

Developing thinking skills in the EFL classroom

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Bolzano 2014

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Why is this topic important?

- Children need to face challenge of a changing and unpredictable world.
- Problem-solving and decision making skills: meet unexpected problems and tackle them.
- School curricula: systematic, error-free learning, correct answers, assimilation of facts, teacher's assessment.

Outline

- Why teach thinking?
- Can thinking be taught?
- Teaching language and thinking
- Outline of thinking programmes
- What is involved in thinking?
- The teacher's role
- Working with activities

Top skills that employers want

- Verbal communication
- Teamwork
- Commercial awareness
- Analysing and investigating
- Initiative and self motivation
- Drive
- Written communication
- Planning and organising

University of Kent 2014

Skills lacking among job applicants

- Practical or job specific skills **63%**
- Planning and organising **41%**
- Oral communication **41%**
- Customer handling **40%**
- Written communication **38%**
- Problem solving **37%**

UK Commission for Employment and Skills,
2013: p32

Interview process Oxford

- Why do lions have manes?
- How hot does the air have to be in a hot air balloon to lift an elephant?
- Is it easier for organisms to live on land or in sea?
- Why do humans have two eyes?

- *How logically and imaginatively interviewees approach the problem.*



Can thinking be taught?

- Pupils benefit from being coached in thinking.
- Success is due to good teaching.
Carol McGuiness 1999
- Whole school approach

thinkingschools.co.uk

Language and thinking: why this approach?

- Learners' cognitive engagement in the task.
- Activities have a purpose; thus language is meaningful.
- Beyond language teaching.
- Applicable to any age.

Puchta, H. & Williams, M. 2011. Teaching Young Learners to Think.
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Thinking programmes

- Feuerstein: Instrumental Enrichment
(14 cognitive areas; bridging)
- Somerset Thinking Skills Course: Blagg et al.
- Matthew Lipman: Philosophy for Children
(communities of enquiry; 30 countries)
- Thinking maps (thinking tools) (David Hyerle)

What's involved in thinking?

- Cognitive resources
 - Concepts
 - Skills
 - Knowledge
 - Language
- Cognitive strategies
 - Control process; selection and coordination of resources

Blagg et al. 2003



Puzzles | Worksheet

Work out the answers.

1



Tom, Jane, Sue, Mike, Sam and Will played a game of football. Mike scored 2 more goals than Sam. Sam scored one more goal than Sue. Jane scored 3 more goals than Sam. Tom scored 2 more goals than Mike. Sue scored one more goal than Will. Will scored one goal. How many goals did each child score?

Tom scored _____ goals.	Mike _____
Jane scored _____	Sam _____
Sue _____	Will _____

Problem solving cycle

- Gathering and organising information
- Defining the problem
- Generating approaches to solving it
- Planning action
- Monitoring, checking, evaluating
- Communicating solutions

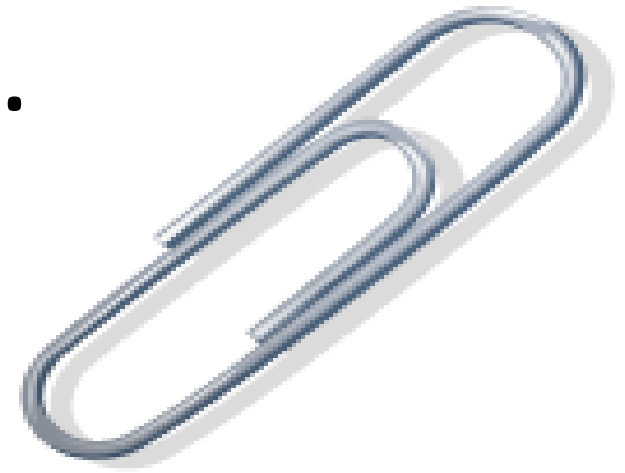
Thinking skills

- Making comparisons
- Categorising
- Sequencing
- Focusing attention
- Memorising
- Exploring space, time, numbers

- Creating associations
- Cause and effect
- Making decisions
- Solving problems
- Creative thinking

Creative thinking

- In your group, think of 10 ways to use a paperclip. Be as creative as you like.



Exploring space

- Need a reference system to understand and control the space we live in.
- Need sense of position, distance, direction, proximity, dimensions.
- Ability to imagine change in position necessary for hypothetical thinking. Ability to imagine another viewpoint
- Problems if child sees surroundings in egocentric ways; difficulties in solving problems.

Where's Tom? | Worksheet A

1 **A** Look at the picture of Tom. Write *in front of him*, *behind him*, *on his right*, and *on his left* in the blanks.

The tower is _____ him.

The hotel is _____.

The shop is _____.

The park is _____.

