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Building Networks among Teachers
ARTESOLEFL Journal

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We are presenting this new journal as a tool for teachers of English who develop their activities in different types of institutions and levels of education.

One of the aims of the journal is to offer the opportunity to publish contributions, research articles, reviews and pedagogical experiences in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

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Those articles, pedagogical experiences or reviews that do not meet the requirements of this journal, will be reconsidered by the editorial board for publication on the EFL Web page.

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Content

CONTRIBUTION

The Relevance of Reading Comprehension of Expository and Argumentative Texts at High School and University Level

María Susana González - Universidad de Buenos Aires

ABSTRACT
Reader variables, text variables, and variables that depend on the context of situation interact during the reading process in a foreign language and affect text retrieval and the selection of strategies. At High Schools and Universities we have to teach English to heterogeneous groups of students with different threshold levels of the English language and different interests. Reading expository and argumentative texts presents several difficulties for our students who, in general, are not trained to **read** these text types. Therefore, the purpose of this contribution is to socialize theoretical and practical information about the possibility of including reading comprehension lessons at High Schools to prepare students to face the reading of expository and argumentative academic texts at Universities.

Keywords
Reading comprehension – expository texts- argumentative texts- high schools - universities

INTRODUCTION
The idea about how the reading process develops has changed throughout the years. There are two extreme positions: some researchers consider the reader decodes lineally every single word while some others define reading as a complex process in which the reader works with information from different sources at the same time and with different goals in his mind. At present, we consider reading comprehension as a complex interactive or transactional process in which there are three participants: the reader, the text and the reading situation (Silvestre, 2004).

VARIABLES THAT AFFECT THE READING PROCESS
Second or foreign language reading is a complex object of study influenced by different types of variables. This process is triggered by the text, if there is no text there is no reading process. However, we also need a reader who wants to read. Therefore, in this complex process we have to distinguish different types of variables: reader variables, text variables and the reading situation.

Reader Variables
If we focus our attention on the reader, we can distinguish among the reader's physical and personal characteristics, his background knowledge, and his reasons to read a text (Alderson, 2000). Alderson considers that the reader has physical stable characteristics such as age, sex, and nationality and also unstable features such as processing speed and eye movement. He associates personal characteristics with individual attitudes towards reading such as interest, insecurity and anxiety. For example if a student finds a text threatening, the results will be poorer; students who are anxious tend to read superficially, those who are insecure do not trust their inference abilities read lineally and stop at every word they do not understand.

As regards background knowledge, we know that the nature of knowledge readers have, will influence what they remember of a text (recall), their understanding of the text (product of the process) and the way they process the text (Barlett, 1932). Patricia Carrell (1983) distinguishes two types of background knowledge or schemata: *formal schemata* or knowledge of the target language, the linguistic conventions, text organization, features of genres; and *content schemata* or knowledge of the world, of the culture in which the text is produced, and of the subject matter of the text.

There are different approaches in connection with the importance of the second language threshold level. On the one hand, the supporters of *the linguistic threshold hypothesis* considers it is

necessary to have a certain level of knowledge of the target language to transfer reading abilities from L1 to L2 if not, a short circuit is produced (Clarke, 1979; Cziko, 1980). Those researchers who support *the linguistic interdependence hypothesis* consider that when a reading ability is learned in the mother tongue, it is ready to be used when reading in a foreign language (Cummins, 1979; 1991).

Knowledge about text types and genres helps the reader to anticipate how a text is organized and what type of information will be given in each section, thus the reader will know where to look for important information. Readers also have knowledge and abilities to learn and process information and also to reflect on their reading process, to plan it, to monitor it, and to self evaluate it.

All these knowledge sources interact with each other so if one of these knowledge sources is weak, any of the others may act as a compensatory mechanism for example: superior linguistic knowledge can compensate for lack of subject knowledge, familiarity with subject matter can compensate for inferior linguistic proficiency. Cultural knowledge is an important issue because reading texts in unfamiliar cultural settings can result in difficulty in processing and recalling but reading texts in familiar settings can also result in inaccurate recall (Bernhardt, 2011).

Summarizing, a skilful reader recognizes words at high speed: more than 5 words per second. As they use less capacity to analyze the visual stimulus, they have other resources available for other sort of processing. An experienced reader monitors cognitive processes, recognizes important information in a text, asks questions about the text content, uses co-text for inferences, anticipates, hypothesizes and verifies hypotheses.

Text Variables

We should consider text variables such as topic and content, syntactic complexity, orthographic nature of the language, cohesion, coherence, choice of vocabulary, and readability. Apart from the traditional linguistic variables, other features such as non-verbal information, and the medium of presentation of the text materials should also be taken into account. (Alderson: 2000). These variables play a crucial role when the text materials are conceptually more difficult or poorly known by the reader or when the readers are inexperienced. Texts that deal with familiar and concrete topics are easier to process than those in which the topic is unfamiliar and more abstract. As regards text types, expository texts are more difficult to process than narratives. Literary texts that have specific cultural information may prove difficult.

The combination of verbal and non-verbal information (pictures, graphs, photos, etc) may help readers. The organization of a text may make texts easier to follow and to recall. Coherent texts are easier to understand than incoherent texts. Conjunctions facilitate discourse processing for average-ability readers when the topic is less familiar, so coherence interacts with text topic.

The Reading Situation

The reading situation should also be considered. Readers may have different goals when facing a text so the decisions they make at this moment will influence their selection of strategies, their comprehension and retrieval of the text. Reading purposes can be classified under seven main headings: reading to search for simple information, reading to skim quickly, reading to learn from texts, reading to integrate information, reading to write, reading to critique texts, and reading for general comprehension. When we read to search for simple information, we scan the text for a specific piece of information or a specific word. An example of this type of reading is when we read to look up a phone number, an address, a word in a dictionary. When we skim, we combine strategies for guessing where important information might be in the text to concentrate on the reading of these segments of the text until a general idea is formed. Reading to learn occurs in academic and professional contexts, reading to integrate information, write or critique texts requires additional decisions about the relative importance of complimentary, mutually supporting or conflicting information. Finally reading for general comprehension requires an automatic processing of words, strong skills in forming a general meaning representation of the main idea and

efficient coordination of many processes under very limited time constraints (Grabe & Stoller; 2002).

Louise Rosenblatt considers you can adopt an efferent attitude or an aesthetic attitude but these two stances are extreme, generally when we read there is a continuum and sometimes a complete change. A university student may have any of these goals in mind when facing a research article or a chapter from a textbook.

CLASS SITUATIONS
At High Schools and Universities we have to teach English to heterogeneous groups of students with different threshold levels of the English language and different interests. Reading expository and argumentative texts presents several difficulties for our students who, in general, are not trained to cope with these text types. Therefore, the purpose of this contribution is to socialize theoretical and practical information about the possibility of including reading comprehension lessons at High Schools to prepare students to face the reading of expository and argumentative academic texts at Universities.

