

Teaching Conversation (10 Documentaries For Law Students)

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Abstract: *Students of English for Specific Purposes do not learn for the sake of learning. They need to be practical and to consider English as an essential tool to help them climb the ladder in their future careers. Thus, this is why we got engaged into a challenging and rewarding project with our 2nd year of study Law students to boost their communicative skills and foremost, to guide them to better use spoken English and legal jargon in order to gain autonomy, together with confidence. In this respect, we have selected ten documentaries for these students to watch and debate on, ranging from topics such as online identity theft to women’s rights and liberties in the Arabic world or to what is to be hidden in the mind of a serial killer. Not surprisingly, our students have shown great interest into these matters as the end of term feedback revealed to us. Not only that they have improved speaking and vocabulary, but they have also stretched the boundaries of critical thinking they could reach at the start of our journey together and the art of arguing for one’s perspective over global issues connected to the field of Law. The theoretical support for our project and for this paper was provided by many scholars such as Scott Thornbury and Diana Slade’s “Conversation: From Description to Pedagogy”, or by Jim Scrivener, “Learning Teaching. The Essential Guide To English Language Teaching” and others.*

Keywords: *communicative skills, identity, productive skills, learner autonomy, conversation, confidence*

The power of conversation in theory

Casual conversation is an essential human activity starting to develop at a very early age. It is then no haste to consider conversation the main tool for all learning activities, be it in a formal or in an informal environment. Still, conversation is associated with informality and this is the definition that most dictionaries provide.

The main feature of conversation being spoken, that is to say it happens in real time, Scott Thornbury and Diana Slade perceive it as a “spontaneous production” (Thornbury, Slade 1). Furthermore, we could not possibly think of such a production without imagining a shared context and the interaction of participants.

On top of that, as the above researchers put it into words, using conversation to teach languages can be risky: “The fast and unpredictable nature of conversation means that it is not always plain sailing. Occasionally, ambiguities need to be resolved“ (Thornbury, Slade 17). In our case, promoting conversation as the core means for discussing with students legal matters, led to connecting them to a series of documentaries from different cultural spaces. We could but make way for diversity and a handful of arguments to support their views. The dynamic that results from such interaction can be of great benefit to second language learners because they need “to constantly adapt their message according to their interlocutors’ reactions, both verbal and paralinguistic” (Thornbury, Slade 17). Consequently, the rule of thumb becomes autonomy, creativity, two aims that all teachers want to reach as far as their students’ development is concerned.

Conversation is also interpersonal, argue the same authors. When picturing two parties that have to interact, teacher and students, we have to take into account a non-symmetrical relationship. The teacher might ask more questions, but roles can be changed. Besides asking our students questions related to topics of interest, we have also encouraged them to ask each other questions or to use key-words such as legal concepts to raise a problem. By doing that, the educator initiates moves that students ought to react to which obviously turns into a controlled environment, slightly apart from that of a casual conversation. Even so, freedom of speech cannot entirely be destroyed.

Adding to those already mentioned as conversational features, identity has to come up front. Conversation expresses identity thus being filled with expressions of likes, dislikes and emotions. Humor and teasing can occur which can lighten up the classroom atmosphere and can encourage those participating to feel comfortable, confident in their views. Only when a positive environment is created in the classroom can students and teachers alike flourish, improve their skills and truly communicate.

Vocabulary plays a huge part in meaningful conversations. Our purpose when selecting documentaries to discuss about was to help determine learners use targeted language as they could get familiarized with it while watching the video productions in question. An advantage for feeling at ease with new vocabulary is that when speaking, people need to use less utterances than when writing, so the workload was limited and so the pressure. A person uses approximately 2000 words in daily interaction, so in order to emphasize the legal feature of a conversation, we might count a

dozen of idioms and expressions more, but not in impressive numbers. It could be that the range stretches to 2500 to cover all topics throughout the semester. It could also be that lexical variety is less and lexical frequency is more. Still, vocabulary can be improved by watching films, clips or documentaries: “learners may not acquire 100% of this vocabulary correctly, but it will be good enough” (Alluri 149). On top of that, instead of using translation, students can guess meaning from the context which encourages independence: “they are expected to deduce the meaning of a particular structure or vocabulary item from the situation” (Di Pardo et al 3).

