



Learning Teaching

The Essential Guide to English Language Teaching

THIRD EDITION

Jim Scrivener



MACMILLAN BOOKS FOR TEACHERS

Series Editor: Adrian Underhill

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Language Teaching

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MACMILLAN

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About the series

Macmillan Books for Teachers

Welcome to Macmillan Books for Teachers. The titles are written by acknowledged and innovative leaders in each field to help you develop your teaching repertoire, practical skill and theoretical knowledge.

Suited to both newer and to more experienced teachers, the series combines the best of classic teaching methodology with recent, cutting-edge developments. Insights from academic research are combined with hands-on experience to create books with focus on real-world teaching solutions.

We hope you will find the ideas in them a source of inspiration in your own teaching and enjoyment in your professional learning.

Adrian Underhill

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About the author

Jim Scrivener has worked in many different countries, including Russia, Georgia and Hungary. He has been Head of Teacher Training for International House Hastings, Director of Education for IH Budapest and is currently Head of Teacher Development for Bell International, where he designed the Online Delta course. He was leader of the team that designed the Euro exams and has been actively involved with Cambridge ESOL exams including design of their online teacher portfolio. He is also the author of *Teaching English Grammar* which won the English Speaking Union Award for Best Entry for Teachers in 2010.

He is married to Noémi and has two adult sons, Alex and Ben, and a young daughter Maisie. He can be very boring about Bob Dylan if you give him half a chance.

Foreword to Third Edition

Learning Teaching has been one of the most popular and widely-used guides to ELT since it first appeared in 1994. It provides a complete training course in today's classroom practices and is rich in immediately-usable practical techniques and suggestions for classroom activities. It speaks in a uniquely reassuring and encouraging way to both novice and experienced teachers, offering clarity about the practices of good teaching while also supporting the teacher's own development of their craft through experience, common sense, self evaluation and reflection. *Learning Teaching* informs the reader succinctly without over-informing, proposes rather than demands, offers choices rather than single all-purpose solutions, and above all instils the confidence that 'I can learn to do this well'.

This third edition adds a substantial and timely new element in the accompanying DVD which allows readers to watch ideas from the book being practised by teachers in real language classrooms. There is a complete one-hour lesson which provides insights into many small but crucial aspects of teaching technique as well as some of the bigger questions about how a whole lesson can be shaped and managed, what can be expected from learners and how they may progress during a single hour. And there are many short clips in which different teachers, including the author, demonstrate key techniques described in the text (such as learning names, board writing, eliciting, concept questions, using timelines, drawing out quieter students, working with errors and many others). The DVD includes a wide-ranging selection of printable worksheets, observation tasks, templates and resources.

There are also revised and updated sections on recent developments and changes in ELT including CLIL, young learners and teaching exam classes, and a new chapter on technology covering presentation software, Interactive Whiteboards and virtual learning environments.

As well as being of use to trainee teachers on initial and in-service courses, experienced teachers will be able to use it to review their repertoire of ideas and approaches, and trainers and managers involved in the professional development of others can also use the material here on their courses. This third edition of *Learning Teaching* will build on the reputation of its predecessors and remain the single-book-to-have for ELT professionals who want to develop and become the best teacher that they can be.

Adrian Underhill

Series Editor

Introduction to Third Edition

Teacher: One who carries on his education in public. (*Theodore Roethke*)

This is a book for language teachers. Mostly it's a guide to methodology – to what might work in the classroom.

Learning Teaching is a book that can help you learn to teach in more effective ways. It is also a book about a kind of teaching where you are also learning. However, it is not a book about the right way to teach. Indeed, there is no scientific basis yet for writing such a description of an ideal teaching methodology. Instead, we can observe teachers and learners at work and take note of strategies and approaches that seem to be more beneficial than others, not necessarily in order to copy them, but to become more aware of what is possible.

The act of teaching is essentially a constant processing of options. At every point in each lesson, a teacher has a number of options available; he or she can decide to do something, or to do something else, or not to do anything at all. In order to become a better teacher, it seems important to be aware of as many options as possible. This may enable you to generate your own rules and guidelines as to what works and what doesn't.

Language teaching happens in a wide variety of locations and contexts, with a wide variety of colleagues and learners, and whatever I describe in this book, I'm certain you'll find something different every day of your teaching career. For that reason, no book like this can definitively tell you **how** to do it. You can get ideas and step-by-step guidelines and a little inspiration, but bear in mind that everything you read also needs to go through the filter of your own understanding and be checked out in terms of the local context you work in.

Thus, rather than saying 'This is how to do it,' I've tried to say 'Here are some ways that seem to work.' You'll find lots of ideas and options in these pages, and it's largely up to you what you want to take away from them. I aim to give you a 'toolkit' of possibilities.

Situations and examples are mainly drawn from the world of English teaching, but the ideas and techniques may also be useful to teachers of other languages. The book is primarily aimed at teachers starting out on a training course or in their first year or two of work, but I hope that you will find something interesting in it wherever you are in your career.

The order of chapters in this book may partly reflect the order a new teacher finds topics of interest and importance when learning to teach. I aim to give you some essential background information and core survival techniques early on.

To encourage you to engage with the material in the book, there are many tasks. Sometimes these are questions to answer or think about; sometimes they are bigger problems or things to try out. Of course, if you prefer, you can simply read the tasks and go straight to the commentaries.

In this book, I use *he* and *she*, *him* and *her* largely at random.

Jim Scrivener

Chapter 1 Starting out

This chapter offers a general introduction to ways of working in a language classroom and to a range of teacher and learner roles. It also addresses some important questions about how people learn.

1 Classrooms at work

Task 1.1 Classroom snapshots

A friend who knows nothing about language teaching has asked you to describe a snapshot of a typical moment in a language classroom – a picture that captures the look, the atmosphere, the learners' mood, the teacher's attitude, etc. What would your instant snapshot show?

Commentary

Your image probably captures some assumptions you hold – about what a teacher's job is, what learners can do and how they should work, etc. If you are on a training course and haven't started teaching yet, your snapshot might be very different from, say, a teacher who has been working for twenty years. In this book, we will look in detail at lots of lesson ideas, activities, methods and techniques; but before that, it may be useful just to get a more general picture of what goes on in language teaching – to look round a few classroom doors and glimpse what's going on inside.

Watching different classes

In my own teaching career, I have found that one of the most useful things is simply to watch other people teach. I often take away tangible things from this observation, such as ideas for specific activities, the pace they work at or a particular 'something' that the teacher said or did. Over the years, I find that I have incorporated a lot from this into my own teaching.

Some aspects of lessons can be difficult to interpret. Sometimes I feel that the atmosphere in a room is excellent or that the class is particularly engaged or working in a distinctively autonomous manner. But it isn't always easy to work out how these apparently 'natural' things have been achieved.

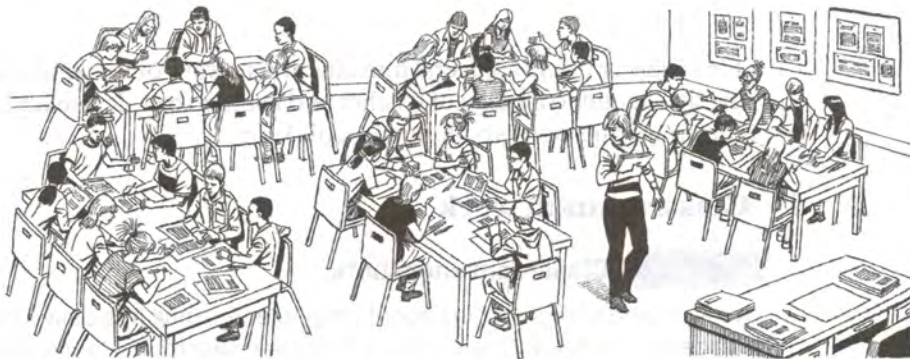
One thing I have concluded over the years is that much of the 'magic' that makes a good lesson (often attributed purely to 'natural' skill or 'personality') is something that is almost always achieved by very specific actions, comments and attitudes – even when the teacher isn't aware of what he or she has done. And because of this, we can study these things and learn from them.

