

Teaching dictogloss as a classroom activity to student EFL teachers using classroom response tools

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Abstract

This paper reports on an evaluation of a workshop to introduce dictogloss procedures to a group of student EFL teachers using classroom response system (CRS) tools in a high-tech learning environment. Response tools allow students to interact anonymously with the projector/interactive whiteboard (IWB) using their own devices (computer, tablet, smartphone etc) not only synchronously in the classroom but also remotely and asynchronously. For shy, more introverted students reluctant to participate orally in the lesson, interaction via their own mobile devices permits an alternative avenue towards a more active participation in classroom lessons. The response tool used was Wooclap which was fully integrated into the students' Moodle VLE. Dictogloss is a well-established listening comprehension activity based on dictation in which a short text read to learners is re-constructed and reformulated in pairs. The activity permits a focus on linguistic form within the context of a communicative classroom. Results from the three response tasks indicated a high level of involvement and response among the student teachers.

Keywords: dictogloss; classroom response system tools; pre-service teacher training.

1. Introduction

This paper describes a workshop project to introduce *dictogloss* as a practical teaching activity to a group of pre-service German student teachers of English using classroom response system (henceforth CRS) tools. Dictogloss is a classroom activity in which learners listen to a short text read by the teacher twice and then attempt to recreate the text in writing as accurately as possible. In presenting dictogloss for the first time to student teachers, it is necessary to ensure their continual focus on the procedural stages of the activity in addition to linking these practical concerns to second language acquisition theory. CRS tools were used in the context of this workshop in an attempt to ensure that this focus and involvement was maintained throughout the activity. A secondary objective of the activity was to demonstrate the efficacy of using CRS tools in the EFL classroom at lower secondary (approximately 12-16 years) level. Learners at this level are often very self-conscious and may sometimes be reluctant to participate actively in oral activities; instead they can be encouraged to respond using mobile devices linked to the CRS tools via projector/IWB.

The author of this paper with many years of experience training teachers of English for the state school sector sees *dictogloss* as bridging the gap between language acquisitional theory on a teacher training course and a set of practical procedures for the classroom. The demonstration of the activity as part of a teacher training programme

requires that student teachers not only understand the theoretical underpinnings in terms of SLA theory but are also able to follow the various stages of the activity in terms of lesson planning. In Nation's (2007) terms, text reconstruction as an activity provides learners with a meaning-based input (the *dictogloss* text in the form of a personal anecdote, short story or historical event etc) but at the same time provides the opportunity for language / form focused learning.

Dictogloss is a well established teaching activity with a long pedigree in language teaching circles. *Dictogloss* activities can serve as the basis for the joint reconstruction of a short text in pairwork dyads. *Dictogloss* can be best described primarily as a listening activity but with an additional focus on writing and speaking in which the teacher reads a short text to the learners. Learners listen to the text once without making any notes before listening for a second time, making notes on the essential points from the talk, noting down significant words. Their task is to work in pairs or groups to reconstruct the text as accurately as possible paying attention to both grammatical form and lexical usage in addition to ensuring that the factual contents/ information of the text are correct. CRS tools can serve to display in class text reconstruction responses from a group of learners.

Since 2008, with the introduction of *Padlet*, a number of CRS tools have appeared, enabling learners to interact with the projector /IWB interactive white board, sharing written language products of the interaction. Tools such as *Mentimeter*, *Lumio*, *Padlet*, *Kahoot!* and *Wooclap* can help shy and reticent pupils/ students to participate more fully in classroom interactive sessions. A key point to make here is that responses are made anonymously and learners can participate without fear of being singled out for negative reasons. Research on the impact of CRS tools at tertiary level has pointed to many benefits in terms of the modernization of university teaching and the move away from traditional transmission lecturing (Adams and Columba 2014; Aktekin, *et al.* 2018; Garcia-Lopez and Garcia-Cabot, 2022).

The CRS tools mentioned above, offer very similar functionalities, supporting real-time responses and providing instant feedback or results which the teacher can display to the audience. A variety of question types may be used including multiple-choice, open-ended, polls, word clouds and quizzes. *Kahoot!* however has a more explicit focus on game-based learning and competition, possibly lending itself more readily to younger age ranges. However all the main CRS tools offer functionalities leading themselves to dictogloss activities.

