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Presentation and Evaluation of a Listening Lesson and the role of ICTs

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Abstract: The purpose of the particular paper is to present a listening lesson and evaluate it according to certain criteria. In the first part, there is a brief description of the teaching situation, with reference to students' profile, the curriculum and the coursebook. In the second part, the listening input of the lesson is evaluated, while in the third one, the actual listening activities. In the last part, there are some suggestions concerning the improvement of the listening activities, so as to serve students' needs and interests.

1. Description of the teaching situation

The particular class consists of 15 Greek students (9 male and 6 female ones), aged 10 to 11, attending the fifth grade of a Greek private primary school. All learners are monolingual and they have been learning English, since they were in the first grade. The group's competence levels range from elementary to post elementary (A2-A2+) according to the CEFR (2021). Most of them are highly motivated and willing to engage actively in any kind of activity and interact with their classmates and teachers by using the English language. At the same time, they show a positive stance towards English. Also, their concentration span is high, especially when the topic discussed is relevant to their needs and interests. The book used is called 'English 5th Grade' and it includes thematic vocabulary, grammar taught in context, engaging and captivating dialogues that promote values and critical thinking, listening activities related to students' interests, while at the same time, all language skills are developed. The lesson that is evaluated, can be found in fifth unit of the book with the title 'An Ambitious Project'. The listening is about two friends talking about ways to protect the environment and their participation in a school project on recycling.

2. Evaluation of listening input

The content of the listening input is highly transactional (Brown & Yule, 1983), since the speakers only provide some information about an environmental project through their dialogue.

The listening input is non-authentic, as it is performed by actors who read out a script and it has a pedagogical purpose (Sifakis, 2018: 170). According to Nunan (1999), authentic input has genuine features and a real communicative purpose.

As far as genuineness is concerned, discourse lacks a lot of elements of real spoken language (Rost, 2011: 166; Underwood, 1989: 100). For example, the speed of delivery is not natural (Richards, 1983), since both speakers talk very fast and in fact, perform the scripted text in an unnatural and mechanic way. Furthermore, there are no silent or filled pauses, false starts, natural hesitations (Field, 1998) and speech errors (Richards, 1983). Even the intonation is unnatural and it lacks variations, as the speakers do not seem to adapt their tone to what is being said or express any kind of spontaneous emotions, making it even more profound that they just perform a written text. This is really evident even when they ask questions (Busy? Why? Are you studying?). Moreover, there are no self-corrections, repetitions and paraphrasing. At the same time, one of the speakers (Kostas) gives detailed information about an environmental project without being interrupted by

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Mark, while his pronunciation is deliberate and fake. Finally, no slang is used at all, while the density of information is high (Sifakis, 2018: 175).

The input is not especially difficult for learners to follow, since its topic is quite interesting for them and by activating their background schemata (Bartlett, 1932; Richards, 1983), they can easily relate and understand what they hear. Also, it is not simplified (Rost, 2016: 162), since the syntax and grammar used are the ones expected at the particular level of learners, while there is no special use of phonology (pitch), rephrasing and repetitions.

The input is relevant to learners' needs and interests, because they listen to two boys talking about an environmental project on recycling, topic familiar to them because they have already taken part in a similar project and their feedback was really positive. Regarding the target syllabus, the input is part of the fifth unit, which deals environmental issues and actions, making it thus relevant, while at the same time, it includes the unit's already taught vocabulary.

Concerning discourse, it is transactional (Brown & Yule, 1983) since the main focus is on transmitting information about the recycling project. Furthermore, it is fully- scripted and recorded, because it is written out in advance and performed in the studio by actors (Sifakis, 2018: 170). So, there is no background noise, which indicates that the quality of it is pretty good. Also, learners are supposed to listen to the input and do the tasks, without reading any script.

Finally, the schematic structuring of information is descriptive (Sperber &Wilson, 2012), because it describes the process of persuading the teacher and students to take part into a recycling project.

