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Technology plays an increasingly prominent role in language teaching. From interactive whiteboards and data projectors to podcasts and computer programs, its presence is everywhere.

The CPE class I am working with have used CDs for listening skills practice, watched DVDs, used the Internet to carry out research for a class project, worked on their pronunciation in the computer room (using Eyespeak and Connected Speech), been introduced to the IH Campus, referred to a dictionary CD-ROM while online and started a Blog. All this and we are only four weeks into the course.

Published material utilises technology more and more with test-builders, accompanying DVDs and companion websites becoming part of the course ‘package’. Learners’ expectations are increasing, too. In the future will others look back and wonder how languages were taught before the advent of the Internet? Just as teachers now might be forgiven for wondering how languages were learnt before the era of the photocopier?

The IH Journal has adopted an electronic format; the e-journal will be the second issue of the year. Traditionalists will be pleased to hear that the first issue of the year will remain in its hard copy format. Whether you decide to read this issue digitally or print it off, I hope you find something that interests and stimulates you.

Andrew G Scott
IH Journal Editor
Dear IH Journal,

This summer the Kingdom of Playland Constitution, which among other things asks its citizens to recycle, reuse and reduce rubbish and gives them the right to a five-day weekend, celebrated its first anniversary. Surrounded by the Lithuanian Highlands, Prime Minister A. Teacher issued the following statement from the Government Office in the nation’s tiny (but very real) enclave:

"It is a delight to see Playland having grown from a fun ESL project into the micronation it is today. During the course of our first year we have gained recognition from other small nations, been praised by ESL authors and have been mentioned several times by the BBC.

Recently our flag has been sighted in places as far afield as Australia, the Sahara Desert and the Ukraine and we are communicating with the Executive Supervisor of the Eurovision Song Contest to enter a song for the competition.

Citizens in several countries continue to link up and take part in activities such as chat sessions and form lasting friendships – all good reasons why our nation has been called “an excellent way to introduce international concepts”.

We hope now that other schools will join us.’

As part of the anniversary celebrations Mr Teacher has launched a competition to young ESL students around the world, asking them to design a Playland postage stamp. See: www.playlands.org/competition#stamp

The Kingdom of Playland is a little known and very new nation. Beginning as a classroom activity for a summer intensive course, it has since grown to include younger learners everywhere – passport applications are welcomed from all IH schools. The multi-skilled activities enthuse its citizens (whose average age is 12) and provide them with much inspiration while allowing them to see their work displayed in a very original way. For their teachers and schools (dubbed ‘Embassies’) it continues to be a valuable source of fresh lesson ideas and material.

While its Embassy in Portugal now seeks new premises, the Playland Government looks forward to a new academic year and would like to hear from anyone interested in joining in the fun. To find out more please visit www.playlands.org/teachers.

Andreas Grundtvig
IH Geneva
I was born in Kaunas, Lithuania, and grew up in the Soviet era. Luckily, I had an intellectual background – my father was a professor at the Vilnius Technical University and my mother also taught there. Whenever I had a question, for example ‘Dad, why can’t we go abroad?’ he asked ‘Which answer do you want to hear, the way it is in reality or the way it is supposed to be?’ From the early age I was encouraged to think critically.

I started learning English before going to school. My father, fluent in German, told me that as a small nation, Lithuanians should speak at least one foreign language. I graduated from the Vilnius State University majoring in Romance languages – French and Spanish and I got my MA in French literature at the University of New Mexico in the USA. I speak five languages – native Lithuanian, English, French, Russian and Spanish. With every new language I’ve learnt, a new window to look through at the world opened up for me. Every language put a different mark on my personality.

I’m proud that I speak Lithuanian – the oldest Indo-European language spoken today. There are over 1500 identical words in Lithuanian and Sanskrit. The French linguist François Meillet pointed out that if you wanted to listen to how our ancestors spoke, you should go to a Lithuanian village and listen to the local people.

The French linguist François Meillet pointed out that if you wanted to listen to how our ancestors spoke, you should go to a Lithuanian village and listen to the local people.

I’m also proud of Lithuania’s cultural heritage, its pagan roots that are alive in folklore, festivals and traditions. Lithuania was the last European country to be Christianized in the 16th century. Mythology is my passion. I’m proud that Maria Gimbutas, a prolific author of books on pre-history and archeology, deciphered the language of the Goddess. This language was used in the old, pre-Indo-European, pre-historic Europe. It is still spoken today – by Navajo Indians in New Mexico who live in a matrilineal society.

In Soviet times Russian was a must at school and we heard it everywhere. On one hand I’m glad I know it because I can read Dostoievsky’s novels, Achmatova’s poetry, listen to Vysotsky’s songs, watch good Soviet comedies and understand Russian anecdotes that cannot be translated into any language because they lose their flavor. On the other hand, when I hear it on the street I shudder – it’s the language of the former occupiers. When I speak Russian face to face though, I have no problems.

I associate Spanish with the Argentinean tango, which is my second passion. My tango teacher, Eduardo Gimenez, is my former colleague – he taught Spanish at Soros International House where I’ve been teaching for six years. Not only have I learned that it takes two to tango (just kidding) but also that tango is the dance where a man draws and a woman colors – in perfect harmony.

I love France and French culture. Luce Irigaray, a French philosopher in the feminist field, illustrates how social values permeate the language. For example, she indicates that in French things that
have more value have masculine gender ("un fauteuil" – an armchair but "une chaise" – a chair, "le concorde" (harmony) has feminine gender but the man made plane is "le Concorde"). Prestigious professions such as a doctor, a writer, a poet don’t have feminine gender in French spoken in France but they do have it in Quebec, Canada. According to Luce Irigaray, women cannot trace down their genealogies because they don’t have their names. Women get their fathers’ and their husbands’ names. So what does it tell us about the society we live in?

English is a lingua franca. When I speak English I feel free. It is a wonderful feeling. Each and every one of us is a multi-faceted human being. Part of our journey in life is to discover those facets and let them shine. As the renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell put it, ‘the separateness apparent to the world is secondary. Beyond the world of opposites is an unseen but experienced unity and identity in us all’.

I immigrated to the US on October 7, 1988 - the day Lithuania regained its independent state’s flag. When I landed in New York City I was on a totally different planet. I had a culture shock. I have never seen so many Afro-Americans, so many Asians, orthodox Jews or Latin American people in one place. I have never tasted so many cuisines. I was surprised when total strangers on the street said compliments such as ‘Nice coat!’ or ‘I like your jacket!’ I wasn’t used to saying ‘hello’ now matter how many times I’d see the same person the same day. At first ‘wow’ and ‘oops’ sounded like an unnatural, exaggerated reaction. I remember going to the movies and resting my eyes on the screen because people carrying packs of popcorn and Coke seemed too unreal. Later, I fell in love with New York. I remember standing at the Hudson River in Manhattan, feeling in the center of the world. The Big Apple is definitely a multi-cultural melting pot.

Culture is behind every language. When I teach languages I teach culture. I use poetry and songs to illustrate grammar points, novels to increase vocabulary, jokes to make my students laugh. For example, Jacques Prévert’s poem “D’éjeuner du matin” is a beautiful illustration of the difference between two tenses – le passé composé and l’imparfait. I addressed not only grammar points with this poem – reading, listening, and speaking skills were blended.

Eric Clapton’s song “Tears in heaven” is a good introduction to second conditionals. Helen Fielding’s book “Briet Jones’s diary” is great for Valentine’s Day to talk about lonely-hearts columns, living single, looking for boyfriends/girlfriends, love etc.

Wherever I go, my eyes are scanning for teaching materials. In Riga, Latvia I went to TGI Friday’s restaurant and brought their menu to my students. I used it to illustrate the abbreviation TOIF and to talk about American and Mexican food. I showed my daughter’s wedding invitation to illustrate the abbreviation RSVP. Students are always interested in personal and specific and they get bored with general and vague.

I started teaching French as a TA at the University of New Mexico. That’s where I learned to personalize activities to make them relevant to my students and to make my teaching student-centered. I’ve become familiar with the communicative and lexical approaches to teach languages.

My daughter Gun, who was in Junior High at that time, enjoyed her French class because her teacher showed them how to make crêpes and had them sing songs. All learners like to be actively involved in their learning with hands-on activities.

I was amazed how much positive reinforcement children get in American schools. Soviet schooling for me was traumatic – it was nothing but shaming and reprimanding. One year I taught French and Spanish at Taos High School. Taos, New Mexico is a fascinating blend of three cultures – Native American, Hispanic and Anglo. At first my Latin-American students, who took Spanish for an easy “A”, looked at me suspiciously. “Where are you from? Lithuania? And you are teaching us Spanish?” I had a tough time with my teenagers. I didn’t have that “drill sergeant” quality and I had discipline problems. Teaching is impossible when you can’t control your class. In my French classes I settled my unruly students by having them listen to MC Sonar’s rap songs. Soon I realized that teaching high school students wasn’t my cup of tea. So I turned to adults and got two part-time jobs teaching ESL in New York, (one in Queens and one in the Bronx – two colorful New York boroughs). I had Latin-American students in my classes. They were all smiling, they loved talking about their big families, and they also danced salsa and merengue. I used Carolyn Graham’s “Jazz Chants” to drill do, does, did, have you ever etc. My students enjoyed it. They still do.

In New York City, I met Airing Bylaw, (a Lithuanian-American), a teacher, and a translator and reggae musician. She has become my mentor. I learned a lot from Ausrińė about the communicative approach. She started teaching ESL in 1989 in New York City’s men’s prisons. The inmates requesting ESL were mostly Puerto Rican and Dominican, with some Russians, Georgians, and Vietnamese, among others. Teaching them was interesting, using English-speaking inmates as tutors. There were no textbooks, or any other materials to speak of, so it was played by ear.

She also taught multi-cultural students in public libraries. The aim of the state sponsored programs was to get immigrants off welfare and get them employed as soon as possible. Grammar and tenses weren’t as important as communication. They needed survival skills. In one class she had 17 different language groups: Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Spanish, Farsi, Portuguese, Urdu, and Turkish, to mention a few. Her rule of thumb is to speak ENGLISH ONLY in her classes, so it was an advantage that she didn’t speak any of her students’ languages. She brought telephone books and other realia and let them find a physician’s not a doctor’s office and make an appointment. Or call a catalogue company (Victoria’s Secret) and order a copy to be sent. If a student eventually received the catalogue, that student passed the test. She did role-playing such as a visit to the local health center with a nurse, a receptionist, a doctor with a real stethoscope and a patient with a sick child; or the employer-employee situation, providing job interview skills. In one-role playing situation, the mother was Japanese,
the father Russian and when the Japanese son introduced his Croatian girlfriend, the mother was adamantly against the relationship (she wanted a Japanese bride for her son) while the father thought the girl was cute.

Teaching multi-cultural classes was both enriching and rewarding for Aušrinė. Students from Western countries shook hands, Japanese bowed and Indians acknowledged the other person’s divinity by bowing with their palms put together. The last day of class everybody came dressed in their ethnic costumes and brought regional, homemade food typical for their country. This was educational to all and there was a lot to talk about while recipes were swapped.

The hardest thing for Aušrinė was to teach Muslim students from Africa. She uses visuals in many of her classes and this handful of students had never been exposed to pictures for religious reasons. For example, a picture of a horse had nothing to do with a horse. One picture means different things for students from different cultures but that’s where the conversation starts.

Now Aušrinė lives and teaches English in Vilnius. She does speak the language but adheres to ENG-LISH ONLY in her classes. Some of her students didn’t even realize that she speaks Lithuanian until a few weeks into the class. Her Lithuanian students have been seriously employed since Lithuania joined the EU: her students are bankers, sociologists, psychotherapists, and surgeons, et al. They visit Brussels for various conventions and vacation in Turkey or Egypt where English works better than Lithuanian. Massive traveling is going on. When her students travel they have to bring back a present which opens up the class to conversation. One of her students works for a tea company (she recently returned from a Zimbabwean tea plantation) so she brought various teas to class – green, white, fruit, and provided a tea degustation with students teaching new adjectives to describe each aroma, texture and flavor, reasons for likes and dislikes.

She teaches at home in a relaxed atmosphere – her students put on wool socks, sip tea and nibble cookies. The atmosphere is so relaxed and anxiety free that nobody is afraid to join the conversation even if language skills are far from perfect. ENGLISH ONLY works. Her students report to her, “I went to London and had no problems communicating.” They love role-playing, watching movie clips, guessing words from definitions, playing games. Isn’t playing more fun than grammar books? They never leave empty-handed. Aušrinė lends them videos, DVD’s, National Geographic, Vogue. She also teaches a class of fashion design students so they have the skill to describe their fashion collections in English.

Aušrinė learns more and more about Lithuanians while teaching them. What she cannot accept is her students’ answer “maybe” when she asks them “Would you like some tea?” “Well, maybe.” Aušrinė simply doesn’t respond to such an answer. She isn’t sure where it comes from. Is it from the insecurity fostered in Soviet times or is it a cultural thing? One of her student’s was pregnant. This was an excellent opportunity to talk about giving birth, labor pains, taking care of the baby. She gave a baby shower. Lithuanians were shocked. “You give presents before the baby is born?” Apparently Americans are more optimistic than Eastern Europeans. She also organizes annual potluck Thanksgiving dinners. She makes the turkey and the sweet potatoes while the students decide what kinds of foods would have been available to Native Americans and Pilgrims in November. No, fruit salad is out but nuts and dried fruit are okay. Moonshine (they love the word) was probably available, or so they all like to assume. They talk about the possibility of their recipes and can’t believe there will be a party without herring and sour cream.

Aušrinė thinks that Lithuanian students don’t have a strong sense of responsibility. In New York City where the waiting lists for ESL classes are a yard long, miss three classes and you are out. In Lithuania students miss classes without administrative consequences. She has trained them to at least inform her if they are not going to attend (the number of students in attendance is important for a teacher in prepping class) and that was a huge step in responsibility training.

I’ve been teaching English and French at Soros International House since I moved back to Lithuania in 2000. Even though I’ve had many ups and downs, I enjoy teaching and my students enjoy learning. I have Lithuanians, Russians, Poles and Jewish students. This term I have one student from Turkey. How pleased he was when I asked “How are you?” and ‘Thank you’ in Turkish! My level 1 Russian student is glad when I occasionally explain grammar in Russian.

Every year we have an international team of teachers in our school. This term we have Julia from the US (she has Lithuanian relatives and is learning Lithuanian. She wants to learn the language of every country she lives in; I wish Russians did that), Max is from Scotland, William is from England, Jonathan is from Australia (he referred to Vilnius as being quaint), Anna is from Poland (she is a published poet), Janet is from Brazil (she is of Lithuanian descent and a doctoral student at the Department of Philology at Vilnius University doing research in learning Lithuanian as a foreign language), Andrea and Marina are from Italy, Jan is from Norway, and Sergio and Manuel are from Spain.

While talking to my colleagues I’m constantly learning about different cultures (slang, jokes, idioms). We have a flamboyant Lithuanian teacher, Algis Šveikauskas, who has worked for the BBC for 18 years. His British English is rich in idioms, proverbs and sayings. He wears a pink cap because ‘pink makes the girls wink’. When Algis came back to Lithuania he had a culture shock. There was no respect for personal space in crowded public transport, whenever he asked ‘How are you?’ Lithuanians replied ‘Bad, very bad’. And they went on and on about their problems. Algis admitted wanting to go back to London ASAP. Recently he has shared his experience in reading books with his students. They’ve read ‘The Great Gatsby’ by John Fitzgerald and ‘The remains of the day’ by Kazuo Ishiguro (with pre-reading, while reading and post-reading activities). After reading the books the students have watched the movies. Students like reading books and it’s a great way to expand vocabulary.

Whenever I observe my peers teach, I learn new things. Whenever I’m being observed, I learn from the feedback. When my colleagues come to my lessons I involve them in class activities. When Anna came to observe my level 2 French classes, I asked her to read one of her poems. So she sat on the floor, read it and then translated it into English. (All my Lithuanian students learning French
Ausra was born in 1957 in Kaunas, Lithuania. After attending a secondary school which specialized in English, she graduated from the Vilnius State University majoring in Romance languages in 1980. In 1988 she married a Lithuanian-American and moved to the USA. She received her MA in French literature from the University of New Mexico and started teaching French in American High Schools. At the same time she became a part-time ESL teacher. In 2000 she returned to Lithuania and in 2002 she began teaching English and French at Soros International House in Vilnius.

When Andrea came to observe the same class, one of my students spoke Italian with him and then they interviewed Andrea who speaks both Lithuanian and French. It was a good “asking questions in French” practice as well as a cultural exchange.

Before going to teach, I ask myself, “What is the aim of my lesson, how am I going to achieve it, how will I lead my students step by step to my goal, and what will my students be able to do after the lesson?” To do this I have learned from Lina Marčiulionytė who is our teacher trainer and who is a professional to her bone marrow.

The beauty of teaching languages to multi-cultural students is that during the lesson my students and I are united in our diversity (and different is good!). Teaching and learning is an enriching and rewarding give and take. And the sky is the limit as far as learning how to teach goes.

1 A course in linguistics at Vilnius State University
Combatting Inertia in Teenagers and Generating Kinetic Energy in the Classroom:
A pseudo-scientific report on student-generated materials for exam classes

Christopher Cooke

Introduction

My science career came to an end when my 6th form physics teacher, Mr. Bland – and yes, he was – wrote on my report card that I “appeared incapable of logical thought.” His judgment came as no surprise to me. Months of rolling ball bearings and analyzing pi and theta were literally Greek to me.

One thing I like about teaching English is that the classroom is not a science lab. There are so many variables and the most carefully thought-out plans can go askew because students - unlike elements (if we exclude mercury) - mutate depending on the weather, mood or time of day so that we must constantly adapt the plan to get the best results. This is particularly true for younger learners. Teaching does involve experimenting, but I find that I learn most in retrospect: trying something out, seeing what goes wrong and refining it for next time. Sometimes the best discoveries are the result of happy accidents. Look at Archimedes: he didn’t set up his bathtub in his lab in an attempt to understand laws of buoyancy. He was just down at the baths having a relaxing old time when the idea came to him. I’m not saying that fundamental laws of physics and the invention of the lever are on an equal level as teaching a group of teenagers, but I’m sure many would agree that discovering a way to get students involved in the learning process and enjoying it at the same time would be greeted with shouts of “Eureka!”

What follows is a report on an experiment I carried out with a group of teenagers in an attempt to increase motivation and involvement during an exam preparation course.

Hypothesis

I’ve never liked course books designed specifically for teenagers. They reek of old people quizzing their nieces and nephews on what’s hot and sticking it in a course book to appeal to students from Taipei to Tehran. While adult learners often have more motivation – either internal or external – for learning a language and will grin and bear a lesson...
tracing the career paths of the members of ABBA, teenagers have no qualms about dismissing material as irrelevant and uninteresting. More often than not they are right. My strategy has always been to use adult course books with teenagers, modifying and supplementing them where necessary. But are we the best ones to decide what is of interest or of use to our younger learners? Most songs, films or articles that I choose will be met with groans, either because my selection really is off the mark or simply as a knee-jerk reaction against the teacher trying to be hip. Again, not entirely unjustifiable.

This was my initial hypothesis: By making teenagers responsible for the content of their lessons, motivation will increase and more effective learning will take place.

But don’t we do this already? Students bring in songs, music videos and articles and we spend hours adapting and manipulating them into workable classroom activities. As a result the lessons more closely reflect our students’ needs and interests, but never seem to enthuse students as much as we had hoped. And couldn’t the students acquire useful skills from being involved in the process of making the materials themselves? Perhaps there is as much to be learnt from the creation of materials as from the completion of them.

