3.6.4 Writing an encyclopaedia entry

Brief description, and rules of the implementation of the learning activity

This focuses on developing students' ability to adjust their thoughts, emotions, and personal attitudes toward a given topic to meet new demands or circumstances, while adopting others' ideas in whole or in parts. Children work together to create an alternative dictionary definition for a specific word. These creative entries are mixed with the official dictionary definition and then redistributed. Groups read a selected entry aloud and must explain why they can accept parts or all of it. By actively justifying their peers' interpretations, students practice adopting new perspectives, tolerating different viewpoints, and embracing multiple valid descriptions of a single concept.

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
  - Flexibility
- **Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus**
  - Emotional awareness (emotional regulation and communication)
  - Creativity
  - Problem-solving
  - Critical thinking
  - Curiosity, sense of wonder, and openness

Age group	Student number	Duration
7 + years old	groups of 3 to 6 students, whole class	20-40 minutes

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity

- Words selected from a dictionary. Each group writes an alternative entry that is identical in form and meaning to the word selected by the teacher.
- All completed entries, together with the official dictionary definition, are collected and mixed.
- Each group selects one sheet and reads the text on it.
- After reading, each group explains why the received entry can be accepted and which parts of it are agreed with, either in whole or in part. Learners are not required to accept definitions that are completely incorrect.
- The essence of the activity is that students must accept and justify their peers' opinions.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Indoor activity, with children seated in groups around tables.

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How does this learning activity develop this particular skill?

- This activity develops students' cognitive and emotional flexibility by:
- encouraging them to think about a word's meaning from multiple perspectives, without clinging to a single "correct" answer;
- enabling creative adaptation when they formulate their own dictionary entry to convincingly resemble an authentic one—even if the information isn't entirely accurate;
- teaching them to accept different interpretations from others and learn from feedback, thus promoting emotional resilience;
- providing practice in quick situational awareness and adaptability while listening to and evaluating other groups' entries.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

The aim of this activity is to develop cognitive and communicative flexibility – that is, the ability of students to think flexibly, consider multiple perspectives, and remain open to different interpretations. By writing their own definitions for a given word and then listening to and analysing the entries of other groups, students learn that there can be multiple valid descriptions of the same concept.

As a result of completing this activity, students will:

- be able to adapt flexibly to new information,
- understand different ways of thinking,
- be able to be tolerant of others' viewpoints,
- be able to approach their own and others' solutions with critical thinking and openness.

This skill also enhances comprehension: students become more aware of the diversity of language and understand that meaning is not always fixed but can be subject to interpretation.

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

The explanation of the selected word must be believable and should appear professional. It should follow the style and structure of a dictionary entry.

- During the learning process, students are introduced to the skills of creating concise, focused texts.
- Analysing the definitions written by peers helps students recognize deviations from genre conventions and identify inaccurate or misleading information.

Materials and tools needed for implementation

Paper sheets, writing tools, specialized dictionary of foreign words and expressions in the target language can be used for this activity.

Guiding questions

- Could you imagine different definitions for this word?
- Why did you choose this particular wording? What other options did you consider?
- How do you think another age group or a specialist might interpret this word?
- What did you like about this definition, even if it's not the official one?

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- Why might that team have thought the word could be described this way?
- Was there any version that gave you a new perspective on the meaning of the word?
- What would happen if this was the official dictionary entry? How would it affect understanding?
- What do you think is important to highlight when deciding which version is the most convincing?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Students find it difficult to let go of the "correct" answer.
  Tip: It's helpful to emphasize that the goal of the activity is not only to find the exact definition but to encourage flexible thinking, creativity, and understanding different perspectives.
- **Challenge:** Students have difficulty accepting solutions from other groups.
  Tip: It can be useful to ask each group to highlight at least one positive aspect from another group's text, which helps foster a more accepting attitude.
- **Challenge:** Some students struggle with participating in creative writing.
  Tip: Providing guiding questions can support their thinking process (e.g., "What does this thing do?", "When do we use it?", "What could it mean in another context?").
- **Challenge:** Texts can be recognized by their style.
  Tip: Encourage groups to phrase their definitions as "dictionary-like" as possible, so it's harder to identify the author.

Difficulty level tailoring

This activity develops students' flexibility in adjusting their thinking, emotions, and personal attitudes toward a given topic, while considering and adopting others' ideas in whole or in part. Teachers can tailor this learning activity to three difficulty levels to meet students' needs.

- **Beginners (6-7 years old):** – Learners with low flexibility: Students with low flexibility may struggle to accept alternative definitions or ideas from their peers. At this level: Groups should work on simple, concrete words or terms. The teacher provides structured guidance, modelling how to evaluate and discuss different entries. Teams are encouraged to identify parts of entries they can accept, even if they cannot accept the whole definition. The teacher may limit the number of alternative entries to reduce confusion and stress. Reflection and justification can be scaffolded with sentence starters (e.g., "I agree with this part because…").
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** – Learners with moderate flexibility: Students with moderate flexibility can handle more complex words and multiple alternative entries. At this level: Groups work independently to create entries that are consistent in form and meaning. Students can compare several entries and discuss which parts they agree with. The teacher provides prompts to support justification but encourages students to make their own decisions. Peer discussion and explanation help students practice partial acceptance and thoughtful evaluation. Teams can explore why certain entries are more acceptable than others, strengthening reasoning skills.
- **Experts (9–10 years old):** – Learners with high flexibility: Students with high flexibility can work with abstract or challenging words and a larger number of alternative entries. At this level: Groups can independently write and evaluate entries, justifying acceptance of others' ideas in whole or in part. Students can reflect critically on subtle differences between entries and explain their reasoning to the class. The teacher's role is minimal, mainly facilitating discussion and ensuring respectful communication. Teams can debate and negotiate the acceptance of entries, further developing cognitive, emotional, and social flexibility.

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Debriefing and Reflection questions

- How easy or difficult was it to think differently from how a word is defined in a dictionary?
- What was it like to accept others' different formulations?
- Did your opinion about a particular word change during the game? How?
- How was your group able to cooperate in creating the dictionary entry?
- Was there a moment when differing opinions arose? How did you manage to reach a consensus?
- What made a dictionary entry convincing or credible?
- What language tools did you use when forming the definition?
- Where do you think you can apply this kind of thinking in the future?

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