

## Edward De Bono and Teaching English in Lithuania 1991 to 2001

Nin Bižys, Vaiva Zuzevičiūtė

**Abstract.** Teaching English in Lithuania is a complicated and important process, because it also includes teaching different ways of thinking and introduction of a young generation to European and global culture. Teaching English is an educational process which takes place in a politically, culturally and intellectually influenced context. Some cultural, political and pedagogical issues (E. De Bono thinking methods and aspects of their implementation into teacher's practice) of teaching English are covered as results of a reflection upon teaching/learning practice in this article.

**The aim** of this article is to analyze the context of several ways of teaching English and the stimulation necessary for learning/thinking activities of Lithuanian English students.

**Methods** employed in the article include literature analysis, reflection upon teaching/learning practice and practical research since 1991. One of the authors (Nin Bižys) is an Australian who based her findings on extracts from a diary and parallels them to her experiences as an English teacher from 1991 and so the article is written in the first person. The second author (Vaiva Zuzevičiūtė) is a Lithuanian who has added her personal and practical knowledge as an English teacher and who also uses Edward De Bono's ideas.

**Lithuania is a big shock to me** (My diary, 1991). This was written when I arrived after the tragic January events. Since then and over the ten years, I have lived in Lithuania and worked mainly as an English teacher. In Australia I had been an Art teacher and spent my years *dragging* creativity out of my pupils. This was to be good training for the English I would be *dragging* out of the traumatized (post soviet) Lithuanians.

**Lithuanians are all traumatized** (My diary, 1991). It is a great loss globally and to Lithuania that very little scientific study of those traumatized Lithuanians has not been completed since the post-soviet years. Since then people and the culture has changed greatly and rapidly. Included in these changes is the system of education. This article is not about the changes that were completed but more about the findings and adaptations made to my teaching of English within the ever- changing Lithuanian system and culture. The article is also about the integration of knowledge, style of teaching and other people's ideas that have all become a part of an organic and ever changing way of bringing English to Lithuania. *'I am the first foreigner she has ever spoken with in her thirty-three years. She helps me a great deal and whenever we have to do anything difficult and that seems to be very often we just say "Let's do it for Lithuania" and it is always easier somehow'* (My diary, 1991).

The English spoken then was what I labeled *uncomfortable* English. This still exists today because of the lack contact with what Lithuanians call the *living language* or *natural speakers*. The term actually refers to those who come from an *English speaking country*. English speakers in Lithuania today are mostly from Europe and this in itself has created

a different type of English. The best way to describe this difference of 'European English' is one that is almost without the many idioms we as Australians use all day and every day. A barrier Lithuanians had in the early years to actually speak and without errors was a major problem. This barrier was based on the demands of the soviet education system, requiring pupils/students to speak correctly, rather than speak at all and one that rarely allowed them to express individual thoughts and opinions. This barrier has somewhat disappeared over the years. Topics or themes as a test of oral English knowledge were part of exams and still are in Lithuania. In the early years pupils would come to me to prepare for year 12 exams. Minimally I introduced E. De Bono's first Cort Thinking card, i.e. **P.M.I.** (Plus, Minus and Interesting). In this way the pupils had an easy to remember formula (Lithuanians wanted a formula for everything in those days) that would allow them to present *their* personal opinions. I was told that teachers do not allow such personal expressions. This has changed and not only is P.M.I. acceptable but of great use in teacher training and preparing pupils for *debates*. Much to the dislike of E. De Bono I still use a fourth aspect with his brilliant PMI concept, named U or unique. **Unique** was added because of the lack of self-esteem found in the Lithuanian people and even today by finding the unique aspect of any topic or theme and especially those about themselves their self- esteem is improved. The closest parallel to presenting unique is in the way the East would see the 'essence' of something.

**If Body Language is the single most element in communication then how do Lithuanians fall in love? I was later told 'with their eyes'** (My diary, 1992).