Task 1.2 Different lessons

Read the following brief snapshot descriptions of moments from different lessons in different locations.

Which one (if any) is most like how you see yourself as a teacher? Are there any characteristics or approaches you find interesting and would like to use yourself – or would reject?

Classroom 1: Andrea



Andrea is working with 34 fourteen-year-old learners. Although the large desks are fixed in their places, she has asked the students to move so that they are sitting around both sides in ways that they can work in groups of six or seven. Each group has just finished discussing and designing a youth club on a sheet of A3 paper and is now working on agreeing a list of ten good arguments to persuade the other groups to choose its youth club design (rather than one of the others). Each group will have to make a presentation of its arguments in front of the class in about ten minutes' time.

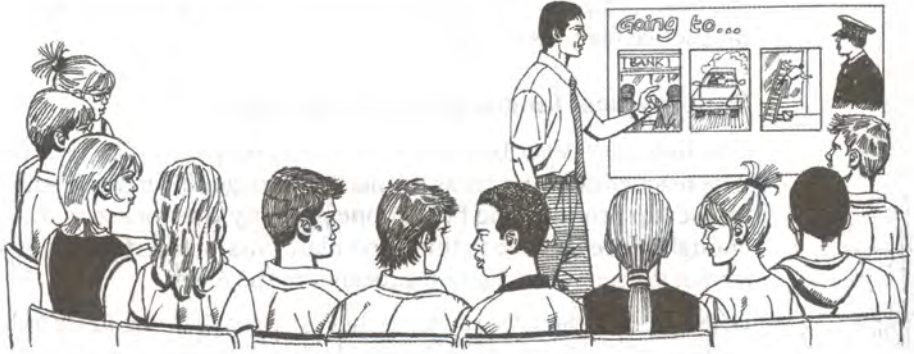
There is a lot of noise in the classroom. Andrea is walking around listening in unobtrusively to what is going on in the groups. She smiles when she hears good ideas, but she isn't intervening or taking any active part in the conversations. She answers basic questions when a learner asks (eg if someone wants to know the word for something), but she avoids getting involved in working closely with a group, even with one group that is getting stuck – in this case, she makes a quick suggestion for moving forward and then walks away to another group.

Classroom 2: Maia



At a first glance, nothing much seems to be happening here. Maia is sitting down in a circle with her eight students, and they are chatting, fairly naturally, about some events from the previous day's news. Although Maia isn't doing much overt correction, after watching the lesson for a while it's possible to notice that she is doing some very discreet 'teaching', ie she is managing the conversation a little, bringing in quieter students by asking what they think and helping all learners to speak by encouraging, asking helpful questions, echoing what they have said, repeating one or two hard-to-understand sentences in corrected English, etc.

Classroom 3: Lee



Lee is standing at the front of a class of eleven young adult students. He is introducing *going to* as a way of talking about predicted events in the future. He has put up a large wallchart picture on the board showing a policeman watching a number of things in the town centre. The picture seems to immediately suggest a number of *going to* sentences such as *They're going to rob the bank*, *He isn't going to stop* and *It's going to fall down*. Lee is pointing at parts of the picture and encouraging learners to risk trying to say a *going to* sentence. When they do, he gently corrects them and gets them to say it again better. Sometimes he gets the whole class to repeat an interesting sentence. It's interesting that he's actually saying very little himself; most of his interventions are nods, gestures, facial expressions and one- or two-word instructions or short corrections. Generally, the learners are talking rather more than the teacher.

Classroom 4: Paoli



Paoli's lesson is teaching some new vocabulary to an adult evening class of older learners; the current lesson stage is focused on learner practice of the new items. Everyone in class is sitting in a pair, face to face. They are using a handout designed by Paoli which gives the learners in each pair (known as A and B) slightly different information. The task requires them to use some of the new vocabulary in relatively natural ways to try and discover information from their partner. There is a lot of talking in the room, though it's clear that not everyone is participating to an equal degree. One or two pairs are almost silent, and one pair seems to be whispering in their own language rather than in English. Paoli is moving round the room trying to notice any such problems and encouraging students to complete the task in the intended way.

Commentary

We have glimpsed four different lessons. The descriptions below summarise some distinctive features of each.

Some typical language-teaching classes

The first class described above involved groups working cooperatively on a task. The teacher saw her role as primarily ‘managerial’, making sure that the activity was set up properly and being done properly. She took care that she allowed enough space (ie time to think and plan without interference or ‘unhelpful help’) so that learners could get on and achieve the result.

In the second class, we saw a teacher apparently doing fairly little that might be traditionally viewed as ‘teaching’. However, even at this glimpse, we have noticed that something was going on and the teacher was ‘managing’ the conversation and the language more than might have been apparent at first glance. Is this a valid lesson? We’ll look at possible aims for lessons like the first and second snapshots when we get to Chapter 9.

The third class involves a lesson type known as a ‘presentation’, ie the teacher is drawing everyone’s attention to his focus on language. Interestingly, although the teacher is introducing new language, he is doing this without a great deal of overt explanation or a high quantity of teacher talk. We look at grammar presentations in Chapter 7.

In the fourth lesson, the learners are doing a pairwork vocabulary task. The teacher’s role was initially to set up the activity, and at the end it will be to manage feedback and checking. At the moment, he can relax a little more, as nothing much requires to be done beyond monitoring if it is being done correctly.

Out of these four lessons (which I think may be fairly typical snapshots of modern language classroom life), we have seen relatively little overt ‘teaching’ in the traditional manner, although we have seen a number of instances of the teacher ‘managing’ the seating and groupings, ‘managing’ the activities (starting, monitoring, closing them), ‘managing’ the learners and their participation levels, and ‘managing’ the flow of the conversation and work.

I think it’s reasonable to argue that much of modern language teaching involves this classroom management as much or more than it involves the upfront explanations and testing that many people imagine as the core of a teacher’s job. This is partly to do with the peculiar subject matter we work with, ie the language we are using to teach with is also the thing we are teaching.

Although there is a body of ‘content’ in language teaching, the main thing we want our students to do is use the language themselves – and therefore there are many reasons why we mainly want our students to do more and therefore for us to do (and talk) less.

You could now use:



- **Observation Task 1** on the DVD to make ‘snapshot’ observations of teachers at work in your school;
- **Observation Task 2** to get a more detailed picture of classroom management in their lessons.

2 What is a teacher?

Language learners don't always need teachers. They can set about learning in a variety of ways. Some learn by studying on their own at home with books, CDs, DVDs, e-workbooks, computer programs and so on; others seem to 'pick up' a language just by living and communicating in a place where the language is used (this is known as **immersion**).

Of course, many students do learn in classes with other students and a teacher – whether that's a class they chose to come to (for example, at a language school) or maybe a class they were required to attend (such as in a high school). And much language learning will involve elements of all three ways: self-study, 'picking it up' and classroom work.

But, if it's possible to learn successfully without a teacher, then what difference does having a teacher make to the learning process? Why do some people pay to have a teacher? What do students expect from them? To put it bluntly, what on earth are teachers for? If you are (or are planning to be) a teacher, it's important to consider such basic questions.

Task 1.3 Remembering teachers you have known

- 1 Think back to some teachers (of any subject) you have had in your life. What do you remember about them and their lessons? The teacher's manner? How you felt in their presence? Can you recall any specific lessons? Specific teaching techniques? What it was like to be a student in that room? What words or phrases characterise the atmosphere of the classes (eg *positive, encouraging, boring, friendly, like an interrogation, sarcastic, humorous, respectful, scary, quiet*)?
- 2 To what extent do you think your personal style as a teacher is based to some degree on these role models?

Commentary

When I started teaching, I found that my basic image of what a teacher's job was and how a teacher should behave were drawn largely from what I had seen my own teachers doing. These internal images were quite deeply held and quite hard to challenge. Any teacher starting out needs to check if they have inbuilt assumptions about teaching from this exposure to hours and hours of observing your own teachers at work.

