A note from the director of the Language Center

This is the first issue of the Language Center Newsletter devoted to research and practical academic cases about effective teaching and learning. The newsletter is the result of the enthusiasm, creativity, and effort of a group of teachers from the Language Center, as well as the cooperation and support from the students of the Department of Communication Studies. The aim of this newsletter is to share and exchange research endeavors and classroom practices by our faculty members and students, all related to effective learning and teaching. We hope that the teachers’ and students’ authentic experiences will be inspiring for the whole academic and teaching community. Therefore, we invite and welcome contributions from all academic disciplines and from various teachers’ and students’ profiles. We would like to thank Professor Abdylmenaf Bexheti for his contribution to this first issue. We hope that all of you will find this newsletter as a good resource to help you enhance your teaching and learning.

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Director
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A successful class on “Economy for Managers”

You should be an eloquent and competent lecturer as a precondition for students to understand you, but you should be pragmatic and practical when you teach Economy for Managers, if you want to be comprehensive! A good professor in economy is not the one who complicates even more the economic problems, which are already too complicated, but the one who explains complex issues in a simple way. This is similar in other disciplines. For instance, if you want to write briefly and clearly, you should read a lot, but not the other way around, at least, not in the economy.

Not long ago, during my lesson on Monetary Economy (for managers) I was supposed to explain the monetary policies which are an instrument for creation of better conditions for the real economy. This sounds simple but in real life it is a bit more complicated. In economic sciences, the lessons usually start with an assumption, because you need to suppose how the “homo economicus” (the consumer) would behave and she/he is not always reasonable. My question to the students was about what our modest economy misses the most? Of course, there were various answers, from ideas, knowledge, and information… to money. But money has become expensive after the crisis. In contrast to the period from a year ago, the price of money has gone up for more than 40% (in 2008 the average interest rate for crediting was about 8%, while in 2009 it became over 11%) and there is not enough money available. This created a big debate in class about how it was possible to happen and why the money became much more expensive than the real goods, which on the other hand even reached an average negative level (deflation of 0,8%). This problem is a complex and a multifactor one – it does not only depend on the government decision to lend by all means hence raise the value of money. Why has the same not happened to the bananas or the water melons and not to mention the computers, cars, or plasma TVs?

This complex question requires a simple explanation. In our economy, besides other influential factors, one more paradox happened in the mix of policies, both monetary and fiscal. In order to cover its needs for the usually unproductive expenditures (during the campaign, as well as before the elections in the first half of 2009) the Government used to loan and withdraw money from the economy with high price and minimal risk, by which the “price” of money reached even 9,1%. This situation made the other institution, National Bank of the Republic of Macedonia, to do the opposite thing – withdraw the money from circulation (she so called monetary sterilization) after which they announced a higher price of the money – of 9,25%. This irrational and uncoordinated “competition” between the two institutions in charge left the economy with less money. We should all be aware that everything that is deficient on the market is paid more, especially if it is something which is necessary, such as the money. This means that two institutions with the same instrument (withdrawal of money from circulation) cause opposite effects to the real economy.

My students learned this lesson and they will remember it until they join politics where I am sure they will behave the same as our institutions do. In our circumstances, the politicians are mostly concerned with raising their popularity and it is not important to them that the living standard is getting down until it does not reflect the next election results. This is our paradoxical situation. I hope that we are not a country of paradoxes.
Enhancing the Writing Quality

Teaching writing as a process, especially in a foreign language, can be a huge challenge. Studies show that teachers and researchers are split on what approach to teaching writing is most effective with students. Researchers have identified a lot of obstacles why foreign students encounter difficulties while trying to learn how to write effectively. Along with that, they have also identified strategies for improving student writing, which has been my research focus lately in my academic and research career. Below I will share a classroom experience where I integrated both my personal and professional experience.

Once I told my students that that day we were going to practice writing skills they immediately supplied themselves with a piece of paper and a pen, waiting impatiently to hear the topic and start writing. My first impression was that these students had mastered their writing skills and that they enjoy writing! Although I had prepared pre-writing activities, where my students would practice “persuasive writing” before they write the paragraph, I decided to assign the students the topic and let them write without familiarizing them with the pre-writing strategies. The results showed that there were only a few students who wrote well-organized paragraphs, others had difficulties with writing or had no enthusiasm to write, and several papers lacked coherence and cohesion. This motivated me to ask my students about their writing experience from primary and high school. My questions were as follows:

• The teacher gave us grades without any justification!
• Our papers were full of errors being corrected with red color!
• We sometimes received bad grades even when we had no mistakes!

