



## Mari Nakamura

The *Young Learners* column provides language teachers of children and teenagers with advice and guidance for making the most of their classes. Teachers with an interest in this field are also encouraged to submit articles and ideas to the editor at the address below. We also welcome questions about teaching, and will endeavour to answer them in this column.

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Hello colleagues,

Upon request from several readers of this column, we are starting a series of articles focusing on the development of 21st century skills among younger learners. Let us welcome Kathleen Kampa and Charles Vilina, experts in this area of study, to set out on our journey of inquiry and discovery.

# Building 21st Century Skills in the Young Learner's Classroom (Part One)

Kathleen Kampa  
Charles Vilina

The world is evolving rapidly and our students need the skills to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century. They need the ability to think critically and creatively in order to come up with solutions to regional and global problems. They need the social skills necessary to work with others, to communicate, collaborate, and compromise. They need to be adaptable and broad-minded, with a global perspective that respects differences as well as similarities.

Although many would agree with the above assessment, it seems to present a challenge for us as English teachers. We may indeed be preparing our young learners to be future scientists, foreign ministers and global entrepreneurs. However, our primary goal is to help them become competent in the very essential skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English.

So, how can we be expected to do both?

The good news is that when we create a classroom environment in which the 21st century skills of *critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication* become the primary focus of learning, we have the opportunity to build powerful English language skills in the process. Educators now know that English can be taught effectively through interesting content. When students are challenged

to think *critically* and *creatively* about this content, especially while *working together*, English becomes the means of *communication* through which goals are met.

## Developing Critical and Creative Thinking

Some of you may be familiar with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. This looks at the thinking skills that students use when learning new content. These are listed in a progressive order, from "lower order" thinking skills to "higher order" thinking skills, moving up from the bottom of the triangle shown below.

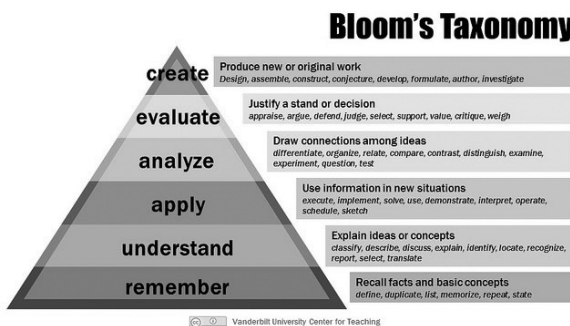


Figure 1. "Bloom's Taxonomy", by Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, 2017 (<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>). In the public domain.

Our goal is to move students up the taxonomy as we teach a unit, usually starting with the lower order thinking skills of "remembering and understanding," and moving up to the higher order thinking skills of "analyzing, evaluating, and creating." As students are challenged to think more critically and creatively about content, they are motivated to learn and to communicate.

So how can we move up Bloom's Revised Taxonomy with each unit? You can use the objectives shown to the right of the triangle above. Use the verbs listed in the objectives to help identify the expectations and appropriate activities for your lessons.

Let's look at some examples:

### Remember and Understand

Before we can move to higher order thinking skills, we must first teach the target vocabulary or grammar to our students, perhaps using picture cards, matching games, and simple chants or songs. These activities build the lower order thinking skills of remembering and understanding by naming, describing, reading, and writing the new words or phrases. Simple questions such as “What do you see?” or “What is she doing?” elicit responses at this level.

### Apply and Analyze

Next, students apply and analyze these new words. For example, students could work together to **compare and contrast** sports vocabulary using a Venn diagram, shown below in Figure 2.

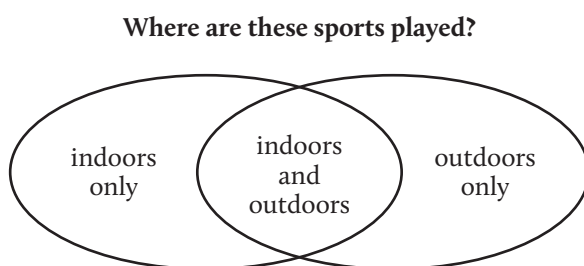


Figure 2. Venn diagram to compare and contrast sports vocabulary.