Severely traumatized people are often unable to express their feelings and this made the teaching of English very difficult in the early years. The topics found in the ever-increasing supply of text- books from America and England were often about aspects of a culture that was unfamiliar to the Lithuanians. Going to the super-deluxe cinema, as in Australia and shopping were non- events in a land where cinemas were 'video salons' and shopping was done using vouchers in the early 90's. As much as this has changed there is still little expression of personal opinions on films, global events or local events beyond criminal news, scandal or gossip, in everyday conversations. To get over this and other barriers I have turned many times to E. De Bono's tools *plus* my training as an Art teacher which

gave me the necessary creative aspect to teaching English and finally a dash of who I am as an Australian or foreigner. The first set of ten cards (60 cards in total) is called **BREADTH** and used as part of what E. De Bono says are cards that will develop “thinking” which he defines as ‘the operating skill with which intelligence acts upon experience’ (De Bono, 1986a:5).

**The full sets of ten cards under BREADTH are namely:**

1. **PMI** or the treatment of ideas.
2. **CAF** or the factors involved (consider all factors).
3. **RULES** or thinking about rules.
4. **C&S** or consequences and sequel.
5. **AGO** or aims, goals and objectives.
6. **PLANNING**.
7. **FIP** or first important things, i.e. priorities.
8. **APC** or alternatives, possibilities and choices.
9. **DECISIONS**.
10. **OPV** or other people’s views.

The easiest to teach and use has always been the first card, i.e. **PMI** and the wonderful aspect of this card is that it allows for such thoughts and questions under the M or Minus. ‘What is *not so good* or *what could be better* about a party, holiday or money? I rarely speak of what is *bad* about something because of the present *negative* understanding of critical thinking in Lithuania. Added to this, is the finding that being ‘tragic’ is a part of the Lithuanian culture as much as my ‘artificial foreigner’s smile.’ Further with PMI and for a more balanced view or as De Bono writes, to find the **PO**, i.e. what is POSSIBLE in a culture of YES and NO I often **mix** the two concepts, i.e. PMI plus PO. The terms *could be better* and *would be better* are useful to speech and grammar training as much as for positive thinking and in helping Lithuanians to believe that there are other possible ways and methods. For stronger pupils/students the **added variations of PU, MU, IM, and PI** give eight aspects of any topic or theme. PMI also leads itself directly to teaching SWOT analysis, a very useful tool for all students, especially business students.

Added to this, M. Michalko’s **FUDS** (fears, uncertainties and doubts) is very useful and meaningful. Michalko also (as De Bono in his way) aims at controlling and working on the FUDS so as ‘to transform destructive negative attitudes into a new and positive reality. To do this, ‘simply acknowledge the negative feelings and then focus your energies on what you want to substitute for them’ (Michalko, 1991:3).

**CAF** or consider all factors, is good as a tool for developing vocabulary. As an introduction I use the naming of parts and facts about objects and proceed to finding factors. Facts about a car, bicycle or building are a good starting point and *later* a pupil/student begins to understand, find and use the factors of more abstract objects and ideas as they become more confident. The card develops thinking about factors related to actions, decisions, planning, judgement and forming conclusions. Further, the card opens one’s world *beyond* oneself in that one thinks of others and the society (De Bono, 1986a:13). When using this card the inclusion of a *sketch* of the object is asked for as part of the exercise. This allows for a certain amount of visual and creative thinking and expression and

allows pupils/students to express themselves more freely in drawings rather than just words. Globally visuals are part of most professional presentations and learning to sketch as one speaks, they take away some of the self-consciousness of using English. This card is also an easy way of beginning to understand that we *omit* things sometimes and so it is a good way to create check-lists for other thinking exercises. To be aware of *what is missing* is an important part of good thinking and a holistic understanding of life/thinking and is a self-evaluation/check-list of thoughts.