3. Description and evaluation of the listening activities

The main aim of the listening lesson, which has three stages (pre-, while- and post- listening) is to teach vocabulary and encourage learners to take action and start recycling. In all stages, there is integration of other skills (such as speaking, reading and writing), too. The overall orientation is listening-to-learn, since the main listening task's purpose is to test listening through marking the statements as True or False (listening comprehension question) (Lynch, 1998, 2002; Mendelsohn, 1998; Oxford, 1993; Rost, 2002; Rubin, 1994). In this way, the washback effect is negative since if the learners' results are not the expected ones, they will have to be exposed once again to unrealistic and non- authentic tasks, like the one they were. Also, learners are familiar with the particular listening input and that is the reason why, they are interested and motivated in dealing with the tasks. Concerning the time of the tasks, the 'time-on-task' is enough for learners to deal with the activities, while the 'wait time' could be a little longer, since some of them may be inhibited, not confident enough or even unmotivated to participate in the activities. Finally, both the teacher and the learners (peer feedback) provide meaningful feedback during and after the tasks.

In the pre-listening stage, there is a task where learners are given a picture and they are supposed to predict what they see (Brown, 1977; McKeating, 1981; Richards, 1983). Its purpose is to activate their background schemata (Bartlett, 1932; Richards, 1983) with the use of a visual, essential element for learners' listening comprehension (McDonald, 2010) and help them relate it to the actual listening input that follows. Fry (1977) stressed the importance of prediction in the process of receiving speech.

In the while- listening stage, the actual listening task is divided into two smaller parts. In the first part, learners listen to the recording and focus on the gist of the boys' conversation, which means that they are supposed to understand the main message of their dialogue. In the second part, learners listen to the same dialogue again and they are asked to mark the sentences as True or False, task that can inhibit them and decrease their confidence on their listening skills (Porter & Roberts, 1981). This is a bottom-up process focusing on listening and searching for specific information (intensive comprehension checking activity) (Lynch, 1998, 2002; Mendelsohn, 1998; Oxford, 1993; Rost, 2002; Rubin, 1994). Thus, the focus is on the product (correct answers) and not on the actual process of

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listening (Berne, 1998; Mendelsohn, 2001), since in that case there would be a follow-up activity clarifying the underlying difficulties (Brown, 1986; Sheerin, 1987) and its purpose is to test (Sheerin, 1987; Thomas 1982). Such kind of tasks focus on memory and not real comprehension (Roberts, 1983). In this part, there is integration of writing too, but in a restricted way, because learners must only mark the utterances as T/F.

In the post-listening stage, there are four tasks. In task 3, learners form pairs and based on the ideas given by their teacher and the actual listening input, they are asked to keep notes on how to produce less rubbish. So, the skill of writing is integrated, since learners have to focus on ways to reduce rubbish and write them down. Writing skills are not extensive here, because learners are asked to take notes and not write long texts.

In task 4, learners take turns and act out a dialogue in pairs, providing solutions to the problem of pollution, raising at the same time their classmates' awareness of environmental issues. In this part, the skill of speaking is integrated with listening, while interaction is incorporated, too (Nunan, 1991: 279). Its importance is vital, because only through the offering and receiving of meaningful feedback, comprehension can be achieved (Davis, 2003; Ghaith, 2003; Lightbrown & Spada, 1993).

In task 5, learners are asked to create a list of recommendations to help the environment, based on the data collected in the previous tasks. This task requires writing (listing solutions) and speaking (choosing the most important ones and arguing accordingly).

In task 6, learners are asked to work in pairs to do a quiz relevant to the listening input, so as to realize the damage people cause to the natural world around them. In this way, they are supposed to cooperate and develop their speaking skills and critical thinking. However, this goal is not actually achieved, since the task is not well-structured and clear.

4. Suggestions about improving the listening activities

There can be some suggestions for the improvement of the particular tasks.

The first task is quite useful, because it assists learners in understanding what will follow. Although, it could include more visuals (pictures) for learners to compare and relate to the input.

The first part of the second task would remain the same. The second one focuses on bottom -up listening (hard focused) (Hedge, 2000) and it has the form of a closed type activity (T/F), where the answer can be either correct or incorrect and its purpose is to test (Sheerin, 1987; Thomas, 1982). According to Richards (1983), in such kind of tasks learners are supposed to depend on their memory to deal with the tasks instead of their understanding of the real text. This task could be replaced by a communicative one, which would focus on the top-down process (soft focused listening), motivating learners to listen for meaningful purposes.

