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# **MACMILLAN LIFE SKILLS**

## **LANGUAGE IS A LIFE SKILL**



**MACMILLAN  
LIFE SKILLS**

## Content list

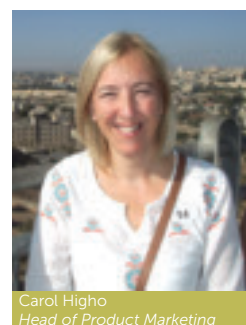
Page 1	Addressing the life skills crisis So what are life skills?
Page 2	Are life skills really important? What can we do as teachers?
Page 3	How do I include life skills in my class Where can I find more ideas and activities on life skills?
Page 4	Life skills in <i>Learning Stars</i> (Primary) Article by Jeanne Perrett
Page 5	Life skills in and <i>Beyond</i> the classroom (Secondary) Article by Rebecca Robbe-Benne
Page 6-7	Life skills: what they and why we need to teach them Essay by Steve Taylore-Knowles
Page 8	<i>An Open Mind</i> to Thinking and Problem Solving: establishing priorities (General Adult)
Page 9	Function globally: negotiate
Page 10-11	The <i>Skillful</i> approach to critical thinking Article by Dr Sara Hannam
Page 12-14	<i>In Company</i> life skills: Influence Essay by Mark Powell

## Welcome

Life skills are something of a buzz word not only in education, it is also the focus of discussion across a range of industries around the world. Life skills have been defined by the World Health Organization as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”.

Over the coming year Macmillan will be providing weekly tips for developing life skills with your class. We will also have a free monthly article/infographic (providing discussion opportunities), activities, quizzes, video interviews, webinars and much more. From primary to adult courses, grammar skills to business English we have courses that include a specific focus on life skills as well as delivering engaging English language learning content. This booklet presents some key authors’ ideas on life skills and how these relate to specific types of student. We have included a few sample activities which highlight a specific life skill as a sample of things to come.

We hope you’ll join us over the coming months to learn more and use the ideas to help your students succeed.



Carol Higho  
Head of Product Marketing

*"Education today is much more about ways of thinking which involve creative and critical approaches to problem-solving and decision-making.*

*It is also about ways of working, including communication and collaboration, as well as the tools they require, such as the capacity to recognise and exploit the potential of new technologies, or indeed, to avert their risks. And last but not least, education is about the capacity to live in a multi-faceted world as an active and engaged citizen."* ①

## Addressing the life skills crisis

### by Dr. Spencer Kagan

We face a life skills crisis. This crisis can be conceptualized as a catastrophic imbalance between supply and demand. Much is being made these days of the need to boost academic achievement. In reality, though, in terms of importance, the need to boost academic achievement runs a distant second to the need to boost life skills. For the happiness and success of our students and the productiveness and success of our society, as educators we need to admit, face and address the life skills crisis. ②



## So what are life skills?

A definitive list is something educators, governments and employers continue to discuss. But no matter if you call them life skills, 21st century skills, soft skills, etc. students who are able to understand and use these skills, along with their educational qualifications, will be better placed to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities.

### Thinking skills

- Creativity/imagination
- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Self knowledge
- Critical thinking
- Accessing and analysing information

### Working skills

- Communication/collaboration/Cooperation
- People Management
- Time management
- Organisation
- Negotiating
- Leading by influence

### Learning skills

- ICT
- Agility and adaptability
- Receiving and giving feedback
- Handling criticism
- Innovation/exploration
- Learner autonomy

### Social skills

- Citizenship
- Social responsibility
- Cultural awareness
- Social development
- Respecting diversity
- Networking

**Dr. Spencer Kagan** is an internationally acclaimed researcher, presenter and author of over 100 books, chapters, and scientific journal articles. He is a former clinical psychologist and full-time Professor of Psychology and Education at the University of California. He is the principal author of the single most comprehensive book for educators in each of the four fields: cooperative learning, multiple intelligences, classroom discipline, and classroom energizers. His instructional strategies are used in teacher training institutes in many countries. Dr. Kagan provides workshops and keynote speeches in over 30 countries and his books are translated into many languages. Dr. Kagan developed the concept of structures; his popular brain-based, cooperative learning and multiple intelligences structures like Numbered Heads Together and Timed Pair Share are used in classrooms world-wide. Dr. Kagan has been featured in the leading educational magazines including *Educational Leadership*, *Instructor*, *Learning Magazine*, and *Video Journal*.



