

# PUZZLED?

**Helping learners make the most  
of puzzles...**

**Clare Harris: for the QATESOL/QCAL mini  
conference in Mackay, August 2017**

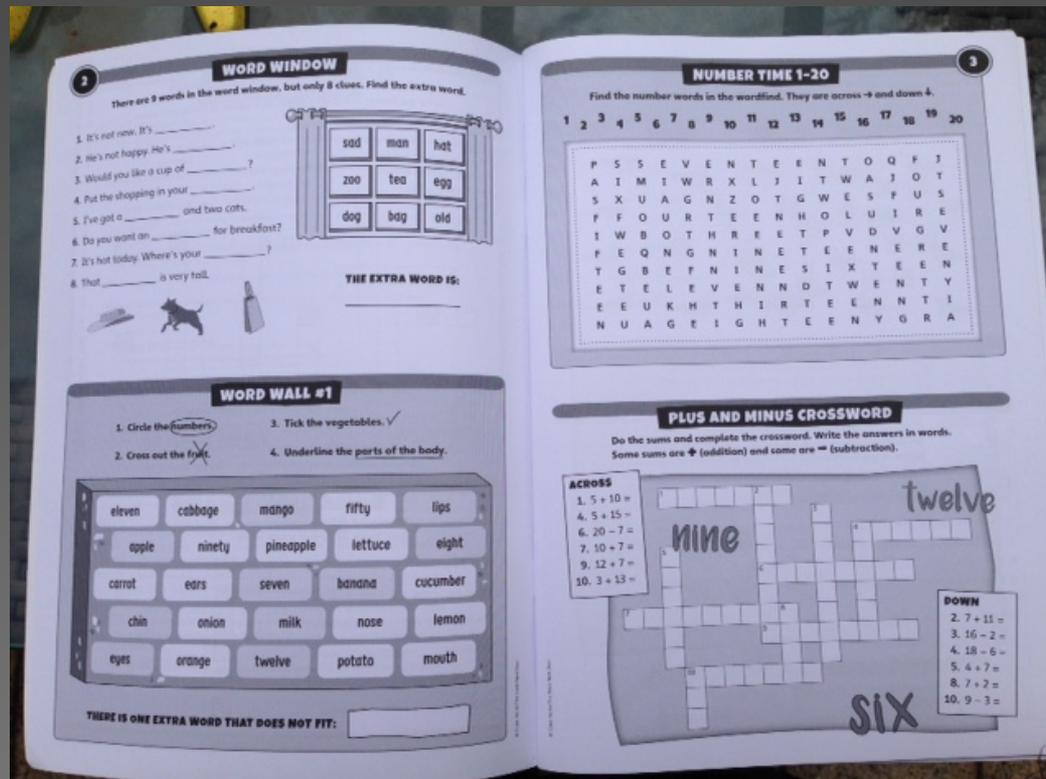
**Clare Harris: [thebooknextdoor.com](http://thebooknextdoor.com)**



# A POSITIVE ADDICTION?

- ▶ ‘The brain is ravenous for new information... We take pleasure in pattern finding ... it’s a huge bit of what the cortex is primed to do ... (Daniel Bor, Neuroscientist, interviewed by Time)
- ▶ As in online game mechanics: ‘variably-timed, earned rewards ... are addictive’ (Markus Kolic, on Quora)

# 'EXTRA EASY PUZZLES' WAS INSPIRED BY MAGAZINE PUZZLES



# WITH DIFFERENT PUZZLE TYPES, AND A 'PAYOFF' HIDDEN WORD

**10 NUMBER TIME 20-100**  
Find all the numbers in the wordfind (→ and ↓).

20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 1000 1,000,000

T	F	L	T	W	E	N	T	Y	V	C	G	J	Y	S	A
T	I	W	R	V	I	S	K	B	M	V	V	H	K	I	D
H	F	C	Y	R	G	H	U	N	D	R	E	D	E	X	E
I	T	Y	J	O	H	S	B	G	F	E	P	H	F	T	D
R	Y	O	G	O	T	V	U	G	Z	Q	X	O	Y	D	
T	E	L	G	Z	Y	N	D	W	J	J	U	R	H	I	
Y	S	E	V	E	N	T	Y	M	M	V	N	T	F	F	
I	T	H	O	U	S	A	N	D	Y	W	Z	O	Y	M	E
Y	U	M	I	L	L	I	O	N	V	U	A	U	J	F	X
O	L	L	I	N	I	N	E	T	Y	I	I	K	A	J	B