The hypothesis needed refinement: By making teenagers responsible for the content and creation of their lessons, motivation will increase and more effective learning will take place.

Equipment used

A word on the entirely accidental impetus to the experiment. It was a Thursday lunchtime and I had spent the morning delivering inputs to CELTA trainees on receptive skills. At 3 o’clock that afternoon I had a lesson with my group of CAE teenagers. The book didn’t stimulate me and I realized that time was running out. My eye fell upon my CELTA input notes and I thought, “Why not do something with these?”

I could think of three good reasons to justify this choice;

- a. encouraging students to select their own material would increase motivation.
- b. creating reading tasks would reinforce strategies for dealing with texts.
- c. encouraging students to analyse examples of exercises from CAE would be useful preparation for the exam.

There are 7 students in the group, all Italian, some of whom have been in the school since they were 5 or 6. Now mostly 16 or 17, they are a bright, inquisitive bunch who are, however, easily distracted. They tend to hijack lessons, turning them into open class discussions in an attempt to avoid accuracy based exam practice activities. All of them have passed the FCE and many have aspirations to study abroad. Their course runs from October to May and they come once a week for two hours on Thursday afternoons. We were using Advanced Expert CAE by J. Bell, R. Gower and D. Hyde (Longman). We also had access to class sets of the CAE practice test books.

Procedure

Step 1: Text selection

I started off the lesson by telling the students that we were going to be doing something different for a couple of lessons. I told them that they were going to take on the role of teachers and to be involved in the creation of materials.

The first step for the students was to select the text that they wanted to exploit. We did this by:

- a. analysing text types used in the CAE exam.
- b. discussing other considerations for selecting authentic texts.

I put students into small groups and gave them CAE practice books to go through and notice what types of texts the exam writers chose. Students noticed recurrent text types: newspaper articles, advertisements, reports or editorials. I also asked students to make notes on the length and layout of the texts.

The students sorted themselves into pairs. Their homework task was to find one or two texts that they considered suitable for a reading lesson. I encouraged them to select something that they found interesting and that would be stimulating for the rest of the group.

The students were enthusiastic about the activities. They asked why they were doing it and I was frank with them. I told them that I was tired of doing readings with them that didn’t generate any interest or discussion and that I believed that they were capable of selecting and creating materials that would be more appropriate and useful. I explained that we would be using a combination of exam practice activities and teacher training tasks. They seemed pleased at the idea of doing something that native speaker adults were doing.

All of the students came in with something for the following lesson. I brought in a worksheet that I use with CELTA trainees in a session on authentic materials. The activity requires students to rank the importance of different factors for selecting a text. This included things like considering the students’ needs and interests, text length, amount of new lexis, register, etc.

I was determined not to meddle in their choice of texts. There was a good variety of text types: an article and questionnaire about personality profiling, an article on speed dating, a gossip column, a horoscope, the prologue from a novel by Erica James. But I did have to veto the Cosmo sex quiz. I could picture my next parents’ meeting trying to justify why that was a suitable text for minors to be reading in a private language school.

By the end of the lesson each pair had whittled down their choices and had the raw material for their reading lesson.

Step 2: Reading tasks

The next step was to decide what to do with the chosen texts. Again, we referred to the CAE practice books to see what kind of reading exercises they used and how the choice of reading task fitted text type. One pair chose a multiple choice activity; another the activity to decide who does what. Students became aware that there is a connection between text type and activity type and got a clearer idea about how many questions to expect for each text.

The students’ homework task was to create a reading comprehension task appropriate to their text.

At this point students were getting into the swing of things. The pair-work homework component wasn’t a problem as students could easily email drafts to each other and consult over the phone. I allowed time at the beginning of each lesson for the pairs to consult and compare their work. A competitive edge had crept into the project as well, which further spurred the students on.

Students brought in their work and we spent the first 20 minutes of the following lesson on correction and discussion of the activities. Students needed guidance with the number of questions they had prepared and gauging the difference between testing comprehension versus just being plain tricky. I moved about the pairs as they compiled their work, looking at what they had done and prompting self-correction.
Step 3: Vocabulary
It was time to deal with vocabulary. I wanted to include a stage that would lead students towards working out meaning from context. It is not an activity that is included in the exam but I knew that it would be a useful exam strategy.

This time we looked at the CAE course book to see how vocabulary was taught and how strategies for working out meaning were presented.

The students chose three types of activity:
1. The “find a word in paragraph x that means …” type, e.g. “find a word in paragraph 2 which means a police officer wearing ordinary clothes and not a uniform”,
2. The “which is the best meaning of the underlined word” type, e.g. “When I first met my wife, I understood that she was my perfect mate.” A partner B. friend C. woman,
3. The “underline these words in the text, decide the part of speech and work out a synonym … then match to one of the following definitions” type.

I stressed that they should only look for words that were essential for the comprehension of the whole text, not every new word they met. This had the happy result that the students realized that most unknown vocabulary was not a hindrance to answering the comprehension tasks they had prepared. Although they had been told many times, the message seemed much clearer when they saw it for themselves.

Having dealt with vocabulary and comprehension, I tried to work out what other exam practice could be squeezed out of the texts.

Step 4: Affixation
I decided that Part 4 of Use of English would be suitable as it practices the skill of summarizing and works on affixation, an essential skill for this part of the exam. It is also an activity type that my students were having trouble with.

By way of preparation we looked at some examples from the course book and practice books, noting what types of words were removed from the text (verbs, nouns, adverbs, adjectives, etc.) and the balance of prefixes and suffixes required to complete the text correctly. The students noticed how often the gapped words had a negative meaning. From this I guided them towards appreciating the importance of reading the text first to have a general idea of the content.

This was the most difficult activity for the students to prepare. They had to summarize their text while trying to include 10 words that could be suitably removed for the purpose of the activity. To make it easier I told them that they could write another text that was in some way related to the original text. For example, the Erica James prologue was developed into a short text dealing with the problems related to visiting elderly relatives.

Students submitted the exercises and I corrected them using a correction code that they are familiar with. Students then self-corrected as much as possible after which I corrected them. As the Use of English activities are totally accuracy-based I saw no point in letting slips and errors go.

Finally I asked students to prepare an easy skim-reading task for the gapped text they had prepared. This is not in the exam, but I wanted to reinforce the necessity of reading the whole text before focusing on each individual gap.

Step 5: Speaking
It seemed logical to include a final discussion stage that would allow students to process the information and to personalize the texts they had read.

Back to the exam practice books, we looked at examples of the types of questions students are asked in Part 4 of the speaking exam. As each of the students’ texts had clear topics (families, personalities, gossip, horoscopes) it wasn’t difficult for students to prepare a set of five or six discussion questions that would generate a discussion similar to that in the exam.

Step 6: Writing up the plan
The next step was to put all this material into some sort of logical format. I used a handout from a CELTA input on lesson planning which lists the components of a lesson plan and provides a grid for writing it up. While the students hadn’t seen a lesson plan and were not familiar with all the terminology (warm-up, stage aim, etc.), they had certainly seen a few plans in action. It didn’t take them long to find their way around the plan and they went home to write up their own.

Step 7: Teaching the lessons
I worked out that we could get through 2 or 3 of the students’ lessons in a 2-hour lesson. One pair decided that they didn’t want to teach it and I wasn’t going to force them. They had put a lot of work in and produced a very sound lesson but were quieter members of the group and didn’t feel comfortable having to teach it. Fine by me.

The students team-taught their lessons using their lesson plans as a guide. This is the point where things started to crumble. The ‘teachers’ tended to over-lead the ‘students’ talking through each and every activity, going around the room asking for contributions one at a time. They didn’t give the students sufficient time to do the activities. They got the students to read out loud. Monitoring involved peering over the students’ shoulders and either telling them it was wrong or giving them the right answer. They didn’t appear to understand that the activities that they had created didn’t require a lot of intervention. It was fascinating to see that in spite of years of student-centred lessons, the students still see the teacher’s role as that of boss, controller and corrector.

Results
I didn’t have a clear overview of the project before starting out. I took an organic approach and dealt with matters as they evolved. I saw what students were producing and then planned the following lesson to build upon what they had created. I constantly asked myself: “What logically follows on from this?” and “What more can students be encouraged to do with the text?”

Positive aspects
1. Students were more motivated than usual.
2. Lessons were almost entirely student-centred. My role was to lead noticing activities, proofread and correct materials and to provide a framework and models of activity types.
3. Students became familiar with CAE activity types, particularly reading comprehension questions, word transformation exercises and discussion activities.
4. Students became aware of strategies for dealing with unknown vocabulary in exams.
5. Students’ behavior was noticeably more mature and responsible.

Negative aspects
1. The process took a good six lessons; a decent chunk from any exam preparation course.
2. Focussing on the components and layout of a lesson plan was not a useful exercise for the students even though they were interested in it.
3. The stage where students taught their lessons was not as effective as it could have been.

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So what would I change?
With this particular class I think that the six-lesson chunk of lessons was a good investment of time. It came halfway through a preparation course and provided a balance of working on general English and developing exam technique. Alternatively, the project could take place less regularly over a longer period of time; say every three or four weeks to incorporate and work on exam activity types as they come up in the course book.

I would do away with the actual teaching of the lesson. The students have effectively created practice exam activities, the type of activity that they need to concentrate on and do in silence at home or in a study centre. I would take the students' materials and put them into booklet format with a key (created by the students) as homework. At the end of a lesson one pair of students would be responsible for introducing the topic of their text through some kind of discussion question or lead-in. The students would do the activities at home and check their answers. The first ten minutes of the next lesson could be spent doing the speaking-type discussion questions that the students prepared on the reading texts.

Conclusion
This was my original hypothesis: By making teenagers responsible for the content and creation of their lessons, motivation will increase and more effective learning will take place.

This type of project work is ideal for exam preparation classes. This one happened to be CAE level, but I see no reason why the same approach could not be taken with students at FCE or PET level.

I believe that this approach could be used for student creation of other materials. If a teacher has used video with students accompanying worksheets dealing with vocabulary, comprehension and the like, students could use these models to make their own activities for pieces of video of their own choice. Rather than using discussion activities or role-plays from a resource pack, students could be encouraged to evaluate and analyze these types of activities and then create their own. All that is required is a degree of experience as a language student and a familiarity with standard EFL activities.

While my methods were less than scientific – I’m sure Mr. Bland would give me a D - the experiment proved what I have always believed: teenagers like hard work and respond well to a challenge. If you treat them like mature learners they will behave accordingly.

Christopher is from New Zealand and worked at IH Rome for 16 years teaching adults and younger learners as well as running teacher training courses. He is now doing freelance CELTA training and is currently working between Canada and the US.

Professionalism in ELT

Wayne Rimmer

While demand for English has never been higher, confidence in ELT as a stable and rewarding career option remains depressingly low. A recent article in the IATEFL newsletter sums up the general attitude.

‘Towards the end of my undergraduate business degree, a friend asked me what I planned to do after graduation. I had already accepted an English speaking job in Japan and when I saw her she remarked, “Oh the TEFL thing”… I began teaching and although the work was immensely enjoyable, I realized that my friend’s snap judgment made sense. The vast majority of language teachers I met were simply there for a short experience before returning home to get a “real job” (Hutchinson, 2007: 10).’

There is a definite identity crisis in ELT. Teachers feel undervalued and cynical of an industry which offers little in the way of financial benefits or job security. It is puzzling that ELT can’t shake off its negative image given the importance which millions of students attach to learning English and the lengths/expense they will go to facilitate this. ELT as an industry generates an enormous amount of money: Graddol (2006) estimates an income of £1.3 billion for the UK in invisible exports and £10 billion a year in other education related exports. Money generally bequeaths a grudging respect (how else would chartered accountants get anyone to marry them?) but the public perception of ELT is still that of a fringe casual business carried out by a rag-tailed army of bearded back-packers and second-generation hippies.

Depressing reading for those individuals and organisations, like International House, who do estimate their contribution to society
and maintain a culture of teacher development. It is also unfair to the many teachers who, lacking the support and benefits of other educators, try their best to make their classrooms effective learning environments. For, inevitably, it is teachers who are lambasted for the lack of professionalism in ELT. Teachers, however, can only operate within the confines of a system which allows them to practise. My argument is that without a fundamental reappraisal of the values and systems with which ELT is organized, teachers will continue to be in the firing line and students will be short-changed in their efforts to learn English. The rest of this article takes a closer look at the sorry state of ELT.

Qualifications? What qualifications?

Take three well-paid professions and compare their entry requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Entry Requirements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctor (GP)</td>
<td>seven years at medical school and state medical certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chartered Accountant</td>
<td>three years of post-graduate work experience and two sets of accountancy exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prostitute</td>
<td>youngish, attractive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, the entry barrier to ELT is lower to the third profession listed. There is no consensus on what exactly qualifies somebody to teach English. Teachers consequently come from enormously diverse backgrounds. Even restricting the market to the IH style private language school model, the teacher profile is very mixed. An IH school may contain some or all of the following:

Local teachers with local pedagogical qualifications

Local teachers with local pedagogical qualifications and CELTA or equivalent

Native-speakers with CELTA or equivalent

Native-speakers with an unrecognized certificate

Teachers with academic rather than pedagogical qualifications

Teachers with experience but no formal qualifications

Unqualified native-speakers

For native-speakers, it is embarrassingly easy to get into ELT. A non-graduate with a four-week teaching certificate can fix up a job teaching kindergarten in Japan or ESP in Poland. Berman (2007) draws parallels between ELT preparation and the short training courses for Shamanic counselling, which similarly promotes practitioners as ‘experts’, able to charge high fees despite rudimentary training. Sadly, there are still plenty of options for completely unqualified ‘teachers’, especially in developing markets like China and Russia. Often there is the ludicrous situation of low-skilled native-speakers being paid a premium over experienced local teachers. Kirkpatrick (2007) makes the point that he can think of no other profession where country of origin is valued more than genuine expertise.

Native-speakers take heavy criticism for bringing down the standard of qualifications but in their defence they have few options available to them. Unlike accountants and doctors, all ELT training is privately funded. At best a career development loan might be possible. This makes longer more substantial courses like MAs financially very burdensome. In addition, wages in ELT are low so trainees will find it difficult to recuperate the cost of an expensive course of study. The situation is unlikely to change as the British government is completely uninterested in funding ELT training. There used to be a year-long PGCE in TESOL with a mandatory grant but this was discontinued on the grounds that there was no sense in British tax-payers funding people to teach abroad. The government does not recognize the indirect benefits which the students of those teachers bring back to the country, from buying materials from British publishers to generating a constant stream of Summer school students for Madame Tussauds.

Personally, I would like bodies such as IATEFL to put more pressure on the government to support potential teachers. ELT desperately lacks a voice in the corridors of power. Full government regulation is unrealistic because ELT is too fragmented to monitor and control. There are a bewildering number of ELT organizations out there such as ARELS, EQUALS and BALEAP (it’s getting hard to choose an unused acronym) all representing different interests and fighting different battles. None of them pose as regulatory bodies because they know it would be futile. At the end of the 1990s there was a short-lived attempt to create a British Institute of ELT, BIELT, but it lacked impetus and overlapped too much with all the other acronyms. Only the government, at least domestically, could perform a gate-keeping function on ELT but it is unlikely that this step would ever coincide with the dominant party’s vote-winning manifesto.

Direction

There are two distinguishing features of a profession.

1. Licensing and regulation of practitioners
2. A shared body of knowledge and expertise

As discussed above, the lack of an entry barrier to ELT rules out the first criterion. It is also extremely doubtful that ELT has enough of a coherent philosophy of teaching and learning to meet the second criterion. There is much discussion of the role of the teacher in instruction but the conclusions reached are often incomplete or even contradictory, forcing teachers to fall back on instinct. Thornbury (2001) argues that ELT has been pulled in two directions. From the one side, there is a demand for more input from applied linguistics into teaching. For example, Rimmer’s plea (2006) that corpora should inform syllabus design and assessment. From the other side, teaching is seen as a form of therapy with learners’ needs and interests of paramount importance. The first direction emphasizes language, the second affect. The two approaches are not actually incompatible, for example grammar can be taught in a humanistic way, but they have rather different expectations of what skills and priorities a teacher should have. Which path an individual teacher takes will largely be a matter of personal choice. The natural consequence is a very wide range of teacher beliefs and methodologies. Variety is no bad thing per se but the lack of standardization makes it difficult for
teaching to be accountable. Until there is clearer consensus on what a teacher should know and do, ELT cannot claim to be professional in the sense of defining the content area.

Pay and conditions

For a brutal snap-shot of the dire conditions, not to say exploitation, prevalent in TEFL, check out the infamous Sandy’s UK Tefl blog http://www.teftrade.blog-city.com. Sandy explains the motivation for his blog in a special EL Gazette feature on the value of blogs in raising awareness of teacher-related issues.

I first turned my hand to blogging in January 2005. Having returned to the UK from the Middle East, I was appalled at what I was witnessing in the private-EFL scene. Hourly rates were actually lower than in the late 1990s; professional language schools treat their main resource, the teachers, with contempt; and there was a high level of pessimism among teachers. There were also lots of classroom stories that I thought should see the light of day, so I decided that a blog was in order (EL Gazette. April 2007: 22).

The classroom stories referred to are familiar reading as all of us have anecdotal evidence of the uncaring environment which many teachers have to work in. One teacher told me of the school he worked for in Barcelona where teachers were immediately dismissed if students complained about their teaching; a personal friend was told by her Director that she was too fat to teach in-company in Seoul. The sad thing is not the ubiquitousness of such stories but the indifference with which we regard them. ‘That’s how it works’, would be a typical reaction, followed by a similar story with the well-known script ‘hapless teacher abused by employer again’. Our cynicism is not surprising given that, unlike colleagues in state schools, we have no laws or unions to protect us, especially if working overseas.

Of course, ELT is constrained by market forces like any other business activity and economics heavily determines pay and conditions. Schools will only pay low salaries if they know they can get teachers for that price. It comes down to the classic supply and demand curve. Demand for English classes is high but, thanks to low entry barriers to ELT, supply of teachers is also plentiful. We are back to qualifications again since the stream of new teachers allowed to enter the market stops private institutions from having to make terms and conditions too attractive. This is ultimately as bad for students as for teachers because the private ELT sector deliberately caters for people with a short-term interest in teaching. People who want a career in ELT are undesirable because, with their strange needs for things like mortgages and pensions, they would push up wage costs.

Making a difference

Comparisons between ELT and established professions like law and accountability will always be unfavourable. Teachers who aspire to the same level of comfort and job security as lawyers and accountants are certainly going to be disappointed. Ironically, it is the huge success of ELT which contributes to its lack of professionalism.

Ironically, it is the huge success of ELT which contributes to its lack of professionalism.

Demand for English is too high to allow much selectivity in the quality of teachers. Despite this, the deplorable state of the ELT industry does not necessarily doom teaching to mediocrity and learning to stagnation. Individual teachers can make a difference if they are honest about the shortcomings of their initial qualifications and prepared to develop. Individual schools can make a difference if they provide support and training for new teachers. As Berman (2007) argues, professionalism is more about conscience and commitment than being a member of the right club. No one should stand at the front of a classroom who does not believe that they are in a privileged position to enrich students’ lives. That is a very real power which teachers should neither under-estimate nor abuse. Clandfield (2004) offers the most realistic advice to newcomers into ELT when he says that ELT has to be accepted on its own terms. No, ELT has no clear career structure. No, ELT is not a money-maker. However, ELT can be what we make it and surely the sense of satisfaction and fulfillment from doing a job well is the true hallmark of the professional.

