

00:00:02

[Matthew Long]

My name is Matthew Long. I am currently the head of the English department in my school, based here in Mexico City. I've been in Mexico for about nine years now and I've also got teaching experience in South Korea for three years and also obviously back in the UK. So we're going to talk to you today about some of my findings that we've gone through. So the Global Communication Backpack Functional English every child should know.

So if anyone has been to my webinars, most likely the Latin American teachers who have connected, I like to start with a little bit of a true or false just to get us warmed up, get that brain active like I was mentioning with mind brain education. So true or false, if you could just write into the chat, is this statement a true statement or is it a false one? And that is the biggest predictor of a child's success in a first global interaction is the size of their vocabulary and how many words they have memorized. So is that a true statement or is that a false statement? Can we get an understanding or a guess from a child or speaker's ability to communicate purely based on their vocabulary knowledge and the depth of their vocabulary?

00:01:34

I can see an overwhelming response in the chat saying some person has gone as far as saying definitely false, false, false, false. A few truths, which there is some impact on the size of our vocabulary, but yes, it is a false statement. Okay, so yeah, we as teachers, we have been almost conditioned to think that vocabulary, grammar are the be all and end all, which, you know, there is some importance to those elements of our language. But as Canal and Swain mentioned in their research, English proficiency isn't a vertical ladder. It isn't the more grammar you have, the more vocabulary you have has a bigger proficiency level and is actually quite different.

So even if our books, our backpacks are stuffed with these heavy boxes, books of grammar and vocabulary, it's a false sense of confidence sometimes because when they go out into the real world, as we know, people have gone traveling, people have gone trekking, the weather often changes and we need to have the tools in our backpack to make sure that we have those grammar and vocabulary books. But we also have a bunch of skills, a bunch of tools for us to adapt to any situation. By giving our students some of the tools that we're going to be looking at today, we are developing their agency, which is the theme of today. We're going to be giving them the agency to take control of that communication, take control of the conversation, and build their confidence and communicative skills. So as you can see on this AI generated image, the left one is the kind of traditional backpack that teachers used to pack our students with a long time ago.

00:03:42

And on the right is the more modern backpack with those different tools, but also vocabulary and grammar guide inside, tucked away neatly. So just to give a little bit of context on some of

my experiences. So as I, as Moni politely mentioned earlier, I've worked with the British Council on macmillan for some time. I was invited in Mexico to be the pronouncer at the national spelling bee contest. Students from all over Mexico, they had their state, they had their classroom school competition, their state competition, and they sent two children from every state to Mexico City.

It was a wonderful event. Students were able to tell me the spelling of, of words such as serendipity and able to pronounce it and say the spelling. However, there were a few moments that were a bit of an eye opener for myself. There were students who would take the ball and of course, being British, they weren't overly familiar with my accent. So when I said the word that they needed to spell, they completely froze.

00:05:01

They've been studying, they've been memorizing. They had the knowledge of each vocabulary set and the spelling that goes along with it, but they weren't able to communicate with me, to ask me to repeat if I can say it again, if they can give a definition. So there really, the communication broke down. They had this wonderful advanced vocabulary knowledge, but they were unable to communicate with me to repeat with some kind of basic lexical chunks. So that got me thinking, what do we do here?

We're giving them a really nice set of knowledge, but they're not able to use it. So today I'm going to be talking about some little skills that we need to be working on. And it's also backed up by some of the research from Jennifer Jenkins.

Jennifer Jenkins. She talks about not creating spies. Our students as spies. When we are preparing our students in the classroom to go out into the real world one day, we're not trying to trick people. We're not trying to send them to the UK or send them to a foreign country.

00:06:22

And the people they're talking to believe that they are a native speaker. Quite the contrary. We would like our students to be effective communicators. We are training them to be global communicators. Sorry, I got a bit of a coffee.

Right. That should have got rid of it. We're training them to be able to deal with a wide berth of situations, not just sound native, not mimic the accents that we're giving them. It is much more important that they are able to be effective communicators, have deep, meaningful conversations, and ultimately solve the goals that they're trying to communicate with. Something always important to mention that I was at a conference two weeks ago, and some of the most successful people in Mexico in business, they weren't speaking like native speakers, but they are very successful at their communicative skills, and they were able to get their message across.