Students were also asked about their writing experience at SEEU. Their replies were similar to the previous ones. Not surprisingly, based on the students’ writing I discovered that the students weren’t prepared enough to write academic papers and they lacked writing skills!

While researching this topic I gained insights that helped me integrate writing into my classes in a more successful way. There are several researchers who have suggested that if the writing process involves multiple drafts, the first draft should have feedback on content and the second on grammar (for example, Ferris, 2003; Headcock & Lefkowitz, 1996; Kroll, 2001). Moreover, John Truscott (1996) in The Case Against Grammar Correction in L2 Writing Classes argues that grammar correction not only is ineffective but it is even harmful, and for that reason, it has no place in the writing classroom. Accordingly, I concluded the following:

• Writing should be taught using motivating pre-writing activities in order students to identify and learn the parts of a paragraph or an essay (examples and lesson plans are provided at the Teacher’s Handbook for Writing Basics-compiled by Luiza Zeqiri, Melissa Hauke, Iranda Bajrami, Neda Radosavlevik and Serdal Xhemali).
• Writing should be taught as a process involving multiple drafts where students have to rewrite the same paper until they get a final organized/well structured paper.
• The teacher should focus more on giving content and organization feedback rather than traditionally detecting surface errors only.
• Teacher-student conferencing should be organized after each draft in order to explain difficulties and establish a good teacher-student rapport.
• Peer feedback is also useful (students learn a lot from each other).

Amazingly, after implementing multiple drafts in teaching writing at the Language Center, the students started to prove progress with their writing skills. The results from the final exam showed great improvement on the students’ paragraphs. Process writing also helped the students become more confident of their writing skills and it created a positive attitude towards writing.
Dealing Effectively with Culturally Diverse Classrooms

The South East European University is a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and a multi-religious environment, which precisely reflects the diversity of the country of Macedonia. In our context, ‘effective teaching’ takes a rather different and unique dimension. Our classrooms are comprised of students from different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. What makes the context more unique is that we have students with a ‘cultural capital’ who by default position themselves as superiors, hence leave other students as members of the so-called ‘minority’ groups. This, in many cases, depending on the geographical region of the country, reflects the demographics of that particular area. In this case, the ‘cultural capital’ of SEEU students belongs to the ethnic majority who live in the western part of the country. In many cases, we might even encounter situations where students not part of the ‘cultural capital’ may come from one, two, or even three different cultural backgrounds.

Classroom diversity is a resource and an advantage for both teachers and students. However, if we don’t deal with it effectively, in most cases, most students, both those possessing the “cultural capital” and those who don’t, will hesitate to participate in the classroom activities. This is a serious challenge for most teachers teaching in the multicultural classroom, and as such it should be addressed by using all means possible to overcome it.

Research to date has shown that students from culturally diverse backgrounds have problems in tutorials related to participation, marking, spoken and written communication, critical analysis, and application of concepts to their own context (Woods, Jordan, Loudon, Troth, & Kerr, 2006). Existing strategies to overcome these problems include co-operative learning (George, 1994), “think-pair-share” and “drill and review” (George, 1994) and peer tutoring (Slavin, 1990).

George (1994) recommended and tested co-operative learning techniques and concepts that helped students to learn together in the multicultural classroom. Co-operative learning involves groups of about four members working together on a task where members are individually accountable for their part of an outcome that requires a co-operative effort for successful completion. The other strategy is the “think-pair-share” strategy developed by Lyman (cited in George, 1994) where, after listening to a question about a reading, students were given time to frame an answer and pair with a learning partner for conferring, before being called on randomly to share their collective answer with the class. The “drill and review” strategy has also been successfully tested in multicultural university classrooms (George, 1994). This strategy divides the class into dyads with one student recalling what was taught (driller) and one student listening and responding to the review (reviewer). Roles would be reversed for other exercises, and this dyad would remain together throughout the course. The other co-operative learning strategy used with multi-cultural classes is the peer-tutoring method (Slavin, 1990). This method usually involves a more permanent tutoring relationship between a more advanced student and a student peer. The method has been shown to improve the academic performance, attitude and motivation of the student tutor and the student peer through the processes of recall and explanation.

