As a teacher it is important to assess students work samples in order to determine perceived common areas in need of support. Learning to address all students’ needs will result in a positive impact upon the students as they will be actively engaged in areas where they may be falling short or are in need of extra guidance.

A collection of work samples was assessed for a Year 9 ESL English class. Students indicated that they had been in Australia no longer than five years and were from many different cultures and ethnicities such as Burma, Iran, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, China, Liberia and Kenya. Students were asked to compose a recount on the topic of ‘Celebration’. Overall, students sat comfortably within Level 3 in the ESL Scales for their writing. They appeared to confidently write a simple creative text (recount) as well as including simple descriptions of things, events, places, processes or people[[1]](#footnote-1). Some students used ‘some’ conventions for separating ideas or sections in a text (starting a new idea on a new line, starting a new section on a new page, paragraphs)[[2]](#footnote-2). At level 3, the students wrote coherent sentences using some dependent clauses, for example ‘I can do anything when I am happy’; and use simple phrases to express personal opinion (‘I like… because… and…’; ‘I think (that)…’)[[3]](#footnote-3).

However it appeared that ‘some’ students were unable to successfully make varying use of articles for common and mass count nouns, such as ‘the homework, a water’[[4]](#footnote-4). Seemingly the students lacked an overall understanding of how to use articles correctly. Among the world’s most widely spoken languages, articles are not found within many countries such as China, Indonesia and Japan as well as many others, but certain words can be used like articles, when in need. The form of the article may also vary according to gender, number or case of its noun. “The English article system presents many problems for non-native speakers of English, particularly when they do not have an equivalent structure in their first language” (Miller, 2005). Thus by encouraging students to identify specific uses of articles in English, students are able to improve their understanding of this difficult area and are guided to the more accurate usage of the English article system.

In order to address this issue a mini-lesson has been created to teach the correct usage of articles in the English language system. A PowerPoint presentation has been composed and begins with ‘building the field’; students will communicate more confidently if they have a sound knowledge of the concepts being studied. As an ESL teacher it is important to provide the language and scaffold the requirements prior to expecting students to engage in this task. This presentation includes ‘unpacking’ and modeling the language of the topic, reading, talking, listening, viewing and questioning as well as concept mapping[[5]](#footnote-5). Many students are reluctant to write, particularly on topics which they are not familiar[[6]](#footnote-6). Therefore a Cloze passage has been composed; the teacher and students are to work collaboratively by completing this activity as a whole-class. The teacher will provide a model that demonstrates what the students will need to do in order to correctly compose a text using articles. The usefulness of this teaching strategy encourages students to “use predication skills as they are reading” (Gibbons, 2002). Students however should not be asked to complete a cloze passage on a topic which they know nothing about. Therefore this activity will be completed after students have a sound knowledge about articles.

This lesson also allows for students to be engaged and involved in their own learning through a student-centered approach. Students will take part in a group activity that allows for classroom talk and collaboration. In an ESL class it is important that students are collaborating with peers other than from their own language background, in order to build their own English speaking skills. Furthermore students will be asked in groups of 3-4 to re-arrange a set of sentences. These are cloze sentences which are jumbled; students need to indicate which article belongs where.

During each ESL lesson it is important that an ESL teacher promotes a classroom climate that engenders mutual respect. The student and the teacher must be celebrating success, sharing ideas and promoting team work to build skills and knowledge to create a positive learning culture for all students[[7]](#footnote-7).

References

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1. 3.9 Level 3 Writing, *ESL Scales,* Pg 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 3.10 Level 3 Writing, *ESL Scales*, Pg 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3.11 level 3 Writing, *ESL Scales*, Pg 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 3.11 level 3 Writing, *ESL Scales*, Pg 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Quality Teaching Framework, Table 1: Intellectual quality. Element: Deep Knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Quality Teaching Framework, Table 2: Quality Learning Environment. Element: Engagement. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Quality Teaching Framework, Table 2: Quality learning environment. Element: Social Support [↑](#footnote-ref-7)