**RULES** are the least interesting to Lithuanian pupils/students so I usually speak of rules for teachers, parents, government representatives and any professional person within the community. This exercise is always an eye opener because of the specific and unique rules within the Lithuanian culture. An example is the way students/pupils see the ‘rules’ that the Lithuanian police keep to as opposed to ‘should’ maintain. The Ten Commandments to study rules make for one approach and only once was there an outcry from a business student who did not want to ‘study religion’. The student’s task was to form a set of rules for ‘business people’ based on the ‘big ten’. This has meaning to business students and the exercise is easily adapted to the type of group in the classroom e.g. rules for an Engineer, an Architect or a Computer user. The Rules card also allows for the introduction of another of De Bono’s books, i.e. **Parallel Thinking** which is used with tertiary students and pedagogues. Parallel Thinking gives one a useful tool for seeing how everyday activities can be used as guides to understanding more complex activities and/or planning new activities. A simple exercise also brings in card three of DeBono’s *Creativity* set of ten namely, *Random Input* plus a concept from *Thinker Toys* by M. Michalko (1991:162-163). A pencil may be used as the random input to find new ideas and ways to complete an exercise in finding “what ways people may improve office relationships.” Parts of a pencil can be *paralleled* to solving the office team- work problem e.g. the eraser relates to the need to get rid of certain problems. Finding ‘rules’ followed by *other* people, is a little more difficult but once students have a few suggestions or tools as guidelines given to them, it is a good way to review anyone’s actions and behavior. **C&S** or consequences and sequels are part of beginning to introduce the need to be responsible for words and actions, an essential part of democracy and living responsibly in a democratic system. **It seems that the recent changes have been a shock to many Lithuanians and no one prepared them for DEMOCRACY. They can die for DEMOCRACY but they do not know how to live with it** (My diary, 1993). The introduction of the well-known ‘ripple effect’ is one way of explaining how far some actions and words can and will go, once we have ‘reacted’ to some event or what we have heard or said. For senior students adding information from E. Berne’s **The Games People Play**, reflects the book’s strong influence on me as an Australian/foreigner and secondly explains the ‘deadliness’ of some games or the consequences and sequels of actions etc.

This card is also where by finding the good and not so good things (PMI) of the ripple effect the C & S can be studied so that pupils/students look beyond the surface of their life or their immediate world. Further, the card introduces the idea of being **PROACTIVE** rather than 'reactive' and integrates PO into the C&S card. By studying the ripples/consequences/sequences of actions and behavior pupils/students learn that one does *not have* to remain reactive but can 'design' new and positive ways of thinking and acting. "The positive revolution puts design instead of criticism"(De Bono, 1992:18) and "sets out to put things together so that the outcome is constructive and effective."

**AGO** or the aims, goals and objectives had to be carefully analyzed by the education group before writing the book "Lessons for Teachers" because in the Lithuanian language the three words came out almost equally as aims, aims and aims. The card relates very easily to business students who one day may be writing a business plan. In class, aim is seen as the 'big plan' e.g. to lose weight. The objectives as how to do this (e.g. join an aerobics class and learn to eat nutritional food) and the goal as the result, as in scoring a basketball goal or to keep to the loss of weight idea, lose five kilos.

Added to this card is that it helps in the teaching of verbs especially, 'want to, need to, have to, should, would, could will, etc.' Expressing what *we want* in life is not an easy thing for Lithuanians because they cannot escape from what they '*can do*' (My diary, 1995). Therefore, teaching how to reach small goals is as much English learning as it is self-esteem building and thinking. Having an aim gives pupils/students control/autonomy of their lives and forming the objectives usually opens the use of PO or possibilities that they have not thought of yet.

**PLANNING** is one of the hardest cards to introduce because Lithuanian pupils/students rarely find anything that *can* be planned and *fulfilled*. It is as if planning relates to dreams or the impossible and 'why bother dreaming' (My diary, 1996). Motivating Lithuanian classes to complete E. De Bono's suggestions such as those mentioned below is difficult:

A boy plans his holiday.