Lexical repetition functions as a distinctive characteristic of conversation and, in our case, it counts words related to discrimination, identity, human rights, crimes, torts, breach of contract, punitive and monetary damages, legal career issues and challenges and more. Needless to argue that the lexical pattern of a discussion supports the topic as the above authors explain, too: “The reiteration of lexical items is an important means of achieving discourse cohesion” (Thornbury, Slade 51).

Together with the skill of writing, speaking belongs to the category of productive skills. In his book on learning how to teach, *Learning Teaching*, Jim Scrivener argues that:

If you want to get students talking in class, we need to answer all these objections. If the subject is relevant and interesting, if the students already know about or are provided with information to give substance to the topic, if they feel motivated to talk about it, if they feel that they really want to say something, there is a good chance of something interesting happening. (Scrivener 211)

Apart from raising interest, the role of the teacher is to structure the talk:

making sure that all learners get a chance to participate, trying to prevent it getting boring, occasionally adding to the discussion itself in order to keep it interesting. (Scrivener 211)

When it comes to speaking time, teacher speaking time (TTT) should be less or diminished as the conversation develops. In order to avoid dominating the discussions, teachers should pay attention not to fall in the trap of “talk-talk loop” as Scrivener calls it: “you say something, but because there is no response from the learners, you say something else, and again

with no response” (Scrivener 212). It is better to allow your students time to think and not fear long awkward pauses:

Repeatedly adding new comments or new questions can have the opposite effect to that intended, confusing the class and closing down people who were planning to speak. (Scrivener 212)

Another thing that can encourage conversation is addressing open questions such as those containing Wh-words (where, what, who, why, how, when). This strategy will somehow oblige participants to give more information, other than “yes” or “no”.

The strategy of playing the opposition party can also work:

One useful intervention you can make is to sometimes play the devil’s advocate (i.e. deliberately taking an opposing or contrasting viewpoint in order to spur on conversation). (Scrivener 212)

Other ways to start a discussion is by small talk or by writing something controversial on the board so that participants can comment upon it. Always remember to have a clear task and to communicate it to the class in a short and relevant manner.

The ultimate goals of speaking in class are fluency and confidence: “Fluency and confidence are important goals when considering speaking lessons “ (Scrivener 212). We aimed at these from the very start considering that our students as future law professionals are going to deal with a lot of speaking, either persuading people or explaining legal procedures to them. When having a larger group of participants these targets are more difficult to achieve, but, in our case, having fifteen to twenty students in a group was not that big of a challenge. They all had the opportunity to speak, expressing their views in a relaxed, supporting atmosphere.

If a teacher enrolls into a speaking quest, it is crucial to bear in mind a couple of things related to people’s emotional reactions:

When people study a language, they accumulate a lot of up-in-the-head knowledge (i.e. they may know rules of grammar and lists of vocabulary items, but they find that they can’t actually use this language to communicate when they want to). For many learners their

passive knowledge is much larger than their active language. (Scrivener 213)

It is the duty of the educator to gently activate as much as possible and to add even more knowledge through the help of conversation or other.

On top of that, students might feel foolish or embarrassed to speak or they might lack practice. So, having in mind these possibilities, the teacher should try and put these students “in safe situations in class...create activities in which learners feel less worried about speaking, less under pressure, less nervous about trying new things“ (Scrivener 213). Considering our work with law students of second year of study, we have to admit that law topics are never comfortable, so they need to cope with discussing about gender discrimination or terrorism or serial killers or unfair dismissals at work. This is the risk they have to take and luckily, things have proven but great so far.