References


Postscript

Since writing this article, I have become involved in an IATEFL working party which has been set up to work out how IATEFL can protect the interests of its members. The input of overseas teachers to this working party is particularly welcome so please contact me if you want to help.

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Films in English Language Teaching

Mark Lowe

During the past year I have run a British Council film club for film buffs and students of English (many from IH). My tasks have been to choose the films, to prepare notes on language and other points needing explanation and to go over these notes with the audience before showing the film, to show the films, and to lead discussions about the films after they have been shown. It has been a very enjoyable and rewarding assignment: it has increased my knowledge of British cinema (being a British Council-sponsored club, the films have to be British or to have links with Britain), and I have got to know some very interesting and charming people who share my love of the cinema. The experience has also led me to reflect on the use of film in language teaching:

Why use films in language teaching?

At the most general level, films help us to learn languages because we absorb language as we watch films that we enjoy. But alongside this very general reason, there are more specific reasons for using film to teach language. Here are six such reasons.

(1) First, films provide examples of language used in context. We not only hear language exchanges, but we also see the situations in which they occur, and the gestures, facial expressions and emotional messages that accompany the language. Language comes alive. Examples of such exchanges are legion: Hugh Grant and Andie MacDowell in Four Weddings and a Funeral as he attempts to propose and she reacts, Mr Emerson and Lucy Honeychurch in Room with a View debating who she should marry, Pip and the convict at the start of Great Expectations – and Pip and Abel Magwich later in the film, Lady Bracknell and Jack Worthing in the famous ‘handbag’ scene in The Importance of Being Earnest – and Cecily and Gwendolen arguing over which one is engaged to Mr Worthing in the same play, Bond and Goldfinger, or Bond and the slimy Captain Grant in From Russia with Love, and so on and so on. Films add a vital dimension to the language being studied: they show language used in (almost) real life.

(2) Secondly, films provide input of vocabulary, idioms, collocations and grammar in use. In other words, they are an excellent source for the words and phrases that students need to build into their language store. Almost all films can be used to provide language input, provided they are motivating - and provided the diction of the actors is clear. Feature films are ideal for general language input, while films that use specialised language help ESP students. For instance, Yes, Minister for the language of politics, and the Inspector Morse films for the English of law and the police. Documentaries are valuable, too. Planet Earth is a rich source of the language of Wild Life and the environment, while Simon Schama’s A History of Britain series contains many examples of the language of historical enquiry: of feudalism, power politics down the ages, chivalry, imperialism, the growth of legal institutions, the development of industry and capitalism, and so on.

(3) Next, films provide a window into new cultures. The Queen offers fascinating glimpses into the respective roles of monarch and Prime Minister in modern Britain – glimpses that must astonish many foreigners. Mrs Brown offers a perspective on the same topic 150 years ago (how little has changed…). Gosford Park shows the snobbery and triviality of much country house life in the first part of the 20th century - and the huge gap between upper and lower classes that existed then. As Time Goes By provides a more up-to-date view of English life – and not just life among the top and bottom levels of society. Almost all films reveal something of the culture from which they spring: La Dolce Vita taught me much about Italy, and Les Enfants du Paradis about France - there are plenty of British, Australian, Indian and American equivalents.

A recent enquiry among my Geor- gian students put the ‘window on culture’ reason high on their list of benefits to be gained from watching English films. These students wanted to know about Shakespeare and Dickens and Graham Greene, about our history, our art and our music – as well as mastering the English they need for business and professional purposes. I showed a number of films about music for such students: two superb BBC film biographies of the composers Edward Elgar and Delius - and a DVD of a concert given by The King’s Singers, interspersed with interviews with the singers. This DVD showed a form of music-making at which British groups excel but which is little known outside Britain – small vocal groups singing madrigals, motets and other music written for small choirs. It went down very well, and
members of the audience have been borrowing my DVD ever since.

(4) One other use of film is to help students understand and distinguish between different accents. For this purpose, the best films are those that juxtapose various accents. For instance, Four Weddings and a Funeral contains - along with standard British English - American, Scottish and Estuary English. Mrs Brown contrasts the English of court and government on the one hand and Scotland on the other. The Bond films contain American as well as British accents (Bond’s friend Felix Leiter is from the CIA; half of Diamonds are Forever is set in the USA). Twilight of the Gods presents Welsh as well as Oxford accents. The BBC’s adaptation of George Eliot’s Middlemarch is also very useful since it shows many varieties of British English, including West Country, Midlands, Birmingham and London – together with Irish - and different forms of upper class speech. (the gentry - Casaubon, Lydgate, Arthur Brooke and Sir James - all speak differently, and they in turn all differ from Dorothea). The Go-Between compares the upper class accents of Mariam (Julie Christie) and her family and friends and the rustic accents of the tenant farmer (Alan Bates) and his friends. The Quiet American juxtaposes Michael Caine’s classless British accent and the Mr Pyle’s educated American accent. And so on. An additional advantage of this wide variety of accents is that, as they listen, students develop their general listening skills as well as learning to discriminate between the different forms of English.

(5) Films can help students to improve their dictation. Actors with notably clear diction include Derek Jacobi (for instance in the Cadfael mediaeval detective series and a wonderful cameo footman part in Gosford Park), Sir Alec Guinness (in roles such as the eight characters he plays in Kind Hearts and Coronets, and Herbert Pocket in Great Expectations), and Michael Caine in The Quiet American (he speaks with a classless accent – providing a specially useful role model for our classless times). For women? Judi Dench as Queen Victoria in Mrs Brown, as Queen Elizabeth 1st in Shakespeare in Love, in As Time Goes By, and so on. Dame Maggie Smith also speaks beautifully and clearly, as we can hear in Room with a View and Gosford Park, and Gwyneth Paltrow in Shakespeare in Love delivers her lines with winning clarity and sensitivity. Dame Edith Evans and Dorothy Tutin in The Importance of Being Earnest are other great dictation role models for women – but from a bygone age. Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell speaks as our grandmothers did, while Dorothy Tutin speaks as these ladies might have spoken when they were young girls.

Some of the most successful dictation role models are in documentaries produced by the BBC. Sir David Attenborough narrates the text accompanying Planet Earth with matchless eloquence and clarity. He uses strong stress and intonation to heighten his meaning, and he speaks slowly, with powerful rhythm, which helps his listeners fully to understand his message. In Attenborough’s voice we hear the traditional skills of rhetoric and public speaking used to superlative effect. Quite different, but equally effective in its own way, is the diction of Simon Schama that we hear in A History of Britain. His accent differs from Attenborough’s, but he speaks with an emotional power, skill and clarity that are equal to Attenborough’s. Students who study these series show notable improvement in their speaking skills.

(6) The more English films that students see, the better their English gets. I therefore try to encourage students to get interested in a whole series, and to borrow all the films of a series in order to watch them on their own screens. I show representative episodes in the club, and if the students like the films, they then borrow the whole set from the Council library (or sometimes from my own collection). All the series or serials that follow have worked well: Planet Earth and Attenborough’s other Wild Life series such as Life of Mammals and Life of Birds, Schama’s A History of Britain; Yes, Minister (the ‘shall we ban smoking?’ episode struck a particular chord here in Georgia); Michael Palin’s Himalaya travelogue; Middlemarch; the Inspector Morse series (Twilight of the Gods, set in Oxford and starring John Gielgud, was a notable success); the Brother Cadfael series of mediaeval murder mysteries, and the James Bond films (Goldfinger went down very well – my students were specially intrigued by Goldfinger’s plans for stealing the gold from Fort Knox). Once the students get hooked on a series, they borrow the whole set of films, and watch them at home - often. The effect on their English is dramatic. There are few better ways to learn a language fast and well than to watch and listen to a lot of films in that language.

How to use films?

There are really only two ways to use films in language study: the ‘acquisition’ way and the ‘learning’ way. The ‘acquisition’ method encourages students to see a complete film without worrying about unfamiliar language: they pick the language up as they watch. In the ‘learning’ method they study the language of a film (or generally a film clip) in some detail, with linked exercises, role play activities etc.

(1) Acquisition. Students gradually absorb language as they watch and enjoy films. I explain important language items that may cause comprehension problems before the film starts, but I never interrupt a film once it has begun. Here are some examples of language that I explain. Great Expectations starts with a key scene in which an escaped convict asks the boy hero for ‘victuals’. Although this word was common in Dickens’ time, it is rarely heard today. However, understanding it is vital if we are to make sense of the scene, so I explain that it means ‘food’. Other examples are environmental vocabulary in Planet Earth (eg endangered species, boreal forest) and specialist historical terms in A History of Britain. (eg chivalry, feudalism, Magna Carta).

I also explain non-linguistic references that might be lost on a non-British audience. For instance, the custom of awarding honorary degrees at Oxford and Cambridge Universities, with appropriate ceremony and costumes: this is essential background to understanding the Inspector Morse film: Twilight of the Gods. (I also include a note about Brunhilde’s Immolation from Wagner’s Gotterdammerung, which plays an important part in the story: Wagner’s operas are little known in Georgia). Before showing the recent remake of The Quiet American, I gave the students a brief account of the origins of the Vietnam War and the parallels with the Iraq war, since one cannot properly understand the film or its recent cult status without knowing this background. With Yes, Minister, I explained the relationship between elected Minister and career
Civil Servant and its part in the British government system. With Mrs Bennet, I told the audience about Prince Albert and Queen Victoria’s desolate widowhood, matters little known in Georgia (or anywhere else outside Britain, I suspect). With Palin’s trek in Himalaya, I explained the long and distinguished tradition of Nepalese Gurkha soldiers serving in the British army. With The King’s Singers, I translated the words of Tallis’s 40-part motet ‘Spem in Alium’ from Latin into English, so that the audience could understand the words of a piece of music that has an important role in the film (I have never put my hope in any but you, O God of Israel, who will be angry, and then be gracious, and who forgives all the sins of men…….). And so on. Many British films require some explanation of their background to be fully comprehensible to a non-British audience.

I sometimes ask the members of the audience to think about related general questions to help them appreciate a film: questions of motivation, character, interpretation, analysis -and so on. Here are some examples. What is the secret of Michael Palin’s success on his epic journeys? How does he make friends with so many people so quickly - and how does he get them to talk to him so readily? Why do the marriages in Middlemarch go wrong? What are the problems between Casaubon and Dorothea, and between Lydgate and Rosie? Could the partners have acted any differently? Were their problems inevitable? Which life does Pip suggest is better: the life of Joe Gargery the blacksmith? What are the main arguments put forward in the final episode of Planet Earth concerning global warming? Do you think these arguments are valid? If so, what can we do about global warming? How many different methods are used in Kind Hearts and Coronets to murder the characters played by Alec Guinness? How did Morse solve the various mysteries of Twilight of the Gods? What parallels are there between Queen Elizabeth 1 of England and Queen Tamar of Georgia? (for the History of Britain series). By asking such questions before the film starts, I try to focus the audience’s minds on key aspects of the film’s message. We discuss the questions after the film is shown.

(2) Learning. This is the method commonly used with film clips in EFL classrooms. Most major courses today include a video/DVD component with linked exercises. The most thorough-going such course + video known to me is the new Longman Total English course, which provides an individual DVD with every student book, each DVD containing clips from a variety of sources plus accompanying exercises in the textbook. New Headway, Cutting Edge and other courses also contain video/DVD components, while there are free-standing EFL videos such as The Lost Secret, still effective despite its age. However, my aim in this article is not to describe such material: it is to offer ideas on how to devise our own film-based activities, using films and clips that we choose, not clips chosen by someone else. I describe some ‘learning’ activities I have used with clips in the classroom (not at the film club).

I try to devise communicative activities which promote understanding of the film, rather than conventional exercises on language points. I ask the students to think about character, motivation and solutions to problems, encouraging them to adapt the language of the film in their answers. (There is plenty of scope for analytical language study in the grammar lesson: the film period is a time for a more communicative approach).

To work satisfactorily, film clips have to be short and reasonably self-contained. An example of such a clip is the famous laser table castration scene in Goldfinger, which lasts about 90 seconds. After showing the first few seconds, with Bond bound and spread-eagled on the golden table, and the laser machine cutting into the gold between his legs, I ask the students to guess how Bond manages to escape from this mortal danger. After discussion of this topic, I then play the whole clip. It contains some memorable dialogue, including this exchange between Bond and Goldfinger: ‘Are you expecting me to talk, Goldfinger?’ ‘No, Mr Bond, I am expecting you to die’. This exchange, plus the dialogue before and after it, lends itself to role play, so we act out the scene in pairs, with one student as Bond, and the other as Goldfinger. The scene in the same film with Q and the modified Aston Martin can also be used. Students are invited to guess what changes Q has made to the Aston Martin car. Then they see the clip, showing the passenger ejector button and the passenger ejector seat, plus the various weapons that emerge from the headlamps, exhaust, wheels etc. Then they role-play Q briefing Bond about the car - and Bond’s reactions. The golf match and the initial game of cards on the beach (in which Goldfinger cheats) can also be used for splendid role play activities. Another suitable dialogue can be found in From Russia with Love: the scene on the Orient Express train when Bond meets and then has dinner with Captain Grant. I ask the students, before showing the clip, to try and spot the clues which demonstrate to Bond that Grant is a baddie. The first clue is that Grant calls Bond ‘old man’, which grates on Bond’s nerves. But the clinching clue is that Grant drinks red wine with the fish at dinner. Only the most frightful Chardies do that, so Bond’s suspicions are confirmed. Once the students have grasped this central point, they role-play the scene. (I stop the role-play just before Bond and Grant start fighting).

There are many other scenes that students can watch and then role-play, using the ideas and emotions of the scene – freely adapting the language used in the film. Here are some examples: Hugh Grant trying to propose to Andie Macdowell in Four Weddings; Queen Victoria’s first meeting with John Brown in Mrs Brown, and her later meeting with the wily Disraeli, who attempts to coax her back into public life; Sir Humphrey and Jim Hacker, the Prime Minister, in Yes, Minister, as they try to decide on a policy over smoking; the various meetings between Queen Elizabeth 2 and Tony Blair in Queen; Lord Hinksey dropping tricks with Mr America, academic in Twilight of the Gods, Michael Caine and the beautiful Vietnamese girl in The Quiet American – as they argue about who should marry the Vietnamese girl, Mr Emerson and Lucy Honeychurch discussing who she should marry in Room with a View, Michael Palin and the army officer or the mountainaineers in Himalaya, and so on.

Occasionally, I ask students to do a more straightforward exercise in order to aid comprehension. An example comes with the King’s Singers DVD. I ask the students to listen to a Beatles song and to fill in missing words in the printed lyrics to help them understand the song. (I leave out target words in the copy given to the students). One other kind of ‘learning’ exercise activity concerns dictation. After the students listen to Attenborough narrating the text that accompanies a Planet Earth episode, I ask them to...
What films to show?

The British Council Film Club has a policy of showing alternate feature films and documentaries. This has worked well for our particular purposes, but other systems are possible. I list the films that we have shown in Tbilisi below. There are many other films we might have used, but for various reasons did not. American films were outside the Council’s terms of reference. Some films that I wanted to show were not available in Tbilisi (for instance: *Howards End*, *Our Man in Havana*, *Monty Python, The Full Monty, Brassed Off* and *My Beautiful Launderette*). Some good films would not have suited our audience (for instance, dramatisations of Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf novels, because they would not appeal to the men in the audience – and some gangster films, because they would not appeal to the women in the audience – or to me). I also decided not to show World War 2 films – it is time to move on, and I did not show films of Shakespeare plays because the English, although magnificent, is too distant from today’s language to be useful for or comprehensible to most of our students. (In a future film series, I intend to run a special season of Shakespeare films for the aficionados). All this has resulted in a slightly genteel collection of films: we could have done with one or two gritty films from the North of England, and some Ethnic Minority films, too. I hope to include such films in another season, and thereby enliven our students’ English learning experience with a full range of cinema’s language, critical intelligence, artistry, fun – and imagination….…..

(a) Feature Films:

Four Weddings and a Funeral

(Hugh Grant is always Best Man. Can he be a groom too? He meets a charming American lady. Will they marry?)

*From Russia with Love* (the second Bond film), and *Goldfinger* (the third Bond film)

The Go-Between (…”a film of formal, almost sculpted elegance, of precise, leisurely beauty, permeated by melancholy.” Time Out), starring Julie Christie and Alan Bates

*Gosford Park* (comedy / murder thriller / 1930s country house period piece).

*Mrs Brown* (Queen Victoria and her Scottish game-keeper, John Brown, plus her devious and cunning Prime Minister, Disraeli, in a masterly portrayal by Anthony Scher)

A Room with a View (a film version of E.M. Forster’s perceptive and witty novel)

The Queen (Queen Elizabeth 2 and the death of Princess Diana)

The Quiet American (remake of Graham Greene’s great novel about the illusions and betrayals that led to the tragedy of the Vietnam War)

Shakespeare in Love (how Romeo and Juliet might have been written)

(b) Golden Oldies:

Great Expectations (the Dickens novel, in David Lean’s classic 1948 version)

The Importance of Being Earnest (1950, Oscar Wilde’s much quoted comedy, with legendary acting from Edith Evans, Michael Redgrave and others)

Kind Hearts and Coronets (Alec Guinness plays eight parts – all murdered)

(c) Serials:

As Time Goes By (Judi Dench and Geoffrey Palmer – a classy modern soap opera)

Brother Cadfael (mediaeval murder mysteries, starring Derek Jacobi as a detective monk)

Inspector Morse (BBC police series, seen by 750,000,000 people round the world)

Middlemarch (classic BBC dramatisation of George Eliot’s masterpiece)

Yes, Minister (satire on British politics - Baroness Thatcher’s favourite TV programme)

(d) Documentaries

Frederick Delius and Edward Elgar

(Ken Russell: biographies of English composers)

Himalaya (Michael Palin’s epic journey from West to East of the Himalayas)

A History of Britain (Simon Schama’s superb 15-episode study)

The King’s Singers – from Byrd to the Beatles (six young men sing a range of songs from the 16th century to Duke Ellington and the Beatles – superb ensemble)

The Life of Mammals and The Life of Plants (Attenborough)

The Beatles – superb ensemble

The Go-Between

('.. a film of formal, almost sculpted elegance, of pre-cise, leisurely beauty, permeated by melancholy.’ Time Out), starring Julie Christie and Alan Bates

*Gosford Park* (comedy / murder thriller / 1930s country house period piece).

*Mrs Brown* (Queen Victoria and her Scottish game-keeper, John Brown, plus her devious and cunning Prime Minister, Disraeli, in a masterly portrayal by Anthony Scher)

A Room with a View (a film version of E.M. Forster’s perceptive and witty novel)

The Queen (Queen Elizabeth 2 and the death of Princess Diana)

The Quiet American (remake of Graham Greene’s great novel about the illusions and betrayals that led to the tragedy of the Vietnam War)

Shakespeare in Love (how Romeo and Juliet might have been written)

Mark has recently moved from being DoS in IH Tbilisi to the DoS job in IH Sarajevo. He was educated at Clifton and King’s College Cambridge, where he studied music and philosophy. After nine years in the British Council, he joined Longman as a commissioning editor, spending nearly twenty years as an EFL and general educational publisher. He did his Celta and Delta in the mid-1980s, and has been back in the classroom ever since, working in Saudi Arabia, Poland, Estonia, China, Azerbaijan and Georgia. He is mainly involved now with teacher development.
The Jazz in Teaching -
ways in which being a teacher is like being the leader of a jazz band

Alexander Gödde

When I started teaching, fresh from my preparatory courses, I came with one picture that my mother (who taught first and second graders for over twenty years) had given me about teaching:

‘Teaching is like being a lion tamer. You can’t ever show any fear or nervousness and control is everything in the classroom.’