A girl plans her career when she leaves school.

The need for planning one day at a time or looking back on a recent event and thinking about how it was planned is how this card is usually presented. Time was seen, understood and lived out quite differently by Lithuanians, on my arrival here. Planning is seen as an essential part of being happy (if not happy then cheerful) and raising one's self-esteem by having successfully completed something familiar as a planned day. Further, planning involves being responsible for the control of one's-life, self-discipline, the result of actions and being democratic. Changes come from planning the difficult things to achieve so I appeal to the Lithuanian male's interest in martial arts (banned under the soviets and now legal in Lithuania). To the females I appeal to them to become the woman they want to be, i.e. not just the beautiful 'Balts' that they are but also 'assertive' females, requiring *planning*, time and discipline.

**FIP** or first important priorities is connected to other cards and especially to planning and as such it is difficult to motivate interest. This lesson needs a *slow* beginning and the use of topics that are familiar to Lithuanians such as, *How do we begin our day? What do you think of first when you want to do something?* Having opened our eyes and 'not standing up' but 'waking up,' the uniqueness of each person becomes reality as much as the great variety of the first thoughts and actions of the day. What is first is often a result of habit so the first conscious act needs to be recognized and named either as habit or something that can be changed or developed. Suitable questions are formed around '*What could be the priorities of the Lithuanian president, the Head of this school/college/university, a journalist, a rock star, your doctor etc., and what would be their first steps?*'

Of course, very quickly it was noticed that priorities and reality are not the same in Lithuania but the pupils/students began to use the card and became aware of what priorities *should be and/could be*. This is a card that adds to planning in that it helps in the listing of how to *change* something such as a bad/unwanted habit e.g. being lazy to which most pupils/students readily admit.

**APC** or alternatives, possibilities and choices is a card that has the usual and 'present negative approach in Lithuania because pupils/students have the cultural 'gene' that does not allow for more thinking than the present reality allows' (My diary, 1997). Finding alternatives is done as a competition, for example, think of 50 ways or more, to use old newspapers. Anyone can think of 5 or 10 and that is poor thinking according to the competition's rules. Those who find 20 to 30 are beginning to think and those with 50 or more are really being creative and thinking well. This is a good homework exercise and those pupils/students who come to class having done the exercise and those who have not yet 'switched on' quickly find the possibilities to be almost infinite.

The card requires an 'aha' as in creative thinking and once the 'aha' appears we can begin using the card because pupils/students have 'discovered' for themselves that the exercise includes the *integration* of all they know. In using the card recall of the scientific and technological discoveries of our world is an asset. The *magic of serendipity and the innovations* based on dreams, accidents and genius all relate to this card. The card is also a very good way of relating to the world of the pupil/student because it involves the awesome possibilities of films, animation, imagination and computer games where all things ARE possible. Choice is usually connected to the 'ripple-effect in that *'we are the choices we make.'*

**DECISION** brings in the *values* we have without dictating them and is rather about finding values. This card is very useful because it gives guidelines for the decision-maker. According to E. De Bono, he gives us the following challenging process:

- Why are some decisions easier than others?
- What are the most important things to think about in making a decision?

- How can you tell if the decision you have made is the right one?
- Is it better to think about decisions or just to make them and see what happens?

These are not easy questions to answer even for an adult. Relating to everyday decisions made by pupils/students e.g. where they sit in class, smoking, drinking, what they read/and if they read, their friends, what they watch on TV, what they eat etc. is one approach. Added to this card is E. De Bono's excellent book, **'Atlas of Management Thinking'** which is full of sketches that explain *intuitive* thinking and includes 'decisions' (1981:23-38). Lithuanians respect and use logical thinking as if it is the exclusive gift of good thinkers. Whenever I hear the phrase 'logically speaking' I think to myself, 'that person is sadly using only a small part of his/her brain's power' (My diary, 1998). E. De Bono's books all aim at expanding thinking to better thinking and avoids the 'I'm right and you're wrong' of 'arrogant' thinkers (from E. De Bono's book with the same title; 1990). Many intelligent people waste their time and energy showing only that they are right and miss the strength of correct thinking.