L1 READING MODELS
In the late fifties and the sixties the dominant paradigm was behaviorism, therefore reading was considered as a process of stimulus recognition, in this case the written word. It was seen as a bottom up process during which the reader had to follow different steps: focus on the graphic stimulus, decode sounds, recognize words and finally decode meanings. In other words, the reader begins with the physical stimulus and finishes with the mental representation. In these serial models the reader has a passive role.

In the late sixties cognitive psychology paradigm introduced the importance of memory, attention, and connections among nets. In this period we can distinguish two steps: linear processing and interactive, transactional and constructivist processing. The (Gough's model, 1972) is an example of a model that is lineal but has some level of interaction. Adams's model (1990) is interactive because he considers there are different processors that interact: phonological, orthographic, meaning, and contextual. An example of a transactional model is Rosenblatt's model (1981). She considers the reading process as a meaning construction process during which the reader establishes a dialogue with the text and the author. An example of a comprehensive model is Goodman´s with his transactional, socio and psycholinguistic model (1994). He considers the reader constructs meaning through a strategic process of reading. Among the cognitive models we must mention the connectionist models. Kintsch (1988-1998) developed his construction integration model which combines integration and reconstruction of the text base. The text base is constructed by the reader with the information the text provides and the reader integrates it with his background knowledge. Connectionists believe information is distributed along a neural web with nodes which are activated by a concept, schema, a proposition, etc. Those nodes that are useful continue being activated and those which are not are deactivated. These webs are constantly changing.

READING MODELS IN L2
According to Elizabeth Bernhardt (2005), studies in second language reading imitated studies in L1. As a result, there was an excessive use of schema theory and a lack of interest in exploring the differences between the two processes. The question "is reading in L2 a language problem or a reading problem?" was still in the air.

In the nineties researchers began to point out the need for a holistic approach to the reading process in L2. However, at the beginning of the nineties reading experience in L1 had not been taken into account although there had been studies of transfer between two languages. At the end of the nineties, researchers concentrated their interest on the impact of L1 literacy on the use and acquisition of the L2. The big question was how literacy in L1 explains the process in L2 (Bernhardt, 2005). Elizabeth Bernhardt has an interesting proposal for reading in L2: interaction of variables in the development of the reading process.

There are three moments in this model (Bernhardt: 1991, 2000, and 2005). In 1991 she suggested that lexis, phonological features and graphemes are difficult to be recognized by readers. In her

longitudinal model of reading development in L2, she pointed out that the level of lexis error is high at the beginning of the process but then it decreases. On the contrary, syntax begins with a low level of error and then it increases.

The influence of perception and background knowledge maintains an equal level throughout the whole process. In 2000 she considered two parameters should be taken into account in the development of the reading process: knowledge of L2 and reading ability in L1. In the latest reformulation of her model (2011) she considers that reading experience in L1 is responsible for 20% of the process, the target language knowledge 30% and the rest (50%) corresponds to individual characteristics of the reader. In this model, the notion of compensatory mechanisms is very important because it can explain how different knowledge sources interact in the process when the others are inadequate or do not exist.

MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

As high school teachers, we generally face a lot of problems when choosing adequate materials for our students because textbooks very often deal with unappealing topics and students show their lack of interest. Besides, in general, textbooks offer short texts so if we introduce longer pieces of writing, students are reluctant to read them.

Some of the questions we have to answer are: what kind of reading materials do we have to look for?, where can we look for them?, how should we grade them?, how much grammar or lexis should we teach?, what are our students' interests according to their age, cultural background and school level?, what may our students read in English?, which text types or genres are easier?.

Some possible answers to the above questions are the following. We can look for texts on the Internet which offers all sort of text with different lengths and complexities. Personally, I believe we should select texts according to their genre because some genres are easier than others and all of them have different types of organization and different lexical-grammatical choices.

Examples of Different Text Types Used in High School
Narratives

Very interesting short stories can be downloaded from the Web. Narratives are a good option to begin with because all of us are acquainted with the organization of this kind of genre as we have listened to narratives since we were kids. We all know that a narrative has an introduction where the characters and the setting are presented directly or indirectly and it presents a conflict that may be solved or not.

The following is only a suggestion to approach the reading of a short story following the three steps proposed by Kenneth Goodman (1994):

Pre-reading
What do you expect the story to be about? Hypothesize. Do you know the author? What does the title suggest?

Most short stories generally present the characters, the setting (time and place) and the situation in the introduction. See if you can discover them by reading the first two paragraphs.
Then, complete the following questions:
- Who? (characters)
- Where? (place)
- When? (time)
- Why? (situation)
- Anticipate the conflict.

While reading
- Now, read the complete story. Enjoy it! Read for pleasure first! Do not use your dictionary yet.
- State the conflict
- Was it solved? How?

After reading
- Summarize the story in a paragraph
- Change the end
- Change the type of story (if it is a science fiction story, turn it into a police story)
- Justify the choice of the title

Expository texts
Expository texts are about certain topics and the reader is supposed to have certain knowledge about them. According to Meyer (1975), there are 5 types of expository texts representing different ways in which authors organize their topics: collection (lists), causation (cause – effect), response (problem- solution), comparison (compare- contrast), description (attribution). Taking into account these categories, we can guide our students in their reading.

The following is a fragment from a web page. It has information about South Africa, a country that organized the Football World Cup in 2010. This text was discussed with High School students when the World Cup was held.

Pre-reading
- Let's have a look at the following text
- What question does it answer?
- What is this text about? How do you know?

Joined Commonwealth: 1931 (Statute of Westminster; left in 1961, rejoined in 1994)
Capital: Tshwane (formerly Pretoria)
Population: 48,832,000 (2008)
Official language: 11 most widely spoken
Currency: rand (R)

<div align="center">

Country Flag

</div>

South Africa – Geography

The Republic of South Africa is composed of nine provinces: Northern Province, North-West, Mpumalanga, Gauteng (Tshwane–Witwatersrand–Vereeniging), Northern Cape, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. South Africa has land borders with: Namibia,

Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland. Its sea borders are with the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Lesotho is enclosed within its land area.
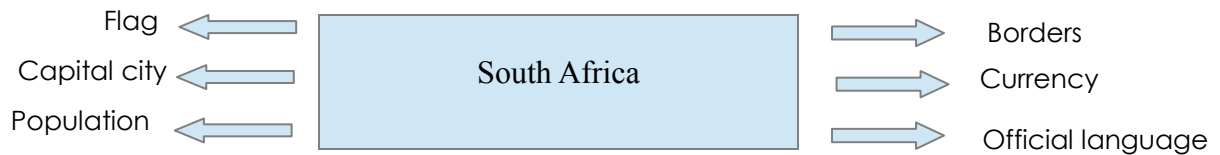
Area: 1,221,038 sq km. http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107983.html

While Reading
- What is the author's goal?
- What linguistic elements stand out?

After reading
- Complete the following chart with information taken from the text

- Write a similar text with information about Argentina. Work in pairs.