I have been teaching mainly adult classes and this picture has, of course, not proven to be too useful and I’ve long since abandoned it - like I have abandoned most pictures and concepts, at least as far as any of them applying universally to everything I do in the classroom.

Communicative teaching may be what we at International House mostly do, but there’s no denying that old-fashioned, behaviouristic drilling works best for learning irregular verbs and the same goes for every concept they’ve taught us – they all have situations where they work and where they fail.

Of course it isn’t possible to abandon pictures of teaching completely. Our brain is a pattern recognition machine, so we can’t help having some picture of teaching. These pictures are essential in our everyday teaching and teaching preparation: nobody can derive every decision from first principles all the time. In the end, it’s about juggling the different pictures and concepts of teaching and picking the one that seems most appropriate at the moment.

And while all pictures fail at some point, it still makes sense to share the better ones that we come up with. A new picture of teaching makes us re-consider our notions of what we are doing, makes us think about different aspects of our work - and whether we like the picture in the end or not, this breaking out of the rut of our everyday existence as teachers is an important thing from time to time.

Beyond that, a good picture of teaching may stay with us beyond this initial phase of judging it and may become a part of what guides us in teaching.

A few months after my start in teaching, during our weekly seminar at IH Dnipropetrovsk when asked what my picture of teaching was, I came up with one that has stayed with me ever since and that I’d like to share: teaching is like being the leader of a jazz band. Following are some aspects that I’ve come up with since. I hope that most of this echoes your own thoughts and feelings about teaching - and that, maybe, a few points show you an aspect of it that you hadn’t seen this way before.

• You’re the band leader - but everybody else has to play too, and you are a part of the band.
• It’s a performance. Even if everything goes wrong, you can’t just end the concert - and if you stop something abruptly, you better make it seem like a logical thing to do at that time.
• There should be a sense of harmony between players - but the occasional clash can be beneficial too.
• You have to play the same songs with different numbers of players - from a duet to a big band, but always have it remain noticeably the same song - and when everything breaks down, the thing can turn into just a solo performance.
• You have a set group of players, but sometimes a guest comes in, some people are ill, don’t show up for a performance or are in a state or mood that makes them next to useless - but you adapt and still have to play the tune - even if the drummer’s not there.
• You have to take the different abilities and strengths of the players into consideration. Sometimes you have to arrange for an amateur band and map out even the simplest turnings of phrase, at other times you can get by with a rough outline of where you want to go with your band of professionals.

• There are a lot of different player types:
  • some play better on the fast songs, others are really only good for solos on ballads, some never improvise, but are happy to just play background to the soloists, some catch on fast and can play you back a new tune immediately, with others you might have to wait till the next performance for them to remember anything.
  • Also - it’s not just about the music, but about the band as a community: how they feel towards each other, if they know each other, want to cooperate, are interested in a particular subject, if one of the players’ enthusiasm suffices to pull all the others with him
  • The players’ input decides the outcome, you only moderate it.
• Things need to be staged to remain interesting - the set list needs thinking about.
  • Sometimes all-slow or all-fast sets may befit the occasion, but mostly variety is what makes it interesting.
  • However much you plan - you never know if they are going to follow.
• There needs to be some space for the band members to bring in their personality on the day of the performance.
  • You adapt your set list - a long solo may mean that you have to cut somebody else short if you still want to play some other tune.
• There are standards and new compositions. With the standards you may only play through them quickly to remind the players of
their existence and for everybody’s enjoyment of something easy well done - or you play with a new twist to add another aspect of the structure. Since they know them, you can concentrate only on the new and do a lot there, whereas with a new song you really need to concentrate on getting the basics right.

• There are instrumental songs where it’s more about the technical aspects - scales, harmonies and structure - and ones with lyrics, where it’s more about filling it with feeling appropriate to the meaning of the song.

• The same tune played twice never comes out exactly the same.

• You and everybody else can get too lost in a song, which seems fine at the time, but later you realize it wasn’t actually good music that you were producing.

• Sometimes you plan it down to the last little detail, and it has to be like that to work well - then you have to convince, push and cajole your band to do it this way, maybe with the promise of something more fun afterwards.

• Sometimes you only have a rough idea of what you want to play, and it all comes together only with the students’ input.

• Sometimes you improvise so much that the outcome is a new song - which may also be nice, and in time become one of your standards.

• A little motif can develop into a long, beautiful song without you ever having planned it.

• At the end of a song, you should always return to the central motif to wrap things up.

• There is theory behind it all, but in the end, it’s all about giving a good performance.

• Technical perfection does not make a great artist.

• It is easier to play well if you know your craft – but amazing things can be done with the simplest of means.

• The greater your repertoire, the easier it is to improvise and to react to the other players.

• Some artists hone their style to perfection while others reinvent themselves constantly – and both can make for a great career.

• Great results can come both from following an established style to perfection and from inventing your own style – and while the second is certainly harder to do, it is also probably more rewarding.

• When experimenting, you should be willing to try breaking all the rules – but not all at once.

• Even the most experimental players still need to produce sound the human ear can hear.

These are just some thoughts I’ve had about this picture/analogy. They are in some rough order, but I don’t think order is of too much importance here – the individual points should speak for themselves.

If you want a task:
1. What do you think the rough order is?
2. Invent your own way of ordering the points.

And, by all means, disagree wildly with me, point out basic mistakes I’ve made, tell me the most obvious things that I’ve forgotten. I’m open for discussion and hoping for your contributions in exploring this idea.

Alexander Gödde

Margaret Horrigan

Which model?

In language teaching we are concerned about models of presenting language. The Presentation Practice Production (PPP) model has maybe had its day. The Task Based Learning (TBL) model is becoming more popular. The Authentic Use, Restricted Use and Clarification (ARC) model is very flexible. I am rather partial to the Test Teach Test (TTT) model myself… but how useful are these labels? What really occurs in language classrooms? Do we need to be so concerned about these models of teaching? Surely there is a more global way of looking at language teaching models. I certainly think so.
Before we embark on our journey we need to clarify one thing. Language without context is meaningless. Take the simple ‘OK’. Bill Bryson sets out a number of meanings for this international word in his lovely book *The Mother Tongue* (1990). ‘Lunch was O.K. (adjective), ‘Can you O.K. this for me?’ (verb), ‘I need your O.K on this’ (noun), ‘O.K., I hear you’ (interjection), and ‘We did O.K. (adverb). The moral I learnt from his enlightening paragraph was that language out of context is useless. So, when a student asks me what something means, I ask them to at least tell me the sentence or where they heard or saw the troublemaker in action. In short, I try to find out the context in which it occurred.

What's ‘context’?

So, what is this elusive ‘context’? The American linguist Dell Hymes (1974) gives us a useful acronym (another one!) to establish context. SPEAKING:

Setting - where does the text occur?

Participants – who is interacting?

Act - what type of text is occurring?

Key – what aspects of phonology are involved? Instrumentalities – how is the text delivered?

Norms – what is the level of formality? And, finally, Genre – what label does the text come under?

By the time you have identified all these aspects related to a given text, and by text here I mean from a single imperatively up to a novel, you have more than likely established context. A simpler way to establish context is to ask the Who, Where, What, Why, When and How’s related to the text. An example?

“Stop! … Who said it? A mother.

Why? She’s concerned.

Who is she speaking to? Her child.

Where are they? On a street corner.

I’m sure you get the general idea. If we change a single component of the context some important differences arise. Instead of a mother speaking in the example let’s say it’s a policeman. Now try and answer the questions related to context again. Although the text, “Stop!”, stays the same the whole context changes with a character change!

Now, if language without context is meaningless, we need to add that language teaching without a skill is impossible. If you have a context the language is presenting itself via a skill. This might be through listening, reading, writing or speaking. It is here that the models take shape. In TTT we tend to work through the productive skills. In PFP we tend to work through the receptive skills. In ARC we work through anything we want by shifting the letters of the acronym around.

If we use a video segment the context is generally set via paralinguistic or contextual clues. However, explicit setting of context tends to occur predominantly through elicitation. Who is eliciting from whom? The teacher asks guided questions to prompt specific answers from the students. I find it hard to establish what skill is involved in elicitation. I am initially tempted to say that the listening skill is involved here. Yet, interaction is needed. Perhaps the more optimistic teachers among us would be inclined to label elicitation as speaking. I feel it is a pedagogic tool that has little bearing on real life. It is a teaching tool. The debate on elicitation is open and I am not really interested in developing the argument beyond its pedagogic value here. The only time I have elicited in real life is to ‘spool’ the genre itself; it has immense value amongst teaching professionals on a night out!

If context is followed through completely, learners are involved in a language skill. There are basically two paths we can take as teachers. To present language via a receptive skill: listening or reading. Or there is the more risky road of the productive skills: writing or speaking.

Receptive Skills

If the teacher opts for this path they are playing it safe. They generally have an agenda. This agenda is the target item. There is a basic blueprint to follow:

1. Generate interest
2. Set the context
3. skim/san reading or Listen for gist/detail
4. Comprehension task
5. Language Focus
6. Practice with new found linguistic knowledge

The last two points have nothing to do with reading for reading’s sake! but more to do with getting down to the brass tacks of teaching language. Yet a skill - system - skill tendency is evident. The receptive skills of listening or reading follow a format. Once we have assured that learners understand the text as much as possible, we pull out language from the text. Then we get students to practice the language focused on.

Productive skills

If, however, we take the productive skills path we are on a harder road. There is the amount of control we exercise, as teachers, to take into consideration. Starting a lesson with controlled practice re-inserts the agenda of specific language to be covered. We, as teachers, know that a controlled task, such as an information gap about John Lennon’s life, will bring to the fore specific items of language. In the Lennon info gap this might be questions in the Past Simple. The specific language items promoted may or may not need clarification. In short, if we chose controlled practice we know that certain items will reveal themselves and have made this choice based on the outcomes of previous lessons. The aim might be to provide practice or check if students can produce a specific item of language.

The even harder road to take in productive skills is that of freer practice. We do not know what will come to the surface in such cases. We have to deal with learners’ needs ‘on the spot’. Both ways follow a pattern:

1. Productive skill.
2. Correction.
3. Productive skill.

This pattern may follow through in a series of lessons, as in some cases of process writing or may conclude in a single one, as in a TTT lesson. The controlled practice means you have the opportunity to research the language you intend to teach. Free practice means you need the ability to draw on your linguistic knowledge and experience to teach linguistic outcomes on the spot. There is really no guarantee that students will get to where

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1 What I mean by comprehension is Frank Smith’s ‘0 incomprehension’ – or reading for reading sake. This is how you would read a novel or a newspaper article for example. Point 3 covers ‘sub skills’ whilst 4 is a skill. If you were to read or listen to a text operating the sub skills of point 3 only, you would not be able to answer detailed comprehension check questions. Let me point out that ‘good’ comprehension check questions are important here.
you want them to be by the end of a given lesson. Thus, tracks may have to be retraced over time. Logistics aside, professional experience and knowledge is most definitely called to the fore in such cases, whether creation of a controlled task or ability to respond to students’ immediate linguistic needs is in order. I’d like to quote my mother here. It is most definitely not her saying but I’ve only heard her say this: ‘The old dog for the hard road. The puppy for the path.’

A motto for life, a motto for teaching. The skill-system-skill pattern is, however, evident once again.

**A new model?**

Absolutely not, just a panoramic view of language teaching models! In practice, teachers start with a language skill. Then there comes the teaching of a system. Then there comes the production of the newly learnt items via a speaking or writing task. Our choice of which type of skill we operate at the start, receptive or productive, leads our students through imminent lesson stages. If we opt for a productive skill at the opening of a lesson we need to think about the element of control we should exert at the planning stage and if we, as professionals, can cope with the outcomes when minimal control is exerted.

Next question. Can we move the stages around? Yes. You’ll have to justify whether learning has taken place if you end with a receptive skill. This justification might occur in the next lesson. This is also true if you end on a system. Can the system come at the start? Well, yes. This is generally what happens in revision lessons. You will find yourself floundering for a context though. May-be your students will provide it if the need for revision came to the fore via homework correction, then the learners could provide the context. Listening, in any case, will occur for the majority.

**Task Based Learning**

Task Based learning (TBL) is a bit of a dark horse as there are so many variables involved in a single task (planning time, familiarity with task, teacher involvement, access to reference materials etc.) that a single article cannot do it justice. For now, I would suggest that there is not a single skill-system-skill pattern applicable to TBL but many, as manipulation of a single variable can result in extremely different lesson outcomes. A quick example is planning time. The quantity of time that students get to plan their output has considerably different effects on the language that they produce. Ironically the more planning time provided does not always mean an increase in quality of language. This aside, the skill-system-skill pattern will be evident in any TBL lesson albeit in shuffled or multiple form!

**What’s new?**

Absolutely nothing. I have hopefully just removed those nasty acronyms and set out what realistically occurs in any language classroom. Look back on your lesson plans. Label them with the skill - system - skill pattern. If you are constantly following the same pattern, receptive skill - system - productive skill, maybe it is time to challenge yourself with a productive skill start, maybe not. I admit to predominantly following the receptive skill - system - productive skill pattern. It’s the safe route. I teach a lot of younger learners. I feel that I need to account for where I am going. I need to challenge myself a little more. There, I have said it. I still play it safe after seventeen years!

What I have tried to illustrate here is that the majority of lessons follow a predictable skill - system - skill pattern. There is only one pattern which attempts to meet students’ individual needs and this is by starting our lessons with free practice of a productive skill. All the other formats carry a specific language item agenda. It’s not that one model is better than another. Indeed, it would be a sad case if this were true, as we would all teach in more or less the same way. I, myself, have always hated acronyms. They mean absolutely nothing. Worst case scenario, they enable us to show off our knowledge as professionals. At their best, they enable us to say things quickly. In reality they are prescriptive not descriptive pedagogic tools.

For the old dogs among us a new acronym is stirring, SSS: skill-system-skill. For the puppies among us… the path is widening.

**References**


For further Reading on Language Teaching Methodologies: www.englishraven.com/methodology

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Whose English do you teach?

David Stevens

The aim of this article is purely to stimulate you into asking yourself some basic questions about the language you teach. Have you been deliberately opinionated in order to help provoke ideas and thoughts about the issues raised?

When you open your mouth in class or refer to your textbook, to what extent are you presenting ‘real’ English to your students? What do you consider ‘real’ English? How much do you listen to and analyse your colleagues’ English, the language you listen to and the materials you read, whether on paper or electronic, and incorporate it into your teaching?

Below are some ideas that you might wish to reflect upon.

Text Book

Time frame - when was your textbook written (rather than last reprinted)? For example, does your textbook teach ‘Good,’ as an answer to ‘How are you?’ or ‘I guess, . . .’ as a common prelude or conclusion to giving an opinion, thought or decision? How does it cope with multi-word (phrasal) verbs, or doesn’t it? Does it have any really authentic list of local ‘false friends’ and common structure errors, not only for newly arrived teachers to consult, but also for longer-term teachers, to help them avoid accepting common mistakes which may even be entering their own language from long exposure.

Is what you get your students to learn and practice in the class little more than the language they would use in class, or is it perhaps based upon your own cultural bias regardless of what students are interested in or would generally use in their own lives?

Local/ School English

What English do, or did, local people learn at school and to what extent does this need to be modified? In countries of the ex Soviet Union many schools and universities still teach what could be called ‘Soviet English’, a language based on the parts of early twentieth century British and US literature which were permitted by the state, together with a rigid grammar system which would be totally incomprehensible to an outsider-will, for example, is the ‘indefinite and/or definite future’. Is, or recently was, the situation similar where you teach? Is the language you teach prescribed by local culture or custom – which could mean that some of the topics and texts (even photographs) are not acceptable in the political/religious culture in which you work?

If you have been teaching in a country for some time, how much has your understanding of the local language given you a tolerance of the influence of that language on grammar, usage and pronunciation? On a recent visit to schools in Italy I found that I sometimes couldn’t understand what students in class were saying although obviously everyone else could, including the teacher. I would strongly urge all schools to have a comprehensive list of local ‘false friends’ and common structure errors, not only for newly arrived teachers to consult, but also for longer-term teachers, to help them avoid accepting common mistakes which may even be entering their own language from long exposure.

International English

How aware are you of ‘Mid-Atlantic English’ (‘Sargasso Sea English’) – now used by the BBC World Service and other global communicators, which mixes U.S., British, journalist and international business English? International broadcasters are a rich source of material to help you find out where English is going – phone-in and vox-pop programmes especially. Listen into or visit the websites of C.R.I (China Radio International/Canada Radio International) and the host of other world broadcasters and you will get a whole new insight into how English is being used around the world.

Does this mean ‘Surprisingly our hosts have been very sympathetic’. Does this mean ‘Our current hosts are being most concerned’ or ‘Our current hosts were very friendly’?

Esp

Is this little more than general English with a specialist dictionary – especially at lower levels? To what extent are you really qualified to teach specialized language – perhaps your students should be teaching you? Should the English you teach teenagers be a form of ESP?
Journalist English

This inevitably is much used by textbooks in an attempt to be relevant and contemporary. But magazine and newspaper articles, often edited to highlight particular language areas, can become dated or irrelevant. How reflective is this language of real/contemporary/plain/idiomatic English or is it really a specialist language loaded with archaic idioms and allusions which are only found in that particular area of journalism? How successful would one of your students be if they tried to communicate in the language they heard from a football commentator or read in a Sunday newspaper lifestyle article? Does the Internet provide a useful alternative source or is it a minefield of inaccuracies and misusage? It is surprising how many major multinational companies have quite basic mistakes on their websites.

Political Correctness

Does this stifle debate and argument in the class? How can we teach these areas of language if we are constantly making sure that nothing we introduce is controversial or open to discussion? Perhaps textbooks are being overly PC?

Intonation-trends

Many textbooks and teachers are still teaching the ‘up’ intonation at the end of a sentence to indicate a yes/no question. Once thought of by many TEFL teachers as an Australian idiosyncrasy, the rise at the end of a clause or sentence is increasingly used by English speakers all over the world. The trend seems to be especially common amongst the under thirties, if British and other English-speaking radio programmes and contact with TEFL teachers give us an accurate picture. In a recent edition of a BBC World Service programme on global cultural trends, three out of the five speakers used a rising intonation, although only one of them with any degree of consistency; none of them had an Australian accent. From this we could conclude that the basic area that we need to tackle is helping students to produce language which sounds interesting – with emphasis on logical pausing and the subsequent and consequential range of pitch.

Stress trends

Word stress appears to be moving towards the first syllable, especially in pseudo and real prefixes, so we can commonly hear words such as ‘protesters (people who are in favour of testing?)’; ‘re-store (John Major in the 1990’s) ‘I want to re-store Conservative values’ (put them back in store?). How can you be sure that the stress patterns you, or your book, are teaching are the norm, especially if there isn’t one? A recent CELTA pre-course task asked trainees to indicate the syllable stress on the verb form of record. When a group of teachers were questioned about the answer, only non-first language speakers could express any degree of confidence about the correctness of the ‘right answer’ re-cord. It is noticeable that for many L-1 speakers, two-syllable words often carry equal stress on both syllables. So, where does that leave us?

Teachers whose first Language is not English

Where does or did your English come from? How do you keep it fresh and do you keep in touch with current usage. Have you modified your ‘University English’? You can insist that the first language speakers around you correct your mistakes and keep your vocabulary and usage alive and growing. Last year, at the request of local teachers, we started a series of contemporary English workshops and the English spoken in the Teachers’ Room is subject to the same scrutiny as in a normal class. These initiatives have been welcomed with enthusiasm and have also led to an increased interest in the language amongst first language speakers.