**OPV** or other people's views is usually what the pupil/student receives daily at home and at school. 'They see themselves as always being told what and how to do everything as they are being controlled and what most learning is about' (My diary, 1999). Lithuania still places major emphasis on remembering facts while globally the education systems have moved on to teaching *how to find* what we need to learn and how what we do know can be *applied*.

What has become a well-known game globally and in Australia, i.e. Trivia has little/no meaning here. General knowledge is limited to local knowledge. Besides broadening the global knowledge, this card is an added asset in *convincing* Lithuanians of the need for a wider and global set of information based on the wonderful words of many different people, especially the Nobel Prize winners and the brilliant lyrics from popular songs.

Traditions are essential to any culture and these traditions must be passed on but not without adding to them, changing them or by bringing them into the new age. Heroes are few in Lithuania and not part of the culture as in Australia. The sport's hero exists but beyond him/her there is little or no hero worship or hero to follow. That may be a good thing but 'who **are** the people that our Lithuanian youths look up to? In Lithuania those that Lithuanians respect are those they trust but not always their hero' (My diary, 2000).

**The Lithuanian culture influences how Edward De Bono is used:** Laisvės Alėja, the main street of Kaunas, is full of silent, beautiful and expressionless people (My diary, 1993). The pace is faster and the noise level has increased and today there is a new confidence in the youth but there is still a strong helplessness in seeing the future. Today there is a glass ceiling through which the young are unable to pass regardless of how well educated they are. The irony is that it is the educators themselves who most

often do not allow the passage, such as in the case of the new generation of teachers and lecturers.

**Their classrooms have curtains and there are dollies and vases of flowers on the desks** (My diary, 1994). Today computers have replaced many cozy classrooms and the rush to use computers has replaced a desire for knowledge beyond that of using the Internet and playing games. Without new values and adaptation of knowledge Lithuania will have a generation of unthinking technical experts who will be handicapped to DO anything creative with their computer knowledge.

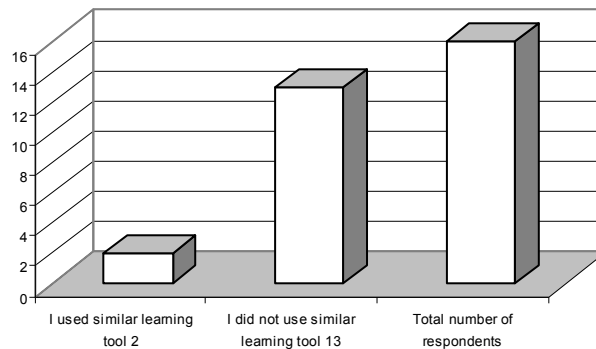
**The Education Ministry wanted to keep their young at home till they are seven years old** (My diary, 1992) and if so, they would have had a nation of happy 'vegetables' because we know from many sources that learning done until seven is a powerful thing. When I tell Lithuanian teacher's that there are kindergartens in Australia teaching Philosophy, the reaction is one of disbelief or the standard and strange Lithuanian answer of 'maybe'.

There have been many foreign visitors in Lithuania presenting so much information but not one Lithuanian has ever asked a foreigner 'What mistakes have you made? With all these Western foreigners influencing Lithuania with so much information, I would like to know why Lithuania is not looking to the EAST with whom they have so much in common' (My diary, 1994). 'Lithuanians are close to the earth and spiritual things. Their feet are IN the earth and their heads are IN the cosmos' (*from the title of an artwork in the second Art show in Kaunas, 1994*). This is a wonderful range to choose from but one not sought for nor yet applied. I only hope Lithuanians will not lose this understanding of the spiritual and the energy of life's forces that they so strongly have in their culture and missing in an education system that rarely has a written policy on ethics.