In the third task, an ideational framework (Burgess, 1994: 310-313) could be used so as to guide learners on how to organize their ideas/ ways to produce less rubbish instead of just listing them.

In the fourth task, learners act-out a dialogue about ways to protect the environment. This activity could ask them to adopt different roles as listeners and speakers or even take part in scenarios (Oura, 2001) and engage in a really communicative dialogue. Also, learners could be asked to form pairs according to their level of proficiency and act out easier or more demanding dialogues accordingly. Finally, the teacher's role in their exchange is not mentioned, so there is no evidence whether the dialogue is guided, semi- guided or autonomous.

The fifth task is not really interesting for learners and autonomous, since if the previous one was missing, it would not make any sense. At this point, an alternative task could be asking learners to perform a role-playing activity as interviewers- interviewees, politicians, animals, homeless or just residents of a town, expressing their feelings over pollution, describing the overall situation and searching for solutions to the environmental issues and write them down. This would be more interesting and interactive, too (Rost, 2016).

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In the sixth task, no background information is provided to learners, while at the same time it is a quite boring activity. Learners are supposed to make calculations taking into consideration facts that they do not know and they are not interesting both for their age and level. So, this task could be removed.

5. Conclusion

The particular listening lesson was appropriate for the learner's CEF level (A2-A2+) and the tasks were quite satisfactory. Although, there can be some improvements to fit students' needs. The listening tasks would be more authentic-like if they were more relevant to the real world (Bransford et al., 1990; Cronin, 1993; Duchastel, 1997; Gordon, 1998; Herrington & Herrington, 1998; Lebow & Wager, 1994; Oliver & Omari, 1999; Sternberg et al., 1993; Winn, 1993; Young, 1993), while they should not focus on testing, by asking learners to provide only correct answers, but interpretations in context (Brown & Yule, 1983: 57-69). At the same time, learners should be provided with authentic material (Gebhard, 1996; Nunan, 1991: 279), such as visuals, video (Stempleski & Tomalin, 1990) and realia to increase their motivation and attention (Freeman, 2009; Richards, 2001), compare and relate the language learning with the external world (Berardo, 2006; Brinton, 1991; Oguz & Bahar, 2008; Parsons & Ward, 2011) and prepare them for real life (Richards, 2001), whereas they should be taught listening strategies (Chamot, 1995; Mendelsohn, 1994: 36-47; Sharma, 2011).

Finally we have to underline the role of digital technologies in education domain that is very productive and successful, facilitates and improves the assessment, the intervention and the educational procedures via Mobiles [23-27], various ICTs applications [28-51], AI & STEM ROBOTICS [52-68], and games [69-72]. Additionally the combination of ICTs with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation and emotional intelligence cultivation [73-117] as well as with environmental factors and nutrition [19-22], accelerates and improves more over the educational practices and results, especially in language learning domain.