Your English

This is the English you really know and feel comfortable with. It is, after all, the language you are most able to teach with confidence and you should feel that, however much you are presenting your idiolect, at least it is ‘real’. My own favourites are the suffix -ish, which I consider essentially English, and the use of have got to for a general one-off obligation, as in I’ve got to go now. Both of these are almost totally neglected by textbooks. But we do need to ask ourselves to what extent our own language reflects the above considerations and, undoubtedly more importantly, are we properly addressing the needs of our students?

David has been in TEFL for over 20 years and is the Director of Education at IH Lviv in Ukraine. He has trained teachers in Eastern Europe, Spain and Kazakhstan and is an IH Visitor. He is currently writing a survival guide to teaching English.
Rapport in the ESL Classroom

Martin Tilney

It has been just twelve months since I completed the CELTA course so I hardly feel qualified to discuss classroom logistics but in that short period of time I have learned quite a lot about rapport in the ESL classroom, which I would like to share with my fellow teachers in the IH Journal.

At the age of 22 I’m the youngest teacher at IH Cairns. I have never had a problem with establishing a good rapport with my students, for various reasons. I believe it’s mostly due to the fact that there is not a distinct student-teacher barrier in my classroom. My students are always – to say the least – surprised when we first meet.

Because of my Asian appearance I do not meet the mental image of ‘the teacher’ which exists in the minds of my new students. At first I thought that this would be a problem, but it has turned out to be an element of surprise that can really work in my favour. I always make an effort to explain that I am a native English speaker, and the students gradually get used to a teacher who doesn’t look like one.

One day we played a joke on some new students. I swapped places with a Swiss German student (the only person in the room of Western appearance) who stood at the whiteboard and pretended – to the great amusement of his classmates – to be the teacher while I sat at the desk with the other students. At first the new students were confused and failed to see the humorous side, but such antics, I believe, are good for bonding and camaraderie.

With regard to learner motivation, Hugh Cory states that rapport is ‘the single most important factor within our control’ (The IH Journal, 8). In his anatomy of motivation, Cory defines rapport as “a relationship of trust and responsive” where the teacher believes in the students and the students believe in the teacher (The IH Journal, 7). This should be considered when accounting for learners’ needs.

Being able to reduce the seriousness of the classroom’s atmosphere really helps to create a comfortable learning environment. I believe that if the teacher-student barrier is broken down, the students will feel more comfortable and be more willing to participate. It also helps them to become independent learners by understanding that the teacher is a human being and not just a stereotype. Students come to realise that a good portion of the ‘real teacher’ lies within himself or herself.

On the one hand it feels a little strange for me to ‘instruct’ people older than myself, so sometimes I find classroom management difficult. However, I believe if you can sense that your students genuinely respect you, it’s not necessary to be overly assertive. This is the difference, I believe, between teaching ESL and teaching high school English. I often raise my voice but I never condescend. Having said this you have to, at times, make it clear that you are in-control, and you can prove this by being fair and never losing your composure.

In ‘Learning Teaching’ Scrivener contends that ‘if there is a trusting, positive, supportive rapport amongst the learners and between learners and you, then there is a much better chance of useful interaction happening.’ (p86) and he offers some advice for giving first lessons in Chapter 2. He suggests that you, the teacher should:

- Talk to the students as they come into the room […] try sitting with them […] rather than standing in front of them […] 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 (Learning Teaching p.35).

- Learn names as soon as possible […] there is a huge difference in comfort levels if you know people’s names […] make learning names quickly and accurately your first priority (Learning Teaching p.36).

- Be yourself […] don’t feel that being a teacher means you have to behave like a teacher […] authenticity in you tends to draw the best out of those you are working with (Learning Teaching p.36).

In addition to these pointers I wish to add a few of my own:

- Remember trivial pieces of information about your learners, and use them in illustrating language points. Personalised or funny examples are more easily remembered.

- Treat everyone fairly, and encourage the students who are more reserved. Elicit solutions from students who you already know to have the right answer.

- Spend some time with your learners outside the classroom if possible. This could include planning an excursion or having a beer with your group.
Rapport cannot be taught to new teachers, for it depends on the individual’s personality. However, if you just show students the respect you would expect, there should be no problems. Be open and honest with them, and never take yourself too seriously. If the teacher can be perceived less as a teacher and more as an equal, I believe the students will learn much more naturally and independently.

Works Cited

Gabi Bonner

It occurred to me suddenly as I was leaving the lesson, and I was horrified. I’d just spent more time talking than my students – giving instructions, correcting errors, modelling pronunciation, conducting feedback, and telling the disruptive ones to shut up and listen! I mean, it seems to be common knowledge amongst EFL teachers, and it was drilled into us during CELTA, that too much TTT (Teacher Talking Time) is something to be avoided, as it takes the focus away from the students thus making the lesson too teacher-centred. Although I’m aware that a certain amount of ‘quality TTT’, for example modelling language, is necessary and can be a positive thing, I was still convinced that I had a fairly grave case of verbal diarrhoea. I decided then and there that serious measures had to be taken to reduce the dreaded TTT. I’d heard about a somewhat unconventional yet quite intriguing approach to language teaching called the Silent Way – in which the teacher is mainly (but not completely!) silent, therefore giving the students more opportunities to speak. I decided that this could well be the solution to my problem, or at least make for a fascinating experiment, and so I made it my mission to find out more...

So what’s the Silent Way all about?

Devised by Caleb Gattegno, the Silent Way is a pedagogical approach to language teaching based on the premise that the teacher should be as silent as possible in the classroom (about 90% of the time), and that learners should be encouraged to produce as much language as possible. The learning hypothesis behind the Silent Way is that learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned. Also, students learn more effectively through problem solving involving the target language. It views language learning as a creative, problem-solving and discovering activity in which the learner is a principal actor rather than a bench-bound listener (Bruner: 1966).

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Basically, the Silent Way can be described as a problem-solving approach to language learning, and is summed up nicely in Benjamin Franklin’s words:

“Tell me and I forget,
Teach me and I remember,
Involve me and I learn.”

In a Silent Way lesson teaching is subordinated to learning (Gattegno: 1972). The teacher takes on a role that resembles that of a leader of a team of investigators on a voyage of discovery. He or she creates an environment that encourages student risk-taking and facilitates learning. The teacher’s role in a Silent Way...
The Silent Way and my students

When I began reading about the Silent Way I have to say I was rather excited. You see, having had quite a few ‘motivational issues’ with my upper-intermediate intensive class, it seemed that trying out the Silent Way and giving them responsibility for their own learning might well help to motivate them. I decided to take things one step further than Gattegno proposed however, and attempt to teach the entire ninety-minute lesson completely silently! I decided that if the students knew I was not prepared to utter one word, then there would be no expectancy on their part that I would speak if they didn’t understand something. I was also hoping the ‘novelty value’ of a completely silent lesson might also capture and sustain their attention and interest. One of the principles behind the Silent Way is that through problem-solving, learners become more autonomous and responsible for their own learning. It has been proven by researchers that learner autonomy plays a significant role in increasing integrative motivation (see Dornyei: 2001). Could this possibly give me the opportunity to kill two (or more!) birds with one stone? :) To get my students to speak more in class, make them responsible for their learning, AND increase their motivation. It almost sounded too good to be true!

I got mixed reactions from my colleagues when I announced what I was planning to do. Some gave me a fairly indifferent ‘uh huh’, being used to my ‘little experiments’, some were interested and wanted to know the details of my plan, and some told me I’d never be able to teach an entire ninety-minute lesson without at least giggling and/or saying something by mistake. There was no going back though… I was determined and inspired!

Monday 23rd April

I taught a control lesson which had the exact same stages as the silent lesson would, working on a receptive skill followed by a productive skill. The receptive skill we focussed on was intensive reading. Students read a series of mini-sagas (English File Upper Intermediate) and we paused after each one to fill in a missing word and re-tell the story in the students’ own words. I then had students complete a (productive) Task-Based problem-solving activity, in which they were required to organise a class trip to Venice. The unit in the textbook is ‘A Moment in Venice’, so it was connected to the theme of the lesson. I gave instructions, checked them, and conducted whole class feedback as usual. I administered a short feedback questionnaire at the end of the lesson (see appendix). At the end of the control lesson I announced what I was planning to do in the next lesson. They were used to my experiments and had learned to tolerate them, but this time they looked at me as if I had completely lost it. Maybe I had… but then I convinced myself that some guy with a really cool name who has written heaps of books and even invented a whole approach to language teaching MUST at least have some idea what he’s talking about. I begged my students to promise to come on Thursday.

Thursday 26th April

Thursday morning 8.45am. I enter the classroom with a feeling of slight trepidation riddled with excitement and anticipation. I have eight students. Not as many as I had hoped to come, but enough. I wrote ‘Please try to speak only English’ on the board, as I’d been warned that these type of experiments can lead to students reverting to their L1 if they don’t understand something. I waved hello, pointed to myself and then a smile and thumbs up to let them know I was well. I then pointed to my students with a questioning expression. “I’m fine and looking forward to the lesson”, said a shy girl who hardly ever speaks. Not a bad start, I thought to myself, encouraged by this initial positive response. I then pointed to other students and they told me how they had learned to tolerate them, but this time they looked at me as if I had completely lost it. Maybe I had… but then I convinced myself that some guy with a really cool name who has written heaps of books and even invented a whole approach to language teaching MUST at least have some idea what he’s talking about. I begged my students to promise to come on Thursday.

I held up the handout I’d made and gestured that they were to match the words on the left with the definitions on the right in pairs. I then managed to check my instructions using gestures.

Next the pre-teaching of the vocabulary needed for the subsequent reading task… I held up the handout I’d made and gestured that they were to match the words on the left with the definitions on the right in pairs. I then managed to check my instructions using gestures.
I pointed to the handout and put on my ‘questioning face’. Some lovely person got the idea and said, “match- ing”. I wanted to hug them. The whole class feedback for this task was fast and efficient, with me picking students to share their answers and then using my by then famous ‘questioning face’ to check if the other students agreed. I pointed to my mouth to let them know that I wanted to hear the pronunciation of each word. I waited until I heard the correct pronunciation, and then I got that student to repeat it again and I drilled the word several times. I even managed to ask a CCQ using gestures and miming; I have to admit I was fairly impressed with myself for this. The word was ‘horrified’. I wrote a number one and a number two on the board, and then I pointed to number one and made a happy and relaxed face and then pointed to number two and made a horrified face. Then I pointed to the numbers and made my ‘questioning face’. “Number two!” YES!!!

Then I wrote ‘page 43 please’ on the board. Students turned to page 43 of their textbook, and I pointed at which task I wanted them to do. It was to read the first paragraph of the text about mountain climbers and decide what they would’ve done had they been one of the climbers in the story. I then checked my instructions by point- ing to the other paragraphs and putting on my ‘questioning face’. “Just the first one”, someone said. I nodded in approval, and then pointed to the map of the world on the wall with my ‘ques- tioning face’. “Himalayas”, “Tibet”, “Nepal”, right! I then showed them an OHT with instructions for their first task. It was to select five people for their team in the race to the summit of Mount Everest to win the £5 million prize. The team members could be famous people or people the students knew, but they had to justify their choice. I then had them come and write their proposed team members on the board, and they then had to explain why they’d chosen these particular people, and they debated it and eventually came to an agreement. Task two was to select their equipment from a list of possible items (including English File Upper-Intermediate, a teddy bear and roller blades!). The same procedure was followed as for task one, with a debate and finally an agreement.

Subsequent tasks included choos- ing their guide, choosing a team member to lose when the food supplies ran out, choosing a piece of equipment to lose, deciding whether or not to let Pavel Bem (the mayor of Prague who’s actually climbing Ever- est now!) join the team when we run into him on the last leg, and plan- ning the party for when we reach the summit. While students were dis- cussing and carrying out the tasks, I sat on the sideline thinking about how proud I was of my students for making their lesson such a success, and I was aware that I was witnessing the almost complete subordination of teaching to learning. I have to say I was thoroughly entertained as well!

I mean, listening to people discuss whether Superman, Batman, David Beckham or Tom and Jerry would be most efficient at getting to the summit of Everest can only be hilarious!

When I finally spoke at the very end of the lesson, the students seemed really surprised, and not the least bit relieved. They filled in the same questionnaires as for the control les- son, and they gave me some oral feedback. One student told me he thought I should act in the theatre! I’m not sure if this was a compliment or not but I think I’ll take it as one, be- cause as mentioned above, the Silent Way teacher is supposed to take on the role of a ‘dramatist’!

Discussion and Implications

In the feedback questionnaire re- sults, unlike the control lesson, all but one student had a strong opinion on the lesson. Out of the eight students, five gave very positive feedback about the lesson, saying that they enjoyed the lesson, they learned lots, they had more opportunities to speak than usual, they’d be happy to have similar lessons in the future and the teacher’s behaviour helped them to learn.

One lovely person even said that the lesson was super! One stu- dent wasn’t sure about the lesson, saying that he enjoyed it somewhat and learned a bit, but wasn’t sure if he wanted similar lessons in the future. He did say that he had more oppor- tunities to speak than usual though. Two students gave negative feed- back, saying that they didn’t enjoy the lesson, they didn’t learn anything and that they didn’t have any more opportunities to speak than usual. While no student gave negative feedback to say that these two students are the strongest in the class and usually speak the most. Possible reasons for this negative feedback could be that they know they’re the strongest in the class and they’re used to this idea and they like it, and so when suddenly the nature of the lesson is such that linguistic com- petence is not the only necessary quality or skill, but also problem solv- ing – a different type of intelligence – and extracting meaning from gestures and taking risks, they’re suddenly not the best anymore. It’s possible that when they discovered that they didn’t stand out at the best in the class anymore, they felt a bit ‘put out’ by this and became nega- tive towards that particular learning situation. It may also be due to dif- ferent learning styles. The language teaching approaches adopted by the Czech state school system are
particularly conducive to oral learners. A likely possibility is that the stronger students in the class are mainly oral learners, and the Silent Way, being geared more towards visual and/or kinaesthetic learners, did not fit their learning style. This suggests that the weaker students in the class could be more visual and/or kinaesthetic learners and their learning styles have not been sufficiently catered for.

In the oral feedback session most students said that the lesson wasn’t at all frustrating, that it was different, fun, and entertaining. They said they spoke more and cooperated better with each other and worked as a team. They said they all got lots of practice asking questions (to check my instructions) and they helped each other ask questions and corrected each other. They said they didn’t have a problem with being corrected by their peers, as the atmosphere in the class was supportive, relaxed, friendly, and full of laughs.

This (slightly crazy!) experiment of mine shows that even though it’s commonly associated with low-level classes, the Silent Way definitely has some value for higher-level classes; novelty value as well as linguistic value. If there is any sort of focus on vocabulary, I think it would facilitate things by having the teacher model the pronunciation rather than waiting for a student to say it correctly, however for classes in which students are familiar with phonemic script this would not be a problem. I also noticed that even the ‘quiet’ students spoke a lot more, and quite often it was them who were first to interpret my instructions.

I suspect you probably want to know if it was difficult to stay completely silent for ninety minutes. To tell the truth I didn’t actually feel tempted to speak at all. I think this may have been due to the fact that I had planned the lesson in detail and considered exactly how I would convey and check instructions etc, and fortunately I’m also able to think on my feet fairly well. However I can see how the temptation to speak could exist if one were faced with a serious communication barrier. I must admit though that I was on the verge of laughing throughout a good chunk of the lesson. I think this was due to being aware of just how ridiculous I must have looked while making my ‘over the top’ gestures and facial expressions, and extremely poor (and embarrassing!) attempts to draw recognisable objects on the board. But I also wanted to laugh with excitement and delight while watching my students work together and cooperate and speak more English than I’d ever heard them speak before. By no means am I suggesting that language teachers all adopt the Silent Way, but just that teaching a silent lesson is something pretty fun and a bit different, and it might well get those less-talkative students speaking!

So, to those sceptical colleagues of mine who doubted my ability to be completely silent for ninety minutes, not only did I achieve it, but I also proved that a silent lesson can be very successful, effective, fun, entertaining and rewarding, and I recommend you try it sometime. It turns out that silence truly can be golden!

References
Dornyei, Z. Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom. CUP.

Appendix
Please take a few minutes to answer these questions about the lesson you’ve just had

1. Did you enjoy this lesson?
   • yes
   • no
   • somewhat

2. How much did you learn?
   • a lot
   • a bit
   • nothing

3. Did you get enough opportunities to speak?
   • yes
   • no

4. Would you be happy to have similar lessons in the future?
   • yes
   • no

5. How did you feel about the behaviour of the teacher?
   • It helped me to learn
   • it didn’t help me to learn
   • it was crazy

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Setting up a system of Action Research Projects – a checklist for DoSes

Simon Armour

Readers of the Spring 2006 Journal (Issue 20) will probably remember reading about the Action Research Projects run here at IH Cordoba – I also gave an introductory talk about them at the January 2006 DoS Conference. These projects have now become a regular feature of In-Service Development here, adding to the classic channels of Observation and Seminars and, hopefully, help to provide a more stimulating atmosphere for teachers to develop their skills.

Personally, what got me interested in Action Research a few years ago was when Sarah Woodward, a former teacher at IH Cordoba and now an EFL researcher, came to do a study on EFL learners as part of a thesis she was working on. She had recently carried out research in an inner-city UK school and pointed out that our classes – small groups of fairly motivated students, usually with no major discipline problems – were a godsend to a researcher. So why are we so caught up in everyday planning that we rarely sit back and try new things out, and ‘reflect on our practice’? These are key words in Michael Wallace’s Action Research for Language Teachers (CUP – Cambridge Teacher Training and Development Series), which is definitely worth a read before starting (although the full-scale research projects outlined must definitely be simplified for In-Service purposes.)

Action Research has some major advantages as a part of In-Service Development:

- It’s empowering: a teacher can choose to try out an unorthodox approach (with the official ‘blessing’ of the school) – they can also talk about their idea in seminars and do a write up which is seen by all (preferably with no interference from DoSes). All of this conveys the idea to teachers that the school welcomes new approaches and experimentation.
- It encourages everyone to ‘reflect on their practice’. For longer-standing teachers who might be ‘set in their ways’, it encourages them to try something different. For new teachers, it encourages a broader approach, which will help them find the teaching style which suits them.
- It shares out good ideas among teachers: the teaching ideas used are tried and tested over a whole term and carry much more weight than a suggestion ‘off the top of your head’. If a new teacher and a longer-serving teacher work together on a project, it’s a great way of passing on expertise, too.
- It provides encouragement - a kind of ‘stepping stone’ - for teachers towards writing articles for journals later on. Initially most teachers can’t believe that anyone would want to read their ideas, never mind publish them, but the process of photocopying, binding and distributing the write-ups internally in the school definitely gives these teachers more self-confidence.
To other DoSes, I would enthusiastically encourage setting up the projects in your school - here is a brief checklist of what to do.

• Have a meeting at the beginning of the year:
  Talk to the staff (especially experienced staff) about the advantages of doing it – trying out new approaches, sharing ideas, encouraging writing – teachers are usually keen on these things anyway. Show them articles of finished projects – try to enthuse them and win them over. Tell them that the project will take place in the second term – the first term is difficult for new teachers (still finding their feet) and it gives you a bit of extra time at the beginning of the third term to copy and distribute the findings (and for the ideas to filter through to other teachers).