How do we do that, though? So the first one I'd like to look at are the different tools that go into our backpack. We've got our repair kit. We've got our universal adapter. I've also got something that I've named the thread Weaver, an interesting name that.

00:07:44

So these are. These are all skills and tools that we should be making sure our students have in their backpack. Not literally, of course, but before going into the real world. So the repair kit, what is it? So, of course, like in my example, breakdown in communication, it happens.

It can happen to L1 speakers in their native language. It can happen to L2 speakers in their second language, regardless of their fluency level or communicative level. So we need to be making sure that we can give tools like an anchor, a backtrack, a compass, which I'll explain a bit more in a second. So then they can allow the students to control the timing of their conversation. For example, the anchor, which could be our pause button, is simple lexical chunks like, wait a second, I need more time to process this information.

00:08:46

Studies show that non native speakers, We've all done it. You get three minutes into a conversation, you haven't fully understood what was said before, and that knowledge is fundamental to the outcome of that conversation. And if you weren't able to pause and just clarify the meaning, then you're at a big disadvantage. So we need to give our students the tools to say, wait a second. Could you repeat that?

So we're letting them to control time by pausing, rewinding, and also clarifying. This is something that I'm sure that we do every day, but we need to be really enforcing that our students know these skills and also use this skill. And how can we do it? How can we develop this into the classroom?

00:09:38

In our school, we have games such as Draw the monster for the. The younger ones. Or it could be, you know, a dictation of a. Of a picture, a photo dictation where the teacher intentionally is describing the monster or picture in a rushed, quick manner. The teacher only stops when the students are using the lexical chunks of to control the conversation, where to pause, clarify, or repeat the target language that the teacher is giving.

So of course, we start off on a global scale in the classroom with the teacher delivering the information to the students. And then we can break off into small groups and or pairs to be once again encouraging our students just to take control of their own conversation, to just manage the conversation a little bit better when it's got away from them a little bit. Something I'm sure we can all, you know, connect with. So the next one, just a little bit of MBE mind brain education science did a little bit of a brain break. And sometimes we get overloaded information.

00:10:56

So I'd like you to tell me what are some words that your students often forget or often get confused with? They forget they want to say the word that they're thinking, but they just can't get quite get it out. If you could write into the chat some words that they can enough. Oh, I like that one. Assist.

Interesting. Unfortunately, okay, yes. They are often false friends. Thank you so much. Schedule pronunciation.

Actually, I am agree that's a very, very common, you know, little error. Okay, excellent. So in my example, I. Oh, hang on, let me. I've accidentally opened up the chats too big. In my example, embarrassed would be one or fun or funny would be one.

00:11:49

And once again, we've all been in a conversation where you just can't get the word out of the tip of your tongue. And we need to be giving our students the tools to go around the word they're missing. So once again, so they're in control of their communication. It's not just breaking down. How can we do that?

So I propose the universal adapter to be part of their backpack as well. Once again, freezing sometimes happens. Forgetting the word often happens too. That's okay. As long as we are giving the skills needed to our students, then they'll be able to navigate around that freeze or that little frozen moment to be able to describe themselves.

00:12:40

That is why we need to be giving them chunks, key chunks. Like it's the thing for blah, blah, blah. That being the action. For example, if the basketball hoop. Hoop is a very specific word.

It's the thing for throwing the basketball to score a goal. Oh, hoop. You know, just to they can still get their idea across, but just without always having perfect vocabulary knowledge. Others is of course, it's the person who blah, blah, blah. Or it like it looks like a blah, blah, blah.

Okay. So by giving this, we're giving them the control and the skills Most importantly to, to take control and be in control of their own conversation, developing their agency. But how can we develop this in the classroom? Taboo was a board game that I grew up with playing in the uk. I'm certain there are versions of this in your home country, but Taboo is where you're given a list of cards, a list of words, sorry.

00:13:50

And you have to describe those unknown words sometimes with actions. But in our classroom context it would be with key chunks, with key lexical chunks to describe the missing vocabulary set. You can combine this with your target vocabulary just to reinforce the target language that you're currently teaching. So that we've got a dual skill set. We've got the soft skills of being able to navigate the conversation and we've also got the hard skill of the actual concrete vocabulary knowledge.