If you think about it, you have watched and experienced an awful lot of teaching being done to you – and this can often remain a subtle and deep-seated influence. Whether we acknowledge it or not, much of our view of what a teacher is and what a teacher should do can often be traced back to these many years of lesson observation from the pupil's seat. Sadly, a lot of the teaching that has left a deep impression on us was not necessarily very good teaching. As well as some excellent teachers, most of us have probably seen examples of teachers who were boring, unkind, incompetent, sarcastic or inept.

‘Entertainer’ teaching

Learners come to class to learn a language rather than to be amused by a great show. Certainly no one would wish their lessons to be boring, but it’s important to check out if the classes of an ‘entertainer’ style of teacher are genuinely leading to any real learning. It’s easy to get swept up in the sheer panache of one’s own performance; the teacher who constantly talks a lot, tells stories and jokes, amuses the class with their antics, etc can provide a diverting hour, but it may simply cover up the fact that very little has been taken in and used by the students. The monologue may provide useful exposure to one way of using language, but this isn’t sufficient to justify regular lessons of this kind. I’ve found that quite a number of teachers suspect that this ‘performer’ style is a goal they should aim for, partly maybe because of an influence from Hollywood films about teaching. But there is a fine line between creating a good atmosphere and good rapport in class and becoming an entertainer. I hope that I can persuade you that rapport is crucial but entertainment is much less so.

Traditional teaching

For many of us, school teaching was in a style we could characterise as ‘traditional’. While the details may vary considerably from school to school and between different countries and cultures, there will still be many aspects of ‘traditional’ teaching that are familiar to many.

Task 1.4 Traditional teaching

List some of these characteristic features of traditional teaching (eg Where does the teacher stand / sit? How are students seated? How is the class managed?). What do you think are the disadvantages of a traditional teaching approach for language teaching and learning?

Commentary

‘Traditional’ teaching comes in many varieties, but is often characterised by the teacher spending quite a lot of class time using the board to explain things – as if ‘transmitting’ knowledge to the class – with occasional questions to or from the learners. After these explanations, the students will often do some practice exercises to test whether they have understood what they have been told. Throughout the lesson, the teacher keeps control of the subject matter, makes decisions about what work is needed and orchestrates what the students do. In this classroom, the teacher probably does most of the talking and is by far the most active person. The students’ role is primarily to listen and concentrate and, perhaps, take notes with a view to taking in the information. Often the teacher takes as if by right (usually, but not always, benignly) permission to direct, give orders, tell off, rebuke, criticise, etc, possibly with limited or no consultation.

This ‘transmission’ view of the role of a teacher is relatively widespread, and in many cultures represents the predominant mode of education. Students will expect that a teacher will teach in this way, and fellow teachers may be critical or suspicious of teachers who do not. In such cases, it’s important to remember that

your choice of methodology is not simply a matter of what you believe to be best, imposed at any cost, but it is also about what is appropriate in a particular place with particular people. What you do in any school or with any learner will often represent your best compromise between what you believe and what seems right in the local context. You then have the interesting possibility of starting to persuade your colleagues and students to your ideas . . . or maybe learning from them about why their approaches work better.

The process by which traditional teaching is imagined as working is sometimes characterised as ‘jug and mug’ – the knowledge being poured from one receptacle into an empty one. It is often based on an assumption that the teacher is the ‘knower’ and has the task of passing over knowledge to the students, and that having something explained or demonstrated to you will lead to learning – and if it doesn’t, it is because the teacher has done this job badly or the student is lazy or incompetent.

In many circumstances, lecture or explanation by a teacher may be an efficient method of informing a large number of people about a topic. However, if our own educational experience has mainly been of this approach, then it is worth pausing for a minute and questioning whether this is indeed the most effective or efficient teaching method. Whereas most teachers will need to be good ‘explainers’ at various points in their lessons, a teaching approach based solely or mainly on this technique can be problematic.

The importance of rapport

Interestingly, when I recall my own teachers at school, I find it quite hard to recall details of any specific individual lessons, but I can recall – quite strongly – the way that the teacher related to the class and how I felt in this teacher’s presence. I think of some whose lessons were bright and enjoyable, some whose lessons were frightening and tense, some who seemed to bring out the best in me and some who closed me up. The way the teacher related to the learners – and consequently how learners related to each other – was significantly different in different classrooms.

What creates this distinctive atmosphere of each teacher’s class? What makes the difference between a room where people are defensive and anxious, and a room where people feel able to be honest and take risks? Teachers and trainers often comment on the importance of ‘rapport’ between teachers and students. The problem is that, whereas rapport is clearly important, it is also notoriously difficult to define or quantify. Sometimes people equate it with ‘being generally friendly to your students’. While this is a reasonable starting point, I think we need to find a wider definition, involving many more aspects to do with the quality of how teacher and learners relate.

This does raise a problem, though. If a significant part of a class’s success is down to how well the teacher and students relate, does that suggest that successful teachers are born, and if they don’t naturally relate well to people, then they are a write-off? Is your ‘rapport’ 100% natural or is it something that can be worked on and improved?

Task 1.5 Creating a positive learning atmosphere

Figure 1.1 lists some features that may be important in creating a positive relationship and a positive learning atmosphere. Decide which items are inborn and which could be worked on and improved.

In a positive learning atmosphere the teacher ...

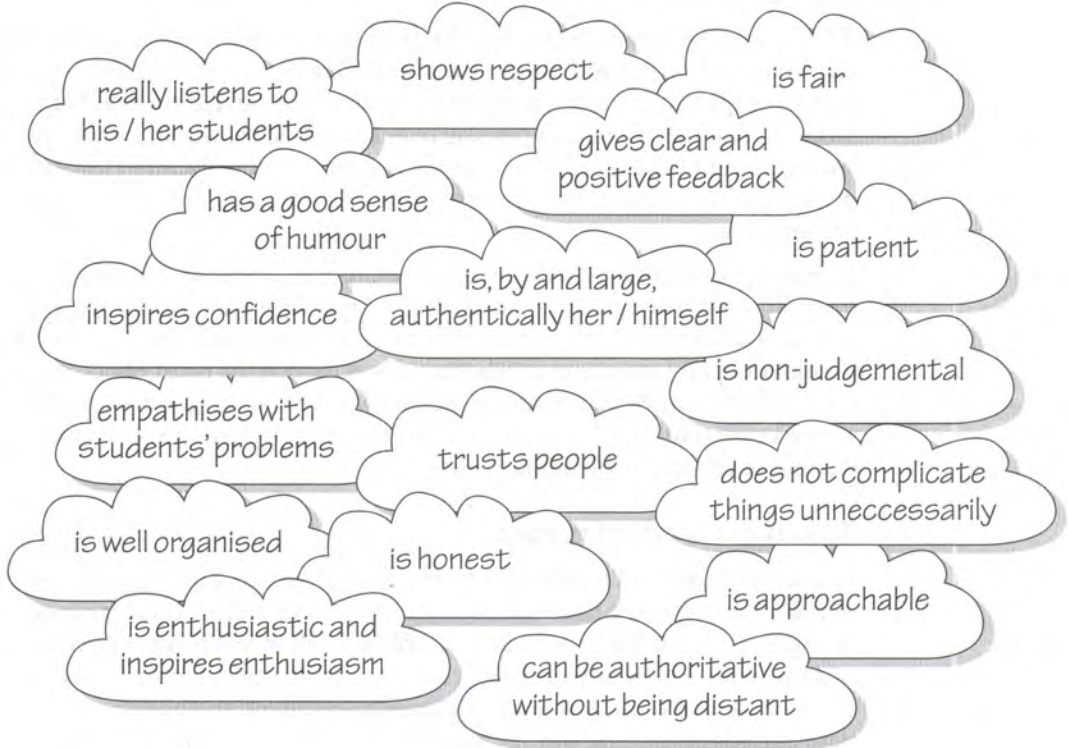


Figure 1.1 Features which create a positive relationship and atmosphere

Commentary

Arguable maybe, but I would say that all of these are things that can be studied and improved on. Some are more difficult than others.

Of course, although it's a good start, a positive learning atmosphere isn't everything. Being jokey, chatty and easygoing doesn't necessarily lead to good teaching – one of my teachers was very friendly and funny, but his lessons ended up in confusion. Contrastingly, lessons from one of the quieter, more serious teachers were often very memorable. This is simply the first building block of teaching, but it's an important one.

