities help the group feel more at ease and start using the language more creatively, producing their own short stories, each student performing at her own level of proficiency.

A similar activity that proves quite productive is **Poem Reading, Drawing and Speaking**. One of the students who has a very good pronunciation, or a few students in a chain-like fashion, read the poem aloud. Then the students have the task to draw a picture of the microbe as they imagine it. This task can be done for homework and as an optional activity as well.

The Microbe

*The Microbe is so very small
You cannot make him out at all.
But many sanguine people hope
To see him through a microscope.
His jointed tongue that lies beneath
A hundred curious rows of teeth;
His seven tufted tails with lots
Of lovely pink and purple spots,
On each of which a pattern stands,
Composed of forty separate bands;*



Illustrated by: Ana Zoran Tsvetkov

*His eyebrows of a tender green;
 All of these have never yet been seen-
 But Scientists, who ought to know,
 Assure us that they must be so...
 Oh! Let us never, never doubt
 What nobody is sure about!*



Hilaire Belloc

Illustrated by: Stefka Ivanova Stoycheva

When students present their pictures at the next seminar they compare, comment and discuss their products.

Each unit finishes with a rubric called ***For Your Portfolio***. Its aim is to encourage students to do some autonomous work at home. Usually it involves some extra linguistic skills such as searching for information, organizing it, proof reading, editing. One such activity again related to the topic mentioned above is:

Cut out a picture of a baby or infant from a newspaper or magazine *baby photo contest*, stick it on a sheet of paper, label the parts of the body and write a detailed description of what the baby/child looks like.

Since some of the students are in their late twenties they already have their own children and they express a keen desire to describe their own babies and children instead of cutting out pictures and describing other children's photos. This adds an invaluable personalizing touch to the activity along with provoking students' creativity and developing their writing skills. When it comes to assessing their efforts it is sometimes really very hard to focus on the students' accuracy in writing when you as a teacher can feel the motivation, inspiration and authentic urge of the students to describe how wonderful and cute their own children are!



As a ***final oral exam*** students of obstetrics have to make a power point presentation that they have developed in the course of about two months. They usually work individually but sometimes they make a peer presentation that may also be quite successful. Similar to the portfolio task, the presentations imply the development of a variety of skills such as doing research, judicious using of materials available on the internet, selecting, organizing, summarizing and then creating and designing a presentation. Typical topics that students

tend to investigate in the field of obstetrics have been: Abortion and Types of Abortion; Spina Bifida; Placenta Praevia; Pregnancy, etc. The presentations are then performed before the whole group thus allowing students to learn from each other, extend their vocabulary, enjoy their oral skills and computer competence. There is a psychological issue here as well that has to do with overcoming the PA - performance anxiety which is extremely important for their future profession. Some shy students suffer from such performance anxiety, so trying and learning to overcome it happens to be an essential life skill.

Conclusion

To sum up, teaching creatively and thus meeting the needs of the new generation of learners ultimately has to do with inspiring and allowing them to be imaginative, creative and involved in their English language learning. Integrating language learning and drawing can turn into a motivating tool even at university level. Preparing power point presentations can challenge students' creativity even further. Using a variety of methods and approaches caters for the students' multiple intelligences and their different styles of learning and hopefully each learner finds something positive and stimulating that boosts her motivation to learn English. Teaching and learning English for obstetrics can be not just hard work but a creative and rewarding experience, a wonderful forum for different generations of teachers and learners to meet and learn from each other.

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