Argumentative texts

Argumentative texts are persuasive and the linguistic marks that stand out are: the use of modality and lexical-grammatical units with positive and negative connotation. Martin and Rose (2008) distinguish three types: *persuasive*: a thesis is proposed and arguments are used to support it, *debate*: arguments are presented to show the shortcomings of an idea, *challenging*: the intention is to destroy the opponent.

The following is an example of an argumentative text used in an English lesson in a High school:
Pre-reading
- Now, let's have a look at this text. How does this title differ from the other text titles? Underline the
  words in the title you understand.
- What is the text about?
- How is this text organized? What do you notice?
- Now, read the text.

Body Piercing is a form of fashion art whose time has come. Are you someone who is ready to give it a try?

1- Getting your body pierced for beauty is a novel idea whose time has come. Actually, from the earliest dawn of humankind, piercing the body has symbolized a variety of responses to a range of circumstances, including the desire to appear fearsome, victorious, or alluring. In many cases it was a male warrior whose body held the greatest number of piercing designs, but females also had body parts pierced to symbolize a role or enhance a bodily function. Nowadays, it's all about fashion, but you don't want to try this phenomenon before giving it some thought.

2- If you have been thinking about having a body part pierced for fashion purposes, here are a few things to consider:

1. Pierced earlobe is the most longstanding body piercing that has come down to modern times. Formerly the mark of a slave as well as fashion adornments of pierced earrings were used in many cultures. But a row of piercing generally extends along the ear's cartilage. Ornaments may be the same or mixed and matched for a colorful effect. This may be the piercing to start with until you determine your personal degree of adventurousness.

2. Facial piercing is more visible to observers. Eyebrows, noses, chin, and tongues are the usual popular locations for gems to be placed. Some employers will not permit their workers to display them to clients while on the job. Younger people who traditionally have fewer social obligations or concerns about personal appearance and others' reactions may enjoy this type of piercing.

3. Body piercing can be exhibited with revealing clothes or kept private for personal enjoyment. For example, a pierced navel might be exposed with a short top or low-cut waist clothing. A navel piercing seems to be favoured more among youth than middle-aged fashionmongers. But famous folk of all ages have experimented with this type of body art.

4. Getting a body piercing means that you may have a permanent scar. If left in place long enough, a pierced opening will leave an indentation in the skin. Should you decide to remove the pierced jewellery, a tiny scar may remain visible for a long time, or always. Decide in advance if you can live with this.

5. Body piercing can bring on a skin infection. Some of these can become severe and require emergency treatment as well as closing of the hole. Other infections may need a course of antibiotics to clear up. Those with diabetes or other circulatory or nerve disorders should consult a doctor before having a body part pierced.

   3- Before jumping on any fashion bandwagon, take time to weigh the pros and cons. You can always schedule an appointment to get a piercing done, but once it has been made, you can't as easily remove it. Be sure it's something you truly want that will accent your personal style before making a permanent commitment.
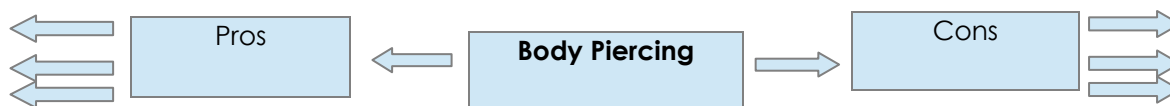http://www.essortment.com/pros-cons-comparison-should-body-piercing-44340.html

While Reading
- What is the main idea of each paragraph? Complete the following chart.

Paragraphs	Main idea
1	
2	
3	

After Reading

- Have a look at the following draft and complete it with the information provided by the text.

FINAL THOUGHTS
Reading expository and argumentative texts in High School is useful for students who are planning to study at University because these text types are read to learn and students have to read them in their undergraduate and postgraduate courses as well as in their research projects. Students are not used to reading these text types even in their mother tongue, so we can help them get acquainted with its semantic organization and with the most common choices a writer makes when he writes an expository or an argumentative text.

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ARTICLES

Reading Comprehension in Interactions in the Virtual Campus

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Maria Rosa Mucci - Universidad del Salvador (USAL)

ABSTRACT
Interaction in reading comprehension activities in university virtual campuses is the most appealing manner communication for students, whose reading skills are shaped by the new technologies. However, to what extent does this type of reading facilitate comprehension? The objective of this paper is to demonstrate the range of effectiveness of actual communication in virtual campuses.

Keywords
Virtual campuses – reading skills – comprehension – new technologies - effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION
At present, new technologies are integrated into the learning process in higher education. As the availability and use of these technologies proliferates, educators are challenged to understand their effects on student learning outcomes to optimize learning. (Johnson et al, 2011). Whether it be collaborative work on the web, information stored in CD-ROMs or in information clouds, or the use of the social networks, virtual learning has breathed new life into some colleges of education (Lemke, 1993; Groff, 1996; Oblinger & Rush 1997 Argentina does not seem to be the exception. There are two aspects that deserve consideration in higher education, the first one is the move from teacher to learner-centered education and the second is the move from the traditional to the virtual classroom. Our students find that in this new context in which they are protagonists, they can access the virtual world anywhere and at anytime, and as a consequence, they should become highly engaged. Students' engagement is accomplished through the creation of active learning modules, collaboration among students, and close teacher-student interaction. (Verbeeten,1999).

Distance education is not a recent phenomenon. Once viewed as an anomaly on the mainstream campus, distance education has become an accepted and oftentimes expected alternative delivery system for academic content (Boettcher, 1999; Kretovics, 1998; Levine, 2001; Murphy, 1996). The use of web sites (Barratt, 2000) and web portals (Looney & Lyman, 2000; Volchok, 2000) hold a great deal of promise regarding the creation of virtual communities. These technologies give student affairs divisions the opportunity to customize students' experience of the virtual campus and therefore, have students access services, receive updates on current events, chat with other students and enter their virtual classes from a single point of entry. It is this type of "one-stop" technology that has the potential to accentuate the difference between a distance program and a virtual community (Kretovics, 2002. It is important to distinguish here between virtual campus and distance programs. We can define Virtual Campus as "a metaphor for the teaching, learning and research environment created by the convergence of new powerful instruction and communication technologies" (Van Dusen, 1997). Distance programs, as defined by Moore (1989), operationally involve "a series of courses or defined curriculum leading to a certificate or degree offered via any distance technology".

Due to the development and expansion of new technologies, several technological tools have been designed. These tools made communication completely possible, thus enhancing interaction among participants in online courses (Dominguez et. al., 2011). For example, the forum allows for both reflection about different topics and participants' socialization. In this sense, it generates a sense of belonging to the class, undermining the belief of isolation usually associated to virtual education (Garcia & Perera Rodriguez, 2007).