**DO THE SUMS—PLUS AND MINUS**  
You can find a new word by reading down the grey boxes.

25 + 25 =

12 + 18 =

50 + 40 =

100 - 60 =

92 - 32 =

35 + 35 =

70 - 50 =

65 + 15 =

**THE NEW WORD IS:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(IT'S GOOD TO \_\_\_\_\_ YOUR WORK.)

**11 -Y WORDS**  
There are nine -y words but only 8 clues. Fill in the answers and find the extra word.

1. It's going to rain. It's cloudy.

2. I want a drink. I'm \_\_\_\_\_.

3. I need to eat my lunch. I'm \_\_\_\_\_.

4. I'm late again! I'm \_\_\_\_\_.

5. This is a nice park. It's really \_\_\_\_\_.

6. I have so much to do. I'm too \_\_\_\_\_.

7. Let's go. Are you \_\_\_\_\_?

8. I hit his car and he was \_\_\_\_\_.

**THE EXTRA WORD IS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DOWN THE RIVER**  
Look at the pictures and write the answers. Each grey box is the last letter of one word AND the first letter of the next.

1. clock

2. hand

3. tree

4. t-shirt

5. egg

6. hand

7. egg

8. egg

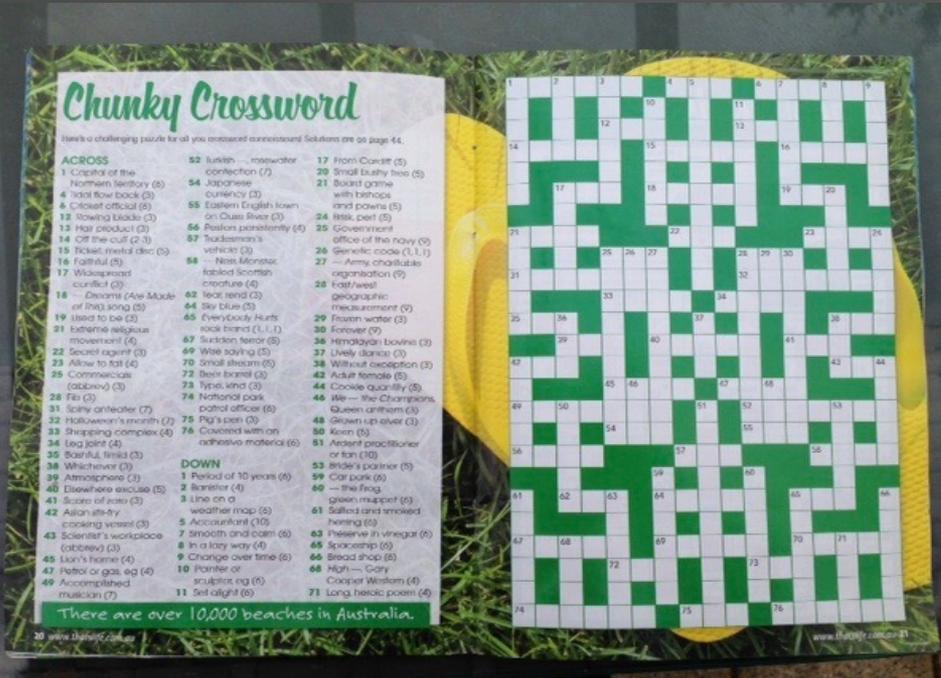
**THE GREY LETTERS MAKE A NEW WORD:**

# HOWEVER, ARE ELT PUZZLES REALLY AUTHENTIC?

Look at the shape and numerous intersections of a magazine puzzle, compared to the puzzles that we as teachers create – this was pointed out by Warren Merkel in his 2016 TESOL Journal article.