To help your students build their communication skills give them grammar models to discuss their choices. For example:

- *I think bowling is an indoor sport.*
- *I think baseball is an outdoor sport.*
- *I think basketball is an indoor and outdoor sport.*

Responses such as *I agree, I think so, too, or I disagree* should also be taught.

Encouraging students to find similarities and differences is an important part of learning, beginning with your youngest students. For example:

*How are these letters the same? b d p*  
*They all have a line and a circle.*

Students can also **classify** vocabulary into various **categories**. For example, animals could be classified based on where they live (biomes), what they eat (meat or plants or both), what kind of covering they have (fur, feathers, shells, scales, or skin), or

how many legs they have. Students can also classify words based on the number of syllables. This is helpful when students write haiku poetry.

Students can also place words into a particular sequence or order. For example:

1. from smallest to biggest
2. from slowest to fastest

Again, give your students sentence models to use with these tasks. For example, when students are sorting animals by size, they might use the following model, comparing two of the animals.

*I think that a rabbit is bigger than a hamster.*

As students work in pairs or small groups to discuss their choices using these sentence models real opportunities for language development occur.

Questions that encourage students to apply and analyze include (depending on the students' level): *How are these the same? How are they different? Where could we use this item?*

### Evaluate and Create

Next, students can take what they have learned to evaluate and create something using the target language. In our courses *Oxford Discover* (Kampa & Vilina, 2014) and *Everybody Up* (Kampa & Vilina, 2016) students use what they have learned in the previous two chapters to do a summative project in small groups. This project offers many opportunities for students to use their higher order thinking skills as they plan and create. Most importantly, they are revisiting and using the target language in real and meaningful ways.

If the topic is about food, older students could be challenged to think of ways to reduce “food miles” (the distance food travels to get to us) to save the environment. Questions might include:

- *What are some ways we can reduce food miles?*
- *What good things will happen if we do this?*
- *What problems may occur if we do this?*
- *How might we improve on our solutions?*
- *Why is this topic important?*

For younger learners, we could ask questions like the ones below to encourage creativity. The following activity using letter shapes comes from *Magic Time* (Kampa & Vilina, 2012).

Let's make letters with our bodies.

- How can you make the letter c with your fingers?
- How can you make it with your arms?
- How can you make it with your entire body?
- How can you make it with a partner?
- Can you make it bigger?

Or when a child has a birthday:

*What would be the best birthday cake?*

Or if you're learning about animals:

*How could we make a zoo that's fun for children and animals?*

Critical thinking and creativity allow students the opportunity to bring their own life experiences into our English lessons, which is highly motivating. As students make connections, tap into prior knowledge, and seek solutions to problems, content becomes real and relevant to them. Learning is personal and self-motivated—and the language of learning is English.

### **Building Communication Through Collaboration**

Finally, let's consider the benefits of collaboration. When students work together to think critically and creatively, to share ideas, and to solve problems, they build strong social language skills in the process. In addition, target vocabulary is strengthened at every step of the collaborative process, giving students confidence to discuss their ideas and goals.

As an example, a teacher may present an activity that requires a student to draw on his or her personal experience, such as to answer the question, "Where do you see numbers each day?" The normal progression we suggest is the following:

Individual Work → Pair Work → Group Work  
→ Whole Class Discussion

First, students work individually to think about their own encounters with numbers during their day. Younger learners can draw pictures, whereas older learners can write simple phrases. The teacher walks around and offers language support, labeling pictures and helping students find the right words or phrases.

Next, students are placed into pairs, where they share their ideas and add more. As students discuss

their ideas with each other, the target language is used and reinforced. Shy students are more likely to speak to a partner than to a whole class at this time.

Next, student pairs are placed with other student pairs, forming groups of four. These four students discuss and build upon their ideas. The target language is reinforced further.

Finally, the teacher invites the entire class to discuss their answers in a "whole class" activity. Individual students are invited to speak up to discuss what their pairs or groups have talked about. By this point, students have had enough practice with the target language to be able to speak with much more confidence.