Edward de Bono's globally known and used book **'Six Thinking Hats'** is a strong part of my English teaching without actually teaching the hats. The book gives *me* the methods and means to present English grammar and its use in a more meaningful way.

In order to know if using thinking hats helps students to learn English better or more easily, a practical research was carried out in 2001 using 16 students by V. Zuzeviciute. These included adults from 18 – 36 years old, 12 females and 4 male students from an in-service training course. They were encouraged to use the six thinking hats as a learning strategy. The white thinking hat meant that a learner tried to give factual information and be precise. The red thinking hat meant that a learner tried to convey his/her emotions. The green thinking hat meant that a student tried to be creative. The black hat meant the identification of possible problems. The yellow hat meant the identification of advantages and the blue hat related to generalization. Results showed that students appeared not to have used similar learning/thinking tools and so discussed the same topic/theme or event from a different perspective. Results are indicated in Graph. 1.

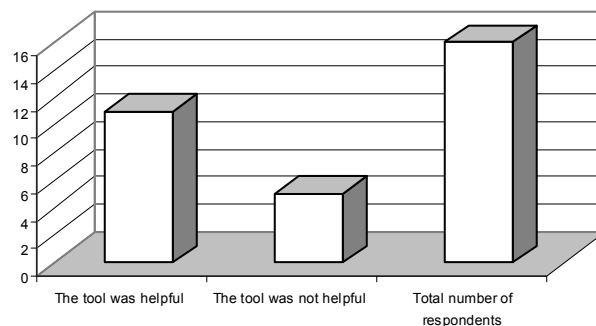
**Graph. 1 Awareness of Learning/Thinking Tool "Six Thinking Hats"**



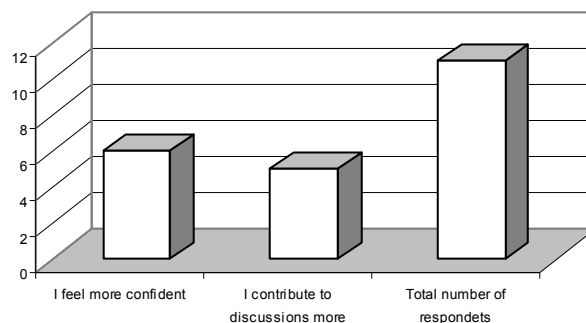
After half a year of studying English, students were asked to identify whether the hats as a tool were helpful or unhelpful. Results are shown in Graph. 2.

Respondents, who identified tool as “useful” (11 respondents) were also asked to identify “why”? Their answers fell into two categories as shown in Graph. 3.

**Graph. 2 Evaluation of Learning/Thinking Tool**



**Graph. 3 Feelings Using a Tool**



As a conclusion it can be stated that the tool “Six Thinking Hats” helps students to take different thinking perspectives. It also helps to broaden the understanding of a topic and as a result, assists in contributing to discussions in a better way and in becoming a more confident learner of the English language.

The six thinking hats offer a chance to the more creative to create variations although E. De Bono strongly states that this is unnecessary. Our Kaunas education study center group decided to add two hats for the Lithuanians, namely a BROWN hat and PURPLE hat. The brown hat of earth’s color was created as a representative of the practical

farmer’s thinking and the purple of the specialists’ and experts’ who are highly valued in Lithuania.