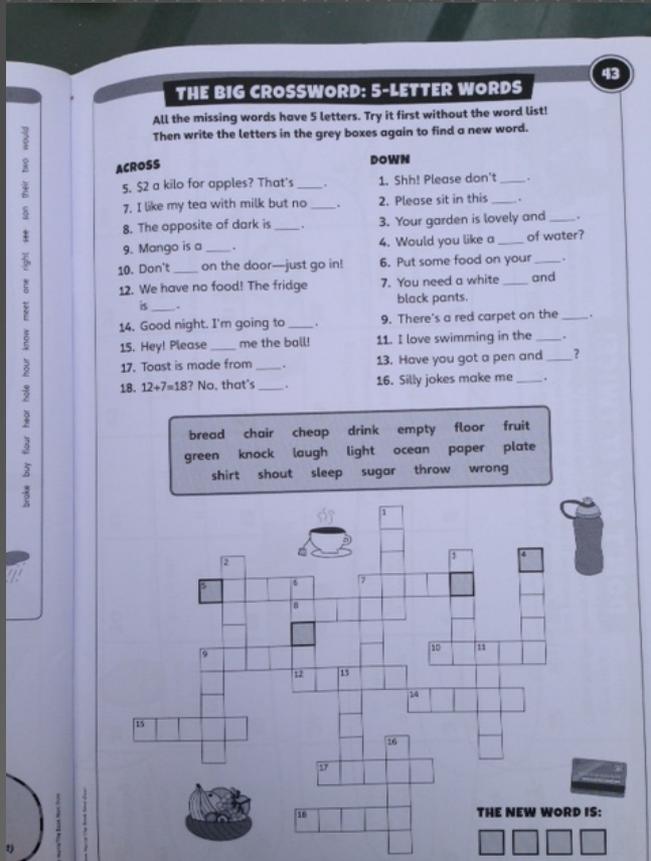
Should we try to replicate commercial crosswords? If we do, we have to accept the inclusion of words our learners will not know...

# A COMMERCIAL CROSSWORD \*...



- Simple, but includes:
- kipper,
  - yak,
  - jig
  - mellow
  - idly

# VS. AN ELT CROSSWORD...



- ▶ No neat shape
- ▶ Fewer word intersections (that allow answers to 'appear')
- ▶ 'Word box' may be offered (can be covered up)

# SOME LEARNERS MAY STRUGGLE

It could be that they need to understand puzzle concepts – or perhaps that artificial tasks don't have much meaning for them?

*As pragmatic thinkers, they seek immediate relevance and opportunities to practise, rather than analytical tasks that ask them to isolate critical features and perform little academic 'tricks' like true/false, multiple choice'.*

(Helaine Marshall, on Hmong students, but I think it applies to other learners I have met.)

# CONCEPTS LEARNERS NEED

- ▶ Reading instructions, puzzle types
- ▶ Across-down, numbering, intersection
- ▶ Tick off the words in the word box
- ▶ Does the word fit in the sentence?
- ▶ Does it fit the number of boxes available?
- ▶ Effect of 'wrong word', getting stuck
- ▶ Self checking, and the 'hidden word'

# COLLABORATIVE LANGUAGE

- ▶ *Clue/answer/word box, hidden word*
- ▶ *It's too long/short, it doesn't fit / it doesn't make sense, cross it off*
- ▶ *It's your turn. What do you think?*
- ▶ *I'm stuck! Can anyone help?*
- ▶ *Back to work – is the break over?*

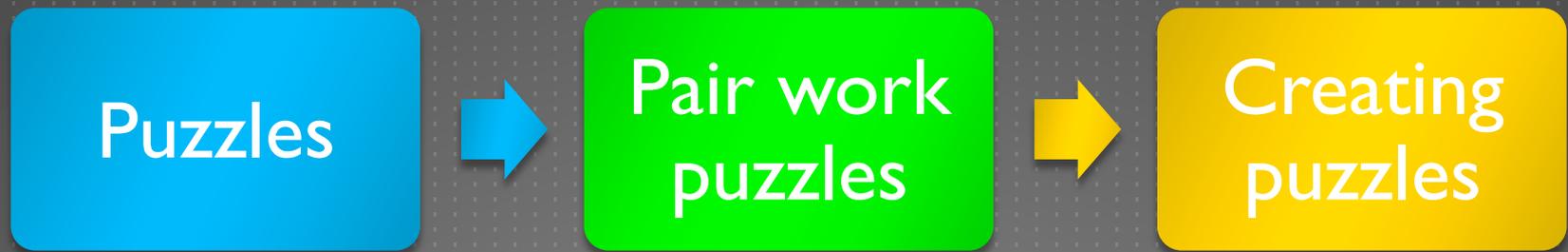
# ‘COLLABORATIVE CRUCIVERBALISM’

- ▶ *‘Adaptable to the classroom, this process involves locating a puzzle that is a suitable challenge (not impossible, not too easy, but like Goldilocks said, just right) and setting groups to work without the aid of a computer...’*
- ▶ *‘Participants are encouraged to verbalize as they progress...’ (ie to think aloud)* (Charlie Sweet et al)

# UNEXPECTED BENEFITS

- ▶ *‘Crosswords can help disengaged young people learn to deal with frustration in learning – you are bound to get ‘stuck’ on a puzzle, or write in the wrong word, but you can learn to move beyond this...in a non-threatening context.’*
- ▶ *‘Learners got a lot out of writing their own crosswords – I gave them the words, but they had to write the clues and use a computer program to create the puzzle.’*

# A NATURAL PROGRESSION?



# MAKING PUZZLES INTERACTIVE

- ▶ Working together to solve a puzzle
- ▶ Taking turns, as class/group/pair
- ▶ Playing 'workplace lunch room' and calling out clues
- ▶ Reading the clues to each other
- ▶ Pair work puzzles (information gap)
- ▶ Pair work puzzles you create
- ▶ Students create their own puzzles

# LEARNERS CREATING PUZZLES

- ▶ Pair work puzzles are a 'lead in' to clue writing
- ▶ You can offer word lists with 'built in' grammatical features: *opened, boxes, safety, quickly*
- ▶ Some words may be better suited to wordfinds (I had trouble writing a clue for *superannuation*.)
- ▶ Computer programs create crosswords – but not the 'hidden word' – you have to do that yourself

# PROGRAMS?

- ▶ Eclipse (for Windows) is free, no ads
- ▶ Teacher's Corner Crossword Puzzle Maker (includes some premade clues)
- ▶ ESLActivities.com crossword generator
- ▶ Free Word Search Creator on BusyTeacher.org
- ▶ I've used Crossword Forge

# SOME REFERENCES:

- ▶ **Science explains why crossword puzzles are good for your health:**  
<http://www.lifehack.org/374975/science-explains-why-crossword-puzzles-are-good-for-your-mental-health> (Sumaiya Kabir on Lifehack)
- ▶ **One activity to develop 9 Creative Thinking Strategies:**  
<https://newforums.com/one-activity-develops-creative-thinking/> (Charlie Sweet)
- ▶ **Why solving puzzles is fun: Q&A with Consciousness Researcher Daniel Bor:**  
<http://healthland.time.com/2012/09/21/why-solving-puzzles-is-fun-qa-with-consciousness-researcher-daniel-bor/> (Maia Szalavitz)
- ▶ **The potential of crossword puzzles in aiding ELLs:** (TESOL journal 2016 7/4 :Warren Merkel)
- ▶ **Teaching Adult English Language Learners with Emerging Literacy Skills: a Discussion:** [https://lincs.ed.gov/lincs/discussions/englishlanguage/l0teach\\_summary](https://lincs.ed.gov/lincs/discussions/englishlanguage/l0teach_summary)
- ▶ **The impact of crossword puzzle teaching on vocabular retention:** (M. Mohammadi)  
<http://www.academia.edu/11003999/>  
[IMPACT\\_OF\\_CROSSWORD\\_PUZZLE\\_TEACHING\\_ON\\_VOCABULARY\\_RETENTION](#)

# MORE REFERENCES

- ▶ A funny snippet of video would be the first 45 seconds of this ‘Two Ronnies’ sketch (the rest relies on an understanding of British class issues and double entendre jokes – and doesn’t support my claim that crosswords are not elitist!)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVWdbO6FFfw>
- ▶ Also mentioned in a nice article from the Guardian Crossword blog:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/crosswords/crossword-blog/2012/sep/20/crossword-blog-best-tv-gags-crosswords>
- ▶ \*The ‘Commercial Crossword’ photo comes from a *That’s Life!* crossword booklet – I really love this magazine for literacy/ABE learners, though it’s still too difficult for the ELT learners I encounter...

# THANKS! HAPPY PUZZLING!

- ▶ Please stay in touch:
- ▶ [info@thebooknextdoor.com](mailto:info@thebooknextdoor.com)