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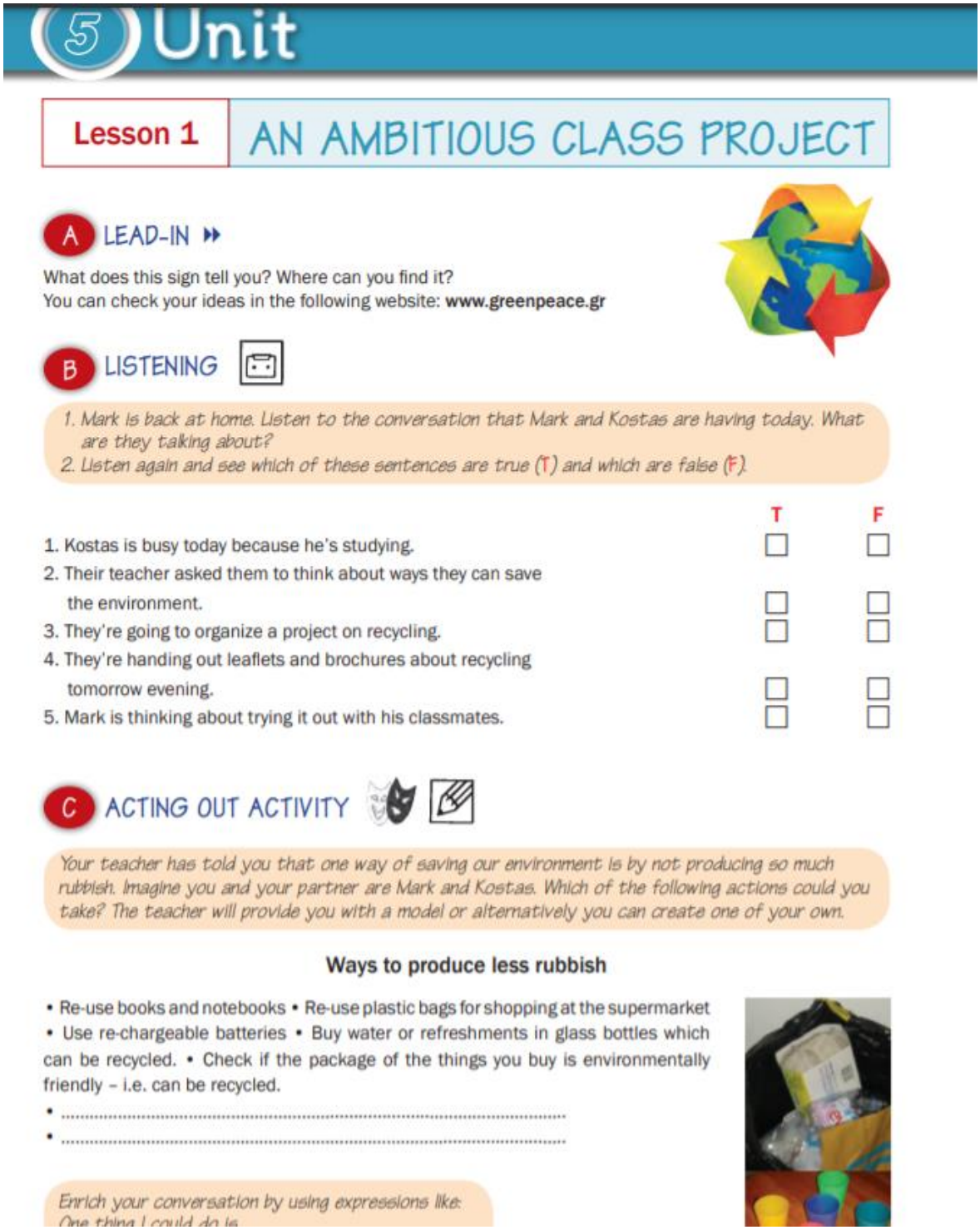
APPENDICES

Appendix i

Task sheet



5 Unit

Lesson 1 AN AMBITIOUS CLASS PROJECT

A LEAD-IN

What does this sign tell you? Where can you find it?
You can check your ideas in the following website: **www.greenpeace.gr**

B LISTENING

1. Mark is back at home. Listen to the conversation that Mark and Kostas are having today. What are they talking about?
2. Listen again and see which of these sentences are true (T) and which are false (F).

	T	F
1. Kostas is busy today because he's studying.	☐	☐
2. Their teacher asked them to think about ways they can save the environment.	☐	☐
3. They're going to organize a project on recycling.	☐	☐
4. They're handing out leaflets and brochures about recycling tomorrow evening.	☐	☐
5. Mark is thinking about trying it out with his classmates.	☐	☐

C ACTING OUT ACTIVITY

Your teacher has told you that one way of saving our environment is by not producing so much rubbish. Imagine you and your partner are Mark and Kostas. Which of the following actions could you take? The teacher will provide you with a model or alternatively you can create one of your own.

Ways to produce less rubbish

• Re-use books and notebooks • Re-use plastic bags for shopping at the supermarket • Use re-chargeable batteries • Buy water or refreshments in glass bottles which can be recycled. • Check if the package of the things you buy is environmentally friendly – i.e. can be recycled.

• .....
• .....