# Are life skills really important?



The dramatic changes in global economies over the past five years have been matched with the transformation in technology and these are all impacting on education, the workplace and our home life.

*"I can guarantee the job I hire someone to do will change or may not exist in the future, so this is why adaptability and learning skills are more important than technical skills." ④*

To cope with the increasing pace and change of modern life, students need new life skills such as the ability to deal with stress and frustration. Today's students will have many new jobs over the course of their lives, with associated pressures and the need for flexibility. As medical science advances, homelife and the community will place additional demands on future generations. Those who are 'youngsters' today will be called on to care for more elderly citizens. Kindness, compassion, and care giving skills will be in demand. As mobility increases, society will be more and more heterogeneous, so tolerance and diversity skills also will be at a premium.



## What can we do as teachers?

There are a number of educational frameworks that advocate life skills curricula to address the socialisation void. Each has a unique focus and addresses a subset of what a comprehensive curriculum needs to incorporate. No one framework is completely comprehensive and, of course, no two class/teacher/student are identical.

## Emotional intelligence and character development

Development of emotional intelligence and the development of character virtues are very closely linked. An advantage for educators of the character educational approach over the emotional intelligence approach to life skills is that the character virtues are concrete and specific and more easily translated into teachable, learnable curricula. It is much easier to deal with "empathy", "cooperation", or "fairness" as discrete, teachable values.

Rather than teaching lessons on virtues a teacher can choose instructional strategies that include virtues as an embedded curriculum topic, so no time is taken from academic content; the virtues are acquired as the teacher delivers regular academic content.

Helping students to gain life skills therefore isn't about developing a new curriculum, it's about teaching the same content but structuring and incorporating opportunities for students to develop life skills into the organisation of the class.





# How do I include life skills in my class?

For younger students the teacher has a much greater influence on the classroom environment. Often there will be an agreed set of class rules – ‘Clean up your work space’; ‘Put up your hand to answer a question’ etc. There are also many opportunities where life skills can be included as part of a group activity, for example if students are working on a floor puzzle, they can be guided to take turns and to understand that as a group they all need to share their pieces and all finish for the group to be successful. They’ll need to communicate and give other students an opportunity to put their pieces into the puzzle to complete it. For this activity, how long it takes is not as important as how well the group work together (see page 4 for primary ideas).

From secondary level onwards it becomes harder for the teacher to enforce rules in the same way, especially if the students don’t understand the reasons or implications for ‘the rules’. Often we have lesson aims, but we can get students involved in thinking about what they want to achieve in the week/term/year; or take responsibility for how much they get out of this lesson/term/school. This gives students an opportunity to think about prioritising, goal setting and possibly time management. Some of the key life skills students can develop at this age include learner autonomy, critical thinking, time management and social development. No matter whether they are going on to higher education, taking a gap year and travelling or into the workplace, these skills will help them advance beyond the school environment and may be the last opportunity some have to acquire these skills (see page 5 for secondary ideas).

Once out of school, either going into further education or employment, an even greater need is presented for adults to access and analyse information, solve problems and make decisions. Those who are able to use their initiative, have integrity, show good judgment, fairness, understanding and cooperation will find these skills also recognised by many employers. Equally, as adults we seek to develop ourselves personally by recognising our own strengths and building on these and by understanding our weaknesses and how we handle these (see pages 8-14 for adult ideas).

*“Preparing young people for their entry into the labour market with up-front education and training is only one facet of skills development; working-age adults also need to develop their skills so that they can progress in their careers, meet the changing demands of the labour market and don’t lose the skills they have already acquired.”* ⑤



## Where can I find more ideas and activities on life skills?

Over the coming year Macmillan will be providing weekly tips for developing life skills with your class. We will also have a free monthly infographic (providing discussion opportunities), activities, quizzes, video interviews, webinars and much more. Life skills have been defined by the WHO<sup>⑥</sup> as “abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. Already many teachers, schools, governments and organisations are looking to develop stronger life skills in their students. We hope you will be interested to learn more and use these ideas to help your students succeed.