I usually teach more than three different classes each semester. In one of my classes I teach this semester I have a unique situation as far as diversity is concerned. The class is comprised of 16 students who possess the “cultural capital” and two students who belong to other cultures, each of them belonging to a different culture. In the first class I noticed that the two students were absolutely withdrawn and were not willing to participate. I noticed their discomfort and I realized they were feeling inferior. I finished the class and thought about it for a couple of days as well as reviewed appropriate literature. After reviewing all the above mentioned techniques for involving all students in a diverse classroom, I decided to use the co-operative learning technique as suggested by George (1994). At the beginning of the class, I purposely asked them how many friends they had in that class. Politely, their answer was “one” which
One of the assumptions when we teach reading as a skill is that developing reading skills has an impact on both second language acquisition as well as students’ academic skills in general. Therefore, we would all agree that reading is important. And, we would all agree that, unfortunately, it is considered as too time consuming and too boring by the majority of our students. Many of them would neither read outside nor in class. The Academic English students were no exception from this rule. Still, reading needed to be done, and short story was included in the course syllabus and the grading criteria.

I was aware I needed something out of the ordinary, something which will grab their attention and hold their interest for that particular class time. I have chosen the Mystery Clue Game created by Dr. Judy Richardson and the short story “The Green Door” by O’ Henry. The first step in the activity was to identify the actions in the story and write them on index cards. I shuffled the cards and distributed the students into four groups. As I was approaching with the stack of papers in my hand, I could see the “oh, no” look on their faces. They probably anticipated lengthy reading and answering questions. When they saw the index cards, they were slightly puzzled.

It took me some time to explain their task. I told them that they need to order the clues according to the order they think the actions in the story are described. Once they started putting them together, they immediately focused their attention, and tried to determine the correct sequence of events. Some of the clues were slightly unusual, some of them quite mystifying. But I could see from the students’ reaction, that they were completely involved in the activity. Later, we compared the group answers, noting the differences among each group.

Was this activity successful? I would say yes, since after introducing it, it wasn’t difficult to introduce the story to the students and to get them read it afterwards. All of them wanted to see “what really happened” and were engaged during reading and the discussion that followed.
Increasing comprehension by using the KWL chart in the classroom

Students are constantly confronted with new information, particularly once they progress to upper level of English, when they transfer from learning to read to reading to learn. In this case, when reading is done for learning, students need to integrate new material into their existing knowledge base, as a good method to increase comprehension. So, for this purpose, I would like to introduce the so called ‘instruction technique’ known as the K-W-L chart, which can be very easily applied in the classroom. This technique was first created by Ogle in 1986. As a language teacher, I have applied this technique mainly with readings, which showed to be very effective and productive.

Essentially, with this technique we first ask the students what they already know (K) about the topic-working as a classroom unit or within small groups, then we set goals by specifying what they want (W) to learn and after the reading students discuss what they have learned (L). Moreover, with this technique students are encouraged to apply higher thinking strategies which would help them to construct meaning from what they read and help teachers monitor their progress towards their goal. For this purpose, a worksheet with separate columns for each of these activities is given to every student.

By using the KWL charts in the classroom, teachers activate student’s prior knowledge of the text to be studied, as well as, start to think about prior experiences or knowledge about the topic, which in general increases the student’s interest in the topic. Next, they set the purpose for the unit, where students are able to add their input to the topic by asking them what they want to know. In this way students will have a reason more to participate and be engaged in the topic. At the end, the students can highlight what they have learned from the reading, in order to revise and remember it easily. This can also be used as a great tool for the teachers to create interesting projects and assignments for the students.

This is how the KWL chart looks like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K</th>
<th>What I know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write the information about what the students know in this space.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W</th>
<th>What I want to know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write the information about what the students want to know in this space.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W</th>
<th>What I learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After the completion of the lesson or unit, write the information that the students learned in this space.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brainstorming as a learning method

My name is Kalin Markovic and I study Communication Sciences at SEEU. In my 3rd semester of my studies, in my English for Specific Purposes 1 class, we learned of a method called brainstorming. It basically consists of noting ideas on particular subjects, and then forming a collective attitude towards that particular subject. From there the collective can build and improve a general idea on the attitude they have formed on a particular subject. I think that the benefit of this method is that everyone has a say in a certain matter which is discussed. It helps improving team work, as well as building team spirit, upon the fact that everyone’s idea and opinion is valued. This method is used from classrooms to board meetings of multinational corporations.