Because speaking as stated above, involves fluency and confidence, one essential aspect for teachers to put on their to-do list is not to interrupt. Whenever trying to correct mistakes (because they always happen in speaking), you interrupt the flow. The question that arises is what shall we do? Shall we work on fluency or on accuracy? We strongly suggest to choose fluency over accuracy during a speaking exercise and this is the recommendation of the above mention researcher:

Students find it hard to continue after a correction, whilst others in class may become more reluctant to speaking for fear of similar interruptions. (Scrivener 214)

We have never interrupted our students, instead we have used scaffolding techniques which are a great method to correct without the speaker even perceiving it as a harsh correction and without destroying their confidence in their speaking abilities.

These scaffolding techniques are meant to support the process of learning and can be exemplified by: nodding (“uh-huh”), eye-contact, asking for clarification or by repeating an unclear word:

encouragement echo-repeating the last word (perhaps with questioning intonation)...asking conversation-oiling questions (ones

that mainly recap already stated information), e.g. Is it? Do you? Where was it? (Scrivener 227)

We have to confess that the feedback our students provided on that was more than satisfactory. The majority of them felt encouraged and supported which obviously led to a greater confidence in their communicative skills.

Appraisals and involvement are absolutely crucial in teaching languages for specific purposes through conversation: “The interpersonal nature of conversation requires speakers to demonstrate their involvement and commitment“ (Thornbury, Slade 66). They can use a whole category of adjectives and adverbs to highlight their opinions and this is why we have introduced a section in our seminars to revise and reconsider these parts of speech. On the other hand, students have to be motivated and appraised by their teachers as the conversation develops and unfolds, either by verbal feedback or by nonverbal one such as nodding or maintaining eye-contact to show interest. We believe we have used all these techniques as well, by paying attention to their needs and by constantly encouraging them to communicate and not to be afraid of mistakes as they are part of the learning process.

Last but not least, the genre has to be selected accordingly. In this respect, we did not provide much variety on purpose because we wanted to practice discussions in a formal or semi-formal style. Our students were requested to exercise free speech in an academic like environment. Distinguishing between styles is also an ability they should possess as they envision their future achievements as real professionals of law:

A learner of a language needs to learn not just words, grammar, pronunciation, but also appropriate ways of speaking in different situations. (Scrivener 231)

The more nuances one adds to their speech, the more likely he is to be successful and being successful professionally is the ultimate goal of any student.

In practice. Our list

Having worked with Law Students for a number of years, we have come to understand their need to express themselves with ease in legal matters. Not

only that they have access to different legal systems that they can compare and study, but they are also provided with various international work opportunities, so mastering English represents a must for their future careers. As such, we consider that it is our duty as educators to support this quest for better chances to succeed domestically or internationally. For this purpose we have selected a series of ten documentaries that summarize real cases of lawsuits meant for our students to debate on and to analyze. This selection is subjective, but we have tried to cover as many topics of interest as possible, from different areas of law, be it corporate law, family law or criminal law. The list can always be adapted, either expanded or limited according with the times and preferences. *The Hunt for Transylvanian Gold* (2016) directed by Andrei-Nicolae Teodorescu stands at the top of our list. This documentary tries to solve the mystery of 13 Dacian golden spirals, stolen in the 1990s from the ancient site of Sarmisegetuza, the capital of Dacia. The story can provide a good learning opportunity for students as it was the subject matter of several lawsuits creating a precedent and stirring debates about organized crime, theft, national treasure, identity and smuggling of artifacts. The plot is difficult and puzzling and it can be an excellent starting point for further research. Augustin Lazăr, general prosecutor of Alba-Iulia was the motor behind which all these truths were revealed, still some of the criminals involved got very mild sentences or even got away with it. So, the documentary shows young people what can happen when national treasures are left in the hands of looters. It also puts upfront concepts like honesty, identity, loyalty, restoring justice for people.