③ Addressing the Life Skills crisis, Dr. Spencer Kagan, Win-Win Discipline: Strategies for All Discipline Problems (St. Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing, 2004)

④ Tony Wagner’s seven survival skills as defined by business leaders in their own words

⑤ Meeting of the OECD Council at Ministerial Level, Paris 2012, Executive Summary, page 9

⑥ World Health Organization

# Life skills in Learning Stars

## by Jeanne Perrett

For our very young learners, life skills fall into two categories: learning about acceptable and good behaviour and learning to become independent and responsible. In *Learning Stars*, we encourage our little ones to think about such things as being kind to their friends, playing nicely, keeping their classroom tidy and taking turns and also to do things like remembering to wash their hands before they eat, getting ready by themselves when they go out with their family, wearing their seat belt and knowing when it is their bedtime.

We flag these skills and values with actual statements in the books and back them up by showing good behaviour and responsibility in the stories and activities. Of course we do all of this with a smile; humour is very important when it comes to encouraging such life skills in very young children and characters getting things wrong sometimes shows them that it is okay to make mistakes too.

**Jeanne Perrett** has a BA Hons in English Literature from the University of Sussex and a TEFL diploma from International House, London. She has taught EFL for over 25 years and is the author of several international course books and novels for young children. Jeanne lives in Greece with her husband and their four children.



I play nicely



Listen and repeat the words  
Listen  
Play and say

# In and beyond the classroom

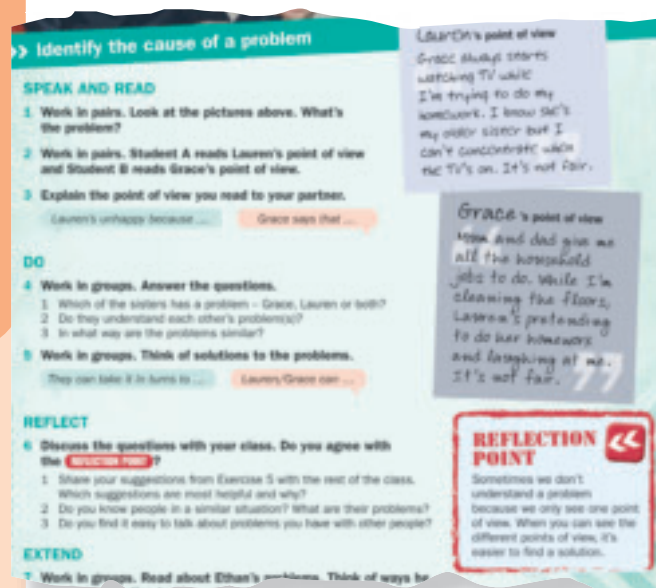
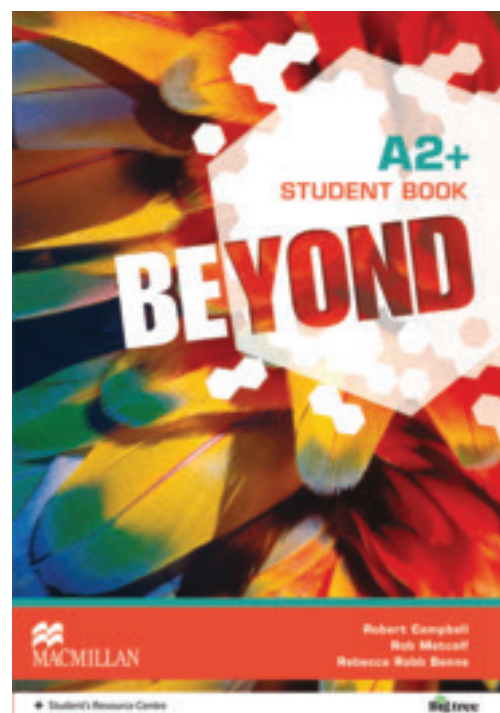
## Rebecca Robb Benne

I've always been interested in the fact that when you learn a language you don't only learn how to speak a language, you learn a lot about yourself; about who you are and what your values and opinions are. This is particularly true of teenagers, of course, who are trying to establish their identity in relation to their peers, as well as learning to become independent in the wider world. In our secondary course *Beyond*, we've therefore integrated a comprehensive syllabus of 'life skills' or '21st century skills' into language learning.

