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INTRODUCING THE PRESENT PERFECT THROUGH MATHEMATICS

Maria Cecília Basílio and Maria Celeste Alves

It is widely recognised that there are close links between Mathematics and Language. Knowing, as we did, that students aged 11 or 12 are able to cope with such simple mathematical notions as "sets" and the "intersections of sets", we came up with the idea of taking some kind of advantage of what our students had grasped so easily, as an aid to the teaching of English, in particular to make the teaching of the present perfect as simple as possible. Students are fed up with being given rules. They must work them out for themselves.

REPORTING A SONG

Bryan Robinson

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Using pop music in the classroom has sometimes been criticised as "lacking in pedagogical purpose". Although most teachers recognise the motivational value of introducing material which is both authentic and immediate, many are somewhat sceptical of its use on courses where there is a clear programme to be completed within a set time-scale: songs are then left for Friday afternoons and the end of term.

Here is a suggestion for the use of one song - 'Father and Son' by Cat Stevens - in activities to consolidate the learning of Reported Speech. It was devised as a follow-up to *Developing Strategies*, (Longman, 1980) Units 8 and 9. Students are required to use all four language skills, to a greater or lesser degree, and certain study skills (note-taking, reporting and discussion) which can be of benefit to them in their studies of other subjects as well as English. At some points they can be given a great deal of freedom to carry out their set tasks, thus taking on themselves the responsibility for the results.

The outline of the lesson which follows is long, probably far too long. However, it has been left so as to show the wide range of activities possible. It is not intended to be followed stage by stage, but rather to be adapted to the needs of each teacher and each set of students. It is hoped that the teacher who doesn't like this particular song may be able to adapt some of the ideas used in the lesson outline and use them with other songs of their own or their students' choosing.

1. Begin the class by introducing the topic of parent/child relationships. When I do this I usually tell a short story about myself and my own 'battles' with my parents about staying out late. (When I was about 15 or 16 years old I would often go out with my friends during the evening and return home after midnight. My parents generally went to bed at about 12 and then read for a while, which meant that their light was almost always on when I arrived home. As I passed their bedroom door, which was next to mine, my father's voice always, always shouted out the same question: "And what time d'you think this is to come home at?" But I never answered him, I just said "Goodnight!" and went to bed.)
 2. Follow this by dividing the class into groups of four or five, if you have a mixed class you might like to separate boys and girls to see if their opinions vary. Make sure that you have an even number of groups. Now, ask each student individually to list 5 problems, similar to that of staying out late, which s/he has with her/his parents.
 3. Within each group students should confer and rank order the problems 1 to 5, from the *most* to the *least irritating* for them. Depending on the class this may take a long or short time, but I find it useful to set them a time limit for discussion. Emphasise that you expect total agreement in the group about the final order.
 4. Ask each group to report to the class its final list and write these on the board so that they can compare them. You may well find that the boy/girl division provides a source of some further discussion here.
- (In a situation where you have fairly short classes this might be the first 'break' in the exercise which could then be continued another day. Should you decide to spread the exercise like this, briefly recap the previous day's topic and then continue.)

5. Now carry out some sort of listening exercise on the song before moving to the groupwork questions. This should be something straightforward, such as ordering lines from the song, as the purpose of it is to introduce the students to the song, and get them accustomed to listening to certain details in the lyrics. Follow this by dealing with any vocabulary items which have been or might be difficult.

6. Divide the class by asking half of the groups to work on the 'Father' questions and the other half on the 'Son' questions (See Worksheet at the end of this article.) Ideally, this would be done by using two separate classrooms with a cassette-recorder in each. Obviously this is far from possible in many teaching situations and is largely compensated for by cutting the worksheet in two, as indicated. Allow your students to listen to all, or parts of the song as often as they wish. (N.B. With this particular song there is no difficulty in distinguishing the different verses of the song as there are pauses of some length between them and each character is sung in a different style.)

If the concept of organising a group listening activity in this manner doesn't appeal to you, the Worksheet could be adapted to produce a reading exercise, after the initial listening work has been done.

7. Checking the answers could be done by bringing the whole class together, working through the exercises and writing them up on the blackboard, or group by group, question by question, as they are carrying out the task. This second method has the advantage of being more motivating, in that they see immediately how accurate they've been, and it also permits each group to work at its own pace. Those who finish first can start the homework exercises suggested below, while the others finish off. The reported speech questions could be checked by the teacher with each group, or by cross-pairing students (i.e. one who has worked on the 'Son' questions with one who has worked on the 'Father' questions).



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- 8. Students often spend time frantically copying down the lyrics of any song which I use in the classroom, so at this point I would give them copies of the text, to keep. Now let them sing the song.
- 9. Two possible homework exercises are: i) write out a story based on the song in the form of a dialogue: the son complaining to his girlfriend, or the father to his wife; ii) compare the problems facing your students with those featured in the song.

WORKSHEET FOR *FATHER AND SON* BY CAT STEVENS

(Group work listening and reported speech exercises)

FATHER

Verse 1

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1) What's his fault? | 4) What should he think of? |
| 2) What should he do? | 5) What may happen tomorrow? |
| 3) What isn't easy? | |

Verse 3

There is a list of instructions. What are they?
(For example: Sit down.)

Now report the different things which the Father told him:
(For example: He told him to sit down.)



SON

Verse 2

How can I to?
 When I do he again.
 It has always the same, same story.
 From the moment I
 I was to
 Now a way.
 and I know
 that I go away
 I know I have to

Now report the question he asked, and what he said with the verbs given.
(Ask, complain, explain, say)

Verse 4

How he has suffered? List some of the problems he's had and their causes.
(For example: He's cried a lot)

What would he do if they were right?

The editor regrets that it has not been possible to reproduce the words of Father and Son, as permission from the copyright holder was not forthcoming.
