

INTERVIEW March 2015 IERG News

Dr. Buğra Zengin
Imaginative Education in Turkey

When did you first learn about IE and how does it inform your practice or research?

I first learned about it through Dr. Kieran Egan. Although my communication with Dr. Egan has been limited to email exchanges, it dates back to 2003, the year he sent me back some very positive feedback on some work I had sent him for review. Attached was his manuscript titled “An Imaginative Approach to Teaching” which was published two years later (2005). I was glad to see some parallels between his approach and the way I had been teaching in terms of using mental imagery, metaphor, play, humour, irony, personalising, and rhyme, rhythm and pattern. His views were like affirmation or an appreciative confirmation that I was on the right track as a teacher. His work has also raised my awareness. I can tell you that I practice the “teaching as story-telling” approach. I also frequently refer to his book “The Educated Mind” in my research. Quoting from such a distinguished authority in the field of education as Dr. Egan brings dignity and prestige to my research, and increases the credibility of my arguments for learning and teaching languages in ways that engage the imagination.

I first used cognitive tools systematically to teach Turkish learners of English individual vocabulary words. After testing a sample in my PhD, I have written a book of these kinds of mnemonics. Since completing my PhD, the scope of my research has involved another challenge for learners of English: learning the English tenses. Out of my pursuits for solutions has come a model that has been supported with longitudinal quasi-experimental research conducted in real classrooms. The link to my published article and two visuals I have designed to mediate the model are available on the IERG website within the Imaginative Literacy, or ILP, Program (<http://ierg.ca/ILP/how-we-can-help/publications/>). I would welcome the opportunity to contribute more of my work to the ILP.

What are your hopes for education in the 21st century?

I would like to see more research on imaginative teaching and more application of research findings. Expertise of teachers should be given its due recognition. I believe it is the teachers—those most aware of the realities of the actual practice—who can, if equipped with research skills, produce efficient models as solutions to the challenges of teaching either by themselves or in cooperation with other researchers. Imagination is power for those who are not ignorant of its potential. For instance, the best engineers or architects are those who tap into the power of imagination. This power is indispensable for the architects of education as well. To give a specific example about language teaching, foreign language teachers who aim to empower learners with memory techniques to facilitate vocabulary recall can use similar strategies as those used by applied linguists working in the field of

advertising, who aim to have their brand etched in memories and understood globally and/or locally among many other products.

What direction(s) would you like to see the IERG taking in the future?

I believe the IERG should be more active in connecting teachers and researchers involved with IE. Each could better help the other. The IERG could also provide help for its members around the world with data analysis. For instance, many teachers are unfamiliar to the technical dimensions of data analysis software. I would like to see the IERG serve as a platform where inventive models designed for teaching are introduced to teachers and researchers around the world.

What is happening with IE in your country?

A few years ago, Dr. Egan's bestseller "The Educated Mind" was translated by Filiz Keser into Turkish and published by Pegem Akademi Yayıncılık, a well-known Turkish publication company specialising in educational research. I would like to see "An Imaginative Approach to Teaching" translated into Turkish as well so that many more Turkish teachers and researchers can learn about Dr. Egan's work. In the future, the expansion of the IERG's Imaginative Literacy Program (ILP) may inspire the emergence of novel ideas in the interdisciplinary field of English language teaching (ELT). I believe that interlingual similarities are underemphasized in the teaching of foreign languages, however partial these similarities might be. What is also underemphasized is the fact that similarities of form are not limited to linguistic forms per se, and should involve interconnections between the visual, auditory and linguistic. I believe that there are enough of these similarities that we can pragmatically use in combination with semantic connections for vocabulary teaching/learning purposes. For instance, the Japanese word "arashi" means "storm" in English. We can alert learners to the partial analogy to "rush" and the semantic overlap between "rush" and "storm". We can imagine both associations working in terms of someone's reaction to a storm approaching. One might say, "Ah, rush, a storm is coming" (an example from Kahraman and Zengin, 2014), the image evoked in the mind can trigger and solidify the association between the L1 and L2 words. For a visual connection, the first letter of the word WIN can be resembled to a champion's raising his/her arms in the air. As for multi-word units, imaginative literacy teaching strategies can include drama activities. For example, we can ask students to write dialogues that use language and expressions they have found from searching on movie subtitle sites. For a few years, I have been focusing on Turkish translations of English language movie "chunks", and there are many great examples of interlingual equivalencies. I would welcome collaborative work with the IERG on mnemonics materials and other imagination-focused literacy strategies, which can intrigue not only the language teachers but also advertising companies—a possible source of funding for the IERG.

If readers would like to learn more about my teaching I can be reached at: bzengin@rocketmail.com