• Hold a meeting to launch it:
  Organise a meeting to introduce it: talk about what action research is, talk again about the reasons why, and talk about what subject they could base their projects on. This needs time and thought, so don’t expect teachers to know straight away in the first meeting – however, they could start thinking about it earlier if you mention it at the beginning of the first term. Take in a list of suggested topics – for teachers who really have no idea what they could do - but definitely encourage ideas which come from them. What areas of EFL are they most interested in? Is there any aspect of teaching (e.g. using computers, emphasising pronunciation more, teenage motivation...) they are into? It could be based on pretty much anything!

• Do we have to do it?
  Teachers of course ask if it is obligatory. My answer is simple: we are all so busy that if it wasn’t obligatory, it simply wouldn’t get done and the whole exercise would be no use to anyone. The finished product in the form of a booklet of write-ups, with seminars to discuss the findings - with all the staff involved discussing or defending their ideas - more than justifies any (understandable) grunts and groans you might get at the beginning from a busy teacher.

• Ask teachers if they want to work alone or in pairs:
  Both are valid ways, and both have their advantages. Working in pairs or small teams gives teachers more opportunities to work together, discuss ideas, teach or observe each other’s classes etc; working on your own allows you to be completely in charge of the idea, and take all the credit yourself if the project works well and perhaps leads to a published article.

• Teachers should word their project title carefully.
  It works best to ask teachers to express their project in the form of a question, but this question must be termed in as specific a way as possible, to make it clearer what exactly they want to find out. Rather like a DELTA exam question, they should include the age group/level in the wording. Here are a couple of examples:

  o Spanish learners are said to depend heavily on the teacher. Can I get my adult FCE learners to be more autonomous by teaching them certain study skills (phonemic chart, self-evaluation etc.)?
  o How important is praising in YLs classes (8-10 Elementary level)?

• Be clear about objectives:
  It’s important to outline at the beginning, too, what teachers should try to achieve by the end of the project. A key issue in Action Research is the ‘scientific’ part – collecting data which is measurable (in some way) and comparable with something else (the ‘control sample’ of scientific research). For students’ knowledge and skills this is fairly straightforward, as they can of course be measured ‘before and after’ by using a range of testing methods, but there are many things in EFL which seem at first light impossible to measure (enthusiasm, progress, behaviour or motivation). However, there are a number of ways available to document most EFL phenomena, as Wallace illustrates in Chapters 3 & 4 of Action Research for Language Teachers. As for the ‘control’, teachers usually use findings from other classes they take – although admittedly there are other variables, such as class ability, different group dynamics etc. In practice, not all write-ups include ‘scientific’ measurable findings, but it definitely lends those that do greater weight.

• When should teachers start?
  I usually give a deadline for teachers of about two weeks after the initial meeting to let me know what project they’ve chosen. This is the chance to check that teachers are going along the right lines. In my experience, it’s never been a case of vetting a ‘potentially dangerous’ idea – no one has ever suggested ‘having all my class in the pub’ or similar! Maybe I’ve been lucky, but for me it’s been more a case of ensuring that the idea really will be challenging and interesting for the teacher and, consequently, will be interesting for the other teachers to read about and discuss. Occasionally I’ve had to say ‘it doesn’t sound very interesting – why not try something more experimental?’ – that’s all!

• Keeping up the interest during the term:
  Teachers need lots of encouragement and inspiration to keep going during the term and really get the most out of the project. I’ve found this works best by holding a seminar to discuss the projects and share ideas about one month into the term.

A good seminar technique to share these ideas is as follows:
- split the teachers into group A and group B (preferably sitting at opposite sides of the room)
- hand out small cards for all teachers to write the aim of their project on one side;
- ask teachers of group A and group B to exchange cards;
- all teachers should then write on the back of their new card three things they would be interested in finding out about the project (e.g. Are the students enjoying it?)
- the cards go back to the original teacher, and one by one they answer the three questions and invite further discussion from the rest of the teachers attending.

The session should be managed tightly, as everyone should have a chance to speak, so for a 1 hour session with 12 teachers it could be a question of only 5 minutes per teacher!

As the project lasts for a whole term, there is inevitably a healthy overlap with observations and seminars: at IH Cordoba, teachers are encouraged to give a seminar on how their project is going, and they can choose it as the focus of a DoS or peer observation during this term.
• How much should we expect from teachers?
   Of course, like most features of In-Service development, a teacher can potentially opt to do very little if she/he wants. If a teacher doesn’t attend the discussion seminar, or if, at the end, their write-up looks rushed and shows little evidence of real classroom research, it probably means they haven’t put much work into it. What should we do? Well, they lose out really - it’s very much a case of ‘what you put into it is what you get out of it’. Also, in Action Research is ‘open to all’ - everyone attends the meetings, hears about everyone’s projects and reads the write-ups (whereas observation, in contrast, is usually a matter between DoS and teacher only). This means that the least motivated teacher usually gets going on something, even if it is just to avoid embarrassment before their peers.

• The write-up:
   About three weeks before the end of the term, you should give teachers a write-up form (make it available as a Word document too). These can vary in length – from a short hand-written write-up using the form to a lengthy computer-written article which more than covers the basic categories in the form. The most important points to get down are:

   Teacher’s name: Title of Project: 
   Level/age/N° SS of target group:  
   Findings from target group:  
   Any comparative evidence from control group?  
   What next? (future projects? etc)  
   Are you interested in your findings becoming part of a published article? YES/NO  
   DEADLINE:

   Once you’ve got all the write-ups in, photocopy all of them, bind them together and distribute them to all the teachers. This is the final step, but not the end of the road: after two years, we have now got a ‘bank’ of write-ups which can be referred to and consulted during future years – a great source of ‘in-house’ expertise.

   You can also encourage the writers of the best write-ups to try and get them published: we’re lucky to have the IH Journal for this, and if Action Research gets more popular around the IH network, maybe this will become a more regular feature. For those with a talent for writing, it’s great to see your name in lights!

Simon Armour:
Simon has been DoS at IH Cordoba since 1991, and apart from teaching & educational management, is interested in translating and Irish fiddle music.

What Difference does Intensive Practice of the Listening Skill Make to Students’ Listening Ability?

Rachel Pearson

What difference does intensive practice of listening skills make to students in terms of:
  a) Students’ listening ability
  b) Students’ attitudes towards listening

Target group: 
8 adult students who study general English in their place of work twice weekly 8 – 9 a.m.
Level ranges from low to high intermediate

NB: Some students in this group were considering doing the PET exam this summer during the research period and I identified the listening skill as the area where they were having most difficulty.
Prior to the research:
Most students openly expressed some dislike of listening. In their work context the students meet non-native colleagues who use English as the lingua franca. They also have considerable contact with American colleagues, whom they say are particularly difficult to understand. In class, one of the students often visibly switches off when she sees the CD player, on more than one occasion actually falling asleep!

Specific aims of Action Research:
(i) To see if negative attitudes towards listening (held by some students) could be broken down by intensive practice.
(ii) To see if students could attain a general intermediate level in their overall listening, to match that of their grammar, vocabulary, writing and (in most cases) speaking skills.
(iii) To see if attention to the various listening skills and practice of each in turn would prepare students adequately for PET exam tasks.

Process:
I started by taking in exam listening exercises at KET level which were safely below the level of all the students. In this way I introduced exam question types, some of which are similar to PET. As it was relatively easy for them, the positive results helped them feel more confident about listening. However, some of the students soon started saying things like ‘yes, but this is easy / so slow!’ at which I encouraged them to see that with preparation and careful prediction of the answers to the questions, they would find all listening activities easier.

In the second stage I took in EFL video material at intermediate level. My intention was to bridge the gap between KET and PET with visual aid, one of the hardest things about the CD being ‘the disembodied voice’. Interestingly, the students could more easily see what they didn’t understand! They found answering questions harder than KET at first because they had reverted to wanting to understand everything the speaker said. As they became more used to video, they separated on one hand being able to answer the questions, and on the other understanding everything the speaker said. This distinction is a crucial stage of progression with listening, when the students realise not everything needs to be understood in order to get the right answer. However, they did find this frustrating. I imagine it’s because we watch TV to relax and have to be trained to see it as a source of L2 exposure. Not understanding everything is not particularly relaxing!

The final stage of the research took the form of analysis of each part of PET, training exercises for each and finally practice. The students were more capable of listening to longer and longer excerpts, were better able to keep their place in the listening and also got consistently better results.

The research ended with a complete PET listening in exam conditions. All the students gained between 50 and 80 percent.

Findings:
(i) Negative attitudes towards the listening skill were broken down to some extent although not completely, and not in all the students. This was mainly due to the following factors:
(a) As every class was based on practising one element of the listening skill or another, the ‘groan factor’ when the students first saw the CD player was eliminated. I had previously explained to the students the need to focus on listening following a test they had done quite poorly. In this way they were open to further work in this area despite it being their least favourite activity!
(b) As the time of the experiment progressed, their positive learning cycle reinforced itself and so the students believed themselves more capable after successfully completing more and more exercises. Class work was reinforced by listening activities I encouraged them to do at home. They could see I was not manipulating results in class, but that they were really getting better!
(c) Students gradually reassessed their position in the class in terms of level. It does not necessarily follow that the student whose grammar is strongest is also the best listener! As they repositioned themselves among their peers, some gained confidence.
(d) One student commented that in her work when she had cause to meet English speaking colleagues, she found the exchanges a little easier to follow.
(e) In those students where negative attitudes towards the listening skill were not broken down, this can be put down to irregular attendance and lack of practice outside the class.

(ii) A general intermediate level was not gained by all of the students as it soon became apparent where gaps in their grammar, but particularly in their vocabulary lay, and how their understanding was consequently marred. However, for a few students, their ability to understand listening activities was increased. How much of this represents real increase and how much is an improved attitude towards listening, is hard to say. It became apparent that such a one-sided course, while addressing a much needed area of work, obviously did not address the holistic needs of the students.

(iii) In terms of improving the listening skills required for PET, the students were able to see for themselves the great progress most of them had made. Their view of listening being a collection of different types of listening plus the prediction techniques they put into practice before listening, helped them to achieve better results. Inevitably for some students the results were more consistent than for others.

Follow up: I invited three of the students to sit the PET mock exam to measure eligibility for the June session. Two of these did it, gaining 91% and 74%. Of these only one has decided to go for the exam in June.

To redress the balance of the skills, and to boost their vocabulary, the students have since been working on native newspaper articles. They are accepting more easily not understanding everything and can capture the global meaning better.
Developing an efficient reward system for Young Learners

Rob Henderson

Like many other teachers, I sometimes found in my classes an unwillingness to participate; difficulty in speaking for long periods; trouble with using and recycling target vocabulary; and strong students dominating the class. I really hoped to find some fun, easily workable system that could motivate young learners more through reward than through the fear of punishment, and at the same time remind them of acceptable behaviour.

I developed the following ‘tick’ system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOMEWORK TICK</th>
<th>GROUP TICK</th>
<th>ENGLOMETER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ma Angeles</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvaro</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paco</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma Paz</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DIAGRAM OF THE WHITEBOARD

Looking at each aspect of the system in turn we can clearly see positive results.

**Ticks for participation**

If a student showed me something that was good, out of the ordinary to their previous behaviour, they got a homework tick. Stronger students naturally saw rewards for this, but also weaker students became drawn into the class with encouragement. When one unconfident elementary student who rarely spoke in class (perhaps overshadowed by stronger members) saw a tick rewarded for whispering in English to his partner, that was the beginning of his increased participation. Several students who were certainly able, but perhaps thought they were ‘too clever’ for the rest, began to participate more actively after I introduced the system because they could see some clear reward. One student, who had a bad reputation in the school for his behaviour, gradually involved himself in the class and as such other members were able to participate more, free from distraction.

Crosses for non-participation were also used. If a student was slow in getting out their book then usually the sight of a pen hovering around their name on the board would get them leaping into action. Strong students who always shouted out the answer modified their behaviour after a cross was given. Disappointment was reduced by keeping an eye on that student and quickly applying a tick in compensation for good answers at a more appropriate time.

**Ticks for homework and checking group work**

I put the students into mixed ability groups of three and encouraged cooperation by giving a group tick for correct answers. 5 group ticks meant one homework tick for each group member. Crosses were only given to individuals for bad behaviour. All the students in the group benefited from correct answers and the stronger students helped the weaker ones.

**Speaking in a group**

The more a group spoke about a pre-selected topic the more group ticks they received. If they reached ten ticks they received a homework point each. Any English was accepted, especially for lower levels, even things that were off topic, bizarrely pronounced or grammatically incorrect. The higher the group, the more they had to focus on accuracy. This was a great success! Students who would never speak started to try, drawn along by the rest of the group. They realised that these periods were for fluency, and if they ran out of things to say then they would begin talking about their weekend, or what happened at school that day. Receiving ticks even for things that had no relation to the topic but were in English
was hugely motivational, especially for bored teens. I now had problems in some classes that a teacher in an English secondary school would hate but for a TEFL teacher was excellent: students talking (in English) about their boyfriends/girlfriends or their weekend whilst I was trying to teach! I never criticised students for anything that was in English, but just tried to positively move the lesson along.

**Pronunciation and intonation**

A homework tick was awarded for correct pronunciation and intonation of a phrase. I would write a list of ten and give an individual tick if someone got 7 or 8 right. This was motivational for students who I found were shy in speaking in a group scenario, but knew that they could speak.

Using specific pieces of vocabulary or ‘chunks’ of language

After demonstrating a natural piece of language, i.e. ‘Could I have a pen, please?’ or something more natural for teens, like, ‘That’s really cool!’ any student using it got a homework tick. My FCE class especially now has a range of expressions that would see them right hanging out with any English teens!

**The Englo-meter**

This was a nice way for students to see their progress visually checked, and a less threatening way to warn the class when group behaviour was becoming unacceptable. As the class talked with me and with each other it would gradually edge up towards ten. If there was lots of L1 murmuring it would be rubbed down just a little, and almost always the students would fight to get it back up again. If the class was sleepy, just putting it up for little things motivated them to participate. Everybody got a homework tick when the meter reached ten and we started again.

**The carrot on the stick**

One student every class was given less homework, although sometimes it could be two. More homework was only awarded a few times, just to demonstrate to the students that it was possible. ‘Seeing’ certain students with the correct answer and ‘not seeing’ others meant that with a bit of manoeuvring, everyone had equal opportunities to leave the class with less homework. Students who left with 5 ticks returned to the next lesson with a greater sense of progress and participation.

**Conclusions**

Students complaining about ticks being given or not given, and negative attitudes towards students who ‘let the side down’ were occasional negative aspects. I resolved this by asserting my authority as the teacher; if complaints went too far then removing existing ticks usually got students to behave.

The great thing about the system is its adaptability. On occasions it was solely necessary as a motivational tool; on others it was better for highlighting poor behaviour. I awarded ticks as liberally as I liked depending on the level of participation that day and the difficulty of the task.

Although the system gives rewards, groups began to enjoy the satisfaction that came with just speaking and were delighted that they would go for a whole class speaking with less and less difficulty. The fact that all students found it enjoyable, sometimes the weakest and least participative of the class more than the strongest and keenest, shows something unusual and worth continuing with.
Techniques and strategies:

To kick off the project we carried out a control Cambridge Young Learner Flyers Test (all tests taken from Cambridge Flyers 1 CUP) that was modified to fit with the new 2007 format. After analysing the results we decided to focus on different parts of the exam depending on class weaknesses. Two more tests were given at three-week intervals leading up to the whole school mock examinations at the end of March. During this time we implemented a variety of activities to introduce the students to exam techniques and strategies. As follows:

Part 1: Highlight words (kids at this age LOVE highlighting pens) they do know in the definition and using those, choose vocab; introduce and practice process of elimination (what it can’t be). Help guessing from the context, e.g. Is it singular or plural? Is it a person or an object? Students need to practise false friends, a new concept at that age. Incorporate Flyers format vocabulary exercises with vocabulary presented in class, and consolidate it through warmers such as hangman and scattergories.

Part 2: Focus on colours, prepositions, size, number, pres. cont. Students had very little difficulty with this part of the test.

Part 3: Students invent their own answers, or, do the opposite: write up their own version of the dialogue with the intro and answers as their only guide. Auxiliary verbs, through highlighting, open and closed questions, and different expressions for assenting and negating were also focused on.

Part 4: They need to be reminded to do question 6 (always forget). Practise identifying nouns, verbs (and tense), adjectives, and adverbs: what is needed in the space? Students were given exercises with the wrong answer and asked to explain why it was illogical.

Part 5: Use highlighting pens to focus on words/synonyms from the questions they can see in the text (there are usually “signal” words), but focus on the actual wording of the question so they don’t simply copy random words from the text into the space.

Part 6: Highlight words before and after spaces. Which word is impossible (getting used to process of elimination)? Practising saying the combinations aloud to each other: which sounds correct? Practice of irregular verbs through pelmanism, chants and story telling.

Part 7: Highlight words before and after spaces to help focus on prepositions, auxiliary verbs etc. and as a short introduction to collocation. This part of the test was difficult to practice due to the large number of language items required to complete the task effectively.
Findings:

Class 1: Wilma Dyer

Part 1: Nearly all the students increased their result by 30% or more. Even younger and weaker students improved greatly as productive skills are not required.

Part 2: All the students continued to produce very good results.

Part 3: Most of the students increased their result by about 50%, especially students with better logistic skills, as they needed to understand the development of the dialogue and note different ways of responding to open and closed questions apart from ‘yes’ and ‘no’.

Part 4: Most of the students increased their result by 30 – 50%. Again, students who were not only able to identify parts of speech but were also able to make logical choices based on the story, performed this part better, especially older students with better cognitive skills.

Part 5: Most students increased their results by 40%. All students became better at searching for answers in the text, although younger students still found it hard to produce accurate structures.

Part 6: Most students increased their result by 20 – 40%. Students chose more correct options, except for items which had not been taught.

Part 7: There was hardly any improvement in this section, apart from the two strongest students. The last point made in Part 6 also applies, but to a greater degree. Less time had been devoted to the input of the numerous complex grammatical items tested in Flyers, such as ‘had to’, modals and relative pronouns, so only very able students came up with the correct answers.

Class 2: Susan Mulquiney

Part 1: All the students increased their results by more than 20%, normally weaker students by 25-30%. Helping them to see what they DO understand (and that it’s in fact the majority of the vocab in the definitions) gives them a psychological boost and the impetus to keep going, and not simply give up half-way as the weaker students did in the control Test.

Part 2: Very little work done on this in class so as not to kill the enjoyment (this is their favourite section and they all do it well).
Part 3: All the students increased their results by 40-50%. Playing the Yes/No game (post exam: using the replies included in the Test) was great fun and increases awareness of language variety and chunks.

Part 4: No improvement in results across the class, although there was some individual improvement in stronger students. In general, students were able to identify the part of speech required, but had difficulty recognising distractors.

Part 5: All the students, including the weakest of the class, increased their results by more than 50% and were extremely proud of themselves. Rightfully so. This part of the Test produced some of the worst results in the Control and some of the best in on-going tests. The biggest change was not only in the results, but also in student attitude to the exercise itself. What was initially approached with “I can’t do this, so I’ll just put anything in the space” apathy, later became the focal point of concentration and one of their favourite sections.

Part 6: Slight increase of 10-20% in results, but will improve with time as they learn more of the particles and grammar words required (e.g. Present Perfect, Relative Pronouns and some Modal verbs are completely new to them.)

Part 7: No improvement across the class, although stronger students tended to enjoy the challenge.

Class 3: Sarah Jones

Part 1: This part of the test saw the biggest improvement across the board. Generally students improved by 25% - 50% or more, making this section the strongest part of their tests.

Part 2: As said above little work was done on this section as the students were already producing high marks. This continued throughout the research project.