In terms of dictogloss activities, learners can share textual their reformulations of the original reading via the response tool on the classroom IWB or projector, encouraging in Schmid and Frota's (1986) terms the *noticing* of grammatical, lexical and orthographical errors. Such a procedure can serve to assist in the development of the pupils' interlanguage systems as they notice the gap between their formulations and the original text as read by the teacher.

With the increasingly digitalized nature of classrooms in technologically advanced classroom learning environments, a number of classroom response system (henceforth CRS) tools have emerged over the past 20 years or so to promote active pupil / student interaction in the classroom. These tools have often been compatible with the parallel introduction and development of interactive white board (IWBs) technology although of course these tools can be also used with a projector and are not restricted to genuine IWBs. The posing of genuine and display questions for pupils to answer has of course always been a distinctive feature of the communicative classroom as teachers have increasingly striven to break away from 'one-way' transmission-based teaching in favour of interaction and collaborative practice. The development of user-friendly tools such as *Padlet*, *Mentimeter*, *Wooclap*, *Wordwall* and *Lumio* to name but a few examples can provide the basis for active written pupil / student participation in the lesson in addition to the encouragement of real-time assessment and feedback, leading to an inclusive learning environment.

The earliest examples of CRS tools were based on a simple 'clicker' response buttons on a handheld device but the trend has been towards the development of more versatile web-based platforms suitable for both IWB and non-IWB usage. These platforms can provide teachers with more or less instantaneous real-time feedback on their teaching, leading to re-adjustment and re-formulation where necessary. Additionally interactions can offer checks on understanding and data-driven input where responses remain logged on the platform while at the same time

ensuring anonymity of the respondents which is all important with adolescent learners at a sensitive point in their lives. In certain classroom environments, language anxiety is often an obstacle to active lesson participation. CRS tools now incorporate possibilities for the gamification of learning activities which can serve as a source of motivation. With a more conventional transmission approach to teaching, research has shown rapid dropping off of attention and engagement following the initial opening phase (Allison 2020). When paced as regular intervals throughout a lesson, these response activities can help to ensure that the students' focus is maintained across the lesson period. Another advantage in view of the recent pandemic is that students can respond to the questions remotely.

Dictogloss as a classroom procedure

The British Council, a key organization in language education worldwide has recognized *dictogloss* as a key activity in EFL teachers' professional development and is highlighted on the organisation's overview of practical classroom activities for new teachers¹. In Richards' (1982/2001) systematic description and comparison of language teaching methods, three levels are recognized in the design process: *approach* as a theory of language and language learning, *design* specifying linguistic content organisation and learner / teacher roles with a dictogloss activity representing a *procedure* as an outline of individual classroom steps and procedures.

Dictogloss is not word-for-word dictation in the manner of a court stenographer, trained in shorthand, transcribing verbatim for example the details of a trial. Thornbury (1997) sees dictogloss foremost in terms of text reformulation and reconstruction, connecting the procedure with research on learners' attention to linguistic form, driving in turn the conversion of *input* into *intake* in L2 acquisitional terms. The '-gloss' element here is important; learners must use their existing interlanguage knowledge to formulate their own rendition of the text. Teachers can use the procedure to help learners to cognitively compare in Ellis's (1995) terms their current formulations with the target language variety, as *explicit* knowledge of linguistic form becomes *implicit*.

The author's decision to focus on *dictogloss* for the purposes of the present reflective practice study was made on the following basis:

- *dictogloss* has a long pedigree in communicative language teaching
- the activity ties in well with several prominent strands of research in second language acquisition in terms of learners 'noticing the gap' in Schmidt and Frota's (1986) terms between their ongoing interlanguage development stage and the target language system.
- the activity has a number of easily identifiable stages and can be adapted for different proficiency levels from pre-intermediate to advanced (roughly B1 and above).
- the activity involves primarily receptive (listening) skills but additionally productive skills in writing and speaking