Enrich your conversation by using expressions like:
One thing I could do is

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D ADVICE FOR THE HOME

- *Now write down clearly as many of the recommendations you came up with in Activity C.*
- *Take them home and discuss with your family.*
- *By the end of the school year report back into class on how many of these you and your family were able to do.*

If you want to find out more about recycling, check the websites included in the Appendix, page 140.

F QUIZ: "WHAT A WASTE!"

Work with your partner and find how much energy will be saved if you decide to apply your plan at school. Try to make the calculations. Here are the facts you need to take into consideration:

For the production of 1 tonne (1.000 kg) of paper we spend :

1) 4.000 kg of wood 2) 40.000 litres of water 3) 7.000 kWatts of energy

Can you work out how many trees, how much water and how much energy we waste in Greece if we think of the 700,000 tonnes of paper we send to the landfills each year?

700,000 tonnes of paper = 1) ..... kg of wood
2) ..... litres of water
3) ..... kWatt of energy

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Appendix ii

Transcript

Kostas: *Oh, hi, Mark! I'm fine, very busy…*
Mark: *Busy? Why? Are you studying?*
Kostas: *Not exactly. You see, I'm working on an environmental project.*
Mark: *Oh, that sounds interesting! What exactly are you doing?*
Kostas: *Well, our teacher suggested that we should think of various ways to protect our environment. So, we're going to organise a project on recycling.*
Mark: *Wow, that's great, Kostas! Are you going to hold an exhibition at school?*
Kostas: *Well, actually we're going to try to persuade our friends and our teachers to recycle paper, aluminium, glass and plastic.*
Mark: *Oh, I haven't thought of recycling plastic… Is that possible?*
Kostas: *Yes, of course it is. Everything needs to be possible if we want to save our planet. So, tomorrow morning we're handing out leaflets and brochures giving information and encouraging everyone at school to take recycling seriously. If we succeed, we'll manage to do something about our future.*
Mark: *That's a terrific idea! I think I'll try it out myself with my classmates. I'll let you know as soon as I have news. But, please, do let me know about your results.*
Kostas: *Ok, I will. I must get back to work now. Talk to you soon.*
Mark: *Yes, talk to you tomorrow!*

Post-Listening

- Ask pupils to read and discuss the statements in the second part of this activity.
- Play the tape/ CD again and let them check their answers.
- Explain unknown words or phrases. You could use realia in order to teach words like leaflets or brochures. For the rest of the vocabulary you could use L1 so that pupils transfer knowledge from their Environmental Education subject.

KEY
1 F, 2 T, 3 T, 4 F, 5 T

hand, 4. persuade, 5. recycle, 6. hold, 7. save, 8. terrific, 9. let, 10. results

DIFFERENTIATED ACTIVITY A • p. 75

KEY
A4-A14: environment,
15I-15B: brochure, 1C-1L: exhibition,
14E-14K: project, E14-E8: protect,
7E-7K: recycle, F3-F8: leaflet,
3E-3K: results, K6-K13: persuade,
M11-M3: encourage, K9-H12: save,
C3-C10: organize

C. ROLE PLAY

PB page: 62 / Time: 10-15 mins / TB Introduction p. 11

→ Cross-curricular link: ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES.

Pre-Role Playing

- In pairs. Here's the part of the dialogue they should use in their role-play – it must be either photocopied or written on the blackboard. Alternatively, the pupils could create their own dialogue.

Kostas: *Well, our teacher suggested that we should think of various ways to protect our environment. So, we're going to organize a project on recycling.*
Mark: *Wow, that's great, Kostas! Are you going to hold an exhibition at school?*
Kostas: *Well, actually we're going to try to persuade our friends and our teachers to recycle paper, aluminium, glass and plastic.*
Mark: *Oh, I haven't thought of recycling plastic… Is that possible?*
Kostas: *Yes, of course it is. Everything is possible if we want to save our planet.*

- This section can be changed with the prompts provided in the Pupil's Book.
- Pupils should take turns and act out the dialogue.
- To provide a model, role play the dialogue with one of the pupils in front of the class.

While-Role Playing

- Make sure they use L2 during the activity.
- Move among the pairs and help when you