Respect, empathy and authenticity

Carl Rogers, the American psychologist, suggested that there are three core teacher characteristics that help to create an effective learning environment. These are respect (a positive and non-judgemental regard for another person), empathy (being able to see things from the other person's perspective, as if looking through

their eyes) and authenticity (being oneself without hiding behind job titles, roles or masks).

When a teacher has these three qualities, the relationships within the classroom are likely to be stronger and deeper, and communication between people much more open and honest. The educational climate becomes positive, forward-looking and supportive. The learners are able to work with less fear of taking risks or facing challenges. In doing this, they increase their own self-esteem and self-understanding, gradually taking more and more of the responsibility for their own learning themselves rather than assuming that it is someone else's job.

Rogers and Frelberg (1994) considered that, out of these three teacher characteristics, authenticity was the most important. To be yourself. Not to play the role of a teacher, but to take the risk of being vulnerable and human and honest. Gaie Houston (1990) has written that 'The foundation of rapport is to learn yourself enough that you know what style you have and when you are being truthful to yourself.'

Although there are some practical techniques you can learn to improve your communication with others, real rapport is something more substantial than a technique that you can mimic. It is not something you do to other people. It is you and your moment-by-moment relationship with other human beings. Similarly, respect or empathy or authenticity are not clothes to put on as you walk into the classroom, not temporary characteristics that you take on for the duration of your lesson. You cannot role play 'respect' – or any of the other qualities. On the contrary, they are rooted at the level of your genuine intentions.

In order to improve the quality of our own relationship in the classroom, we do not need to learn new techniques; we need to look closely at what we really want for our students, how we really feel about them. It is our attitude and intentions rather than our methodology that we may need to work on.

Having said all that, it also suggests that I can't teach you how to do this in a book. For this reason, the main subject matter of the book concerns the more technical aspects of creating a successful class.

Three kinds of teacher

There are obviously many ways of teaching, and part of the enjoyment of being a student in a good classroom is in sharing the unique personal identity, style, skills and techniques that a teacher brings to a lesson.

Having said that, it sometimes gives things a clearer perspective if we simplify rather than complicate. Adrian Underhill has suggested that there may be three broad categories of teaching styles (summarised in Figure 1.2).

The explainer

Many teachers know their subject matter very well, but have limited knowledge of teaching methodology. This kind of teacher relies mainly on 'explaining' or 'lecturing' as a way of conveying information to the students. Done with style or enthusiasm or wit or imagination, this teacher's lessons can be very entertaining, interesting and informative. The students are listening, perhaps occasionally answering questions and perhaps making notes, but are mostly not being

personally involved or challenged. The learners often get practice by doing individual exercises after one phase of the lecture has finished.

The involver

This teacher also knows the subject matter that is being dealt with. (In our case, this is essentially the English language and how it works.) However, she is also familiar with teaching methodology; she is able to use appropriate teaching and organisational procedures and techniques to help her students learn about the subject matter. ‘Teacher explanations’ may be one of these techniques, but in her case, it is only one option among many that she has at her disposal. This teacher is trying to involve the students actively and puts a great deal of effort into finding appropriate and interesting activities that will do this, while still retaining clear control over the classroom and what happens in it.

The enabler

The third kind of teacher is confident enough to share control with the learners, or perhaps to hand it over to them entirely. Decisions made in her classroom may often be shared or negotiated. In many cases, she takes her lead from the students, seeing herself as someone whose job is to create the conditions that enable the students to learn for themselves. Sometimes this will involve her in less traditional ‘teaching’; she may become a ‘guide’ or a ‘counsellor’ or a ‘resource of information when needed’. Sometimes, when the class is working well under its own steam, when a lot of autonomous learning is going on, she may be hardly visible.

This teacher knows about the subject matter and about methodology, but also has an awareness of how individuals and groups are thinking and feeling within her class. She actively responds to this in her planning and methods and in building effective working relationships and a good classroom atmosphere. Her own personality and attitude are an active encouragement to this learning.

	Subject matter	Methodology	People
Explainer	✓		
Involver	✓	✓	
Enabler	✓	✓	✓

Figure 1.2 Three kinds of teacher

These three descriptions of teachers are, of course, very broadly painted. There is no way to categorise all teaching under three headings; many teachers will find elements of each category that are true for them, or that they move between categories depending on the day, the class and the aims of a lesson. However, this simple categorisation may help you to reflect on what kind of teaching you have mostly experienced in your life so far and may also help you to clarify what kind of teacher you see yourself as being now or in the future.

On teacher-training courses, I have come across many participants whose initial internal image of a teacher is based on the ‘explainer’, but who are keen to move to becoming an ‘involver’ in their own teaching. Such a move may be your aim in

reading this book – and the book is mainly geared towards giving you information, ideas, options and starting points that may help you reach that goal. Essentially, therefore, this is a book about methodology. Throughout the book, I have also tried to keep in mind the important skills, qualities, values and techniques associated with the ‘enabling’ teacher and to give guidance and information that may influence your role and relationships in the classroom.

When I think back on my own experiences of being taught, it is the teaching techniques that I remember least. I certainly remember teachers who made subject matter come alive, through their great knowledge and enthusiasm. But the teacher I recall with most pleasure and respect was the one who listened to me, who encouraged me, who respected my own views and decisions. Curiously, this teacher who helped me most was the one who actually did least ‘teaching’ of the subject matter and was, seemingly, technique-free, being basically ‘himself’ in class. My memories of his lessons are of what I did, rather than what he did, of my learning rather than his teaching.

Task 1.6 Explainer, involver, enabler

Think of some people you have been taught by in the past. Which of the three descriptions above best suits each one? This may give you some idea about which images of teaching you have been exposed to and influenced by.

3 Teaching and learning

Let’s look outside the classroom for a moment. How do people learn things in everyday life? By trial and error? By reading a manual and following the instructions? By sitting next to someone who can tell you what to do and give feedback on whether you’re doing OK?

An experiential learning cycle

The process of learning often involves five steps (see Figure 1.3):

- 1 doing something;
- 2 recalling what happened;
- 3 reflecting on that;
- 4 drawing conclusions from the reflection;
- 5 using those conclusions to inform and prepare for future practical experience.

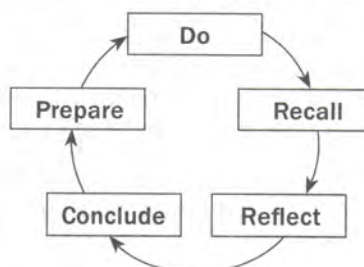


Figure 1.3 An experiential learning cycle

Again, it is important to distinguish between learning and teaching. Information, feedback, guidance and support from other people may come in at any of the five steps of the cycle, as shown in Figure 1.4, but the essential learning experience is in doing the thing yourself.

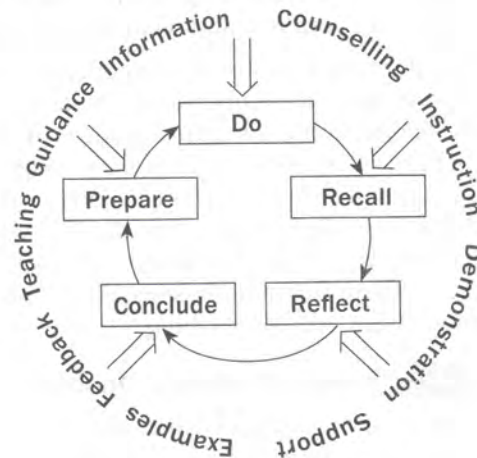


Figure 1.4 Teaching and the experiential learning cycle

This cycle, known as an experiential learning cycle, suggests a number of conclusions for language teaching in the classroom. For example:

- If this cycle does represent how people learn, then the ‘jug-and-mug’ explanation-based approach may be largely inappropriate if it dominates classroom time. Giving people opportunities to do things themselves may be much more important.
- I may become a better teacher if I worry less about teaching techniques and try to make the enabling of learning my main concern, ie the inner circle of the diagram rather than the outer one.
- I need to ensure that I allow my students practical experience in doing things (eg in using language rather than simply listening to lectures about language).
- It may be that being over-helpful as a teacher could get in the way of learning. I cannot learn for my students. The more I do myself, the less space there will be for the learners to do things.
- It may be useful to help students become more aware about how they are learning, to reflect on this and to explore what procedures, materials, techniques or approaches would help them learn more effectively.
- It’s OK for students to make mistakes, to try things out and get things wrong and learn from that ... and that’s true for me as a ‘learning teacher’ as well.

One fundamental assumption behind this book and the teaching approaches suggested in it is that people learn more by doing things themselves rather than by being told about them. This is true both for the students in your classes and for you, as you learn to be a better teacher. This suggests, for example, that it may be more useful for a learner to work with others and role play ordering a meal in a restaurant (with feedback and suggestions of useful language) than it would be to listen to a fifteen-minute explanation from the teacher of how to do it correctly.

A second assumption is that learners are intelligent, fully functioning humans, not simply receptacles for passed-on knowledge. Learning is not simply a one-dimensional intellectual activity, but involves the whole person (as opposed to only their mental processes such as thinking, remembering, analysing, etc). We can no longer be content with the image of the student as a blank slate. Students may bring pen and paper to the lesson, but they also bring a whole range of other, less visible things to class: their needs, their wishes, their life experience, their home background, their memories, their worries, their day so far, their dreams, their anger, their toothache, their fears, their moods, etc. Given the opportunities, they will be able to make important decisions for themselves, to take responsibility for their learning and to move forward (although their previous educational experience may initially predispose them to expecting that you, the teacher, need to do all that for them).

New learning is constructed over the foundations of our own earlier learning. We make use of whatever knowledge and experience we already have in order to help us learn and understand new things. Thus the message taken away from any one lesson is quite different for different people. The new learning has been planted in quite different seed beds. This is true both for your learners meeting a new tense in class and for you reading this paragraph and reviewing it in the light of your own previous experience and knowledge. You can check this out for yourself. Is the information you are finding in this book being written in your head on a sort of 'blank slate' or is it connecting in some manner with your previous knowledge, ideas, thoughts, prejudices?

The two assumptions listed above inform my teaching. They remind me that my 'performance' as a teacher is only one, possibly minor, factor in the learning that might occur. They remind me that some of the teaching I do might actually prevent learning. They remind me that teaching is, fundamentally, about working with people – and about remaining alive to the many different things that go on when people hack their own path through the jungle towards new learning.

Although this book concentrates mainly on teaching techniques, it is important to bear in mind that knowledge of subject matter and methodology are, on their own, insufficient. A great deal of teaching can be done with those two, but I would suspect that the total learning would not be as great as it could be. However, an aware and sensitive teacher who respects and listens to her students, and who concentrates on finding ways of enabling learning rather than on performing as a teacher, goes a long way to creating conditions in which a great deal of learning is likely to take place. Methodology and knowledge of subject matter are important, but may not necessarily be the most important things.

We never know how much 'learning' is taking place. It is tempting to imagine that if teaching is going on, then the learning must be happening; but in fact, 'teaching' and 'learning' need to be clearly distinguished.

Here is the great and essential formula (one that all teachers should probably remind themselves of at least once a day!):

T ≠ L

'Teaching' does not equal 'learning'. Teaching does not necessarily lead to learning. The fact that the first is happening doesn't automatically mean the other must occur. Learning – of anything, anywhere – demands energy and attention from the learner. One person cannot learn anything for anyone else. It has to be

done by your own personal effort. Nobody else can transmit understanding or skills into your head.

It is quite possible for a teacher to be putting great effort into his or her teaching and for no learning to be taking place; similarly, a teacher could apparently be doing nothing, but the students be learning a great deal.

As you'll find when you talk to some students (and parents), there is a surprisingly widespread expectation that simply being in a class in the presence of a teacher and 'listening attentively' is somehow enough to ensure that learning will take place. This suggests a very active role for the teacher, who is somehow responsible for 'radiating' knowledge to the class. Conversely, in this viewpoint, there is an assumption of a more passive role for the student, whose job is mainly to absorb and store the received learning. But this isn't an accurate view of how people learn.

In a traditional class of, say, 25 students, one lesson is being 'taught'. But we could equally think of it as a range of different lessons being received, as shown in Figure 1.5:



Figure 1.5 Different perceptions of the same lesson

Perhaps some students are listening and trying to follow the explanations (but only one of them is able to relate it to her own experiences); some other students are making detailed notes, but not really thinking about the subject; one person is listening and not really understanding anything; one (having missed the previous lesson) thinks that the teacher is talking about something completely different; three students are daydreaming; one is writing a letter; etc.

Here, the teaching is only one factor in what is learned. Indeed, teaching is actually rather less important than one might suppose. As a teacher, I cannot learn for my students. Only they can do that. What I can do is help create the conditions in which they might be able to learn. This could be by responding to some of the student complaints above – perhaps by involving them, by enabling them to work at their own speed, by not giving long explanations, by encouraging them to participate, talk, interact, do things, etc.

How useful are explanations?

Language learning, especially, seems not to benefit very much from long explanations. If the explanation is done in the language being learned, then there is an immediate problem; learners have – by definition – limited understanding of this new language, and therefore any lengthy or difficult explanation in the ‘target language’ will be likely to be more difficult for them than the thing being explained. And even if the explanation is done in their native tongue, explanations about how language works, while of some value, seem to be most useful in fairly brief hints, guidelines and corrections; language learners do not generally seem to be able to make use of complex or detailed information from lengthy ‘lectures’, not in the same way that, say, a scientist might make active use of understanding gained from a theoretical talk. Ability to use a language seems to be more of a skill you learn by trying to do it (akin to playing football or riding a bicycle) than an amount of data that you learn and then try to apply.

Language learners seem to need a number of things beyond simply listening to explanations. Amongst other things, they need to gain exposure to comprehensible samples of language (not just the teacher’s monologues) and they need chances to play with and communicate with the language themselves in relatively safe ways. If any of these things are to happen, it seems likely that classroom working styles will involve a number of different modes and not just an upfront lecture by the teacher. Of course, a lot of teaching work will involve standing and talking to (or with) students, but a teaching style that predominantly uses this technique is likely to be inappropriate.

Students need to talk themselves; they need to communicate with a variety of people; they need to do a variety of different language-related tasks; they need feedback on how successful or not their attempts at communication have been.

So what’s a teacher for? Short answer: to help learning to happen. Methodology, such as we discuss in this book, is what a teacher uses to try and reach that challenging goal.

Task 1.7 Learners’ expectations of teachers

Imagine that you are about to start studying a new language in a class with other beginners. Consider your expectations of the teacher’s role. What are some of the general things she can do to assist your learning?

4 The subject matter of ELT

What exactly are we teaching? What is the subject matter of language teaching?

An outsider might imagine that the content would comprise two major elements, namely knowledge of the language's grammar and knowledge of lots of vocabulary. Of course, these do form an important part of what is taught / learned, but it is important to realise that someone learning a language needs far more than 'in-the-head' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary in order to be able to use language successfully.

In staff rooms, you'll find that teachers typically classify the key subject matter of language teaching into 'language systems' and 'language skills'. There are other important subject areas as well (including 'learning better ways of learning', 'exam techniques', 'working with and learning about other people').

Language systems

We can analyse a sentence such as *Pass me the book* in different ways.

We could consider:

- the sounds (**phonology**);
- the meaning of the individual words or groups of words (**lexis** or **vocabulary**);
- how the words interact with each other within the sentence (**grammar**);
- the use to which the words are put in particular situations (**function**).

If we extend our language sample into a complete (short) conversation, eg

A: *Pass me the book.*

B: *Mary put it in her bag.*

then we have an additional area for analysis, namely the way that communication makes sense beyond the individual phrase or sentence, analysing how the sentences relate (or don't relate) to each other (known as **discourse**). Figure 1.6 shows a brief analysis of the language sample from each of these viewpoints.

So we have five language systems, though all are simply different ways of looking at the same thing. If we are considering teaching an item of language, one thing we need to decide is which system(s) we are going to offer our learners information about.

We might plan a lesson focused on only one area, eg grammar, or we might deal with two, three or more. An example of a commonly combined systems focus in many language lessons would be:

grammar + pronunciation + function

(ie how the language is structured, how to say it and how it's used).

Phonological	/pɑ:s mi: ðə 'buk/ or /pæs mi: hə 'buk/ The stress is probably on <i>book</i> , but also possible (with different meanings) on <i>Pass</i> or <i>me</i> . The words <i>me</i> and <i>the</i> probably have a weak vowel sound.
Lexical	<i>Pass</i> = give; hand over; present <i>me</i> = reference to speaker <i>the book</i> = object made of paper, containing words and/or pictures and conveying information
Grammatical	Verb (imperative) + first person object pronoun + definite article + noun
Functional	A request or order
Discoursal	Although not a direct transparent answer to the request, we can still draw a meaning from this reply. The word <i>it</i> , referring to <i>the book</i> , helps us to make a connection to the request. Assuming that Mary's put it in her bag is intended as a genuine response to the request, it may suggest a reason why the book cannot be passed (eg I can't because Mary took the book with her). In order to fully understand the meaning, we would need to know more about the situational context (ie who is talking, where, etc.) and more about the surrounding conversation (ie what knowledge is assumed to be known or shared between the speakers).

Figure 1.6 Analysis of a language sample

Task 1.8 Recognising language systems

Imagine that you intend to do some teaching using this piece of language: *Can you play the guitar?* Match some points you might focus on with the correct system name:

- 1 the construction *can* + pronoun
 - 2 the meaning of *play* and *guitar*
 - 3 variations, eg strong /kæn ju:/ vs weak /kən jə/, stress on *guitar*, etc.
 - 4 asking about ability
 - 5 typical question-and-reply sequences containing this language
- a function
 - b discourse
 - c lexis
 - d grammar
 - e pronunciation

Answers

1 d 2 c 3 e 4 a 5 b

Task 1.9 Distinguishing language systems

You want to teach a lesson contrasting two potentially confusing areas of language. Classify each of the following teaching points as *G* for grammatical, *L* for lexical, *P* for phonological, *F* for functional.

Example: *house* compared to *flat* = L (lexical)

- 1 *I went to Paris* compared to *I've been to Paris*
- 2 *Lend us a fiver* compared to *Could you possibly lend me £5?*
- 3 *library* compared to *bookshop*
- 4 *woman* compared to *women*
- 5 *Sorry* compared to *Excuse me*
- 6 *hut* compared to *hat*
- 7 *impotent* compared to *important*
- 8 *some* compared to *any*

Answers

1 G 2 F 3 L 4 G / P 5 F 6 P (changing vowel sound)
7 P (changing word stress) / L 8 G

Language skills

As well as working with the language systems (which we can think of as what we know, ie 'up-in-the-head' knowledge), we also need to pay attention to what we do with language. These are the language skills. Teachers normally think of there being four important macro language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing. Listening and reading are called **receptive skills** (the reader or listener receives information but does not produce it); speaking and writing, on the other hand, are the **productive skills**. Skills are commonly used interactively and in combination rather than in isolation, especially speaking and listening. It's arguable that other things (eg thinking, using memory and mediating) are also language skills.

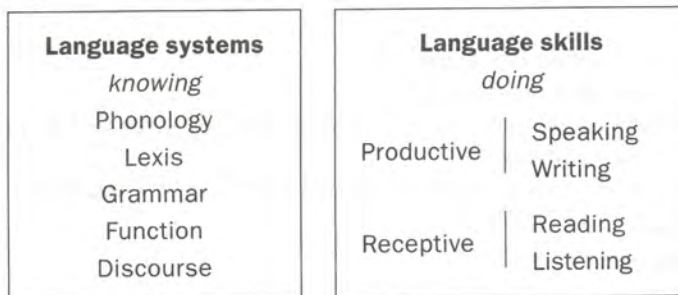


Figure 1.7 Language systems and skills

The main four skills are referred to as *macro* because any one of them could be analysed down to smaller micro skills by defining more precisely what exactly is being done, how it is being done, the genre of material, etc. For example:

Macro skill
Some micro skills

- Listening
- Understanding the gist of what is heard, eg Who is talking? Where are they? What are they doing? What is their relationship? How do they feel?

- Understanding precise information re quantity, reference numbers, prices, etc when listening to a business telephone call where a client wants to place an order.
- Compensating for words and phrases not heard clearly in an informal pub conversation by hypothesising what they are, based on understanding of the content of the rest of a conversation and predictions of likely content.

Task 1.10 Listening to a radio weather forecast

Consider briefly how you listen to the radio weather forecast in your own language. What would be different if you listened to one in a foreign language that you have been studying for a year or so?

Commentary

Many of the skills that we have in our own native language are directly transferable to a foreign language. But we do need practice in a number of areas. For example, I know how I listen to a weather forecast in my own language: I only half-listen until I hear the forecaster mention my part of the country, then I 'switch on' and concentrate to catch the key phrases about it, then switch off again. But when I listen to a weather forecast in a foreign country in a different language, I will have problems, even if I know all the words and all the grammar the forecaster uses. Trying to decipher words in the seemingly fast flow of speech, trying to pick out what is important and what is not, is a skill that needs to be practised; it is work that needs attention in its own right, quite apart from the study of the grammar and vocabulary involved.

The importance of skills work

Don't underestimate the importance of skills work. Not every lesson needs to teach new words or new grammar. Lessons also need to be planned to give students opportunities to practise and improve their language skills. Skills work is not something to add in at the end of a five-year course in English. There is no need to wait for extensive knowledge before daring to embark on listening and speaking work. On the contrary, it is something so essential that it needs to be at the heart of a course from the start. Even a beginner with one day's English will be able to practise speaking and listening usefully. For more on skills work see Chapter 9 *Productive skills* and Chapter 10 *Receptive skills*.

A purpose-based view of course content

Another way of looking at possible course content is to consider the communicative purposes that students need language for. The Common European Framework (see page 147) focuses on what learners can do with language. For example, can an individual learner successfully attend company planning meetings? Or take notes in physics lectures at university? Or give unambiguous instructions to junior doctors on a ward? An analysis of such can-do requirements suggests a different kind of course content, one based around students planning, undertaking and reflecting on tasks that reflect these real-life purposes. This course content would clearly include systems and skills work, but would be organised around this key idea of real-world uses.

Changes of emphasis

Traditionally, language teaching in many countries concentrated on grammar and vocabulary reinforced by reading and writing. The reading and writing was primarily to help teach the grammar and vocabulary rather than to help improve the students' skills in reading or writing. In the twentieth century, teaching approaches based mainly around oral language practice through repetition and drilling were also widely used. Until the 1960s, a lot of courses were based on mainly grammatical syllabuses, but in the late 1970s and 1980s, a number of courses and coursebooks used a functional syllabus, grouping language by the purpose for which it could be used (eg the language of greeting or of apologising).

Nowadays, most interest is expressed in work on all language systems and skills, particularly emphasising listening and speaking (because in everyday life we often do far more speaking and listening than we do reading and writing). Grammar is typically still the language system that features most prominently on courses and in coursebooks – and, at lower levels, is also the area that many students say they want or expect to study in most detail. Often coursebooks teach grammar with an emphasis on communication of meaning rather than purely mechanical practice.

Despite the continuing predominance of grammar, the implications of a more lexically oriented view of language (see page 185) are increasingly having an impact on material and task design. The growing influence of the Common European Framework has encouraged course designers, teachers and examiners to increasingly see successful communication in real-world tasks as a more important goal than that of accurate language use.

Task 1.11 Balancing systems and skills

Here are two teaching situations. What balance of systems and skills would make a useful course for these learners?

- 1 A 24-year-old Japanese learner has studied grammar at school for nine years; she can read and understand even complex texts well. She has arrived in England to take a two-week intensive course. In her placement test (which was mainly multiple-choice grammar questions), she scored very well, but at the initial interview, she had trouble answering even simple questions about herself and often haltingly asked the interviewer to repeat the question.
- 2 A group of three undergraduate science students have enrolled for an English course at a language school in the Czech Republic. They know no English at all.