2. Method

2.1 Outline and participants

The procedure employed was follows. *Dictogloss* was demonstrated as a classroom learning activity to a group of student teachers in the German state system during the course of their second term of studies. Student teachers were aged between 20 and 28 years old; 70% were female. Students had previously studied an introductory course covering second language acquisition and language teaching methodologies. The intention was to demonstrate an practical activity for the classroom grounded in L2 acquisition research. The author of this article outlined the activity using a practical *dictogloss* example designed for a more advanced EFL classroom which is typical in Germany, roughly advanced B2 / C1 and above. Students were also shown a short video demonstrating a dictogloss

¹ <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/knowning-subject/d-h/dictogloss>

activity taken from Harmer (2015) in which a teacher read a text based on a personal anecdote of receiving a present at Christmas². The example *dictogloss* text used for the present workshop was written by the author himself, based on a short summary of the events surrounding the historical AD79 eruption of the volcano Vesuvius and the destruction of the towns Pompeii and Herculaneum as described originally by the Roman historian Pliny the Younger. The *dictogloss* text as read to the students is set out in the Appendix.

The lesson outline is included below (Figure 1) as presented to the student teachers (reproduced from the original Powerpoint presentation).

Dictogloss: an example

Last Day in Pompeii

- lead-in: natural disasters
- follow-up: Pompeii history video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIZ4aSKT3mo>
- Pompeii dictogloss
 - read text one - listen only!
 - read text again- learners take notes
 - learners in pairs or groups re-construct the text as accurately as possible
 - learners upload their texts to classroom response system (CRS) Wooclap etc



<https://antiquitynow.org/2013/08/27/ancient-volcanic-eruptions-lead-to-modern-predictions/>

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Figure 1. Lesson outline for dictogloss

The CRS used for this activity was *Wooclap*. *Wooclap* is supported and fully integrated in the university's *Moodle* virtual learning environment. *Wooclap* represents one of the latest CRS suites at the time of writing (June 2024) with possibilities for creating quizzes, polls and AI-enhanced content in addition to providing presentators with a range of ready-made templates.

An example from one of the response questions is reproduced in Figure 2 below.

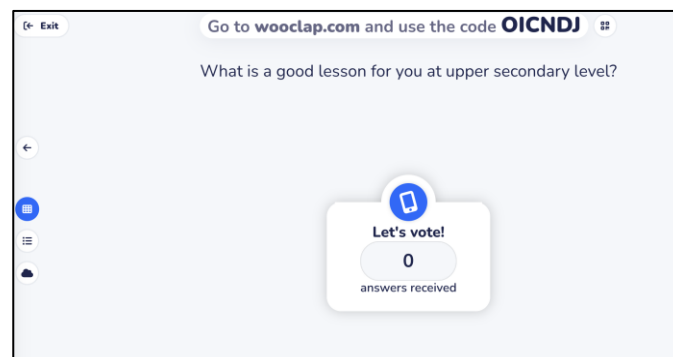


Figure 2. Wooclap participation page.

² <https://youtu.be/SB53j1e6vG0?si=h7Hgezin0pwh8HK0>

2.2 Procedure for introducing dictogloss

The lesson presentation began with a lead-in on the subject of natural disasters to elicit the vocabulary relevant to the area (*tsunami, earthquake, flashflood, landslide* etc). An excerpt from *YouTube* (3 minutes) describing the Versuvius eruption and its effect on the nearby Roman settlements of Pompeii and Herculaneum was then played on the projector. The follow-up to the video excerpt included questions to focus on bottom-up (understanding of specific words in the video, such as *pyroclastic, pumice* etc) and top-down listening (the general gist of what happened to Pompeii). The text was read at ‘normal speaking speed’³ for the first time with students under strict instructions not to take any form of notes on paper or screen during the course of the reading. The text was then read for second time roughly at the same speed of delivery; this time student teachers could take notes. Student teachers were told that it would be more or less impossible to take down the words exactly as they were in the text; this is an essential part of the dictogloss activity which is to broadly capture the factual contents and to permit the reformulation of grammatical and lexical usage where necessary. The next stage of the process involved pairing up students who were then encouraged to compare their notes and to collaboratively assemble the elements taken down in the form of a re-assembled final text. Finally each pair uploaded anonymously their texts to *Wooclap* for display on the projector. These stages are reproduced in Table 1 below.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the main parts of the workshop, with the three main CRS activities using *Wooclap* designed from the outset to create the basis for interaction with the students. The first CRS activity served as the basis for connecting with the student teacher’s previous studies in language education and the communicative language classroom relevant to dictogloss. The second CRS activity involved the publishing and anonymous display of the re-assembled dictogloss on the *Wooclap* platform, while the final CRS task revolved around an short evaluation of the activity in response to the following question:

What do you see as the main advantages and disadvantages of using dictogloss as a classroom activity?