The second documentary proposed is *Conversations with a serial killer. Ted Bundy Tapes* (2019) directed by Joe Berlinger. Ted Bundy was a notorious serial killer in the 1970s who shocked the whole world not only because of his brutality, but also for the fact that he was well-educated (having a law-degree and another degree in Psychology), charming and apparently successful. So what is that which turns a normal human being into a beast? What psychological mechanisms can trigger such a drive to take young girls' lives, to torture them, to mutilate them beyond recognition? One might expect murderers to be spotted from afar, but Ted Bundy's case contradicts Cesare Lombroso's theory (a famous 19th century Italian criminologist) according to whom criminality is inherited and a person *born criminal* can be easily identified by physical traits such as deformities or impairment, as explained in short in Encyclopedia Britannica.

Another valuable lesson to be learnt by law students is related to institutions and the way the share information. In 1970s there was no such communication, no integrated system between police stations or tribunals so this serial killer could travel from one state to another to commit atrocious deeds and he was not identified to be the same person. It took years and more victims before he was sentenced to death penalty and kept in prison for several decades. DNA was not discovered and used in police investigation, so things were even more difficult to prove. Further on, our third choice was *The Nuremberg Trials* (1946), a series of lawsuits initiated by the Allied Forces, after the World War 2, meant to bring justice to the nations that suffered because of the Nazi invasion and the destruction they brought with them. On the occasion of the trials, a documentary was produced by Central Documentary Film Studios in Moscow, USSR, in 1946, bearing the name of the German city where the Nazi leaders' cases were judged by an international jury.

Nuremberg used to be the cradle of the German Fascism and so the trials bore an extremely strong symbolism for all those affected and for generations to follow. Watching and discussing about these trials is an opportunity for law students to exercise empathy, compassion, to understand human suffering, to reconsider core human values. Some documentary scenes might be a little hard to follow as they show human remains of those tortured and killed in Nazi concentration camps such as Auschwitz.

Moving further, our journey of knowledge took us to the USA as *Hot Coffee* (2011) directed by Susan Saladoff was selected fourth on our list. It is common knowledge that USA has been a showcase for spectacular lawsuits for a long time, so looking at some famous examples could only help law students understand legal matters better. Product liability cases flourished in the '90s all across the American states, but one in particular shook the whole system of justice and made it to the media setting both a good and a bad example. It was Stella Liebeck's case, who in 1992, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, bought a 49-cent cup of coffee from a McDonald's drive thru. She was 79 years old at that time. The driver was her nephew who stopped the car to let her pour sugar and cream into the cup. As there were no cup-holders in the car, Stella held the cup in between her legs, but when trying to open the lid, she slipped the entire hot liquid content on her lap causing severe burning, of third-degree to her pelvic region. As a consequence of the accident, the lady in question was hospitalized for eight days. During her hospitalization period, she lost 9,1 kg, the equivalent of 20% of her body

weight, being reduced to only 38kg. She also underwent a skin grafting procedure and had to take two years of medical treatment. She initially wanted 20000\$ to cover her medical expenses, but because of McDonald's refusal, her lawyer filed in a lawsuit for gross negligence. As we value diversity and tried to cover as many parts of the world as possible, our number five was *One day that changed Asia. Tokyo's sarin gas attack* (2018), directed by Eamon T.O. Conner and Sam Taylor. 20th March, 1995. Rush-hour, central Tokyo. What looked like a normal day in a busy metropolis turned into a disaster as a terrorist attack took everybody by surprise. At 8 am, five men boarded five separate underground trains. They had plastic bags containing sarin, an extremely toxic gas which was released in the wagons when they pierced the bags with the sharpen tips of their umbrellas. 13 people died because of choking and hundreds were injured. The attack had been planned and designed by a religious cult, Aum Shinrikyo, well-known for its public appearance and its strong desire to change the world. The shock was even bigger as Japan is considered one of the safest countries in the world, with citizens that follow rules and enjoy a high standard of living which is associated with happiness. So why would one of them try to change the world? Yet, exceptions might occur. The lesson to be learnt, especially for the authorities that need to ensure safety and justice, is that things do not emerge out of nowhere, on the contrary, there are always signs to be read, whilst those in charge have to read them well and fast. The cult in question had shown many signs of warning, but they were not taken seriously. Thus, our law students can reckon that even in highly developed countries, authorities should stay alert and make sure safety is provided to all citizens.