**The requirements of English have changed greatly in Lithuania over the past ten years.** Apart from editing articles and text- books for lecturers there is now a great need for ‘computer’ English. More people only need conversation English but it is still like pulling teeth to talk with Lithuanians. I think this is for two reasons: the cultural habit is tell a story which means you talk and they listen and Lithuanians are still using set answers from some text book rather than ‘getting into’ the conversation as an exchange of opinions. E. De Bono’s books are all relevant to going beyond the standard questions and

answers of any conversation. Very few Lithuanians use spelling as part of using their English. The alphabet and spelling have become important to doing m-business and e-business because English speakers use spelling on the phone and elsewhere each day. There is a great lack of STUDY SKILLS in the new college/university students because the secondary teachers are doing too much for their students or as we say, 'they are spoon-feeding the pupils.' Question forming is as important as any other aspect of learning English. I learnt this when preparing a student for the BRITISH COUNCIL English test. Every teacher is unique and this should be developed into her/his own STYLE of teaching and if so no one teacher can be good at every aspect of teaching English and therefore students should have several teachers.

Teaching English in the new millennium has brought yet another "wave" to the needs for English. Kaunas Business College has been co-working with the Employment Agency who sends to the college those in need of retraining. "English classes consist of 60% psychological support to these *unloved* people, 10% rethinking and understanding their new world and 30% English." (My diary, 2000) Adult education could easily be developed further and quite cheaply. Every person knows *something* that they can teach. Knowledge can be transferred at night schools where every secondary school could hold classes in any subject from cooking to yoga to the more academic and technical subjects. However, a major problem for many of the unemployed in Lithuania is the cultural mindset against employing older people. Besides the "brain drain" of our educated Lithuania suffers a great loss of the valuable experiences of the older community members.

An interview of "second chance" students at VMU revealed, (26 respondents) that adults choose studies of the English language because it is essential for their careers. However, the majority of students – 47%, chose studies "for interest sake, work reasons, and qualifications", which reflects that adults are aware of not only the labor market's situation, but also about their personal needs. For an English language teacher this serves as an insight into

appropriate teaching/learning methods, because a strong motivation already exists.

## Conclusions

In my time here I have learnt to be patient, that gentleness is good, that being slow is being more accurate, that small is beautiful, that one can have a feeling for a language rather than knowing its rules, that professionalism means being yourself, that more can be gained from working together than in isolation, that fear and control are dreadful things and that unless there is national security there is no peace of mind and no progress.

English teachers are the teachers of a new- world. They are the indicators and mediators into the international world. Their values and ethics are far more important than the rules of English.

They have a great responsibility in showing other perspectives on teaching, learning and thinking and creating the new Lithuania of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. Reflection upon practical experiences and research shows both teachers and pupils/students new learning experiences. We are all responsible for the education of our youth and it is not the lack of money that is the problem but the lack of every citizen in accepting the responsibility for preparing the young and in retraining the older people.

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Nin Bižys, Vaiva Zuzevičiūtė

## Edward de Bono ir anglų kalbos mokymas Lietuvoje 1991-2001 metais

Santrauka

Anglų kalbos mokymas Lietuvoje yra sudėtingas ir svarbus procesas, nes mokydami mes susiduriame su skirtingu mąstymo būdu ir jaunosios kartos supažindinimu su Europos ir pasaulio kultūra. Anglų kalbos mokymas yra lavinimo procesas, kuris vyksta politiškai, kultūriškai ir intelektualiai įtakotame kontekste. Kai kurie kultūriniai, politiniai ir pedagoginiai anglų kalbos mokymo aspektai yra aptarti šiame straipsnyje kaip mokymo ir mokymosi praktikos atspindėjimo rezultatas. Yra remiamasi E. De Bono mąstymo metodais ir jų panaudojimo mokymo praktikoje aspektais.

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## The authors

**Nin Bižys**, M.Ed., Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Lithuania.

*Academic interests:* creative thinking.

*Address:* Kęstučio Str. 74-14, LT-3000 Kaunas, Lithuania. *E-mail:* nin@kaunas.omnitel.net

**Vaiva Zuzevičiūtė**, doctoral student, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania.

*Academic interests:* learning modes in higher education.

*Address:* Vytautas Magnus University, K. Donelaičio Str. 58, LT-3000 Kaunas, Lithuania. *E-mail:* Vaiva\_Zuzeviciute@fc.vdu.lt