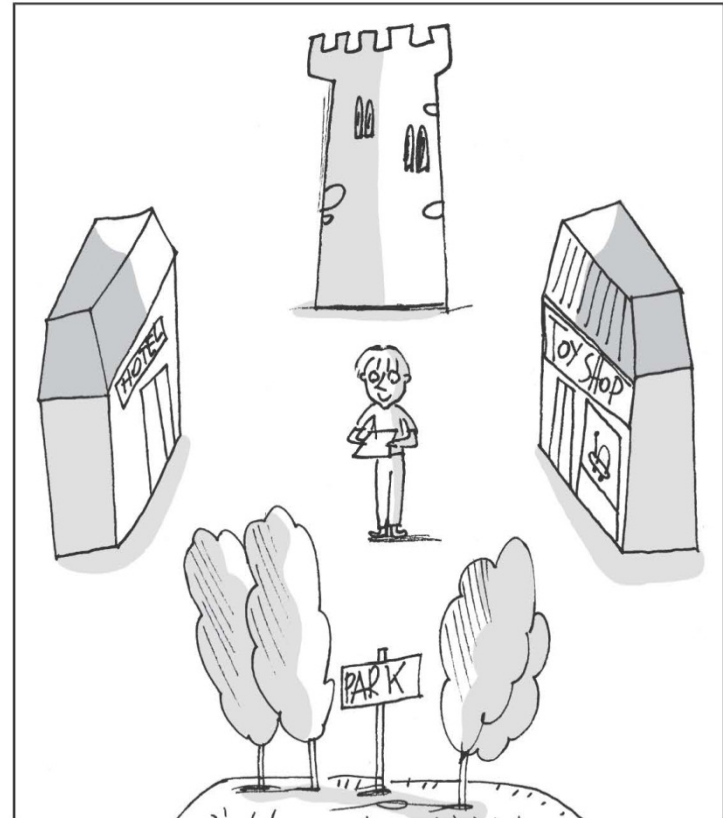
B Tom now turns right.
Finish the sentences.

The tower is on his _____.

The hotel is _____.

The shop is _____.

The park is _____.



2 Choose two of the pictures of Tom and draw one in the square in A and the other in B. Then complete the sentences.

The tower is _____.

The hotel is _____.

The shop is _____.

The park is _____.

The tower is _____.

The hotel is _____.

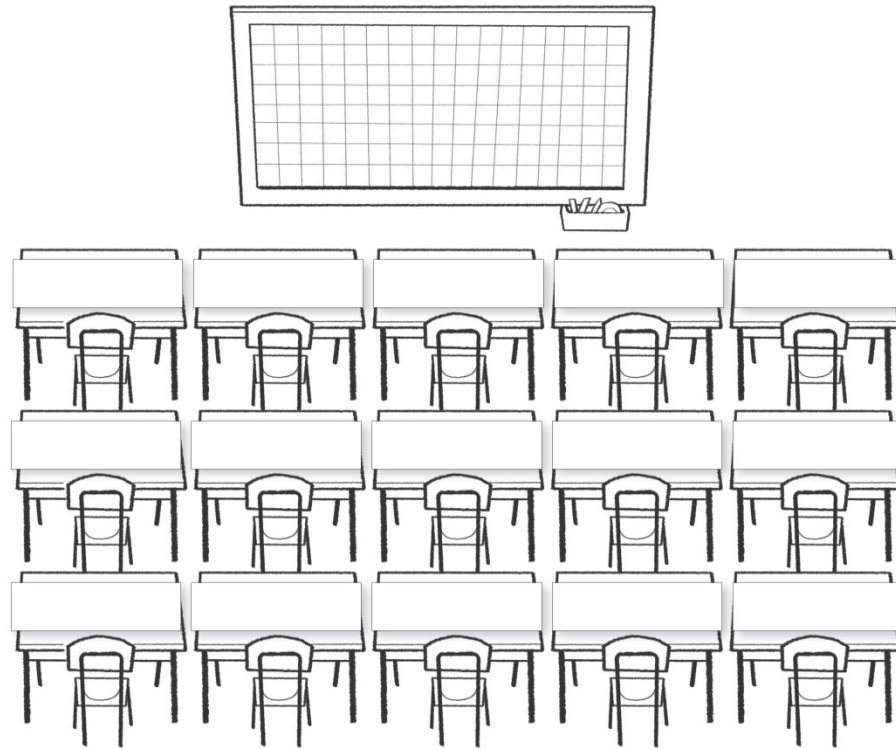
The shop is _____.

The park is _____.

The classroom | Worksheet

Read the information. Write the names in the correct desks.

- 1 Miss Robertson is arranging the seating in her classroom. Susan is in the front row. She is between Jane and Peter. Danny is to the right of Jane and to the left of Richard. Mary is behind Susan; they are good friends. Mary's other friend Sarah is next to her. Sarah has Don next to her. Don's friend Fred is next to him. Mary is on David's right. Donna is at the back next to her friend Claire. Claire is next to Jessica, who is behind Fred. Donna has Anna on her left and Anna is on Chris' right.