Back across the ocean, in the USA, we tried to learn about contracts and the mirage of the Internet by watching the documentary *Terms and conditions may apply*, positioned number six on our list, directed by Cullen Hoback, in 2013. This film aims to investigate the tricks of agreeing to terms and conditions. One might argue that the film relies too much on the idea of a conspiracy theory in which the state is depicted as our most cunning enemy which is not always the case. We certainly do not embrace such a theory. Still, watching the documentary in question could offer us a valuable lesson on awareness, on how laws can actually work against us, on how to, eventually, seek legal advice.

Exploring different cultures and looking at diverse values and traditions ought to be the training of every future lawyer, so *Divorce (Iranian*

style) a documentary produced in 1998 by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini gave us this opportunity. This number seven on our list looks at some Iranian women and their cases, their struggle to seek justice while trying to escape toxic marriages. Such a quest, as fought by ordinary people, can help us better realize the differences that lay between Western and Eastern societies, moreover, disparities that are supported by religion, women's low status in Arabic countries. It can be particularly revealing for law professionals when comparing two or more legal systems in the attempt to improve the one that is faulty to increase people's quality of life.

Still in the Arabic world, still researching on women's rights and liberties, we chose to converse about, at number eight, *Love Crimes of Kabul* (2011) directed by Tanaz Eshagian. This film production manages to show viewers different types of crimes, unthinkable of in Western societies. It uncovers divergent mentalities and behavior in the world, even though the time of the events is the 21st century. So, such a quest for emancipation, for escaping already designated roles in families becomes a treasure hunt for law researchers and law professionals to be as it unveils tremendous contrasts amongst legal systems in different countries.

In Badum Bagh prison in Kabul, there are 125 female inmates. Half of them are convicted for serious crimes as drug smuggling, murder or attempted bombing, crimes that are as serious in the Western world. Still, the other half is sentenced for "crimes" that are to be considered ridiculous by Western citizens such as sex before marriage or outside marriage or leaving home without a male's permission. Watching this documentary unfolds, participants come to realize that many concepts, even though viewed as universal, might have unexpected interpretations in some countries which is the case of "crime". *Gideon's Army* (2013), directed by Dawn Porter, standing nine on our list, explores some of the issues connected to the American legal system, especially those with regards to poor people or black communities who are constantly fighting poverty. The narrative consists of showing the struggle of three young public defenders who are trying to keep their clients out of jail. They might had been the victims of a bad entourage or they might had come from broken homes, but still they should had been offered chances to a better life. This documentary also grants future law professionals a relevant glance into the profession which is sure to assist them in choosing wisely, aiding to decide on their career path, making them aware of the ups and downs of the job and of the expectations they should have.

The stories of these three young defenders are interwoven together with a selection of their cases that prove the point: they need to work for poor wages, but they still need to be committed and defend their clients as all people are entitled to their liberty and life. All successful careers ask for sacrifices and this why our students have to weight well all possibilities before picking out one. They should not wait for milk and honey as it takes a lot of hard work and effort to achieve something.

Our last choice, but not the least important was *Kids for Cash*, a film by Robert May, released in 2013. The topic of this documentary is not trafficking, as the title might suggest, but corruption, a sin to be discovered in many legal systems as people gain power they might consider moral values less worthy. This selection offers future lawyers another opportunity to reflect on their choices, on their profession, on its ethical principles, on the actions they might undertake and on the consequences involved.

Kids for Cash tells the story of a judge who thought he was doing the right thing by sending teenagers to detention centers for behaving somehow off the limit of acceptance, as all teenagers are likely to do. Judges, lawyers, solicitors, notary public workers or legal advisers might fall into the trap of corruption, might be blinded by money and power, so it is useful for students of law to be warned beforehand.

Upon the completion of the seminars dedicated to these documentaries, students were asked to fill in a survey and the results are as follows: 90 % were satisfied with the topics and the discussions related to different legal concepts, 6% considered that the topics really helped them to improve their speaking skills, but they would have selected more recent documentaries and 4% expressed their preferences towards European legal matters as opposed to American ones or others.

We were, also satisfied with the responses, at the same time, admitting to the fact that the above topics need to be constantly updated. Our project can be regarded as a reading project, but instead of books, students had to watch documentaries at home (with English subtitles which made it a reading comprehension exercise after all). We are positive that they went through the process of “reading“ documentaries out of conviction as we had managed to demonstrate the utility of it. As Christine Nuttall explains how continuing the process of reading at home works, we found it similar to “reading” the videos in our list:

First, getting students to read extensively is the easiest and most effective way of improving their reading skills. Second, it is much easier to teach people to read better if they are learning in a favourable climate where reading is valued not only as an educational tool, but as a source of enjoyment. (Nuttall 127)

No person can develop skills in a negative atmosphere or because being forced or hunted down. The above mentioned scholar expresses the same opinion as us and puts it into words with regards to reading, but we find it valid for all skills:

teachers have to create the right conditions for reading to become a valued part of every student's life. They have to ensure that attractive books are available and use every trick they know to persuade students to get hooked on books. (Nuttall 127)

All these exercises of practicing critical thinking and developing arguments and pleading for a cause, had the result of students preparing presentations which meant speaking in front of an audience and convincing them of their truth. Besides discussing and debating and presenting, our students were rendered the chance to revise grammar as without it, one is less likely to be able to articulate ideas nor debate on cases. So, they had Passive voice, modal verbs, If Clauses, Past Simple, Present Perfect, Future forms, Present Continuous, collective nouns, adverbs, adjectives, all to support both their speaking and writing skills.

Targets and conclusions

Conversation as a teaching tool can come in many shapes and colours, but, as for us, the dominant tool was storytelling. Stories collected from different parts of the world were told to trigger communication, critical thinking and last, but not least, the ability to use legal jargon.

Conversation, as two scholars define it “creates and reflects on social worlds” (Thornbury, Slade 142), “is the primary location for the enactment of social values and relationships” (Thornbury, Slade 142), being a “highly structured, functionally motivated, semantic activity” (Thornbury Slade 142).

Teaching conversation can only rely on a short, but intense history. Its pedagogical implications were discovered back in the 19th century by French educators. In more recent times, the Direct Method which was first employed

in Australia, has spread all over the world leading to excellent results when helped by visual aids, dedication and perseverance.

Looking back at this entire process of employing conversation in teaching, we would not be too modest to affirm that our most important objective, learner's autonomy, was reached. As David Little explains it in *Language Learner Autonomy: Some Fundamental Considerations Revisited*, by "learner's autonomy" we should understand one's ability to take charge, to be in control of their own learning. There are three fundamental aspects related to this concept: learner involvement, learner reflection and target language use.

In the 1980s, the concept of learning autonomy was strongly linked to adult education where learners basically did things on their own. Then, a decade after, more in depth discussions about language teaching have started to incorporate learner autonomy together with other innovative trends. Unfortunately, David Little observes that the concept is still elusive as for some researchers it could mean "a potential weapon of colonialism" (Little 15) or "that learners and teachers should have the freedom to do whatever they please, presumably including nothing" (Little 15) The author, therefore, states that "a theory of language learner autonomy should tell us what it is necessary to do in order to develop autonomous language learners and users and at the same time provide us with criteria by which to evaluate their efforts" (Little 15). In our instance, we have not developed a theory for learner autonomy, but in terms of evaluating our students' efforts, we were very satisfied to watch presentations delivered by them at the end of the term on previously discussed topics during our seminars.

The ability to take charge of one's own learning was the foundational vision over the matter, first introduced by Halec in his book of 1979 *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*. David Little believes that this led to politicized views of the process, as man being "the product of a society", he might be able to produce his own society. We would not consider such an approach as we have the examples of Iranian women (products of their society, so to speak) that fight for women's right and for decriminalizing acts that are not criminalized elsewhere such as sex outside marriage as shown in one of the documentaries in our list, *Love Crimes of Kabul*.