Table 1. Lesson stages

Lesson sub-component	Description
CRS Wooclap task I	lead-in: What is a good lesson for you at upper secondary level? Discussion of responses in terms of focus on communication and linguistic form.
Introduction to dictogloss	Powerpoint PPT: introduction to the stages of dictogloss
Dictogloss example	<i>Last Day in Pompeii</i> • lead-in natural disasters • video • first text reading • second text reading (students took notes) • dictogloss text reconstruction (in pairs)
CRS Wooclap task II	uploading text and noticing exercise
CRS Wooclap task III	classroom reflections on and response to the <i>Wooclap</i> activity.

The analysis of results was made on the basis of the learning analytics functionalities built into *Wooclap*, permitting both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the student teacher responses. These functionalities permitted the

³ From a ‘teacher talk’ perspective, no adjustments were made either in terms of speed from the author’s normal speed of delivery. No intonational or emphatic exaggerations were made either to make the text easier to understand.

counting of individual student teacher responses and a qualitative examination in response to the open-ended questions.

3. Results

The results of the three CRS interactions will now be presented. There were a total of 33 students in the classroom organized into 15 pairs and one group of 3 , using a mixture of mobile phones, tablets and laptop computers to participate in the session. Some students used the login address and code to connect with the *Wooclap* platform while others scanned the QR screen with their phones. The results will be given in the form of screenshots of the *Wooclap* display page.

3.1 CRS Wooclap task I

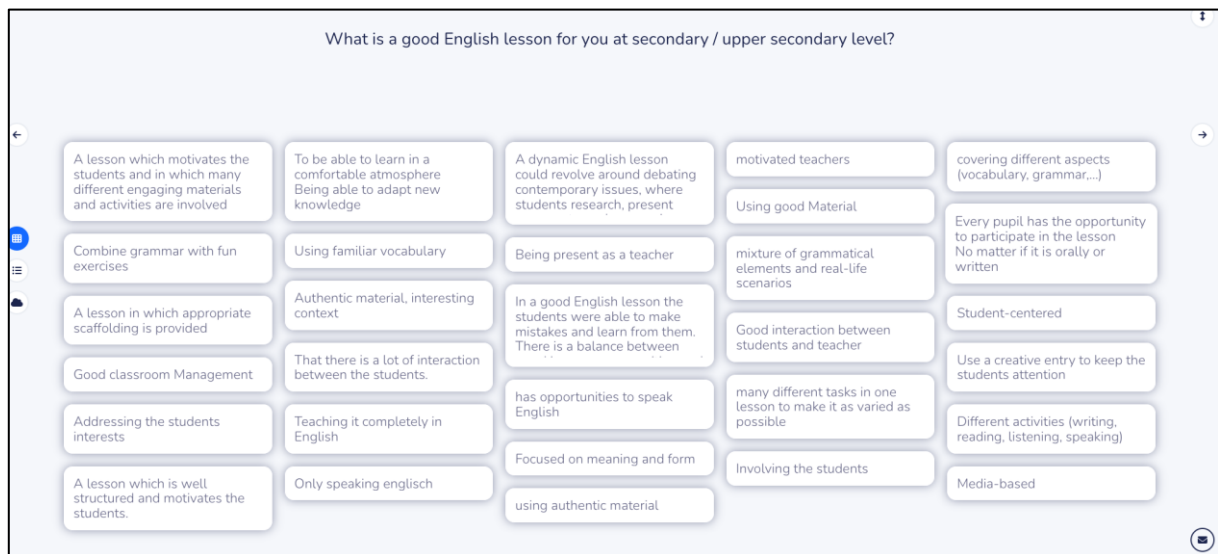


Figure 3. Screenshot from *Wooclap* showing responses to the first question

This activity was an ice-breaker / warm-up designed to connect with previous studies in linguistics, L2 acquisition and language teaching theory and methods. The responses reveal a group of students familiar with the broad linguistic and pedagogical prerequisites of a communicatively focused foreign language classroom

3.2 CRS Wooclap task II

This part of the workshop involved each pair re-assembling the original text from their notes taken from the

second reading of the text.