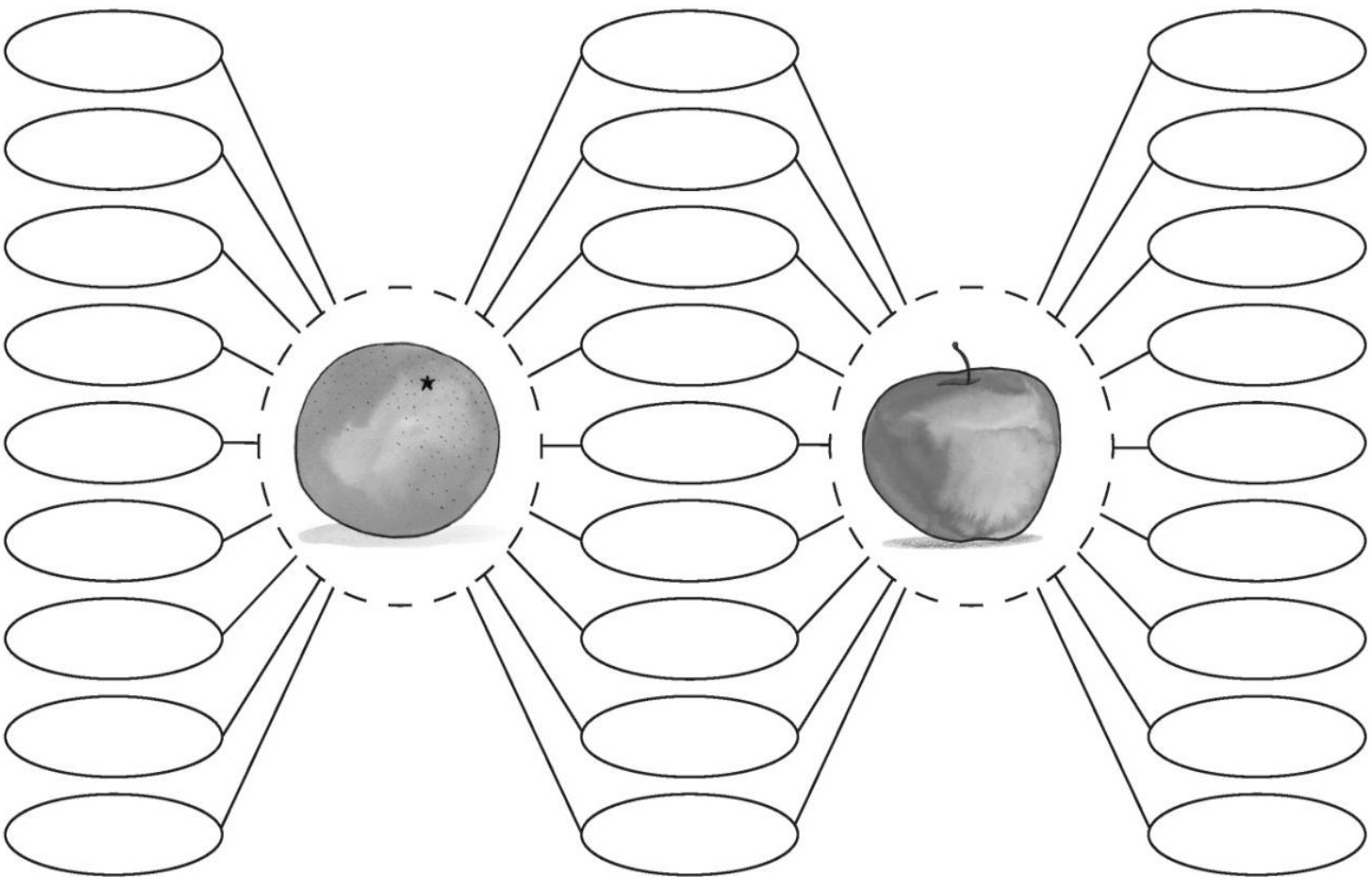
- 2 How many children are in Miss Robertson's class? _____

Comparisons

- Basic building block of decision making and problem solving
- Deficiency leads to inability to store information or use more than one piece of information; impulsive behaviour.

Apples and oranges | Worksheet B

3 Now write words that describe both an apple and an orange in the middle bubbles. Write words that describe only one in the side bubbles.



Exploring time

- An essential part of everyday life.
- We divide time up into seconds, minutes, etc. to impose order on our world. Enables us to live in a social world.
- Need to understand dividing time up, speed, historical time, comparative time (faster, slower), relative time (late, early, before, after), instruments to measure time.
- Lack of a sense of time leads to living in the present, impulsiveness, difficulty planning, lateness.

More than, less than, or same as?

8. A hundred weeks is _____ two years.

9. One thousand days is _____ three years.

10. Half a minute is _____ thirty seconds.

11. Seventy two hours is _____ four days.

12. Three hundred minutes is ____ four hours.

The role of the teacher

- Make the purpose clear
- Children should be free to think without criticism; all ideas are valued, take all suggestions seriously
- Encourage creativity
- Take time: encourage a careful, systematic approach to thinking
- Encourage students to listen to each other

- Seek *best* answers, not always *right* answers.
- Model and scaffold the thinking process; *What information do we have? What do we need to do? What shall we do first?*
- Ask challenging questions: *How do you know this? How did you work it out?*
- Develop feelings of *I can*.
- Foster a sense of challenge.

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