As teachers we've all taught many of these skills implicitly in our lessons, but in life skills teaching in *Beyond* we focus explicitly on a particular skill relevant to teenagers' lives. Let's take, for example, empathy and how students can learn to consider the needs of their classmates – and by extension friends, family and future colleagues. In *Beyond A2+* we ask students to think about the dietary requirements of their fellow students, using the familiar context of planning an end of term party. Students look at scenarios and do a practical task. They then reflect on what they learned from this phase and apply their new awareness to another context – in this particular case, creating a music playlist for the party which takes into account everybody's preferences. When teaching these lessons, it's important to establish a supportive and respectful classroom atmosphere. You'll already be at pains to do this as part of your normal teaching but it's good to remember that life skills' topics are personal ones and that students should never feel uncomfortable in any way.

**Rebecca Robb Benne** is co-author (with Lindsay Clandfield) of the Intermediate and Upper-intermediate levels of Macmillan's new adult course *Global*, and co-author (with Jon Hird) of the Advanced level of the modular course *Move*. She has also written various other courses and resource materials for teenagers.

Rebecca has been involved in language teaching at all levels for twenty years as a teacher, editor and writer. She holds a BSc and PGCE in French and German, and an MSc in Applied Linguistics, and has taught English, French and German in the UK, Germany and Denmark. Her main interests are materials and course design, cultural awareness and motivation.





# Life skills: what they are and why we need to teach them

by Steve Taylore-Knowles

*What is English language education for?*

I know that's a huge question, and one that has many valid and interesting answers. But surely part of the answer must be that education should prepare our students for the future, whether that involves going on to further study, joining the world of work or becoming an engaged member of society. Education is a process that enables students to take their place in society as effective learners, as effective professionals and as effective citizens. And English language education enables our students to do it in English.

There is often, though, a mismatch between what students acquire in the classroom and the demands placed on them outside the classroom. Take the world of work. In a recent survey in the UK, carried out by the research company YouGov, fewer than one in five employers thought that all or most graduates were 'work-ready'. The overwhelming majority of companies said that graduates lacked key employability skills, such as teamwork skills, communication skills and the ability to cope under pressure. In another recent survey, two-thirds of company bosses said that graduates don't know how to handle customers professionally, while half of them said that graduates were incapable of working independently. If one of the purposes of education is to prepare people for the world of work, it seems we're not achieving that purpose particularly well.



Far too often, we've sold our students short. We've given them a decent grasp of English grammar. We've given them a reasonably broad vocabulary. And we've trained them to jump through the various hoops that examining boards put before them. And then we've cast them adrift in the wider world without once considering the kind of flexible, transferable skills they need to really take advantage of the language they've acquired.

We all know that the world is changing fast. What we think we can take for granted one moment has completely changed the next. None of us can predict with confidence what any given aspect of life or work will look like in five or ten years' time, let alone decades down the line, when our students will still be part of the workforce. How can we possibly prepare them for the constant challenges that lie ahead?

We need to equip our students with the kind of skills that will enable them to meet those challenges. These are skills that you, as a successful, effective professional, probably use every day without too much thought. You go into a meeting and put forward your point of view while listening and absorbing the views of your colleagues. You organise your workload and manage your time by prioritising what's important. You make decisions, solve problems and communicate with others. And you use the same skills in many different aspects of your life. Your critical thinking skills, for example, are important whether you're analysing something you're studying, or considering a problem at work or

thinking about an issue that affects your community. In your academic, professional and social lives, you use a number of transferable skills, and it's those life skills that we need to pass on to our students.

Why do we English teachers have a particular responsibility when it comes to life skills? First of all, many of the skills we're talking about are communication skills, such as persuading others, reaching a compromise or being a good team member. Our aim as English teachers should be to develop our students' communication skills, beyond filling them with words and rules. Secondly, our students need to learn the precise ways in which we perform certain functions in English. For many life skills, there are particular forms of expression in English that need to be learned. For the life skill of being assertive, for example, you need to learn how to say 'no' politely but firmly without giving offence. How we do that in English is bound to be different from the appropriate forms in a student's first language.