Dictogloss response A

After you have listened to the text for the second time, work with a partner to try to re-create the text as accurately as possible. Remember though that you do not need to aim for word-for-word accuracy!

Mount Vesuvius is a volcano in the South of Italy. In 79 AD, the volcano erupted in one of the deadliest eruptions in the history of Europe. That was witnessed by a Roman historian and poet Pliny the Younger. The volcano violently spewed forth a deadly cloud of super-hot rock parts and gases to a height of 33 km. Molten rock and hot ashes poured out of the volcano to cover towns and villages around it.

Several Roman cities were destroyed and buried under the massive volcanic flows. The best-known of these towns are Pompeii and Herculaneum. The population of those two cities was in the region of 16,000- 20,000 at the time of the volcano eruption. The eruption was preceded by some earthquakes and a tsunami out at the sea.

The flows of hot gases and lava totally covered both towns. The ruins of Pompeii were found in the late 16th century. Herculaneum was discovered in 1709, with systematic excavation of the town starting in 1738. Nowadays those towns are popular tourist attractions

Close this message X

Dictogloss response B

Mount Vesuvius is a volcano in southern Italy which caused the biggest eruption in Europe history. Th erhole eruption was written down by Pliny. When the eruption started the cloud of ashes reached 33 KM high in the sky and covered many villages nearby. Many Roman buildings covered under the volcanic flow. Mountain rocks came out of the volcano near the cities Pompeii and Herculaneum where at the time 16.-20.000 people lived.

Figure 4. Wooclap dictogloss responses

Due to lack of space, the *dictogloss* responses A and B for two student pairs only are displayed here. Typical of *dictogloss* responses, the screenshots from the platform here reveal various differences in terms of the factual information covered from the original text and different lexicogrammatical devices for conveying the information- compare for example the expression of geographical setting in the *South of Italy* with *southern Italy*.

Pairs were then asked to choose one of the re-assembled texts other than their own to highlight any lexical,

grammatical or orthographical errors. In the case of text B, this resulted in:

Mount Vesuvius is a volcano in southern Italy which caused the biggest eruption in Europe history. Th erhole eruption was written down by Pliny. When the eruption started the cloud of ashes reached 33 KM high in the sky and covered many villages nearby. Many Roman buildings covered under the volcanic flow. Mountain rocks came out of the volcano near the cities Pompeii and Herculaneum where at the time 16.-20.000 people lived.

Figure 5. Corrected version of dictogloss B

Errors underlined on the board and word omissions highlighted.

3.3 CRS Wooclap task III

The question regarding the advantages and disadvantages of *dictogloss* brought about a variety of responses.

The two intended final questions were scrapped due to lack of time workshop session.