No one expects students to conduct these activities entirely in English. Rather, the collaborative approach is one in which the teacher continually provides support (words and phrases) through which students can discuss what they know in English instead of their first language. As this process continues over weeks and months, more and more English is used naturally. The final result is a level of fluency that would not be possible otherwise.

### **Conclusion**

There are many reasons to encourage the building of 21st century skills in the English language classroom. Any activity that seeks to support critical thinking and creativity among our students will increase opportunities to build language skills, as long as students are allowed to work together and teachers provide the language support students need.

In our next article, we'll provide a variety of activities that demonstrate how 21st century skills can put your students on a path towards language fluency at every stage of their primary years.

### **References**

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- Kampa, K. & Vilina. C. (2014). *Oxford Discover*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
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**Kathleen Kampa** and **Charles Vilina** are American ELT authors and teacher-trainers who have taught young learners in Japan for over 25 years. They are co-authors of *Magic Time*, *Everybody Up*, and *Oxford Discover*—courses for young learners published by

Oxford University Press. Kathleen and Charles are active teachers who promote an inquiry-based approach to learning, where students develop English language fluency as they discover the world around them. Kathleen also



creates songs and chants for young learners, and has produced two CDs for children, *Special Days and Holidays* and *Jump Jump Everyone*.

Kathleen and Charles have conducted numerous teacher-training sessions around the world on 21st century skills, multiple intelligences strategies, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), music and movement for young learners, classroom management, and brain-based learning. Kathleen and Charles are enthusiastic about creating a climate of success in their classrooms and training sessions.

## [JALT PRAXIS] BOOK REVIEWS



### Robert Taferner

If you are interested in writing a book review, please consult the list of materials available for review in the Recently Received column, or consider suggesting an alternative book that would be helpful to our membership.

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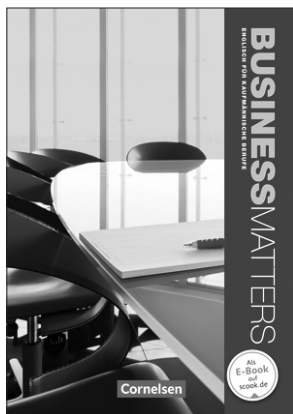
This month's column features Alan Simpson's review of *Business Matters* and Alan Fiedler's evaluation of *Smart Choice 1* (3rd Edition).

## Business Matters

[Ken Thompson & Richard Haill. Berlin, Germany: Cornelsen, 2015. pp. 135. ¥2,960. ISBN: 978-3-06-451348-8. Teacher's Book: 978-3-06-451355-6.]

Reviewed by Alan Simpson, *Business Communication SIG*

**B**usiness Matters is part of a series of 17 vocational textbooks, covering topics from *Technical* and *Office Matters*, to *Shopping* and *Dentistry*. The textbook has 10 units which cover functional topics such as telephoning and presentations, as well as customer care and business travel situations. It is aimed at the A2/B1 level of the Common Euro-



pean Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001), with some case studies targeted at the high intermediate B2 level.

The units are built along thematic and functional lines including: company structures and office tasks; ordering office supplies; marketing and effective advertisements; telephone enquiries and confirming orders; making customer appointments and organizing shipping; customer service mistakes and complaints; business trips; and presenting and job interviews.

In the introductory unit there are formulaic phrases, reading comprehension passages, and paraphrasing exercises as the students practice how to welcome a trainee and give directions, and describe their own daily routines. The gap fill exercise helps students build phrasal units and the role-play encourages them to generate their own language. This activity could be scaffolded by helping learners to predict relevant vocabulary and phrases, with some strategy instruction (Chan, 2009). A longer reading text follows for building content knowledge which is backed up by a summarizing activity giving learners an opportunity to practice more paraphrasing and structuring ideas. Similarly, the occasional summary and email writing activities throughout the book encourage students to produce their own language creatively. This provides more opportunities to receive feedback and reflect on their grammar usage.