However appealing technology may be to our students, we believe that students basically have the same reading problems when reading from a physical page as when reading from the

computer screen (or e-reader). In both cases, the same factors (e.g. distraction, muti-tasking) affect reading and challenge effectiveness. Yet, we believe that some characteristics of online learning are beneficial, if carefully considered, for improving students' reading performance. It is important to note that possible solutions to reading problems are not limited to the concept of interactivity but to the notion of virtual community at large.

Evidently, analyzing reading is not simple. According to Schumacher and Waller (1985), a difference has been drawn between assessing reading behavior in terms of outcome or process measures. When referring to electronic text, outcome measures are particularly relevant since supporters proclaim the efficiency of the performance in terms of results. However, with the emergence of hypertext, navigation has become a central issue and process measures (how the reader uses and manipulates the text) are gaining importance.

There are different positions concerning the effectiveness of comprehension in actual communication in virtual campuses. Previous research has suggested that on-screen reading is unfocused, interrupted and does not translate into academic reading. Nevertheless, from our experience with university students, we consider that difficulties can be overcome if we analyze the reading processes that are required for these electronic contexts in which competent readers should consider not only how to surf the information on the Net but also how to interact with their peers. We will attempt to demonstrate the meaning of comprehension in this "new textuality" and reflect upon the necessity of expending a series of concepts such as reading competence, comprehension and reader-text-author relationship.

Many factors influence results, for example, students' experience (or lack of it) in online courses, individualistic attitude (lack of social skills), misconceptions relating computer skill and online campus training, reading difficulties in reading from the computer, time management, responsibility (or lack of it), among others. This study aims to explore to what extent the type of reading proposed in this course facilitates comprehension. It also aims to illustrate the range of effectiveness of actual communication in virtual campuses.

In sum, this paper is the result of an Action Research project which involved the collection and interpretation of data. Our purpose is to provide answers to the problems that can be encountered in this particular context so that teachers may implement changes in their online courses

METHOD

Participants and Context

Participants for this study were students of Business English I at UVQ (Qoodle Online university campus at Universidad Nacional de Quilmes). The aim of the course was to teach students academic reading skills, basically to help them interpret academic texts as they are asked to read in other content areas during their degree courses.

This course was totally delivered online for the first time in August 2012. Students of Hotel Management, International Business and Accountancy who lived in other provinces or in other countries (for example, one student was living in France) were offered the opportunity to attend the subject online, and be evaluated. However, students living in Buenos Aires who were unable to attend lessons in Bernal (location in Greater Buenos Aires) were also allowed to participate. The participants in this research work were 150 students distributed in six heterogeneous classes. The students had previously attended varying levels of English, if any. They also proved to have mixed language abilities, both in English and in Spanish. They were at different stages of their degree course as well. Moreover, some students were doing their first degree course while others were university graduates.

The university offers an online tour of the virtual campus and a demo of UVQ through a link on the

main page, in case students want to visit it. The main page of the classroom in this course was conventionally and neatly organized. It included the syllabus and the plan of the course. The latter served the purpose of offering students the possibility of scanning the plan to learn about the progression of the topics, all the assignments and deadlines, and tests dates. Other links were also made available, like Messages from the teacher and Open forum. These facilitated communication with the teacher and among participants. The Learners' forum and the Open forum were designed mainly for collaboration, to let students interact, socialize, create meaning, negotiate meaning, debate and reflect. Students could also contact the teacher by writing to him/her at his/her email address. All communication was done in Spanish; only the reading material provided by the teacher was written in English.

The page also featured links to online resources like dictionaries and grammar books, though these were provided gradually as part of the course. For example, apart from the online resources, once specific vocabulary was introduced, the students built their own dictionary of academic business English throughout the course.

All fifteen lessons were numbered and combined theory and practice. Each lesson contained notes on the topic of the week and included links to sites that might help clarify and/ or elaborate on the issues presented. Tasks were classified into three types: a) reading awareness (mostly to aid students in exploring and discovering reading strategies); b) language awareness (to help students discover language rules); c) consolidation (to let students apply the reading strategies and the rules acquired).

The reading awareness activities were done by the students, who shared and discussed their answers in the learner's forum. The teacher did not provide a specific answer but rather followed the discussion and intervened only where necessary until the students came to acceptable conclusions.

The language awareness and the consolidation activities combined exercises with a key, so the students could check the answers for themselves, and exercises (with a deadline) were uploaded for the teacher to assess individual performance. In both cases the students could share and clarify any doubts by using the forum. Every lesson included a forum with a thread for students to ask questions they might have about the theory, the activities or any other concern.

The texts used in this academic reading course were original versions. Selection for every lesson was based on linguistic features (level of difficulty and focus of each lesson) as well as thematic development and relevance. The page also included the MDM (Multimedia material), a link which contained both theory and practice about every unit of the syllabus.

Procedure
For an effective analysis, lessons were grouped into three stages: stage 1, lessons 1-4; stage 2, lessons 5-9 and stage 3, lessons 10-15.

Stage 1
The first part was the basis of the course. The objective was to help students familiarize themselves with the campus, the layout of the main page and its links. It also served as an aid for students to be able to grasp the dynamics of the course, which included interaction in the campus and reading strategies.

The first lesson contained a message from the teacher, with explanations about the dynamics of the course inviting students to read the syllabus and the plan of the course as well as to explore the campus (visit the Plan link, the MDM, identify the different types of tasks, check the forums) before starting working on the activities of the week. The message was written in Spanish and it was made clear that communication was to be done in L1. Students were expected to read information

about academic texts, to upload a survey on learning experiences and their perceptions of them and to introduce themselves in the Open forum.

In her message, the teacher highlighted key points of the syllabus. One important point was evaluation: a) the course did not consider summative evaluation b) the result of students´ performance was to be graded Passed or Failed (no final mark was to be given. Students were also made aware that no particular entry level was required for the course and that they would be guided through, according to their progress. The Plan also made it clear that evaluation included two individual assignments and one collaborative assignment as well as one make-up test, all of which were obligatory. The dates of the tests and deadlines for uploading the assignments were available as well. Students were also informed of two obligatory surveys, one at the beginning of the course and the other at the end. In general, all information about the course was introduced and each important item was highlighted in the Teacher's welcoming message, in the Open forum and in Lesson forum. The Plan and the syllabus contained all the technical information, such as the content and scope (the text types, genres and language units to be taught and learnt), the sequence and the timing of the activities (with the reading skills involved at each stage).

For every lesson, the teacher included an attachment with a plan for the week, in which all the activities were enumerated and all other information, for example correction, duration and deadlines, tips and uploading (where necessary), was specified . Moreover, every week students had to do some activities from the MDM. These were always clearly explained in the description of the lesson and the plan of the week.

The second lesson introduced chapter organization through some theory. Students were expected to collaborate in a debate forum about ways of dealing with a chapter of a book on business. This was to continue for two weeks. Also, a business vocabulary forum was started for students to build their own dictionary of key terms in the field. This activity was expected to continue throughout the course. There was a separate link for both the Debate forum and the Vocabulary forum in the description of the lesson.