1. Key Advantages and Disadvantages of Dictogloss Advantages:	3 I would definitely use it in my class because it was fun and while having fun the students can learn some historical information.	1. advantages: exchange and add up ideas with a partner (maybe your partner noted down something that slipped you mind) disadvantages: it's not really fun.	1. Advantage: Better in grammar, improve listening and writing skills. Disadvantage: too difficult for primary school in this way.	1: +can draw the attention to grammar in a indirect way, exercise listening, speaking and writing - could be too difficult for slower students
1. One key advantage is that this activity is a communicative exercise so pupils can have a real exchange of solutions and also can do a collaborative work.	1. Advantages: we got to really think about what the story was about and really had to focus on what was said. Disadvantages: I couldn't	1. advantage: improve listening and writing skills. Good for taking attention and foster concentration Disadvantage: too difficult for primary school	1. advantages: motivating; training listening and writing it down afterwards without seeing the text; working in teams; different	1. Includes multiple skills and is easy to implement Could be too difficult for weaker students. To avoid that we as
1. Leads to more talking in the classroom in English Could be used to connect knowledge and grammar	I love the anonymity of wooclap Advantage is involving lots of writing, listening, talking,... (exciting for the student) Disadvantage is almost no differentiation for every student	1. +Focus on meaning instead of getting every word right. 2. It helped to reflect on the activity and everyone can give	1. Advantages: listening to text and writing down what the students remember Disadvantages: stressing exercise, am I writing everything write?	I think it is very stressful for some students to do dictogloss. Dictoglosses are less stressful, it is not a big problem to make mistakes. If you don't know a word
1. Advantages: challenges the learners in listening, talking and writing. It can challenge even advanced students. Disadvantages: slow writers may	1. advantage: focus on form disadvantage: difficult for weaker learner 3. no, too difficult for primary school	1. it allows to practise different skills; open to any topic; the task is finished through collaboration 3. yes	It can be frustrating when other students have more than you but on the other hand it includes writing, speaking and listening so there is a big chance any student is	I would consider using dictogloss to some extent, but I would rather have the students write texts in their own to practice their writing skills.
1. there is a clear instruction and		1. Advantages: students communicate with partners, focus	1. advantage: students work on	1. advantage: training to listen and

Figure 6. Some of the responses to the evaluation question displayed on *Wooclap*

4. Discussion

This dictogloss activity was in the form of a single workshop which aimed to introduce dictogloss to a group of student teachers working in a high-tech relatively advanced EFL context while at the same time demonstrating the efficacy of using a classroom response tool like *Wooclap* to encourage interaction and participation among

the teachers.

Table 2. Responses to the CRS tasks

CRS task	Numbers of responses	Percentage of audience actively responding (max 33 students)
CRS Wooclap task I	30	90%
CRS Wooclap task II	29 /14 pairs)	88%
CRS Wooclap task III	28	85%

As can be seen in Table 2, a high proportion of the audience of student teachers responded to the three separate CRS activities paced throughout the workshop. Respondents to the final evaluative *Wooclap* task pointed to the advantages in combining multiple language learning skills particularly with regard to listening comprehension with a focus on text reconstruction. One respondent immediately understood the advantage of dictogloss over a standard dictation activity Dictogloss is open to any subject area but might be too difficult for the primary sector. The task provides a challenge for the more advanced learners but was seen by some respondents as being difficult for weaker pupils. The anonymity of the exercise was appreciated by a number of respondents; individual learners and their language errors are not singled out by name but at the same time the CRS allowed learners to focus on their linguistic errors and how they might be corrected by each other / the teacher. Some respondents appreciated the collaborative aspects of the task where pairs create a single product while other respondents thought that it would be better to work individually on the text re-assembly. One respondent pointed out that the activity was dependent on the technology working properly; however in a subsequent overview of the results it was pointed out that dictogloss can work well with paper and pen.

5. Conclusions

This short reflective practice paper has pointed the way towards the integration of CRS tools such as *Wooclap* into a practical workshop session. The results suggest that CRS tools can help to ensure a high degree of student engagement and participation in the session.

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Appendix

A Dictogloss text

Mount Vesuvius is a volcano in southern Italy. In 79 AD this volcano erupted in one of the deadliest eruptions in European history which was witnessed by the Roman historian and poet Pliny the Younger. The volcano violently spewed forth a deadly cloud of super-heated rock fragments and gases to a height of 33 km. Molten rock and hot ash poured out of the volcano to cover many towns and villages nearby.

Several Roman settlements were destroyed and buried under the massive volcanic flows. The best known of these towns are Pompeii and Herculaneum. The population of both towns was in the region of 16,000 -20,000 at the time of the eruption. The eruption was preceded by a number of earthquakes. The eruption was also accompanied by a tsunami out at sea.

The surges of hot gases and molten lavas covered both cities completely. The ruins of Pompeii were discovered in the late 16th Century. Herculaneum was discovered in 1709, with systematic excavation of the town beginning in 1738. Today these ruined towns are important tourist attractions.