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ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ, ВИКЛИКИ, ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ

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THE LIVING LIBRARY AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

There are many approaches, techniques and instructional patterns for helping English language learners both improve their language skills and develop new ideas for classroom discussions. One of such educational tools, *The Living Library* – which is also referred to as a *Human Library* – has become hugely popular in recent years. Many teachers use the strategy in the classroom setting and this proves its applicability as well as efficiency.

Learning a foreign language in real life situations always brings more pleasure and generates more interest. Students are free to open up, they behave naturally and feel more confident when they are in control of their own learning process. This short article defines the term, provides a brief theoretical background for the implementation of the technique, describes its benefits, and presents practical tips for teaching English in *The Living Library* format.

What is The Living Library? *The Living Library* is an activity in which members meet to discuss and respond to a book. *The Living Library* as a tool works just like a normal library: visitors can browse the catalogue for the available titles, choose the book they want to read, and borrow it for a limited period of time. After reading, they return the book to the library and, if they want, borrow another. The only difference is that in *The Living Library*, books are people, and reading consists of a conversation. The first event of *The Living Library* was organized in Denmark in 2000 at the Roskilde Festival. The original idea had been developed by a Danish

Youth NGO called “Stop the Violence” as part of the activities they offered to festival goers. The concept behind *The Living Library* is to raise social awareness and challenge prejudice and discrimination.

Overview of The Living Library technique and setting. Having experienced this technique in practice – in the context of discussing social issues of inclusion and tolerance – I have introduced it to my teaching performance with third-year university students (C1) at classes of English speech practice. I have slightly changed the format due to syllabus and learning targets, but the idea remained relevant and students responded with enthusiasm to play roles of *Books* and *Readers*. First of all, they are all instructed about the principles of would-be books and readers for *The Living Library* discussion. They are as follows:

- Prepare yourself for your role of being a Book. You have to be convinced about the title you are representing.
- It can be useful to prepare some factual information in order to evaluate the relevance of information some readers might confront you with.
- Be yourself: be honest and open to talk. Listen carefully.
- Do not act another role or invent characteristics for yourself. The reader will eventually realize and you will lose credibility.
- Be ready to share your reflected personal experience.
- While you might have to repeat yourself over and over to different readers, try to treat each of your readers as if he or she was the first one.
- Readers will be interested in your title for a variety of reasons. A good question to start the conversation is “Why did you choose my book?”
- It may turn out that a reader is ignorant or for some reason becomes verbally aggressive and/or attempts to hold you responsible for a variety of things (ending a story in a specific way, choosing literary genres, characters’ behavior, attitudes, etc.) Try to remain calm and show understanding, while expressing your disagreement where necessary.
- It may happen that you are borrowed by two or more people. While this can be very interesting, try to avoid being used to sort out differences of opinion between your readers.
- If you work with a dictionary, pause after every two-three sentences to ensure that everything you say is translated and comprehended.
- And above all, enjoy being a Book! It can be a very enriching and interesting experience.

The Living Library Book’s responsibility is to present a book from the perspective of its author, reporting in a first person narrative mode of

story-telling. Students-books are asked to show a picture of a writer telling a simple story of his/her life or an interesting episode. They bring a book and tell what its main idea, plot, characters, setting, moral message, etc. Students performing a role of a book usually like to read out loud short abstracts, provide a quotation they want to dwell on and encourage students-readers to ask questions. *The Living Library Reader's* task is to develop at least five questions about the text and then address them to the Book in order to get discussion going. Often Books question writer's ideas, struggle to change the course of a book and share their own visions of content, ideas, etc.

Benefits of The Living Library. This project is designed to improve language skills and encourage students to read. It creates a natural classroom setting and gives students a possibility to choose the role they will find most comfortable for them. Being a Book is a chance to express oneself with a story. There is a hope that through these stories all students will realize that everyone is a *Living Book* with a story to tell. *Living Books* introduce readers to different books, thus various worldviews and experiences can be expanded and this adds to widening their circle or readership. Also, *Living Books* help readers get a better insight into the book, giving more details and acting out from a writer's perspective. This, of course, poses more responsibility on Books and requires more preparation, in the long run, however, students are more willing to play Books than Readers as it empowers them and allows them to be more in control of their learning environment. Readers first of all develop their comprehension skills that are essential for reading the text. This altered format – when reading is actually substituted with listening – enables students to improve and extend their creative thinking skills. Both Books and Readers increase their vocabulary usage and oral language skills.

Since the assigned roles in *The Living Library* require students to create questions, analyze books, summarize the text, learners are expected to use a range of strengths and skills to prepare for discussion. This kind of discussion provides a safe classroom environment where students build their confidence, interact with others and are far less monitored by the teacher. They feel free to share their ideas without a risk of being corrected and it releases the feeling of anxiety about making mistakes. One more benefit is helping students acquire sense of responsibility. Having a chance to individually choose a book they want to present for discussion empowers them. They also need to demonstrate good persuasive skills to involve others into a talk.

Useful tips for running The Living Library format. The Living Library project is most applicable at classes of literature and conversational English. Before the class starts, students should already have been exposed to topics related to the main themes of book. To make class effective, it helps to create a set of slides providing information about the author, the book, pictures and stories connected with the reception of the book by public. At the end of the class students should be able to demonstrate the ability to compare and contrast; provide understanding of the plot and the setting of the story; apply strategies of interpretation, analysis, evaluation; define and provide examples of vocabulary from the text.

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AN AMERICAN FAIL: REFLECTIONS OF A U.S. MAN ABROAD

Language is a form of currency. Every one of us deals in it daily. We exchange, barter, argue, persuade, describe and narrate with language. And just as some monetary currencies are more valued than others, language currencies are treated much the same way. In fact, I'd wager that if one were to match the strongest world monies to the country's native language, one would find the so-called global languages at the top, and the English language chief among them. I feel confident that someone has done this already – or else, no one needs to because the results would not be all that surprising. But, as an educator, I must keep this language-as-currency metaphor in mind because it helps my frame of mind in the classroom, and keeps me cognizant of just how fortunate I am to be where I am from and speak the language I speak.

Dr. Jinhyun Cho, a Korean-English translator and professor at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, describes this connection as “market capitalism combin(ing) with academic capitalism.” In my travels and teaching experience abroad – first in Indonesia and now here in Ukraine – I have come to see quite clearly how this relationship plays out. My students overseas, or the parents of students for my younger ones, mostly see English in economic terms. A pathway to university and careers and prosperity in an increasingly globalized world that has positioned English as the language of business. In many ways, speaking English is a status symbol, an indication of good schooling and parenting. In Indonesia, for instance, English speakers are highly sought after in the dating pool. Here in Ukraine, the relationship to English seems to be different, since