I am proud to have been able to take such a class and believe that in the future I will still have the chance to be introduced to such class activities and methods.
Everybody can be a teacher but an ideal teacher is ‘one in a million’

There are some teachers, who hardly ever make an impact on, or touch on students’ lives for the better. Some just go through life teaching. As I look back on my days at SEEU, I remember what an impact this woman had on my life. It didn’t take me too long to think of my favorite teacher’s name. She was the kind of person that everyone in our ESP Communication 1 & 2 class really admired. Honestly, she is the best. She has the qualities of a perfect teacher: problem solver, a good guide, a motivator and a role model for her students. Do you know what kind of methods she used to teach us? She always created an atmosphere that was open and positive and made students feel that they were valued members of a learning community. We were free to say our opinion, even though it was wrong sometimes. We found her to have an unforeseen enthusiasm. And we know, the instructor’s enthusiasm is a crucial factor in student motivation. I am confident that we could all learn from such a teacher regardless if we are students or teachers.

The South East European University is pleased to announce that it will host a major academic conference on the subject of English Language Teaching. The conference, entitled ‘From Teaching to Learning: Current Trends in ELT,’ will take place at the Tetovo campus on April 9, 10, and 11 of this year.

The conference will address numerous academic and pedagogical questions pertaining to the research and teaching of the English language. Participants will offer papers on a wide variety of relevant topics, from those addressing the most traditional questions of grammar and pedagogy, to the most advanced subjects of technology in language instruction and Computer Assisted Language Learning.

The South East European University is particularly honored to welcome three keynote speakers who will present special, extended addresses to the conference. These distinguished academics bring an international expertise to their insights, and all possess notable research and teaching experience. Dr. Lorna Carson, from Trinity College, Dublin (Ireland) will present the paper ‘Language Learner Autonomy: Myth, Magic or Miracle’; Prof. Dr. Gertraud Havranek, from Alpen-Adria-Universität (Austria) will present the paper ‘The Role of Corrective Feedback in Language Learning and Teaching’; and Prof. Dr. Judy Richardson, from Virginia Commonwealth University (USA) will present her paper ‘Matching EFL Readers to Appropriate Texts: Theories, Strategies and Approaches for Student Success.’

The conference will also offer numerous papers and workshops throughout the three days of the gathering. ‘From Teaching to Learning: Current Trends in ELT’ will contain more than fifty individual presentations. Of particular importance is the international contribution to this conference; 35 of the presenters are foreign scholars, representing over a dozen different countries and four continents.

This conference will prove to be a significant contribution to the international academic assessment of the teaching and learning of the English language. It is an honor for the South East European University to present this conference, as it will reaffirm the educational eminence of Tetovo particularly, and Macedonia as a nation, as well as emphasizing the ongoing excellence and internationalism of the South East European University as a centre for teaching, research, and the exchange of ideas.
The Language Center

The Language Center was founded in 2001 and was the first independent unit to provide instruction within South-East European University (SEEU). It provides language services to all SEEU students. Its 20 well-equipped classrooms, CELTA Center, and the Language Resource Center (LaRC) are designed to meet the educational needs of the students, staff and the community as well as create an environment that is conducive to learning.

Language study is a central part of every SEEU student’s academic career, both as required subjects and as optional elective courses. Part of the University’s mission is to promote a multilingual approach to learning, stressing both the importance of local and international languages. The Language Center has the crucial role in achieving this goal. The primary function of the Center is to provide courses specified in the curricula of the five SEEU faculties. Due to these requirements and student interest, the LC is the largest teaching organization at the University, with more than three quarters of the entire student population taking classes there at any given time.

Support for the MA in English Language Teaching Program

In cooperation with the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication, the Language Center has taken supportive role in the MA in ELT program.

Part Time Studies Program

All LC courses that are offered to full time students are also provided via the PT studies program.