Quite a nice all rounded activity. And my third item that goes into our backpack for our students, into the world is our thread weaver, our cultural thread weaver. So of course nowadays we live in the age of AI. You're going to hear some amazing talks about generative or generational AI tomorrow. But in this, the research and kind of readings that I've been doing is in the age of the AI, it is becoming even more important for a human centered society.

00:15:11

Human centered skills, those soft skills that we need to be working with our students daily because those are going to become the most important and adapting to the AI generation, the AI era going forward. So here are some. The first one, I've kind of weaved together two different lexical chunks. The first is to once again to identify the human in the conversation by referencing things about their personal life, things about things that were mentioned in the conversation prior, and just referencing back a little bit, something that AI is struggling to do at the moment. So like you said before, speaking of blah, blah, blah, to connect to another topic or I remember you like AI really has a, has a difficulty, you know, reproducing these human centric skills at the moment.

We can humanize text, we can make it sound more human friendly, but that just human touch because ultimately we're communicating with humans. So we need that skill. In the age of AI, where content is instant, but also in our cultural context, we need to be thinking about ways to deal with directness. Some cultures are very direct in their language, other cultures are not direct and you know, just using, softening a little bit of language just so there are no cultural differences. And you know, we don't be offending anyone now, do we?

00:16:56

So just once again to bring the humans back into the conversation in the center, we need negotiation lexical chunks. What if we. How about. Let's try. Okay, but next time.

Once again, that negotiation at the center, which funnily enough is also part of our Cambridge and, you know, exam skills to bring other people into conversations. So you could play a selection of human based communicative games to develop these skills. Some of them can be the solution squad where there is a negotiation. Student A gets given a card that they want to play tag or it. Student B gets given a card where their outcome needs to be playing hide and seek.

And they can use this kind of negotiation language to find a kind of center, a common center. Or you can have the conversation chain, we have different words. And then to kind of the students draw a word restaurants, student two draws a word recess and then they continue the conversation whilst also referencing back once again that human centered communication. And of course, we live in many different classroom settings. We have students with many different strengths.

00:18:28

So what we do at my school is we provide cheat sheets. So just to give once again, the agency to our students. They have the lexical sets or chunks on their cheat sheet. So then they are provided the agency tool to pause for a second, check their notes, check their cheat sheet, and then continue the conversation. The early fundamental moments of building that skill.

So then to develop their agency, of course, the cheat sheets can be differentiated too. We can go from simple icons to just trigger the memory of the chunk. We can have the beginning of the stem sentences as you can see on your screen, or we can have full sentences. Once again, just another tool for the students to be using their own skills to take control of their own communication.

00:19:28

Or additionally, you know, you can pair stronger students, whatever that means, to kind of, you know, help out, and allows the, you know, more fluent students to grade their speech, once again, an invaluable skill. It's also important when you go into the world, if you're a strong speaker speaking to a not so strong English speaker, to grade and adapt your language. Adaptive skills, once again, one of the most important 21st century skills coming up in the world of tomorrow. And a little touch on assessment for learning, of course, in your course books. I know, for example, we teach learning well, it's wonderful for MBE because it talks about the emotions and feelings.

But we have, we have vocabulary, we have grammatical items that we need to fulfill to give them a fuller backpack. That's okay. We can still continue with pop quizzes. There is a lot of research that actually pop quizzes aid the memory of the students. But Also, we can take a different approach for this type of agency and lexical chunks.

00:20:44

Whereas assessment for learning, in my analogy, we can be given them a passport and just be stamping or ticking every time a child uses correctly at lexical chunk. Once again we're just building the confidence of the students, encouraging them to draw on that skill and just once again get it within their skill set to be regularly drawing back to the, to those lexical chunks delivering. And instead of looking at a test score, they can look at the number of their stamps and how a full passport is a more functional global communicator, even if the grammar isn't always perfect. We've got a few more minutes, I'm going to just throw some more things at you whilst we've got time. Another little additional tip beyond my three backpack tools are lexical chunks being multifunctional.