Part 3: The majority of students improved by around 40%. The largest improvement was seen in students with a generally higher cognitive ability.

Part 4: Unfortunately no great improvement was seen here. However, the students who did improve got between 80% - 100% in this section.

Part 5: Stronger students improved a lot in this section and were able to provide accurate answers. Weaker students did improve and were generally able to identify the answer in the text but were unable to transfer it accurately.

Part 6: Improvements were seen in this section of the test. Incorrect answers appear to be directly related to items not yet taught.

Part 7: No real improvement was seen here. Even the stronger students only averaged around 1 or 2 points out of 5. This again seems to be related to the fact that a lot of the structures are just being or have not been taught yet. Another hindrance would be that the students cannot use the process of elimination, consequently weaker students tended to get 0 out of 5.

Conclusion

As we were simply interested in introducing and practising exam strategies and techniques, rather than inputting new language items/structures, there was more improvement where the language was already known.

However, we all found that students were extremely motivated when they saw that they were improving, but the biggest surprise was the fun they got out of using the techniques themselves.
EFL Young Learners’ Progress Report Cards: A Continuous Improvement Project

Katherine Johnson

The purpose of this article is to describe the findings and changes which have taken place as a result of research into the institutional process revolving around the young learners’ progress report cards (RCs) which our school sends to parents three times a year. The research has involved questionnaires to the parents, teachers and DOses as well as an attempt at benchmarking, that is, studying other schools’ RCs in search of good practices to emulate. The main goal has been to monitor customer satisfaction and see if there were more the school could be doing for them on this front and, of course, at the same time send the message to these customers that we care.

I would like to make it clear that neither the theory nor the data reflected here is comprehensive. Much more has been involved than is discussed below and is still to be investigated more in-depth. I have chosen to highlight what I feel is the most relevant information for IH school administrators concerning this issue.

Our RCs and RC process

Our RCs are printed on card, which is then folded into 3 parts (envelope-size) and mailed to parents. Parents return them, signed, either in person or via their child and they are re-used for the next term. For each term, teachers fill in tick-boxes at the top of the RC about both the child’s progress and behaviour, etc. and then add hand-written comments about the child. On the back, teachers note exam marks, global impression marks and whether or not extra classes are recommended.

The RC ‘process’ refers to the different steps involved. These are as follows:
1. In a meeting for all teachers (generally in December, before the RCs are sent out for the first time), the RCs are shown, discussed maybe and explained for the benefit of new teachers to the school, to ensure they know how to fill them in.
2. Any teacher wanting / needing one receives a ready-made copy of possible comments to write about the student which appear in both L1-L2. This list includes different categories such as: Attitude / Effort / Behaviour / Speaking / Grammar / Writing / etc.
3. If teachers need help as to what to say or how to say something, they can get help from principally the DOses and the English department head of administration but also from other teachers who have been at the school longer or from the school’s Spanish teachers or their own Spanish friends.
4. Once written, almost all RCs are re-read by the DOses to check to see that they have been completed correctly and for anything that is blatantly inappropriate or incongruent or potentially confusing for the parent.
5. The RCs are then passed on to administration staff who mail them off.
6. Photocopies of the RCs are kept on file for two years or so, generally.
The RC Process and TQM

The theory of Edward Deming’s Total Quality Management (TQM) underpins much of what instigated me to pursue this research.

Continuous Improvement

For me, the mainstay of TQM is the emphasis on Continuous Improvement. This concept can be summed up as: for a company which believes that the key to (continued) success is to see to it that its customers receive quality at each and every step of all the services provided, it should constantly be on the look-out for how any of those steps or processes might be improved upon so as to ensure and maximise this quality. With this in mind, I decided to seek out feedback from the parents about the RCs and to see if they were happy with the information they were receiving about their child’s progress. Likewise, our RCs and process was compared with information which other schools so kindly shared in an attempt to further seek ways to improve.

Internal as well as External Customers

Another underpinning of TQM is the idea that not only is it important to monitor the paying customer’s satisfaction with a product, in this case, the parents, but also to monitor the satisfaction of all of the people who are involved in the process. For this reason, feedback from both the DOSes and especially the teachers was also sought. TQM also emphasises the importance of involving employees in both the choice and realisation of continuous improvement projects so as to take advantage of their insider knowledge of the organisation’s goings-on as well as to foster their commitment to any institutional change that may take place as a result of the attempts to monitor a given process.

Standardization

Although Deming’s theory consisted of 14 main points, the last which I will highlight here is that of the importance of standardizing organizational processes by identifying the specifications required by each task within an organization. By this we mean outlining the appropriate steps of a process and striving to ensure both the maximum quality and maximum economy of time, effort and money of a service / product so as to provide employees with clear process specifications which will facilitate their work and benefit the company. In the case of YL RCs, how would this benefit the school? By reducing time spent by both teachers and DOSes in explaining, correcting and re-writing, thereby reducing stress as well as by aiming to improve the quality of teachers’ YL assessment and how they should inform parents about this.

The Questionnaire to the Parents

A one-page, front and back questionnaire was sent to parents by mail along with their child’s RC in an attempt to see how ‘satisfied’ they were (not) with the information they were getting. As only about 17% of the children’s parents returned the questionnaire, the questionnaire was sent out again the following term to make a total of roughly 23% respondents. However, the data from the second batch has not been analysed yet. Nonetheless, the data obtained was interesting, revealing and helpful.

Here are some of the questions which they were asked, each followed by information obtained from the first batch of questionnaires:

- Which part of the RC do you like more: the tick-boxes or the teacher’s personal comment? 68.3% of the parents said they liked having both and 31.7% preferred the teacher’s comments.
- Do you understand the teacher’s comments (perfectly? Well? So-so? With difficulty)? 66.7% responded ‘perfectly’ and 30.2% ‘well’.
- Do you feel the teacher provides you with enough information in their handwritten comments? 96.8% said yes.
- Is 3 times a year enough or would you like to receive the RC more / or less frequently? 81% said it was.
- Is there any other type of information (about your child, his/her teacher, the school) which you would like to see included on this report? Here are just a few of the comments which some parents wrote:

‘I’d like….
- you to orient me about the way in which I can help my daughter improve.
- to know my daughter’s level with respect to the other students in her class.
- them to give a greater relevance to grammar and to know if my son has a good understanding of grammatical constructions.
- We’d like to have a detailed explanation as to what our child needs to improve on as well as possible solutions. In general, we are happy with everything.

Parents also used this space to mention others aspects of the YL department, which although not related directly to this study, were felt to be revealing and helpful in terms of improving the service we provide.

- to be informed about how class time is spent and the atmosphere of the same.
- the parent-teacher meetings to be better structured. If the parents don’t have concrete questions, the meeting seems banal.
- more information about activities (here it is not clear if this refers to outside-school activities or class activities).
- I would like someone to explain to me why so much importance is given to participation in class. (The teacher did just this in the following parent-teacher meeting.)
- Perhaps some fun activities could be offered outside of school during the year.

In addition to the above questions, an attempt was made to identify the type of information parents felt they were not getting about their child’s progress.

1. Their progress in general
2. Their ability to speak English
3. Their ability to write in English
4. Their ability to understand English
5. Their reading comprehension
6. Their knowledge of grammar
7. If they are working hard enough
8. Their knowledge of vocabulary
9. Their pronunciation
10. How they get on with others
11. If they hand their homework on time
12. Their behaviour in class
13. Their degree of participation
14. If they speak too much Spanish in class
15. Other:

Figure 1

This was calculated by taking those categories (Figure 1) which parents marked as the ones they do feel informed about minus the five which they say are most important to them to leave remaining those which, indirectly, they report as not being informed about, at least not sufficiently, the ones the teachers or school are overlooking or missing. That is to say
I felt that if I could determine this, the school could better orientate the teachers as to what to make sure to mention, thereby improving customer satisfaction.

In this and other meetings, there was a focus on consciousness-raising as to the different aspects of young learners and their courses which need to be considered in order to assess their progress effectively and on what information to include on the RCs. There was also a meeting in preparation for the parents-teachers meetings, brainstorming parental concerns and identifying more constructive solutions for parents as to how to help their child do better (not just ‘He’s got to do better’ or ‘He should read more in English.’) This brainstorming also included how to encourage parents to be more involved in their child’s learning process.

Benchmark Results and RC Changes

The changes made to our RCs were decided upon as a result of studying other schools’ RCS, both from EFL private schools and some from local state schools, the study of the feedback from parents and the intense brainstorming session which ensued. The group of people who participated in this discussion and decision-making constituted an informal Quality Circle – a group of people who do ‘the same or similar work’ who attempt to ‘identify, analyse and solve some of the problems in their work, presenting solutions to management…’ (1996 Rees and Porter). These people were the two directors of studies, the head of administration for the English department and myself.

The third, and final, term, teachers were given another list of possible things to say. This time the comments were more specific to the end of the year, that is, not only positive comments summing up a child’s overall progress but also how to discuss good students who did poorly on the final exam and how to phrase negative aspects about a student’s progress or behaviour or how to recommend that a student repeat a level the next year.

Training

Training concerned with teachers’ contact with parents, both via the RCs and on parents’ night, increased significantly. Feedback from the parents’ questionnaire was firstly shared with the DGSes and then the teachers in my effort to ensure that all the stakeholders were included as much as possible. Teachers seemed to appreciate having this feedback shared with them and it was my hope that this aided in appeasing a few teachers’ fears of the questionnaire as a means by the school to seek an appraisal of their work.

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In-House Changes

The L1-L2 translated comments sheet I made up an ‘addendum’ to this which was given to all the teachers during the second term which included:

- more possible comments which they might want to use in their RCs about the four categories mentioned above (speaking, listening, writing and grammar), thus encouraging the teachers to discuss these aspects in their comments. (This part was a direct result of the questionnaire results.)
- Suggested tips/ideas such as:
  1. always start off with something positive about the child
  2. highlight his/her strong and / or weak points
  3. provide a suggestion as to what the child/parent can do to improve in this area
  4. encourage the parent(s) to come to the parent-teacher meeting (many of our parents do not bother)
  5. how to recommend that the child sign up for our free tutorials

The changes made were the following:

BEFORE: The tick-box grid included Speaking, Writing, Reading, Listening and Grammar.

AFTER: We took out Reading as we felt it was very difficult to assess this skill properly and during a single term and added Pronunciation and Vocabulary as a number of parents noted a desire to be informed about these things.

BEFORE: The proficiency categories were defined as ‘Has progressed’, ‘Adequate Progress’ or ‘Needs to do better’.

AFTER: This was changed to ‘Very good for his level’, ‘Adequate for his level’ and ‘Needs to do better’ as it was felt that actual ‘progress’ was not always evident over the span of one term.

BEFORE: The second tick-box grid categories used to be ‘His participation is good’, ‘Behaves well in class’ and ‘Does homework regularly’ and the teacher has to tick either ‘Always’, ‘Usually’, ‘Sometimes’ or ‘Never’.

AFTER: We added to these: ‘Pays attention in class’, ‘Speaks English in class’ and ‘Arrives on time’ as we knew that it was equally important to the teachers that parents be informed about these things as well and the tick-box grid would allow teachers to concentrate on other important factors in their written comments.

BEFORE: Teachers noted the number of absences per term.

AFTER: Teachers now also note the total number of classes per term so parents can clearly see what % of classes their child has missed (e.g. 8 out of 20!)

BEFORE: There was a space for the parents to respond to what the teacher had written.

AFTER: This space was moved to the back page in order to allow teachers more space for their comments as it was one of their complaints on their questionnaire, that they did not feel they had adequate space to comment appropriately, and as parents rarely wrote anything in this space anyhow. Although more space could still be done with, it’s just not feasible.

BEFORE: Students’ exam marks were noted, followed by a circled ‘Excellent’, ‘Very good’, ‘Good’, ‘Bare Pass’ or ‘Fail’.

AFTER: The mark remains but the ‘Excellent’ etc is reserved for the teacher’s global impression of the child’s level. We all agreed that everybody wanted to de-emphasise the exam mark and reflect the teacher’s overall opinion of the learner as so many different factors must be taken into consideration and not just the exam. Also, an exam class average is included.

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Informe Trimestral

Nombre del estudiante

Curso

Profesor/a

Tu curso incluye:
- Profesores nativos cualificados
- Amplias aulas climatizadas
- Sala multimedia
- Videoteca con amplia selección de películas en préstamo
- Libros de lectura
- Informes trimestrales
- Proyección de películas
- Clases de tutoría

Primer Trimestre

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Comentario del profesor:

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Katherine has been teaching at IH Seville for over 20 years and is still learning and still enjoying it. She got her Delta in 2000, has worked as an IHCYL trainer and is currently finishing a distance M.Sc. in Tesol with Aston University. This article summarises many of the main issues which have resulted from her research for her dissertation.

CONCLUSION

This study has been revealing for me in that it has heightened my awareness of the value of taking a closer look at one of the many processes that are part of EFL management. Only by attempting to evaluate each step of a process and soliciting feedback from all the stakeholders involved can any existing gaps in the process be identified. In the case of the RCs, guidelines and support aids for the teachers have improved, needs for more specific training were covered and changes to the RCs themselves were made, all in an effort to enhance the quality of the process and, in turn, the quality of the school’s service.

Bibliography


CEO-Teacher Turned Project Manager

Katie Sherman

‘Work smarter, not harder’ is a coined-phrase with which I often associate unpleasantly such as big business, the corporate ladder and the protestant work ethic. It is not necessarily an idea I thought of utilizing with a class of eight-year-olds. It is in my nature to unconsciously take strong control over anyone I supervise or teach. We the leaders, the teachers, are the spotlight, right? The center of attention, the authority, the reason for the group’s existence—these are terms we might not chant to ourselves every day, but perhaps are a secretive part as to why we like teaching in the first place. Alas, I have found that these are unconstructive outcomes to this mentality. Thus it shouldn’t have been surprising when after one or two sessions of teaching I was experiencing post discotheque symptoms: a light head, an energy-deprived body and a slight ringing in my ears that I couldn’t quite chase.

But what was the problem? I had an array of activities planned, the kids had fun, there was variety and fast-paced games to cater to all those short attention spans. Overall, it was very ‘productive and effective’. The only issue was that every single action revolved around ME. I was an amalgam of game leader, conversation guide, pronunciation model, behavior monitor, activity instructor all weaved into one super woman ‘look at me’ teacher. It was exhausting. Even a controller will seek help in desperate times. In an attempt to lower my blood pressure and reduce some chronic noises in my head, I didn’t say ‘no’ to suggestions made for decreasing the teacher attention and increasing the student to student interaction in my class; making it less about me, more about them. And, as far as my limited experience in this realm has occurred, I have found only good things about it. To quote Steven Covey, ‘a win-win situation’. Not only does it alleviate the majority of the pressure, energy, and conversation direction on the teacher’s part, but it also highly increases student talking time in English, and isn’t that what it comes down to really? Beyond this, I have less behavior problems to cope with because Jame is too busy conversing in English with Patricia to pester the student sitting next to him while he’s waiting his turn to talk to me in English. Meanwhile, I can meander around the classroom at ease, listening and correcting pronunciation, ensuring they’re using the grammar appropriately and above all relinquishing the metaphorical control panel in my mind since I don’t have to be ‘ON’ every minute of the class. My role has transformed from that of a ‘teacher’ in the traditional sense, to that of a ‘project manager’: designing, delegating and guiding as compared...
My role has transformed from that of a ‘teacher’ in the traditional sense, to that of a ‘project manager’: designing, delegating and guiding.

Katie taught a variety of classes at IH Valladolid, Spain in 2005-2006 including children, teenagers, and adults. With a university degree in fine art, she found that teaching English was a perfect way to pursue her passion for living abroad, discovering new cultures and meeting interesting people. She enjoys long-distance running, painting, cross-country skiing, and traveling. She currently works at a Spanish immersion school in Minneapolis, Minnesota (USA) and is pursuing a Masters degree in education with a licensure in visual arts.

1.) As the teacher, you are responsible for presenting the grammar in whichever way you choose. But immediately after comes production of the language. This is something the students should always be doing with each other. Demonstrate the activity with two students, and then set them to work doing the same with each other. Sometimes I use the structure provided in my book, or often I might have sets of cards or papers made up of fill in the blank sentences, or some other way to elicit the grammar. I then pair the students, ask them to use the grammar with the given phrases, then pass the paper to their left, for the next pair to use. Various pictures or images they can point to and produce language from are very helpful in this type of activity as well.

2.) Before even teaching the vocabulary you can see what the students’ former knowledge is by hanging up images and their corresponding words around the room (on different pieces of paper). Group the students into twos, threes, or fours, and have them take the images and words from the walls and place them beside each other on the board. This way you get a sense of what words they may already know. You can also relax a bit while the students are already beginning to digest the material you are about to present.

3.) In order to review either grammar or vocabulary from the previous class, I create a quick document that will elicit the target language (pictures, scrambled sentences, fill in the blank, etc.) At the beginning of class I might have a competition, having the students work in pairs or threes. In this way they help each other with past material, and the teacher is free to walk around and correct where it is necessary.

4.) Keep a ‘reserve’ of games or activities that the students are already familiar with. When it’s appropriate, instead of explaining something that may be complicated, use a game they know immediately how to play, so they can basically be autonomous and use the material successfully.

5.) Theatre and charades are the best. If your book provides short stories with returning characters, use it to your advantage. After the students have read the story (usually with a cassette), have them act it out in small groups, occasionally switching roles. In this environment they are able to use and practise the language with expression. I also tell the students to listen for each other’s pronunciation. They are very good (sometimes too good) at correcting one another. Charades as well are excellent for vocabulary. It’s practically student run, as they take turns acting out the words, and the one who guesses correctly gets to act out the next one.

Go to the people, 
Learn from them, 
Love them.
Start with what they know, 
Build on what they have, 
But of the best leaders, 
When their task is accomplished, 
Their work is done, 
The people will remark: 
“We have done it ourselves”.

In general, as you are planning your lessons, think about your approach and constantly ask the question, ‘Do I need to be the center here or can the students do this on their own?’ A popular, yet very ancient Chinese poem can be quite applicable to this topic – even to eight-year olds.
IHWO News
Autumn 2007

IH Growth

The IH network continues to grow steadily as we identify new high-quality schools around the world. We are now 143 schools in 49 countries, and hope to be 150 schools by 2008. We hope to hit the highpoint of 50 countries very shortly, to celebrate the 55th anniversary of International House.

New schools joining the IH family recently include
- Russia - IH Novokuznetsk
- China - IH Xian
- Iran - IH Tehran
- Romania - IH Brasov

More schools are being inspected this autumn and may have completed their affiliation by the end of 2007.

IH World Team

We are happy to welcome new members to our team, who will be invaluable in helping us provide better services for IH schools worldwide.

Christina Margraf is joining us as Business Development Coordinator. Christina is from Germany but has spent the last few years working in marketing and sales for IH Roma-DILUT.

Naomi Moir is our new YL Coordinator, helping to carry on the development work begun by Paula de Nagy in IH Lisbon and expanding the resources for YL teachers. Naomi, originally from New Zealand, is based in Prague.

IH Resources

The Language Resource Centre for Modern Language teachers continues to expand – please check it out at www.ihlanguages.org if you have not already visited.

There is a Coordinator for each of the 8 main languages (aside from English), who are building a teacher community for their language and sharing resources.

IHWorld.com

All IH teachers have access to the main IH World website (please ask your DOS or Director if you need an ID) and can download materials and resources – which are being added to all the time.

