



Ana Aguilar talks  
to Montse Irun  
ABOUT HER OPINIONS ON

## THE PEDAGOGICAL VALUE OF RE-WRITING

**Ana Aguilar:** Montse, thanks very much for dedicating us some of your very, very busy schedule. Your bio data is really impressive: Secondary School Teacher, PAU Coordinator, University Teacher, Researcher, Technological expert; Where do you find the time and energy for all that?

**Montse Irun:** Well, I have no idea. I like what I do and that's what makes me keep going. I'm lucky to be able to do things I enjoy. I'm very active and organised, those two characteristics also help.

**Ana Aguilar:** We would like to comment on several of your papers that appear on the Internet. Let's start with the most academic: **RE-WRITING AND ITS PEDAGOGICAL VALUE: A CASE STUDY** is an example of

really pragmatic fieldwork and research useful to the teachers. Could you perhaps produce a briefer version for the readers of APAC for News?

**Montse Irun:** Yeah, why not? It was one of the first serious research papers I wrote so it would be a pleasure to re-write it for our magazine.

**Ana Aguilar:** In that paper you show the advantage of Writing as a Process versus Writing as a Final Product; Do you think many teachers are aware of it?

**Montse Irun:** We're living in a now and here period, everything is quick and immediate. This, of course, doesn't apply to writing. You need time, time to think, time to plan, time to write, time to check you've written

what you wanted to convey and time to correct. It's only then that a good piece of writing is possible

Research shows that students don't spend much time in class writing and that most writing activities are done for homework. I think that they need to be taught, to be shown the advantages of looking at writing as a process. We, teachers, need to **spend more time teaching and less time correcting or testing.**

**Ana Aguilar:** The data you present in that paper refers to 2<sup>nd</sup> year Batxillerat, do you begin to practice process writing with your students in that course?

**Montse Irun:** No way, I carried out that research project in Batxillerat because I thought that due to the PAU exams students in batxillerat would be more



aware of their writings. That was the only reason. No, I think that learners should write as soon as possible. Writing is just one of different channels of communication. Teachers have to make sure students speak, read, listen to and write in English as **much as possible and as soon as possible**.

**Ana Aguilar:** Do you not think the learners should begin to learn to write from a much earlier age with the agreement and collaboration of all the teachers in the department?

**Montse Irun:** Sure. When kids start learning a foreign language they should start by listening to English as much as possible. In fact, I think they should listen and do things accordingly; that is listen and do practical things such as listening to a tale and painting the best ending or following the instructions to make a paper plane. Only when they are 8 or 9 years old and they master reading in their mother tongue, they should start writing in English. And I'm talking about writing to convey meaning. I'm not talking about writing lists of words. I'm talking about writing a note to the teacher to say things like "My homework is on the table." Or a letter to the Three Wise Men telling them what they would like to get for Christmas. Later, they can write more complex things and it is then that coordination between teachers is a must. Writing pieces should be more complex in terms of language but also in terms of audience, formats, registers, etc. And this has to be planned. Teachers are really good at planning grammar complexity but tend to forget that skills also need to

be planned. Let me tell you an anecdote: Some years ago I was teaching a group of 1<sup>st</sup> ESO students and I asked them to write a description of their family together with a family tree. One of the students in the class said, "Can I hand in the one I wrote for my 4<sup>th</sup> or my 6<sup>th</sup> primary teacher?" That made me think that something was wrong. Writing should also be planned

**Ana Aguilar:** Should it not even be an issue in the coordination between Primary and Secondary levels?

**Montse Irun:** Definitely. This is one of the issues that need our attention: coordination between Primary and Secondary levels. I have the impression that teachers consider 1<sup>st</sup> ESO students as beginners and don't pay attention to what they have done in primary school. The amount of things they are able to do in primary school is amazing and how little attention is given to these things in ESO. They act in theatre plays, they give oral presentations on a number of topics, they write stories, ... But in 1<sup>st</sup> ESO they study the verb "to be" and write about what they do in an ordinary day. If teachers at primary and at secondary schools speak about the aims, activities and competences developed, we'll all win: our task as teachers will be regarded as more professional and our planning will be based on reality and not on our suppositions. Our students will learn more effectively and meaningfully since their learning will sprout from their previous learning.

But I do know many places

where this coordination is a reality. And in those places, everybody, but particularly students in 1<sup>st</sup> ESO, profits a lot from that coordination.

Are you carrying out some further research on this and other related issues?

**Montse Irun:** Well, I'm very interested in evaluation and competences at the moment. I do think that evaluation is the Cinderella of EFL and that it deserves a much more important place since it is the engine of our students' brains. So I'm trying to develop units of work that integrate evaluation, technology and all skills in order to make my students more competent. A hard but at the same time inspiring task!!!

**Ana Aguilar:** In *X 1 A L'AULA D'ANGLÈS* you give very sound advice on the use of new technology and what schools should do to have a proper foreign language space, but we came to the really important question: do kids learn more with the *Pissarra Interactive* or *el Llibre Digital*?

**Montse Irun:** No way. It's the methodology not the technology that is going to make our learners learn better. We all live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and technology is here to stay. It's absurd to keep computers and digital books or digital blackboards out of the classroom. And I do think that these tools can help us get to students easily. I do not know if they learn more but I assure you that my students are more involved in the tasks they do and that good students are able to show their abilities and are able to work on their own and improve their English. One of



the first things that you notice when you work in a 1x1 Classroom is that diversity is dealt with in a much easier way. But again, it is not the computer but what teachers ask students to do with it.

**Ana Aguilar:** Another of your presentations **ELS ESTUDIS UNIVERSITARIS** describes the University after Bologna where the student is supposed to take a much more active role; is that the case nowadays?

**Montse Irún:** Again this is related to our society. Information is everywhere so the point today is not to have one's brain full of knowledge but to know how to get the information you need and where to get the most effective and reliable one. They also need to be more critical, more aware of a much larger number of topics and issues. So, yes. They should have a much active role; students are responsible for their learning. Teachers can tell them how they can

learn but it is only them who can actually learn. I can teach them how to swim but I cannot swim for them. They are the ones that have to jump into the swimming pool and actually swim. I'm there to prevent them for drowning and to help them.

**Ana Aguilar:** And does **procedural processes** take priority over lectures and rote learning?

**Montse Irún:** They should. Lectures are still important but not so important as they used to be. Knowledge is important but it is more important to know how to do things with that knowledge. Students need to develop other competences and that's what the university is trying to do.

**Ana Aguilar:** You also help candidates for the *Oposicions* in how to prepare their syllabus. In our experience as presidents of the examining boards we found a real lack of connexion between the theoretical first part and the concrete lessons. After having quoted all the right points of the new curricula their lessons were geared around

the present and past tense; have you encountered the same contradiction?

**Montse Irún:** Yes, and I have to admit it's one of the things that worries me the most. Why can't we make new teachers understand that they should do in class what they have said they will in the planning? Sometimes I think it's not the training but their experience as students that teachers "imitate". And that's what research also shows. Never before have pre-service teachers got so much training on how to develop competences in English. Still they do in class what they have seen their own teachers do in class. So when I'm in despair I think that all changes need time and that we have to keep going since our work today will also be imitated one day when our students become teachers.

Montse, thanks a lot. We might want to come back to you shortly to pick up your brains in many other issues that interest our readers

## CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

APAC welcomes the contributions of teachers who want to share their experiences and their thoughts, both for our quarterly magazine and for our annual convention.

Articles or presentations dealing with new materials, new techniques and new methods are most welcome. We are also interested in methodological and educational issues related to the teaching profession.

Reviews of books, interviews and other texts are also published regularly. If you have read a book you would like to recommend or if you have the opportunity to interview somebody who you think may be of interest to our readers, or you have had an experience, attended a course or been to a lecture you would like to tell other teachers about, please write it down and send it to us. ( [info@apac.es](mailto:info@apac.es) )

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