One of the most beneficial things for our students going into the world are tools they can use in multiple contexts, in multiples, multiple situations. For example, I'm looking for, I'm looking for the bathroom. That's kind of an emergency situation. So they've got an emergency tool there. I'm looking for my friend that is in a social context.

00:22:09

I'm looking for my pencil or book in an academic classroom setting. Or I'm looking for the exit, which is once again a safety measure. So just by providing them these lexical chunks, you're giving them what I'm looking for, three words. And they can use it in so many different situations. A little Swiss army knife, as it were.

In this context we're, we're contextualizing the situation, we're providing it the lexical chunks in context instead of just dry. One of my favorite ways to do this is through project based learning, problem based learning. But there are so many contextualized play based learning where we can be using this and we do not need to point out why it is looking for and not look for which is providing them a little stem chunk ready to use, take and apply whenever they need into the, into their real life situation. And finally a little method to use is the task, teach task. So we start off in our little backpack situation where we're giving.

00:23:23

You can set the students a communicative goal where for example they need to plan a class party for tomorrow during recess for picnic, something like that, and you sit. This teacher's role is to sit back, you provide them with the lexical chunks so then they can describe themselves, they can take control of the conversation, but you're just noting down in that contextualized situation, any vocabulary, anything that they're missing, any chunks that they might be missing too, you allow them to try first, once again building their agency. Then the teacher will step in and just provide any missing chunks, any gaps that they might have, the teacher may have identified and just, you know, taught a little bit. And then the students get to do it one more time, once again, building that confidence. They try once, they get a bit of feedback or feed forward and you know, they try again, once again, really building that self belief and agency within our students.

00:24:30

So as I began this presentation talking about the problems or problems, the mishaps or communicative freezes that I witnessed in the National Spelling Bee, we today looked at some skills, some tools that will be able to navigate that. They'll be able to look at their conversation and communication in a different light with more confidence because they know once we deliver these and develop these skills, they'll be able to build on their communication much better. So when they get in front of the stage and see words like serendipity, yes, they'll have that strong vocabulary, grammar, background. But also in the case of the real life where they need to navigate their own conversation, we will be giving them the tools to go alongside those hard skills so that soft skills and hard skills being integrated side by side to have a much better, well rounded student going out into the world. So I have, of course you've got your goodie bags in your freebies.

00:25:48

On your screen is a QR code where you'd be able to download one of the cheat sheets for those three tools that I mentioned today and directly download it. Don't worry, there are no copyrights. I made it and I am not important enough to have copyright. So you can freely

download, print out, laminate, put on your poster, put on your wall, whatever you'd like to do with it. Okay.

There is a QR code which gives you the PDF. If you are unable to download it right now, do remember that this session is being recorded. You will be able to go back and access this if you don't have time or a phone at your fingertips right now. So that's about it for this topic. A short and sweet introduction into the Global Communicative backpack.

00:26:47

I think we may have time for one question, one or two questions. I'm not sure if there are any.

[Mónica Pérez]

Yes, Matthew, before we, before we go to the questions, I want to really thank you for, for this amazing talk. I think it has been very captivating because in some cases we as teachers want to have a formula, what can I do? To have my students speak and speak and to communicate confidently.

But we forget about these things that you mentioned that are essential. Something like the soft skills, the human touch, cultural situations, classroom settings, early fundamental skills, the confidence. Right. So you have given us a lot of tips that are essential and this can be some kind of a reminder for experienced teachers or this can be a guide for new teachers. So Matthew, thank you.

00:27:51

Thank you very much. And let's see if we have questions from our great audience. They have invented really participating. Well, Queen is asking us a certificate.

[Matthew Long]

Sure. So just. I, I just saw that there weren't any questions. I just want to kind of jump on one thing that you just mentioned right there. That yeah, we, we've been taught from the 19th century model of education.

His like through it's been institutionalized around the world in different government settings where we are teaching the students knowledge they need to regurgitate and reproduce that knowledge, which no longer is the world that we live in. You know, going from direct from the classroom into a factory setting. Now more than ever we need to be developing these soft skills in linguistics, in thinking skills. And some of these that we looked at today, they all, they may help you with the communication in, in a conversation. In a conversation.