The third lesson dealt with online texts, hypertext and linearity. It integrated the topics of the previous lessons and added an academic bibliography forum (again, with a separate link in the description of the class). Finally, in lesson 4 participants were expected to upload their first individual assignment, based on all the topics taught so far, particularly bibliography, chapter organization, content, key vocabulary and negotiation of meaning.

Stage 2
The following lessons (5-6) were about text types: narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative. Students were expected to do all types of activities, including a debate on argumentative texts (a separate link). The description of the class and the plan explained that the students had to use the link "subida avanzada" (advanced uploading) in the description of the class to upload their individual work.

Lessons 7 and 8 were devoted to the collaborative forum, in which groups of five students solved eighteen different activities from the MDM. The groups were formed by the teacher, who gave each group a separate debate forum. After two weeks, one member of each group had to compile and upload the group solution. Again, a link (subida avanzada) was made available for that purpose. As usual, the deadline was written in the description of the class, the plan for the week and the course plan. Students were constantly reminded of the significance of reading the plan and the syllabus for important activities and dates. Lesson 9 was an integration and consolidation of topics previously taught.

Stage 3
The content of the following lessons focused further on coherence and cohesion, which included

different cohesive devices and relevant grammar and semantics. In lesson 11, students had to upload their second individual assignment, which dealt with coherence and cohesion. The procedure for uploading the individual work was the same as in previous lessons. However, full instructions were always provided. After that it was felt that basically the workload had been done.

Lesson 14 was near the end of the course and it was devoted to the make-up test, while lesson 15, the final lesson, included a final survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' reading performance was assessed in terms of their questions and comments at every stage of the course. The analysis is bidimensional, one dimension refers to students' interpretation or misinterpretation of assignments, content reading or the campus page; the other dimension is attitudinal.

As regards the level of success of the course, we can say that 70% of students completed the course successfully. This study explores and discusses the results of two classes (out of six), with a total of fifty students.

The following figures show the types of questions asked at different stages in the implementation of the research and the number of students that requested the same information.

FIGURE 1: Questions asked by students during the first stage	
STAGE 1	**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**
¿De qué forma va Ud. a calcular nuestra nota?	38
¿Cuándo es el examen final? ¿Puedo darlo en Julio?	47
¿Tengo que ir a clases particulares para seguir este curso?	3
¿Son obligatorias las actividades?	23
Profesora, no puedo encontrar las unidades 7 y 8 en el material. ¿Dónde están?	30
¿Dónde encuentro el material?	41
No encuentro las actividades. ¿Podría ayudarme?	17
¿Dónde tengo que mandar las actividades para su corrección? ¿Hay un link?	22
No entiendo la teoría sobre las palabras transparentes. ¿Cómo puedo saber si una palabra es transparente?	0
Tengo dificultades con los falsos cognados. ¿Son como sinónimos equivocados? ¿Puedo encontrarlos en un diccionario?	0
Profesora, yo aprendí en la escuela que tengo que buscar todos los sustantivos primero, después los verbos, ¿está bien así?	0
FIGURE 2: Questions asked by students during the second stage	
STAGE 2	**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**
¿El trabajo colaborativo es en grupo o es individual?	28

¿Tengo que subir el trabajo o escribir a su dirección de mail? ¿O escribimos directamente en el foro?	26
Hola profe. Quisiera saber cómo va a dividir los grupos. O sea, ¿a qué grupo pertenezco?	15
¿Cuándo hay que entregar?	8
Profesora, no puedo encontrar el link para subir el TP. ¿Dónde está?	19
¿Hay que escribir las respuestas en inglés o en castellano?	13
¿Podemos representar la información mediante un gráfico?	2
Profesora, ¿qué significa "campo semántico"? ¿Podría darme un ejemplo?	4
¿Qué hago con una compañera que no aparece?	1

FIGURE 3: Questions asked by students during the third stage.

STAGE 3	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
¿Tengo que rendir examen final?	1
¿Cuándo se publican las fechas de examen?	0
Profesora, ¿tiene que llenar una planilla con nuestras notas como se hace en la universidad?	2
Ahora que está terminando el curso hablando con un compañero surgió una duda, quiero presentarme al examen final en marzo pero él dice que no hay examen final. ¿Es verdad?	1
Profesora, ¿está segura que no le debo nada?	1
¿Dónde subo la encuesta?	0
¿Dónde encuentro la información sobre el recuperatorio?	0
¿Es obligatoria la encuesta?	0
¿Tiene nota la encuesta?	0
¿Hasta cuándo podemos entregar la encuesta?	1
¿Qué actividades tenemos que hacer esta semana?	0
¿Dónde tengo que subir el recuperatorio?	3

With a total of 50 participants in this study, teachers received 221 questions during the first stage of the course. In general, the number of questions asked by the students in the first stage show that they were considerably anxious about issues concerning the organization, specially the layout of the main page of the campus and the course.
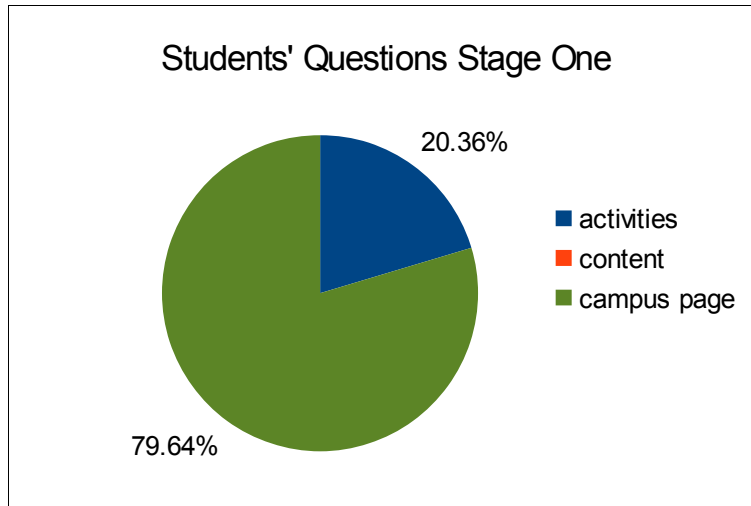
Students' Questions Stage One

20.36%

- ■ activities
- ■ content
- ■ campus page

79.64%

Figure 4: Students' question types, Stage 1.

Students' Questions Stage Two

17.24%

3.45%

- ■ activities
- ■ content
- ■ campus page

79.31%
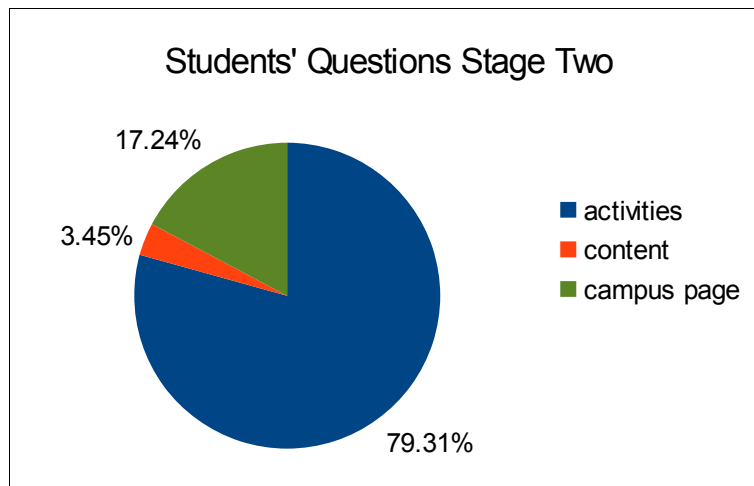
Figure 5: Students' question types, Stage 2.

Students' Questions Stage Three

- ■ activites
- ■ content
- ■ campus page
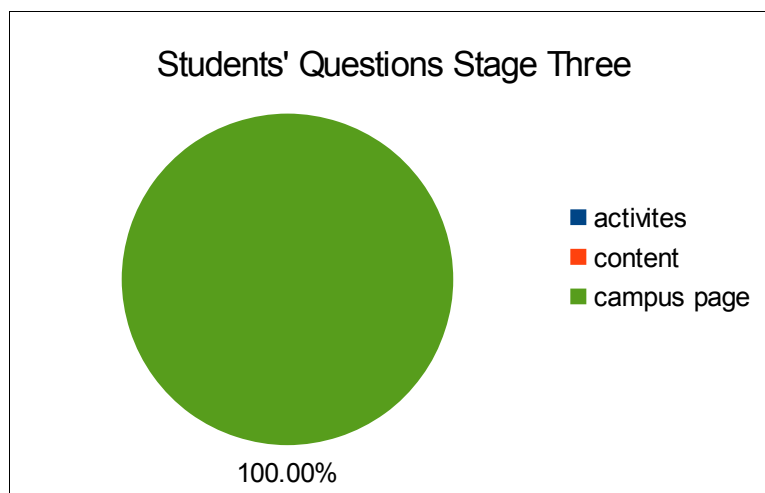
100.00%

Figure 6: Students' question types, Stage 3.

The graphs show that during the first stage, the largest amount of questioning (80%) was concerned about the organization (the layout and functioning) of the page rather than about issues dealt with, such as theory or the content and skills involved in the activities assigned. Very few questions were asked about the activities themselves (only 20%). This seems natural since the first lessons partly focused on helping students navigate and operate the campus with ease.

The second stage shows a decrease in the number of questions related to the page (only 17%) while the weight of the questioning falls on the activities themselves (79%). A non-significant amount of questioning (3%) is related to the content (theory) of the lesson. The low percentage of questions on the theory can be explained by the hands-on approach of the course. Most students asked questions which really required theoretical explanations only once they were doing the activities.

The last stage is all about the page, since the last two lessons involved uploading the test and the survey. The theoretical input in the last part of the course was less burdensome. The aim was to integrate and consolidate knowledge and reading skills. Moreover, the only activities to be corrected and graded by the teacher were the test and the survey. All other activities were considered further practice.

A simple look at Figures 6-8 suggests that students had difficulty finding their way in the campus until the end of the course, while the theory and practice provided by the teacher did not pose a challenge towards the last stage. However, cross-analysis of quantification and qualification of questions undermine such an interpretation. With a total of 221 questions during Stage 1 (Fig. 1), 80% of students' questions asked about on campus operation (Fig. 6); Stage 3 shows a total of 9 questions in all (Fig. 3), even though they make up 100% of the questioning. This means that the increase in the percentage of questioning regarding the campus is insignificant if compared with the dramatic fall in the number of questions asked. A closer look reveals that most students had doubts about the campus during the first stage (Fig. 1), since between 22 and 47 students asked the same questions. In the last stage, the most repeated question was made by only 3 students (Fig. 3).

These results may throw some light on the improvement in interaction among students. The fact that between 22 and 47 (out of 50) students asked the same questions in the same period shows that initially students' interaction level was too low. In contrast, the last stage suggests that students finally found their way through the campus and that interaction increased significantly.

FIGURE 7: Students' comments at the beginning of the course

COMMENTS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COURSE
- Profesora, donde están las actividades? No sé si hago bien en preguntar en el foro.   - Me imagino que debe ser difícil corregir cuando no se sabe sobre lo que se está trabajando.   - Este es un curso de inglés donde no aprendes inglés.   - No puedo entender el texto sino traduzco palabra por palabra.   - Estoy tomando clases particulares pero a pesar de eso no puedo entender si solamente relaciono las palabras transparentes.   - Yo estudié muchos años inglés pero esta es una forma nueva de aprender.

FIGURE 8: Students' comments at the end of the course

COMMENTS AT THE END OF THE COURSE
- Gracias profesora!!! Ahora todo está claro! No tengo dudas con respecto a los contenidos.   - Gracias profesora!!! Ahora todo está claro! No tengo dudas con respecto a los

contenidos.
- Me encantó el curso! Es la primera vez que me responden todas mis dudas. El feedback es muy importante.
- Aprendí mucho este cuatrimestre. Gracias! Que pase lindas vacaciones.
- Estoy pensando en cursar Inglés II el próximo cuatrimestre. ¿Ud. va a ser mi profesora?

Students expressed their feelings and perceptions of their progress during the course. Figures 7 and 8 contain some of the comments made both at the beginning and at the end of the course. The initial comments reflected anxiety about campus operation and the approach to teaching reading comprehension. As can be seen, some comments were aggressive. The final comments stand in stark contrast with the ones made in the first part of the course. Students valued the teacher's work and some of them showed themselves enthusiastic about continuing their English studies. A considerable number of comments were manifestations about teacher's feedback, both in terms of frequency and encouragement. Students showed great appreciation of the teacher's permanent feedback and encouragement. These comments started during the second stage of the course.

CONCLUSIONS
Conclusions were drawn on four key points: reading challenge, adaptation, anxiety and teacher's role.
Reading challenge
Students have computer skills. However, reading hypertext, at least in an academic context, showed to be a big challenge for them. In general and considering the type of questions posed at the beginning of the course, results indicate that it was difficult for them to find the information.

Adaptation
Adapting to reading university material online takes up as much as between one third and a half of the term. At the beginning of the course most of them said they were acquainted with working with the computer, results show that it was not so easy for them to read from the screen.

Anxiety
Students have difficulty dealing with the content of the material. This means that they tend to be overwhelmed by text organization from the beginning, which causes great anxiety. From the results we acknowledge that the level of anxiety decreased as the course was coming to an end.

Teacher's role
It was evident that anxiety increased significantly every time students had to upload work which would carry a grade or a mark. Results show that the role of the teachers was essential to encourage students to continue. We conclude that teachers do well by addressing students' questions to reduce anxiety and thus give way to effective learning.

Limitations and other observations
The teachers of the other four classes, though not formally involved in this study, were periodically asked to provide observations on their students' performance and they shared impressions with us which were aligned with our own observations.

A few students felt inclined to write to the teacher in English, even though their writing was rather weak sometimes, as they did not want to miss the opportunity of improving this skill. Constant encouragement was crucial. At times, students felt it was all a daunting task. On such occasions, it was particularly constructive to express honest, positive value judgments of students' language awareness or performance.

Although the texts were selected on a solid basis and instructions were clear and complete,

teachers kept a permanent commitment to revise all the material for improvement. It was felt that the MDM in particular needed further revision. However, this did not affect the results of this study in any way. It must also be observed that changing some factors in a new study might affect the results, for example, changing the weight of the workload and the theory through the course might produce a different patterning of the questions.

Finally, the results of this study are only indicators further research in this field needs to be conducted to obtain concluding results.

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What Boys and Girls Like: Favorite Topics and Tasks for Primary School Learners

Gabriela Martino

ABSTRACT

Recent scientific studies into how gender affects learning has shed some light on successful classroom practices in a variety of contexts. In this paper I explore how teachers respond to gender differences in the classroom; secondly, I investigate which topics and tasks teachers believe that primary school learners like the most when learning English as a foreign language.

Keywords: boys' and girls' preferences; differences between boys and girls

INTRODUCTION

Along the past decades, gender development has been approached by several major theories. These theories differ on the emphasis placed on psychological, biological and sociocultural determinants. Defenders of the biological influence in gender development (Sax 2005, 2007; Gurian 2003, 2008) claim that boys and girls learn in a different way because there are biologically programmed differences between them. According to Sax (2005), "Today we know that innate differences between girls and boys are profound. [....] Girls and boys behave differently because their brains are wired differently." (Sax, L., 2005). Some other gender theorists (Baron-Cohen, 2005; Chadwell, 2010) rely more on the way on which social interaction shapes individual and group expectations of what men and women should be like. Thus, this theory favors a multifaceted social transmission model in which schools play a relevant role as agents of human development.

One of the clearest explanations of how boys and girls interests begin to separate each from the other in early schooling, lies in the concept of sex-role stereotyping. Chadwell (2010) states, it is crucial that educators not stereotype boys and girls by saying "all boys" or "all girls" learn in one only exclusive way; or that boys move around a lot, and girls sit still, listen, and do their work; or that boys are naturally good at math and girls are naturally verbal. Characterizing gender differences in this way limits the opportunities for students. (Chadwell, D. (2010).

How do boys and girls differ in their preferences for classroom content? What do teachers believe about educationally-relevant preferences of girls and boys? Those are the questions I address in this paper. The purpose of this study was to survey a group of Argentinean teachers of English to explore what topics and tasks primary school boys and girls prefer.

METHOD

Data were collected at two single-sex private bilingual schools in the northern area of Gran Buenos Aires. One of them was a school for girls where all teachers were female; the other was a school for boys where all teachers were male. The age of all the participants ranged from 6 to 12 (from Year 1 to 6 of a Junior school). Thirty EFL teachers were asked to answer a written questionnaire: fifteen female teachers from the girls' school and fifteen male ones from the boys' school. As the teachers' background regarding the mastering of English as a second or foreign language was unknown to the researcher, the questionnaire was designed in Spanish in order to add reliability to the study. It was administered at school, and the respondents answered the questionnaire on paper. Some questions were predetermined, i.e. the respondent was required to complete the question; whereas others were response-keyed because they were designed so that subsequent questions might or might not be answered, depending on the responses. Finally, other questions were open-ended.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers were presented with a list of class activities, which they ranked from 1 to 10, 10 indicating those that the students enjoyed the most and 1 indicating those that the students enjoyed the least. There was also an open-ended option for the participants to mention other activities not included in the questionnaire. The choices of both groups of teachers as regards what activities *they* found more effective to work with girls and with boys differed considerably. The percentages of teaching activities that the teachers who worked with girls found more effective to carry out

were sixty seven in role playing, seventy eight in dramatization and songs, seventy two in cooperative work, sixty seven in contextualized exercises, and seventy eight in creative exercises. In contrast, teachers who had groups of boys reported that ninety four per cent of their students had enjoyed group competitions, seventy eight per cent problem-solving activities and sixty one per cent preferred group and individual activities. (see graph 1).

GRAPH 1– Activities t teachers found more effective to work with girls and with boys
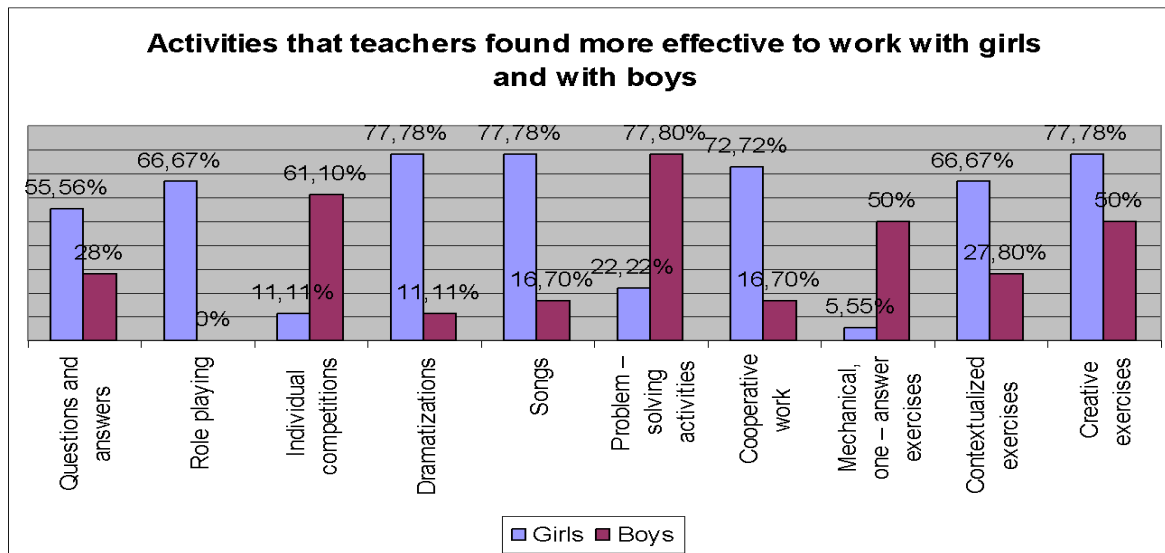
To determine the teachers' opinions about what topics *they* perceived their male and female students found more appealing, participants were presented with a list of 15 topics, which they ranked from 1 to 15; 15 indicating the most appealing, and 1 indicating the least appealing. The information given by both groups of teachers in this respect again differed substantially. The answers given by the respondents demonstrated a marked tendency for girls to enjoy topics such as adventures, animals, the family and friends, film stars, TV stars and singers, romance and love stories and myths and legends. Boys seemed to enjoy natural phenomena, sports, war and discoveries or scientific processes more than girls. (See Table 1)

TABLE 1 - Topics found more appealing by girls and boys according to the perception of the teachers who participated in the study.

Topic	Very appealing for	
	Girls	**Boys**
Natural phenomena	22%	44%
Animals	67%	44%
Family and friends	83%	22%
Sports	17%	78%
Politics and government	17%	0%
Technology	17%	28%
Film stars, TV stars and singers	67%	0%
Adventures	78%	55%

Mystery	39%	33%
The supernatural	39%	39%
Romance and love stories	55%	0%
War	0%	50%
Myths and legends	50%	28%
Discoveries or scientific processes	0%	22%
Cultures and geographies other than their own	0%	0%

To find out what school topics both sexes like, teachers were presented with a list of 12 subjects, and were asked to mark the ones they considered that boy and girl students liked the most. The participants could choose more than one subject. The answers given by both groups of teachers suggested that boys and girls have different interests. According to the opinion of the teachers interviewed in this study, girls seem to prefer literature and singing and drama; whereas boys seem to prefer mathematics, natural sciences, computing studies and social sciences (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 Subjects enjoyed by girls and by boys.

Subject	Enjoyed by girls	Enjoyed by boys
Math	17%	73%
Natural Sciences	17%	50%
Foreign Languages	17%	11%
Computing Studies	17%	72%
Sports	22%	94%
Literature	44%	0%
Music	55%	61%
Drawing	67%	78%
Singing	83%	0%
Drama	94%	0%
Spanish as a mother tongue	6%	0%
Social Sciences	0%	22%

The participants in this study were also asked to define what types of books their male and female students chose to read when they were allowed to choose books for extensive reading or for pleasure. The participants were asked to base their responses on their own experiences. The teachers who worked with girls reported that girls were more attracted to romantic and fantasy novels; boys were reported to be attracted by stories about discoveries and inventions, and by science fiction novels. Both sexes were reported to share an interest in adventure, terror and detective stories (see Table 3).

TABLE 3– Books chosen by girls and boys for extensive reading or reading for pleasure.

Book type	Chosen by girls	Chosen by boys
Adventure novels	67%	78%
Romantic novels	67%	0%
Fantasy novels	89%	39%
Terror stories	50%	56%
Detective stories	50%	50%
Biographies	28%	22%
War stories	28%	39%
Non-fiction stories about discoveries and inventions	11%	56%
Science fiction novels	11%	56%
Scientific non-fictional stories	0%	28%
Historical or geographic non-fictional stories	0%	0%
Poetry	0%	0%

To get to know what games girls and boys choose to play at break time, the teachers were presented with a list of games and were invited to mark more than one when appropriate. Table 4 shows the answers given by both groups of teachers about the games their boy and girl students frequently played at break time. Girls played both in small and in big groups, such as skipping the rope and rubber band skipping. Girls were also reported to like games such as playing with sticker albums or role games (e.g. mother and father, superheroes, etc). Boys, on the other hand, were mainly reported to choose sports. There was also a tendency for boys to play with sticker albums and cards, and to play imaginative or fantasy games (e.g. soldiers, kings and queens and warriors).

TABLE 4– Games played by girls and boys

Game	Played by Girls	Played by Boys
Sports games	0%	89%
Action and movement games	78%	56%
Small group games	61%	0%
Big group games	72%	17%
Sticker albums	66%	78%
Dolls (for ex. Little pet shops, "transformers")	39%	0%
Matchbox cars	0%	44%
Role games	55%	0%
Imaginative or fantasy games	39%	33%

It is interesting to notice that girls showed a tendency to prefer small group games, whereas boys

seemed to choose big group games. These differences in attitude and behavior in boys and girls might affect the dynamics of a lesson. According to Sax (2003) girls are more comfortable than boys are when working in small groups for their cooperative and self-disclosure attitude towards friends of the same sex. Boys are different because most of them do not want to hear each other's innermost secrets. Their focus is on activity, not on conversation.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions drawn in this section may serve to determine the extent to which little girls and boys in Primary school evidence a preference for the same topics and tasks when learning English. At the same time, these conclusions might serve to prove whether Primary school teachers of English are aware that boys and girls might have different interests.

The teachers who participated in this study agreed that girls enjoyed literature and singing and drama the most, while boys were more likely to prefer mathematics, natural and social sciences, and computer science. Girls chose romantic and fantasy stories as reading material, while boys chose non-fiction and science fiction stories and stories of inventions and discoveries. Both sexes were reported to feel attracted by terror and detective stories. Topics such as animals, the family and friends, film stars and singers, romance, love stories and adventures were favored by girls, whereas boys preferred books on natural phenomena, sports, technology and war.

It would be logical to conclude that teachers should have a repertoire of methods, techniques, procedures and strategies to cater for the particular needs of boys and girls. However, as the design of a differentiated pedagogy is in its early stages, it would naturally follow that teachers are just relying on their own intuitions about the topic.

Limitations and Implications of the Present Study

The available research on this topic is surprisingly scanty. Consequently, this study might be considered a starting point for future research. Similar studies should be conducted to determine whether these differences are indeed valid and replicable across different demographic groups and different cultures.

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REVIEW

The ELT Daily Journal-Review

Hall Houston (Goodreads Author), Rose Senior (Introduction)

Published April 29th 2013 by Anthimeria Press. Paperback, 1st, 150 pages

ISBN 1481957392 (ISBN13: 9781481957397)

Reviewed by **María Claudia Albini**, Universidad de Buenos Aires

The ELT Daily Journal is Hall Houston's third book. It was especially written for trainee teachers and for those who are starting their careers. However, it also provides senior ones ideas to brush up on their teaching skills.

The interesting introduction written by Dr. Rose Senior, a class centered teaching advocate, "helps to gain an overview of some of the issues involved in making the transition from newly-trained teacher to independent- minded, reflective classroom practitioner."

The *Journal* contains clean pages on which teachers can write down anything that may help them carry out their lessons successfully, from their careful planning to any idea that may come up to make them more satisfactory. Besides, each page of the journal has a box with a theme teachers can reflect on: *icebreakers*; *warmers*; *closers*; *classic activities*; *something to ponder*; *stop it*!, and *top tips* (15 of each) .The *top tips* are devoted to the four skills as well as to grammar, to vocabulary, to pronunciation and finally to text/discourse.

The *Journal* also presents a number of practical tips provided by fifteen well-known ELT authors from different areas of expertise, which will lead the new teacher in the planning of an appealing lesson.

Finally, there is a section including helpful though rather scanty resources, from books and blogs to websites, periodicals, webinars and organizations.

In sum, *The ELT Daily Journal,* with its clear design and handy size in paper-back, *constitutes* the suitable companion to the newly-trained teacher.

María Claudia Albini: *teacher of English,Music teacher, B.A. in Education and B.A in Arts. A researcher and teacher of English at the Reading Comprehension chair, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires. Coordinator of International Affairs, Secretaría Académica, Departamento de Artes Musicales, DAMus, IUNA, and member of the National Bank of University Project Evaluators.*

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