On the other hand, looking at the teaching side of it, dealing with productive skills (speaking, writing) as a normal follow-up for receptive skills (listening, reading) was of great satisfaction. Interacting with an

audience, as Jeremy Harmer puts it in *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, calls for flexibility: “Part of our speaking proficiency depends upon our ability to speak differentially, depending upon our audience and upon the way we absorb their reaction and respond to it in some way or other.” (Harmer 248) This is valid for both educators and students involved. Furthermore, the author continues:

In informal spontaneous conversations we are constantly alert for the reactions of the people we are interacting with so that we make our communication as informative as required, amending it depending on how the other participants in the interaction behave. (Harmer 248)

There are plenty of difficulties to overcome such as improvising, discarding (no words to be found), inventing words (making up words taken from their mother tongue), paraphrasing (it can complicate things, even block communication), but in the end, it is a question of practice and perseverance. Nevertheless, the biggest advantage of producing language in the classroom is the safe environment which leads to freedom of speech and increases confidence: “The freer the task the greater the chance of seeing how successful a language learning programme has been” (Harmer 250).

Language production has to be stimulated as it was in our case by documentaries that discuss legal issues:

Listening to a tape or disk in which a speaker tells a dramatic story may provide the necessary stimulus for students to tell their own stories, or it may be the basis for a written account of the narrative. (Harmer 251)

The writing part was covered by our students while preparing for presentations.

One more thing that we have also considered is the connection between reception and production because they had to watch the documentaries at home and then debate on different aspects in the classroom, together with the rest of us. Harmer has the same view on integrating skills:

reception and production are so bound up together....many examples in this book show integrated skill sequence, where the practice of one skill leads naturally on to other linked activities. (Harmer 251)

The main role of a teacher when demanding productive skills is to encourage productivity by all means and to be patient:

Teachers should not expect instant fluency and creativity, instead they should build up students' confidence bit by bit, giving them restrictive tasks first before prompting them to be more and more spontaneous later. (Harmer 252)

May we pinpoint the fact that most of our students in the 2nd year of study are already Intermediate or Upper Intermediate, so their challenges when it comes to production were less. Still, in order to avoid frustration or blockages, teachers should offer key language, more exposure (we did that by playing important clips selected from the documentaries in the classroom to discuss about them in particular) and to choose the topics right.

So, the selected topics are of uttermost importance:

If students are not interested in the topics we are asking them to write or speak about, they are unlikely to invest their language production with the same amount of effort as they would if they were excited by the subject matter. (Harmer 252)

As a matter of consequence, we are confident that we have managed to pick up some topics of interest: "It may be better to find out from students what their favourite topics are through interviews and questionnaires- or by observing them" (Harmer 253). Our students were asked to state their opinions and to suggest topics.

If it is difficult for students to make a selection, teachers should take the lead and create interest in the topic. They should display enthusiasm as the above mentioned author advises:

We can create interest by talking about the topic and communicating enthusiasm. We can have students discuss the topic in buzz groups to get them involved in it, or we can ask the group if anyone knows anything about the topic and can therefore tell the others about it....we should give them time to do things (Harmer 253).

Our students had time on their side as they knew the title of the documentary they had to watch with English subtitles and then get ready to discuss about it in class.

In conclusion, helping our students to grow and providing them support to cope with productive skills, mainly speaking, were goals that we have proudly achieved. The process is still ongoing as the list selected by us can always be changed or improved. But as other scholars have already observed, not only speaking and communicating is essential, but being aware of cultural diversity: “they spot similarities and differences with their own community, which makes them more conscious of the cultural characteristics of their own country” (Sanchez-Aunon et al 3). What is essential to remember is that conversation has a magical power on people, it can untie tongues, heal frustration and lack of confidence for better skills to be used in a second language, for specific purposes such as English.

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