### Steve Taylore-Knowles

Steve has spent almost two decades in ELT as a writer, a trainer, an examiner and a teacher. He has written a number of successful courses for teenagers and young adults, including *openMind* (Macmillan, 2010) and *masterMind* (Macmillan, 2011), which include life skills as an integral part of the course. He regularly speaks at events throughout the world on various aspects of English language teaching and learning. Steve is now based in his native county of Lancashire in the north of England, where he lives with wife Jo and young daughter Scout.



So what do we need to do about it? We need to realise how important these skills are. We need to integrate work on life skills into our teaching, so that rather than being seen as an optional extra, or even being neglected entirely, they become the central thread of what we do. Our aim should always be to tie our language work into work on life skills, to activate our students language in ways that develop those skills and to help our students get ready for the constantly changing world that awaits them. If we can help our students develop a range of life skills in English, then they'll come to see that language is indeed a life skill.





# Thinking and problem-solving: establishing priorities

## Activity aims

- Understand the criteria
- List the options
- Order the options according to the criteria

**A.** You see this comment about your city on a website. Read the comment and answer the questions.

Posted on: 03/05/14 at 09:34  
by Danny1992  
Registered: 15/03/10  
Posts: 5

Forum: one day in ...

Subject: Where to go? Help!

I'm in the city for one day next week and I don't know what to visit. I arrive at 7.00 in the morning and leave on the 8pm bus. I haven't got much money – only £40. Please give me some ideas! Thanks!

Replies: 0

[REPLY](#) [◀ PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT ▶](#)



**B.** Work in pairs. In your notebook, make a list of the main attractions in your city. Write down as many as you can. Then write the cost and the time you need to visit each one.

What?	How much?	How long?

**C.** Think about organising your options from Exercise B. Complete this Top 5 Things to Do! list for Danny with your partner. Decide why you think Danny should see or do these things...

Top 5 Things To Do!

- Reason:
- Reason:
- Reason:
- Reason:
- Reason:

**HOW TO SAY IT**

Talking about things to do

How long do you need to visit ...?  
I think you need ... hours.

How much does the ... cost?  
I think it costs ... dollars / pounds / euros.  
I think it's free.

**D.** Write a short response to Danny

Forum: one day in ...

Re: Where to go? Help!

Hello, Danny 1992! There are lots of great things to do in my city. Here are some ideas:

Go to the ..... It costs about ....., and it takes about / you need about .....

Try to see the ..... I think it costs about .....

Visit the ..... It's near / next to / on the corner of ..... It's free!

Enjoy your visit!

[REPLY](#) [◀ PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT ▶](#)



**REFLECT ...** How can the skill of establishing priorities be useful to you in **Work and Career** and **Study and Learning**?

# Function globally: negotiation



## Warm up

**1** Work in pairs. What would you do and say in the following situations?

- You have a ticket for a plane, and at the check-in desk you are told that the flight is fully booked.
- You open your bank statement and find that you have been charged for going overdrawn for a few hours.
- You are the manager of a wholesale business and you want to persuade a retailer to switch their custom to you.
- You are interested in buying a second-hand car, but the price is too high.

**2** Have you ever been in a similar situation? What happened?

## Speaking

Choose two opening lines, and improvise a conversation with a partner. What concessions did you obtain?

- I just wanted to talk to you about my overdraft limit.
- I bought this scarf here last month, and I was wondering if I could have a refund?
- I really like it, but I'm afraid it's beyond my price range.
- I'm sorry, but I asked for a non-smoking room.



## Language focus

**1** Read some sentences in which people are making an offer or concession, and complete each one with a word or phrase from the box.

absolutely the best    acceptable    could    if you can  
if you like    prepared to    then I can    what I can do

- \_\_\_\_\_ is upgrade you. Would that be \_\_\_\_\_?
- Tell you what. \_\_\_\_\_ bring the price down, \_\_\_\_\_ place a firm order.
- OK, I'm \_\_\_\_\_ throw in this radio, and I'll knock ten euros off.
- We \_\_\_\_\_ offer you a credit note \_\_\_\_\_.
- I'm afraid that's \_\_\_\_\_ we can do.

**2** Read the responses below. Which express ...

- a acceptance?    b refusal?
- c indecision or a desire for further concessions?