00:28:53

But also it's that trigger when you start to kind of unpack and describe the words that you're trying to think of. The neurons in your brains are all interconnected, so then they will

just naturally have a chain reaction to unlock all of these other memories and linguistic skills that a student has. So it's kind of two a. Two for one, as it were. Yes.

[Mónica Pérez]

So it's very, very interesting. Right. How that the different contexts can we can have.

[Matthew Long]

Absolutely.

[Mónica Pérez]

Thank you. And Matthew, here we have a question. Sorry, of course I missed the name of the person. Sorry. Some questions, some things have been going through and we have a question that if we should use the same words for fifth grade, the spelling words for fifth grade, all over the world, should we be using the same, the same words for all over the world?

00:29:50

[Matthew Long]

I mean in terms of spelling words, I would just focus on the student needs, the content that you're delivering. Maybe for example, you've got your macmillan syllabus kind of slowly unpacking all the knowledge that they need to use back to back again. So I'd be focusing on the grade and age or CEFR level. I would be once again the same soft skills, lexical chunks. Yes, I would be using them the same because that is so multifunctional so diverse in the situations that they can use it in.

So the vocabulary, I would depend on the age and CFR level and contents that they need. They still do need some of the hard knowledge and hard skills, but the soft skills. Yes. I'd be delivering it the same across. Okay.

Depending if they're adults or children, I'd still be giving them the same.

00:30:51

[Mónica Pérez]

According to the common European framework of reference, maybe. Right?

[Matthew Long]

Yes, absolutely.

[Mónica Pérez]

Okay. And here we have another question for Gulnura. I apologize if I didn't pronounce it correctly. Gulnora is asking you if you have a favorite vocabulary teaching activity.

[Matthew Long]

A favorite vocabulary teaching activity, right. I mean a favorite.

Oh, I, I don't. I mean, I. Oh, I always love with Play doh. I, you know, the old, the old fashioned ones, I think. Lovely. They're kind of old Pictionary, the Play doh where they're building the.

Once again, similar to our taboo topic earlier where they're reusing through Pictionary the vocabulary. Because when we're directly teaching vocabulary, it is about memory, it is about forming these bonds within our brain. So we do need to use repetition quite a lot. So I would be using Pictionary to introduce it and then reinforcing it. It's called retrieval practice.

00:31:56

It's little pop quizzes where they're just frequently retrieving the same vocabulary and that builds really strong bonds which are then able to contextualize and connect on a deeper level. So those memorization games are still very useful for memorizing vocabulary.

[Mónica Pérez]

Perfect, perfect. And you say something that I would like to highlight. We still, they are still useful.

So absolutely nothing goes old fashioned, right. In education.

[Matthew Long]

No, definitely not. No. I mean we do kind of build on our research and build on our knowledge for new approaches.

But yeah, that memorization, it needs to happen. If you can't memorize a word, you're never going to be exposed to it to then use it in a situation. But yeah, today's talk was much more about the agency on how to navigate and keep control of that conversation.

00:32:52

Right. Okay.

[Mónica Pérez]

And Matthew, Sorry. They are telling us that they are having some kind of trouble with the QR codes.

[Matthew Long]

Oh, okay.

[Mónica Pérez]

So is there something we. Or maybe when they get the goodie back, they can go back to the QR code. Is that right?

[Matthew Long]

Sure. I mean, let me just double check. I will make sure that it's available to everyone as long as they have the link. I just looking at my phone now, it just says the.

00:33:21

Some administrators for if you're with your edu ar. So I imagine that's Argentina. If you are with an institutional account, maybe your administrator has blocked it. So you could use your personal account and then you will have access to it, because I've made it available to anyone who has the link.

[Mónica Pérez]

And when they get their goodie bags with a PowerPoint presentation, maybe they will have access again to the QR codes, Right?

[Matthew Long]

Absolutely. I can work with the team to make sure that that's available.

[Mónica Pérez]

Perfect. Perfect. So, Matthew, you have been a great speaker with great ideas for us as teachers. Thank you very much.

[Matthew Long]

Thank you so much.