Commentary

- 1 The Japanese learner clearly needs a lot of work on the skills of listening and speaking. As she knows a lot of grammar, the course could concentrate on helping her activate this passive knowledge; the main thrust of the work could be on realistic listening and speaking activities to promote fluency and improve communicative abilities.
- 2 Most beginners need a balanced course that introduces them to the five systems and four skills. In their future careers, these science learners may well need to read and write English quite a lot, but may also need to visit other

countries, listen to conference speeches (and give them), greet visiting scientists, etc. If they are likely to meet English-speaking people soon, it might be sensible to focus on speaking and listening, alongside work to help them read and write more effectively.

The communicative purpose of language learning

It is important to remember that no one area of skills or language systems exists in isolation: there can be no speaking if you don't have the vocabulary to speak with; there's no point learning words unless you can do something useful with them.

The purpose of learning a language is usually to enable you to take part in exchanges of information: talking with friends, reading instructions on a packet of food, understanding directions, writing a note to a colleague, etc. Sometimes traditional teaching methods have seemed to emphasise the learning of language systems as a goal in its own right and failed to give learners an opportunity to gain realistic experience in actually using the language knowledge gained; how many students have left school after studying a language for years, unable to speak an intelligible sentence?

Task 1.12 Recognising skills or systems aims

Every activity is likely to involve some work on both language systems and skills, though, usually, the aim is directed more to one area than the other. In the following list, classify each activity as 'mainly skills' or 'mainly systems' by ticking the appropriate box. Then decide which skills or which language systems are being worked on.

	Mainly systems	Mainly skills
1 You write a grammar exercise on the board which learners copy and then do.		
2 Learners read a newspaper article and then discuss the story with each other.		
3 Learners underline all past simple verb forms in a newspaper article.		
4 Learners chat with you about the weekend.		
5 Learners write an imaginary postcard to a friend, which you then correct.		
6 Learners write a postcard to a friend, which is posted uncorrected.		
7 You use pictures to teach ten words connected with TV.		
8 You say 'What tenses do these people use?' Learners then listen to a recorded conversation.		
9 You say 'Where are these people?' Learners then listen to a recorded conversation.		

Commentary

In activity 1, the students do read and write, but use few of the skills that we need when we read and write in our normal life. Certainly, comprehending the teacher's handwriting and forming one's own letters on the page may be quite demanding for some students (especially for those whose native language does not use roman script), but beyond this, the activity's main demand is on using grammar correctly.

Activity 2 involves the skills of reading and speaking in ways very similar to those in the outside world. Vocabulary and grammar will be encountered in the reading, but the main aim is for understanding rather than analysis and study. Compare this with activity 3, where the same material is used, but now with a specific grammar aim. Compare then with activities 5 and 6, and 8 and 9. The aim in activity 4 is to encourage fluent speaking. The aim in activity 7 is to teach some vocabulary, and the speaking and listening and writing involved are of less importance.

Other areas that are part of language learning

The map of language systems and language skills is useful to keep in mind as an overview of the subject matter of English language teaching. However, it may well be an over-simplification. Elsewhere in this book, you'll come across some doubts about it (for example, when we ask if grammar is more fruitfully viewed as a 'skill' students need practice in using rather than as a 'system' to learn). And, of course, there is more to English language teaching than simply the language itself:

- Students may be learning new ways of learning: for example, specific study skills and techniques.
- They will also be learning about the other people in their class, and exploring ways of interacting and working with them.
- They may be learning about themselves and how they work, learn, get on with other people, cope with stress, etc.
- They may be learning a lot about the culture of the countries whose language they are studying.
- They may be learning how to achieve some specific goal, for example passing an exam, making a business presentation at an upcoming conference.
- They may also be learning about almost anything else. The subject matter of ELT can encompass all topics and purposes that we use language to deal with.

Many teachers seem to become quite knowledgeable on the environment, business protocol, the British education system, desert survival techniques, etc. This is probably what keeps the job interesting! Some coursebook texts seem to achieve nearly legendary status amongst teachers! (Ask a teacher who's been in the business a few years if they know anything about a nun called Sister Wendy!)

If we start using English in class to do more than simple mechanical drills, then the subject matter becomes anything that we might do with language, any topic that might be discussed with English, any feelings that might be expressed in English, any communication that we might give or receive using English. The people who use the language in class, and their feelings, are, therefore, also part of the subject matter. This might be a little daunting and may lead you to keep the uses of language in class at a more mechanical, impersonal level, without allowing too

much 'dangerous' personal investment in what is said or heard. This seems sad to me; I believe that we need to give our students chances to feel and think and express themselves in their new language.

5 Methods

Task 1.13 Your own teaching method

- 1 Would you be able to name the teaching method(s) you use?
- 2 What are the key features of it and what are its underlying principles?

Commentary

A method is a way of teaching. Your choice of method is dependent on your approach, ie what you believe about:

- what language is;
- how people learn;
- how teaching helps people learn.

Based on such beliefs, you will then make methodological decisions about:

- the aims of a course;
- what to teach;
- teaching techniques;
- activity types;
- ways of relating with students;
- ways of assessing.

Having said that, some methods exist without any apparent sound theoretical basis!

Some well-known methods and approaches

Well-known methods and approaches include:

The Grammar-Translation Method

Much traditional language teaching in schools worldwide used to be done in this way, and it is still the predominant classroom method in some cultures. The teacher rarely uses the target language. Students spend a lot of time reading texts, translating them, doing exercises and tests, writing essays. There is relatively little focus on speaking and listening skills.

The Audio-Lingual Method

Although based on largely discredited theory, the techniques and activities continue to have a strong influence over many classrooms. It aims to form good habits through students listening to model dialogues with repetition and drilling but with little or no teacher explanation.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Communicative Approach (CA)

This is perhaps the method or approach that most contemporary teachers would subscribe to, despite the fact that it is widely misunderstood and misapplied. CLT is based on beliefs that learners will learn best if they participate in meaningful

communication. It may help if we distinguish between a stronger and a weaker version of CLT. With strong CLT students learn by communicating, ie doing communication tasks with a limited role for explicit teaching and traditional practice exercises. In contrast, with weak CLT students learn through a wide variety of teaching, exercises, activities and study, with a bias towards speaking and listening work. Most current coursebooks reflect a version of weak CLT.

Total Physical Response (TPR)

A method devised by Dr J. Asher, mainly useful with beginner and lower-level students. Learners listen to instructions from the teacher, understand and do things in response, without being required to speak until they are ready (see page 182).

Community Language Learning (CLL)

A method based around use of the learners' first language and with teacher help in mediating. It aims to lower anxiety and allow students to communicate in a more genuine way than is typically possible in classrooms.

The natural approach

Devised by Stephen Krashen, this is a collection of methods and techniques from many sources, all intended to provide the learner with natural comprehensible language so that the learner can pick up language in ways similar to a child learning their first language.

Task-Based Learning (TBL)

A variant of CLT (see above) which bases work cycles around the preparation for, doing of, and reflective analysis of tasks that reflect real-life needs and skills.

The Silent Way

Devised by Caleb Gattegno, this method requires the learner to take active ownership of their language learning and to pay great attention to what they say. Distinctive features include the relative restraint of the teacher (who is not completely silent!) and the use of specially designed wallcharts. The use of **Cuisenaire rods** in mainstream ELT arose from this method (see page 300).

Person-centred approaches

Any approach that places learners and their needs at the heart of what is done. Syllabus and working methods will not be decided by the teacher in advance of the course, but agreed between learner and teacher.

Lexical approaches

Proposed by Michael Lewis and Jimmie Hill. On the back of new discoveries about how language is really used, especially the importance of lexical chunks in communication, proponents suggest that traditional present-then-practise methods are of little use and propose a methodology based around exposure and experiment.

Dogme

Scott Thornbury's proposed back-to-basics approach. Teachers aim to strip their craft of unnecessary technology, materials and aids and get back to the fundamental relationship and interaction of teacher and student in class.

Some schools (or individual teachers) follow one of these named methods or approaches. In naming a method, a school suggests that all (or most) work will fit a clearly stated, recognisable and principled way of working. Other schools sometimes advertise a unique named method of their own, eg the Cambridge Method. These are usually variations on some of the methods listed above, or not a method at all but something else, eg simply the name of the coursebook series being used (eg the *Headway* Method), a way of dividing levels according to a familiar exam system, or an eclectic contemporary lucky dip.

Personal methodology

Despite the grand list of methods above, the reality is that very few teachers have ever followed a single method in its entirety (unless they work in a school that demands that they do and carefully monitors adherence).

I remember watching many language teachers at work in the (then) Soviet Union, which was well known as a bastion of traditional Grammar-Translation teaching. Yet I was struck by how every teacher had their own personal way of working in the classroom. There were some similar factors between different teachers, and if I listed all the most frequently observable features and added them together I could have found a core of things that were recognisably Grammar-Translation. But the truth was that there was no monolithic method at work.

Many teachers nowadays would say that they do not follow a single method. Teachers do not generally want to take someone else's prescriptions into class and apply them. Rather they work out for themselves what is effective in their own classrooms. They may do this in a random manner or in a principled way, but what they slowly build over the years is a personal methodology of their own, constructed from their selection of what they consider to be the best and most appropriate of what they have learned about. The process of choosing items from a range of methods and constructing a collage methodology is sometimes known as **principled eclecticism**.

6 First lessons – hints and strategies

Key hints when planning your first lessons

- **Use the coursebook (if there is one)** Don't feel that you have to come up with stunning original lesson ideas and creative new activities. If you have a coursebook, then you have an instant source of material. It's fine to rely on the longer experience of the coursebook writer and do the lesson exactly as it was written. Take your time before the lesson to read carefully through the unit (and give the same attention to the Teacher's Book, if you have access to one). There's a reasonable chance you'll end up with a workable lesson. Many teachers also use ideas books, known as 'recipe books', which do exactly what that nickname suggests – give you everything you need to know to be able to walk into class with the right ingredients to 'cook up' a good activity.
- **A lesson is a sequence of activities** Think of the lesson as a series of separate but linked activities. Your first planning job is to select some

appropriate activities. Read Chapter 2 and be clear what an activity is and how you can organise it in class.

- **Learn something about your students** If possible, talk to other teachers and find out something about the class and the people in it.
- **Plan student-focused activities** Don't plan first lessons that will put you upfront in the spotlight feeling the need to burble. That leads to panic and muddle. Plan activities that are based on the following route map:
 - 1 Lead-in (a brief introduction to the topic, eg you show a picture to the class and invite comments).
 - 2 Set up the activity (ie you give instructions, arrange the seating, etc).
 - 3 Students do the activity in pairs or small groups while you monitor and help.
 - 4 Close the activity and invite feedback from the students.Steps 1, 2 and 4 should take relatively little time. The heart of this sequence is Step 3. This route-map lesson plan is looked at in more detail in Chapter 2.
- **Make a written plan of the running order of your activities** Write out a simple list showing the activities in order. You don't need to include a lot of detail, but make sure you have a clear idea of your intended sequence of stages, perhaps with estimated timings.
- **Consider aims** Think about what students will get from your lesson, ie what is the point of them spending their time in this lesson?
- **Fluency or accuracy?** Decide, for each stage in the lesson, if you are mainly working on fluency or accuracy – this is a key choice for many activities (see Chapter 9, Section 4).
- **Get the room ready; get yourself ready** If the timetabling and organisation of your school allows it, take time before any students arrive to make sure everything is ready before the class starts. Make sure the room is set up as you wish (eg how will you arrange the seating?). Make sure you have everything you need (eg chalk or board pens) – don't expect them just to magically be there! And most importantly, just feel what it's like to be in that room. Start to settle into it, to exercise ownership over it. For the length of the lesson, it's your space.
- **Have at least one emergency activity!** Prepare your own personal emergency 'Help, I've run out of things to do and still have five minutes left' activity (eg a word game, an extra photocopied game, etc). Keep this and add more emergency ideas day by day.

Key hints when starting to teach

Talk to the students as they come into the room

Don't hide or do not-really-necessary 'business' while you wait for all students to arrive. This quickly builds up a tension and distance between you and the students and makes the start of the lesson much more demanding. Instead, think of the lesson as starting from the first moment a student arrives in the room. You can calm your own nerves and break the ice with students very quickly by chatting with each of them as they come into the room. Try sitting with them (even just for a minute or two) rather than standing in front of them. Welcome them. Ask them their names. You'll immediately start to learn something about them as real people rather than as generic 'students', and you'll find that you can start to relax a little.

Learn names as soon as possible

There is a huge difference in comfort levels if you know people's names. They stop being scary anonymous entities and start to become humans. In everyday life, if we meet a number of people in one go, say at a party, we are often a little careless about learning names. But in class, it is a very important teacher skill, and you should aim to internalise names as soon as possible. It is a bit embarrassing if you have to ask people their names over and over again. Don't say 'I'm bad at remembering names.' Make learning names quickly and accurately your first priority. If for any reason the pronunciation of names is a problem, take time to get the sounds right; if you are teaching in another country, maybe get a local speaker to help you.

- 1 As you ask each student for their name, write it down on a mini-sketch-map of the classroom. When you have all the names, test yourself by covering up the map, looking at the class and saying the names to yourself. Check and repeat any names you don't yet know.
- 2 Ask students to make a small place card for themselves by folding an A5 piece of paper in half. They should write their names on this so that every name is visible to you at the front. As the lesson proceeds, turn individual cards around when you think you know the student's name. (Some teachers use cards like these through whole courses; that seems rather lazy to me! This strategy is to help you learn names, not a substitute for that learning!)
- 3 Use name games from Chapter 15, Section 12. If it's not just you, the teacher, who is new, but your students are also new to each other, then using some of these name-game activities will definitely be a good idea.



See *Learning names* teaching technique on the DVD

Be yourself

Don't feel that being a teacher means you have to behave like a 'teacher'. As far as possible, speak in ways you normally speak, respond as yourself rather than as you think a 'teacher' should respond. Students, whether children, teens or adults, very quickly see through someone who is role playing what they think a teacher should be. Authenticity in you tends to draw the best out of those you are working with.

Teaching doesn't mean 'talking all the time'

Don't feel that when you are 'in the spotlight', you have to keep filling all the silences. When you are teaching a language, the priority is for the learners to talk, rather than the teacher. Start to notice the quantity of your own talk as soon as possible – and check out how much is really useful. High levels of teacher talk is a typical problem for new teachers.

Teaching doesn't mean 'teaching' all the time

Don't feel that being a teacher means that you have to be doing things all the time. It may feel a little odd, but it really is quite OK to sit down and do nothing when students are working on a pair or group task. There are times when your help will actually be interference. Take the chance to recover from your exertions, check your notes and enjoy watching your class at work.

Slow down

A large number of new teachers tend to do things much too fast. They often seriously underestimate how difficult things are for students, or are responding to a fear that students will find things boring. Learning to really slow down takes time – but it's worth bearing in mind from your first lesson onwards. For example, don't ask a question and then jump straight in again because you think they can't answer it. Instead, allow three times the length of time you feel students need (this is sometimes called **wait time**).

Key hints for starting to teach better (once you've got past the first few classes)

Turn your radar on

You are likely to be a little self-focused during your early lessons, but as soon as you can, start to tune in more to the students. Start to ask for comments and brief feedback on things you do. Watch the students at work and learn to notice what is difficult, what is easy, what seems to engage, what seems boring. Study your students.

Don't teach and teach ... teach then check

Practice is more important than input. Checking what students have understood and testing if they can use items themselves is usually more important than telling them more about the new items. Don't do endless inputs. Teach a very little amount ... then check what students have taken in. Give students the opportunity to try using the items, eg a little oral practice, a written question or two, or even simply 'repeat'. (Here's a rule-of-thumb ratio to experiment with: input 5%, checking and practice 95%.)

Are you teaching the class ... or one person?

When you ask questions / check answers, etc, are you really finding out if they all know the items ... or is it just the first person to call out? If one person says an answer, does that mean they all know? What about the others? How can you find out?