- Is that your final offer?
- That sounds like a good compromise. I'll take it.
- I'll leave it, thanks.
- Fantastic, it's a deal.
- I'm going to have to think about it and get back to you.
- It will have to do I suppose.
- Is there anything else you can do for me?
- I'm afraid that wouldn't be viable for me.



# A Skillful approach to: critical thinking

by Dr Sara Hannam

At the centre of the learning philosophy in many English speaking universities is the idea that academic thinking requires balanced judgement reached through exploring multiple points of view. It is believed that a simplistic right/wrong approach is limiting and listening to alternatives is likely to lead to a better outcome. This more complex way of considering issues is often referred to as critical thinking, a term that is used widely in further and higher education. There are many different interpretations of what this may mean but a useful definition is the idea of looking at issues from a number of perspectives.

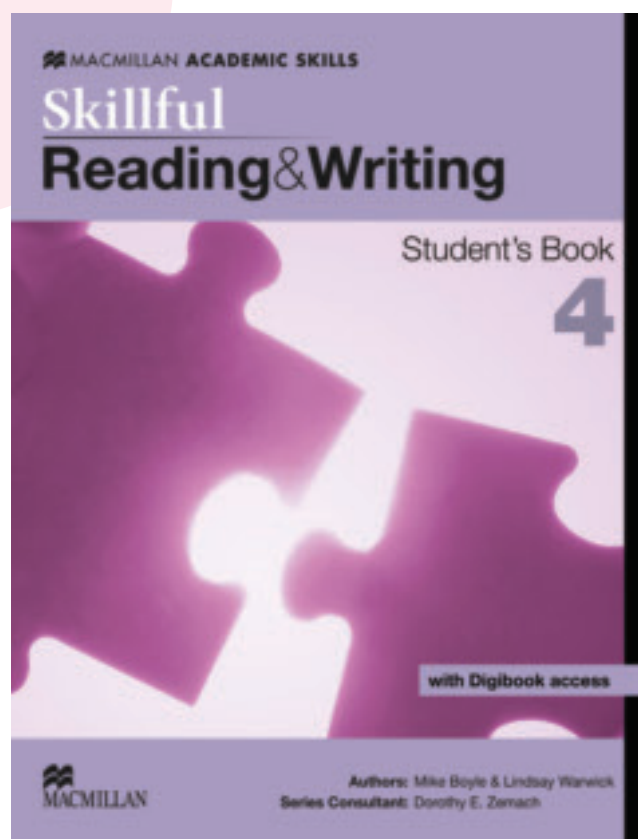
Using our critical mind is an ongoing process which continues throughout our lives. We all have biases (areas of thinking where we have a 'blind spot'). Therefore, critical thinking is about becoming aware of our biases and challenging our own thinking. Another widely held misconception is the fact that the term 'critical' is often seen in its negative sense rather than as an opportunity to explore issues more thoroughly, thereby bringing about more informed viewpoints.

At a very basic level, critical thinking is the act of questioning information by asking where it comes from, who has said/written it, what their motivation was for doing so and what *world view* it represents. World view means the ideas that underpin each person's understanding of how people and relationships interconnect. A simple example of this would be when a person says 'I think everyone benefits from some competition in their workplace', expressing a view that demonstrates that they believe competition to be positive for everyone. Although this might be seen as common sense by many people there is another view which is that in fact some people work more effectively when they are part of a collaborative team which works together to achieve a shared goal.

At university level, it is hoped that students are able to notice these biases in the writing and speaking of others, as well as consulting expert opinion and research in the formation of their own ideas. It is also hoped they will learn to spot inferred as well as literal meaning. This demonstrates they are able

to exercise critical judgment. Whenever you are working with a spoken or written text, try to help your students notice biases and read between the lines. When they are in discussion with each other, try to help them become more self-aware about their own viewpoints in relation to those around them.

At a deeper level, there is another stage of critical thinking which relates to how students process the information they have unpacked. If students are looking at a text about global warming, they may have discussed it and agreed there is a need for action in the interests of protecting future generations. The lesson might end at that point...