Here’s a sample screen from the Resource Centre showing the new tests (and YL Placement Tests) available for download:
Language for Special Purposes

The first modules of English for Vocational Training, developed by teachers in IH Riga, can be downloaded via the new menu at www.ihworld.com/an/an-menu.asp. The next course to be published will be English for Journalists, written by the specialist team at IH Belgrade, and scheduled for the end of 2007.

IH Teacher training

In the last year we have developed several new teacher development courses. The face-to-face versions of the courses are available on CD ROM for schools to run locally. Increasingly we are converting these to Online delivery.

The online courses currently available – or in piloting stage include:
IH 121
IHCYL (pilot)
IHC (pilot)
IHTKT
IH BET (in preparation)

Please contact IHWO if you are interested in taking part in a course or in running one in your school.
IH COLT

The IH COLT training course for teachers who want to teach online has been a great success, and is now being run regularly for IH teachers and staff from other institutions. The course is now available for schools who want to run it with their own trainers, and can be purchased on CDROM for uploading into a school’s online learning environment, or the school can rent space on the IH online platform.

IH World is also running the IH COLT course for individual enrolment. The next courses are scheduled for:
- January 2008
- Spring 2008

The cost of the course, per participant, is £275. For IH school staff, however, it is reduced to only £125. Please email mike.cattlin@ihworld.co.uk to reserve your place.

IH Study Abroad

Don’t forget to visit our website for promotional materials, and download our CDROM – watch out for DVD trailers on www.ihstudyabroad.com.

IH Club

We are now sending out regular newsletters to the IH Club members. IH Club is an alumni club for current and former students of IH – a way to keep in touch with their old school and learn about new developments. Please promote this to your students – it is free to sign up for at www.ihworld.com/ihclub

Calendar of IH events 2007-08

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<td>IH Torres Vedras, Portugal</td>
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<td>IH Directors’ Conference 2008</td>
<td>May 3 - May 6, 2008</td>
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IH World office

Don’t forget that we have moved from 106 Piccadilly to a new office in the old warehouse district next to Tower Bridge - please come and visit if you are coming to the UK. See our website for new address and phone numbers - but the email addresses remains the same.

Michael Carrier
Executive Director
International House World Organisation
michael.carrier@ihworld.co.uk
The Ben Warren
International
House
Trust Prize

Jonathan Dykes

The Ben Warren-International House Trust was set up as a memorial to the life and work of Ben Warren. Ben was one of the key figures in the growth and development of International House.

Ben Warren

Ben was born in Tunbridge Wells in 1943. He took a degree in Geography at Cambridge and then became one of John and Brita Haycraft’s first properly trained teachers. His first teaching post was in IH Algiers, after which he moved back to IH London, where he met his future wife, Carmen, who was one of his students. In 1968, at the age of 25, Ben was appointed Director of International House Tripoli. He was on the verge of opening a second school in Benghazi when Gaddafi’s revolution took place. People with names like Benjamin became the subject of round the clock police surveillance so Ben and Carmen decided to leave.

Ben’s next assignment was as Director of Business English at International House Paris, but it wasn’t long before he decided that it was time to start a school of his own. This first school was opened in 1971 in the industrial town of Sabadell, near Barcelona. IH Sabadell was soon a success and over the next twenty years Ben built a substantial business empire which included fourteen equally successful language schools, a book shop, a company promoting language courses abroad, a magazine for teachers and students and a printing business.

Ben was fortunate in so far as his business acumen led him to start a school in the right place at the right time; but he was also the right person in the right place at the right time; many other people had the same opportunities as Ben, but none came anywhere near to equaling his achievements. Ben’s business successes were based on a remarkable combination of personal qualities. These included almost limitless energy and a corresponding capacity to work hard for long hours, the ability to pick out and retain important detail without letting it cloud the broader picture, an unshakable sense of what was fair and reasonable, a commitment to honesty in all his dealings, and a wisdom which was partly based on his business experience but also partly innate. His advice was always reliable and his judgments thoughtfully made.

When he was killed, aged just 48, he left an immediate family of a wife and three children; he also left an “extended family” which included many hundreds of friends, colleagues, employees and admirers.

All of these people benefited in one way or another from knowing Ben and many of them have contributed directly towards setting up the Ben Warren-International House Trust.

About the Ben Warren Trust Prize

The idea of establishing a Trust in Ben’s name surfaced almost immediately after he was killed. It was decided that perhaps the most effective way to achieve the desired aims would be to set up a fund which could be used to finance an award, to be known as the “Ben Warren Trust Prize”. It was also decided that the prize should be awarded on an annual basis to the author or authors of
the most outstanding work in the field of language teacher education. Teacher education has always been at the heart of the International House World Organisation. The Cambridge ESOL CELTA course (originally the RSA/UCLES CTEFLA), which is the most highly respected training course for EFL teachers ever developed, is based squarely on the pioneering work of John and Brita Haycraft at International House, and IH is still widely regarded as the foremost language teacher training organisation in the world.

Ben Warren was also dedicated to the idea of improving the standards of language teaching through teacher education. The Teacher Training Department at International House Barcelona - which is the largest training centre of its kind outside the UK - is a vibrant testimony to Ben's commitment to this idea, and so it seemed entirely appropriate that the prize should be awarded to someone working in this field.

The prize is normally presented during the International House Directors’ Conference, which is held annually in May. A panel of judges consisting of two representatives from International House and a third person who is not directly connected with International House, evaluate all the entries and the finalists are normally announced by the end of March.

The Ben Warren Trust Prize has quickly become established as the most highly esteemed award in its field. It therefore constitutes a suitable memorial to the life and work of a remarkable man.

**Prize Winners**

**Winner 2006**
**Dealing with Difficulties**
Lindsay Clandfield and Luke Pro-dromou
DELTA Publishing

**Winner 2005**
**The Experience of Language Teaching**
Rose Senior
Cambridge University Press

**2004**
No award made

**Winner 2003**
**How to Teach Writing**
Jeremy Harmer
Longman

**2002**
**Teaching English as an International Language**
Sandra Lee McKay
OUP

**2001**
**Uncovering Grammar**
Scott Thornbury
McMillan Heinemann

**1999**
**Teaching Languages to Young Learners**
Lynne Cameron
CUP

**1998**
**Mentor Courses**
Angi Malderez and Caroline Bodóczky
CUP

**1997**
**A Framework for Task Based Learning**
Jane Willis
Longman

**Criteria**
Here are the criteria for choosing the winner of the Ben Warren Trust Prize. The winning entry should:

- **Be relevant** - to practising ELT teachers, not just academics
- **Be original** - break new ground and not simply refry old, familiar ideas
- **Be inspirational** - teachers should want to rush out and experiment with some of the ideas suggested
- **Be well-written** - intelligible, coherent, a good read
- **Be consistent** with IH core values.

**Correspondence**
All correspondence concerning the Ben Warren Trust should be addressed to the Board of Trustees, c/o International House Barcelona, Trafalgar 14, entlo., 08010 Barcelona, Spain, Tel +34 93 268 45 11, Fax +34 93 268 02 39.

For more information please visit: www.ihes.com/warren/index

Jonathan has spent nearly all his professional life in IH. He started as a teacher in IH Mataro and is now Chief Executive of the IHLS Group which includes 10 IH affiliated schools as well as Web-based language school Net Languages (for details, see www.ihls-group.com). Jonathan lives in Barcelona and can be contacted at jdykes@bcn.ihes.com
Concept Questions and Time Lines

Graham Workman

Reviewed by Neil McMahon, IH Belgrano, Buenos Aires

Cover and delved straight into the world of yes/no questions and stickmen. The book is ring bound to make it easy to photocopy so there was no smell of a freshly published book to it. But not to worry, that’s not what I need it for. Show me how to make decent concept questions! Show me time lines that illustrate the common ground and logic of the English verb system!

My excitement—professional, remember—was unfortunately short-lived. Once inside the format got even less dynamic. There are over 50 photocopyable worksheets/OHTs in the book, providing structures and time lines for different aspects of the verb system and other structures such as conditionals, some modal verbs and verb patterns like ‘remember to do’. They all follow the same three-trick format: time line, concept and concept questions.

Taken on their own, each time line is clear, well-drawn and faithfully portrays the structure. However, it’s a shame there are four different time lines for the present perfect simple, for example, when one would have sufficed. Why not use time lines to simplify things, by showing what the different uses of a verb form have in common, rather than accentuate the differences and make English seem so much more complicated?

Next on each handout is the concept box. This is an explanation of when each structure is used, such as ‘Already is used to show that something is earlier than expected’. Unfortunately, many of the concepts (like the above example) are debatable to say the least. Many of them are also very simplistic and so not particularly useful in the classroom: ‘We use stop + ing to show that an action stops’. Let’s move on quickly to the concept questions.

The highlight of the book is the introduction to concept questions. There are clear and step by step explanations of how to construct them and how to use them in class. Lots of useful examples and engaging exercises with an answer key allow teachers to practise making concept questions, build their confidence and refine their techniques before trying them out on their students. This section will appeal to novice teachers, experienced teachers and teacher trainers alike (particularly those running concept question input sessions on a CELTA). However, on the OHT handouts the handy 10 commandments of the introduction are often broken. Among many similar examples is using the word ‘deadline’ to concept check the meaning of ‘by’. Does this not break commandment 5 about concept question language being simpler than the target language?

I was hoping for a book that would save teachers preparation time, but I would feel very uncomfortable about recommending this book to undiscerning novice teachers. More experienced teachers will be able to work out which OHTs are useful and accurate, but having to decide won’t cut down on prep time. And in the end there is only one suggested way of using all 50 handouts—not really much variety and engagement on the part of the students. Perhaps this book will be most useful on teacher training courses, helping trainers to explain concept questions and then criticising the grammar concepts and time lines during language awareness sessions.

On the whole, ‘Concept Questions and Time Lines’ gives the impression of a worthwhile endeavour which teachers and trainers will find useful, but limited. It merely regurgitates course book grammar rather than providing useful insights and accurate but teachable visual portrayals of language use. A real missed opportunity.
Dealing with Difficulties

Luke Prodromou and Lindsay Clandfield
DELTA Publishing

Reviewed by Micaela Carey, IH Malaga

This book, Dealing with Difficulties: Solutions, Strategies, and Suggestions for Successful Teaching, has a title that explains it all. It is a good investment for the staff room of any language school as teachers can flip through it in their ‘free time’, using it as a reference to solve or prevent problems in their classes.

The areas of difficulties discussed are common in teaching and relevant for most types of classrooms. There are five main sections devoted to difficulties: Large classes and Classroom Management, Discipline Problems, Mixed-level Classes, Homework and Teaching Exam Classes. Within these general problem areas more specific topics are discussed and for each of these subtopics a list of suggested activities is provided.

Say, for example, you were teaching a large class and wanted to get some ideas on how to get students into pairs or groups without disrupting the flow of the class too much. Using the Contents page, which is a particularly strong point in this book as it is detailed, clear and easy to use, you would look under ‘Large Classes and Classroom Management’. Here you would find the sub-heading, ‘Moving Students Around’ and in this section one of the recommended activities is called ‘In the Cards’. It involves using a deck of cards to organize students into pairs, groups of three or more.

Some of the activities in this book are well-known in the world of language teaching. The Class Contract described in the Discipline section or the Word of the Day to finish a class have been around for ages, but sometimes even veteran teachers need to brush up on how to set these activities up or perhaps learn about a variation to spark things up a bit. Each activity is described in terms of Level, Aim, Duration, Materials Needed and Skills/Language Used.

In each chapter there are also pages devoted to Tips and Techniques. Nominating, correcting, monitoring, and reviewing/recycling are some of the topics found in the ‘Mixed-level Classes’ part of the book. In ‘Discipline Problems’ there are tips on reward systems, sanctions, and how to promote students’ self-esteem. The information on these pages is useful and ties in well with the discussions at the beginning of each chapter.

The last chapter is called, ‘Professional Development’ and deals mainly with the theme: You are not alone. The Tips and Techniques pages include ways to connect with other teachers and how to get parents and administration involved and ‘on your side’. The message in this section links well with the overall theme of the book in that strategies do exist for teachers to implement in their classrooms when dealing with difficulties, but that support from others is also available and beneficial.

In general the book is well-organized and clearly laid-out, but the levels suggested for the activities could be a source of confusion. Some of the activities seem geared toward adult classes while others are for young learners, especially those falling under Discipline Problems. When discussing young learners, it seems more appropriate to classify their level according to age. Upon reading about the activity it is often obvious what sort of age range the activity could be used with, but having this information at the top of the page would be much more helpful.

This is the type of book to have floating around the staff room or even on the shelf at home. The highlight of the book is the way it is organized. It lends itself to being used as a reference in times of trouble. Teachers of all class levels and with all types of backgrounds in teaching can benefit from using it.
The Experience of Language Teaching

Rose M. Senior
Cambridge University Press, 2006

Reviewed by Nicola Harris, IH Johannesburg

As an EFL teacher and Masters student (in the middle of my own research), I was intrigued by and excited about as well as sceptical of this book all at the same time. The title alone had me wondering what it was all about and if it would be relevant to all teachers and especially to my context - Johannesburg, South Africa. Before turning to the first page I was already asking questions such as ‘Whose experience of language teaching is this about?’ ‘Will I be able to find myself within the pages?’ and ‘How will this help my teaching?’ I have to admit, I was doubtful that my questions would be answered to any degree of satisfaction. However, once I started reading I was amazed and delighted to find all the answers and much more. I saw myself and other teachers I’ve worked with in every chapter and my initial scepticism was quickly won over.

The book draws on research conducted over a 12-year period (1992-2004). A total of 101 native English speaking teachers from a variety of life experiences and ages and working in either Australia or the UK, were interviewed and/or observed for the research. All the teachers had a university degree and a language teaching qualification and utilised the communicative language teaching approach in their classrooms. Most taught intensive courses to adults with a smaller number teaching young people in schools. The aim of the research was to document the feelings, thoughts, beliefs and overall experiences of language teachers working in a variety of contexts in English speaking countries.

There’s definitely something for every language teacher in this book. It takes you through the teaching journey from the very beginning and reads like a story in the detailed and rich descriptions. The book starts with the experience of being on an intensive training course (such as the CELTA four-week course). The author looks at what attracts such a diversity of people to the profession and how the course is very much a ‘sink or swim’ experience for most trainees. She describes the insecurities of trainees and how they often rush through their lesson plans just to get through the stages and aims they’ve outlined on their lesson plans. Senior discusses how trainees often feel daunted by the prospect of teaching grammar and how this is exacerbated by the trainees’ lack of flexibility due to their limited teaching experience.

The book goes on to look at the early days in the workforce and the feelings of inadequacy new teachers often experience. The author describes the ways in which teachers develop a more outward perspective as they gain experience and how this enables them to focus more on their students’ needs and less on their insecurities in the classroom space. She looks at the tensions and complexities of being a language teacher and how the job demands the ability to shift between different roles and positions in order to create optimal learning conditions. The importance of establishing rapport is discussed in detail as well as making the assumptions of your teaching approach explicit to your students.

The book not only highlights the experience of language teaching but also describes the strategies teachers employ to create friendly, informal learning environments that are easy-to-manage and enjoyable to work in. I found myself trying out some of these practical suggestions in my own teaching and discovered that they definitely added to the cohesiveness of my class. The author also explains why teachers make spontaneous decisions in their classrooms and how such dynamic adaptations are beneficial to the functioning of the group as a whole.

Senior’s main contention is that the classroom behaviour of teachers is both pedagogically and socially driven and she proposes a socio-pedagogic theory of classroom practice to encapsulate this relationship. The author ends the book through a metaphor. She likens the language class to a complex organism whose functioning depends on the parts played by all participants. Senior maintains that the teacher and students play a vital role in maintaining a state of harmony and balance in the classroom – a process similar to the biological process of homeostasis, necessary for the optimal functioning of organisms.

I would highly recommend this book to any language teacher. It provides comfort and practical suggestions as well as acknowledgement of the complexities and intricacies of the profession. The main criticism I have is that it only focuses on native English teachers and the communicative approach. The author however, also acknowledges these limitations and makes recommendations for further research in more diverse contexts, research which is bound to make an interesting follow-up to this excellent book.
50 Ways to Improve Your Business English Using the Internet

Eric Baber
Summertown Publishing

Reviewed by Richard Spillett, IH Moscow

50 Ways to improve your Business English using the Internet is exactly that. Designed for self-study, author Eric Baber has put together 50 activities students can undertake on their own and divided them by skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) to make a book that is both comprehensive and user-friendly.

If it were an EFL lesson, an observer could say it has a clear enough method (Internet learning) and a narrow enough target language (business) to make its aims achievable. This also makes it easily identifiable to those who need it, namely, the businessmen who only make 10% of their lessons and feel they can make up for it with a token gesture lunch break on the net.

Reading it and trying some of the tasks, it seems Mr Baber got to about 35 decent ideas for language learning and then made up the numbers with some less useful tasks. 'A word a day internet diary' and 'Online encyclopaedias' are examples of the less original ideas offered.

The book does however avoid the pitfalls of most books in these genres. The ideas are general enough not to be made out of date by the ever-changing Internet, and the business tasks don’t treat everyone like a jet-setting CEO. Tasks give example websites, which could easily be updated without making the activity impossible, and are useful for students at all levels of a company.

In terms of use for teachers, the tasks could be very useful for teaching over the net, or for those teachers lucky enough to have computer room in their school, or computer in their classroom. The rest of us mere mortals will have to content ourselves with using it for homework tasks (especially for the aforementioned disappearing students). It will also be a useful addition to any in-company department’s library.

So to sum up, ‘50 ways...’ does it exactly what it says on the cover, and does so in an organised and easy to use manner.
Challenges 2

Michael Harris, David Mower and Anna Sikorzynska

Pearson Longman

Reviewed by Claire Firat, IH Qingdao

Part of a new 4-level course for teenagers, Challenges 2 is designed for lower secondary classrooms & covers most of the descriptors of the Common European Framework A2 level.

The coursebook is divided into 10 topic-based modules, each of which is broken up into six broad lessons. The first page of every module features ‘Get Ready’ tasks, usually incorporating listening and speaking activities to raise interest and introduce vocabulary. The next lesson introduces the grammar focus through readings, with guided discovery activities focussing on form and function, followed by both written and communicative practice tasks. A final ‘Your Turn’ focus invites students to practise in personalised tasks.

Lesson 3 is designed to improve reading skills, whilst lesson 4 focuses on functional language through dialogue work. Lesson 5 introduces ‘Across Culture’ text-based grammar practice in odd-numbered modules, and ‘Your Challenge’ writing skills practice and ‘Understanding Grammar’ spots in even-numbered modules. The final piece de resistance is a ‘Project’ work box and a module revision page entitled ‘Study Corner’.

Extra features in the Students’ Book include short, jazzy ‘Fact or Fiction?’ statements for students to solve, tongue twisters to try, ‘Study Help’ learner training boxes to complete, a ‘Timeout’ section in the back of the book full of activities for early finishers and a picture dictionary.

The Challenges 2 suite includes the usual Students’ Book, Class CDs/cassettes & Students’ Workbook. The Teacher’s Handbook displays a reduced size double-page spread of the Students’ Book pages with teaching notes (and even better, tapescripts where pertinent) surrounding it. This means less flicking back and forth between books when planning. Interestingly, the teacher’s notes are quite brief, but still manage to offer additional activity ideas for uninspired teachers. Further to this, there is also a Teacher’s Pack, divided into two parts. The first section is devoted to teacher development, with advice on developing citizenship education in the teenage classroom, motivating and disciplining students, managing the classroom, and even more startling, a beginners’ guide to lesson planning, assessing & testing, and teaching itself. Pearls of wisdom include ‘teenagers can be fun to teach’ and ