‘I THINK THEREFORE I LEARN’: USING LEARNERS’ THINKING SKILLS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Dr. Alan Waters
(Lancaster University)

It has long been recognized that developing learners’ thinking abilities is an important general educational aim. In addition, research has increasingly shown the central role of thinking in the foreign language learning process in particular. For both these reasons, therefore, ELT teaching methods need to encourage thinking by learners.

However, it is often difficult for EFL teachers to see how they can create lessons that will involve learners in active mental processing. This occurs because there is little information on the topic in the ELT literature, and the non-ELT literature of relevance is often difficult to interpret. In addition, there is a widespread belief that learners with less than an ‘intermediate’ level of English do not have sufficient language knowledge for complex thinking activities.

In this talk I will therefore first of all describe a basic framework for categorizing the levels of thinking which EFL teaching activities can involve. I will then consider how this framework can be used to inform the design of logical and coherent ‘learning units’ that can promote advanced levels of thinking in English even when learners’ level of knowledge of the language is relatively low.