# Building in critical thinking skills:



- Alternatively opportunities could be provided to consider what can actually be done to remedy the situation. Much critical thinking focuses on revealing other perspectives and ways of viewing issues that lie behind a *common sense* view of the world. As a teacher, it is important to allow students to explore the area of *responsibility* (i.e. in the case of global warming, who is to blame? Is it larger organisations that generate pollution on a mass scale or the individual in their home? Are they equally responsible?).
- It is also important to consider *agency* (i.e. what is the solution to this problem and what can people do?). The second area may bring up discussions about who has control and power in our world. Bearing in mind your specific teaching context, the development of critical thinking skills needs to tackle issues relating to who has access to decision making and the way resources are distributed.

Developing critical thinking skills takes time and patience – a little and often approach will undoubtedly help bring these important skills to life in your classroom.

**Dr Sara Hannam** is the Deputy Academic Director of Pathways English at Oxford Brookes University. Sara has extensive experience of teaching and designing materials at all level of EAP provision, and is particularly interested in bringing critical pedagogy and practice into university EAP teaching in concrete and accessible ways.

## Put your students in the position of decision makers

(through role play or discussion) to help them really grasp the different perspectives embedded in the complexity around them. For example, in the case of the global warming situation, a big business may be prepared to sacrifice environmental protection in the pursuit of profitable production. At the same time, they may be under increasing pressure to meet internationally-agreed environmental directives to slow down production and make it more environmentally friendly. An environmental analyst may see this sacrifice as a negation of responsibility, whereas the big business will see this as survival. Politicians may feel that they are powerless to demand change from big business as they require their support in other areas of policy. The individual may wish to seek to change this situation to protect our future, but may wonder where to begin, so may form a campaign which then puts pressure on big business. And so the cycle continues...

## Role playing the various positions in class

can help to tease out these differences but some teachers may be fearful of asking students to take this step. However, a critical classroom should not be teacher led but student centred. The teacher should facilitate student thinking by asking the right questions rather than taking a strong position that may make some students feel uncomfortable. It may be the first time some of your students have been in a classroom discussion like this. Encouraging disagreement in a supportive and cooperative atmosphere is at the heart of what a university setting will eventually offer them. As teachers, we can always find a way to introduce critical thinking moments into our classroom by using the resources around us, such as reading and listening texts, and connecting them with outside events. University requires students to make those connections and to read widely to explore important issues further.



# Life skills: influence

## by Mark Powell

The secrets of how to command attention, change minds and influence others have always been amongst the most important life skills – especially for those in the business community.

Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*,

published way back in 1936, was one of the first self-help books ever published and to date has sold over 15 million copies. And in these days of social media it is not just a matter of how many friends and followers you have on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ or Instagram, but how much influence you exercise over those in your personal and professional networks. In fact, thanks to social media analytics, at websites like Klout.com you can actually find out on a score from 1-100 how you rate as a network influencer. At the time of writing US President Barack Obama predictably had a Klout-Score of 99. But, then again, pop-singer Justin Bieber wasn't far behind with 96, three ahead of Bill Gates!

So much for the rich and famous. But why is it so important for the rest of us to be influential? One reason is that in a tough economy, it's the employees who become the go-to experts for their specialist area; who know how to adapt their persuasion style to win over others; who get spotted for their leadership potential and have the best career prospects. But, though being an adept influencer may mark you out for the top, you need to start 'moving and shaking' long before you reach the boardroom. What this means is that, as you climb the corporate ladder, you'll have to influence not only downwards, but also upwards and sideways – each requiring a different set of tactics.



• **Influencing Downwards** In hierarchical corporate cultures (and national cultures as different as those of China and France) there tends to be a command-and-control style of management, which makes subordinates quite willing to carry out directives from above. Nevertheless, as companies become more globalised and workforces more diverse, you will generally find those who report to you would rather be motivated to act than dictated to. And this is always true in more egalitarian and individualistic cultures. Varying the tasks you delegate is one way of keeping motivation high. So is emphasising the importance of the task itself and the learning opportunity it presents. In organisations where initiative is valued (and that's most of them these days) allow your team a certain amount of flexibility in the way they follow your instructions and don't be slow to offer encouragement, support and praise for a job well done. And, except in cultures where people have a large 'space bubble', don't underestimate the persuasive power of brief physical contact. Studies have shown that even a touch on the shoulder lasting just 1/40th of a second significantly increases someone's willingness to comply with your wishes.

• **Influencing Sideways** With more and more international projects requiring (virtual) teamwork these days, the ability to influence your peers has become considerably more important too. The world's leading expert on influence, Robert Cialdini, lists six main factors which promote compliance: liking, reciprocation, consistency, social proof, authority and scarcity. Of these the first three are perhaps most relevant to persuading your peers. First, liking – naturally a colleague you get on well with is more likely to agree to do what you want. This underlines the importance of relationship-building at work. And, if you've done a favour for them in the past (or offer to do one in the future), they are, of course, going to be much more prepared to reciprocate. Interestingly, research has demonstrated that the size of the favour you do is not so important. If you've done even a small favour for someone, they are still much more likely to do



you a big favour in return. Even more interestingly, if they have done a favour for you before, they are much more likely to do so again – this is Cialdini's principle of consistency. So remind the people you ask for assistance of the last time they helped you out before you make your request.

• **Influencing Upwards** Of course, except in the most individualistic cultures, where team members may strive to compete as much as collaborate (if all else fails, try flattery on the most self-seeking!), persuading peers is a piece of cake compared with persuading the boss. But the ability to influence upwards is essential if you're going to get that promotion. So how is it done? The first thing is to put yourself in your boss's shoes. If you were them, what would most interest you about the request or proposal you're about to make? Which of their hot-buttons' should you press? Is your boss very price-conscious or more customer-centric? If they always have one eye on what your competitors are doing (Cialdini's 'social proof'), then point out how your company may fall behind if your idea is rejected. If on the other hand, they require reliable data or supporting evidence (Cialdini's 'authority'), then have those figures ready! Finally, you could point out what the company stands to lose if your advice is not taken and that they need to act fast while the opportunity is still there (Cialdini's 'scarcity').

Admittedly, persuading superiors is not always possible, especially in cultures where there exists what intercultural guru Geert Hofstede calls a high power-distance index (PDI) and bosses seldom consult their subordinates. But at whatever level you try to be influential, remember that effective persuasion is never about manipulation, but always about having the emotional intelligence to tailor your message to the person you wish to persuade.



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He is the author of *Business Matters* (LTP), *Presenting in English* (LTP), *In Company Intermediate* and the forthcoming *In Company Upper Intermediate* (Macmillan).

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# In Company

## Assertiveness

**1** Do you know anyone like the man in the cartoon? Why is it that some people get walked all over at work, while others seem to get their own way?

**2** Complete the following with the words in the box. Have you ever been in similar situations? How did you react?

down x2   in   off   on x2   under

- a** Your boss shoots \_\_\_\_\_ your great idea at a meeting and moves straight \_\_\_\_\_ to the next item on the agenda without giving you a chance to elaborate.
- b** \_\_\_\_\_ pressure to meet a deadline, you find the rest of your team are letting you \_\_\_\_\_ by not doing their share of the work.
- c** In the staff canteen, a group of people push \_\_\_\_\_ front of you \_\_\_\_\_ the queue – again!
- d** You're asked to take \_\_\_\_\_ a lot of extra work and are often expected to stay late at the office to finish \_\_\_\_\_ urgent business – even if it disrupts your social life.



"You must assert yourself more."



**3** Read the short article below. What does the author say about assertiveness and culture? Do you agree?

### Power Distance

How much does the freedom to assert yourself depend on the culture you work within? A great deal, according to intercultural expert Geert Hofstede. In his landmark book *Culture's Consequences*, Hofstede talks about what he calls 'power distance' in different countries. Power distance, he explains, measures the willingness of less powerful members of an organization to accept the unequal distribution of power. So a large power-distance score means a lot of inequality is accepted and subordinates generally follow directives without question. And a small score means subordinates feel freer to query directives and take the initiative. Scores vary a lot from country to country. But not all companies are typical of their national culture. Multinationals, for example, tend to reflect the culture of the parent company rather than those of the countries they are located in, creating all kinds of intercultural problems in the process.

**4** Where would you place these countries on Hofstede's Power Distance scale? How about your own a) country and b) company? Check your answers on page 127.

Argentina   Germany   Japan   New Zealand   UAE   USA

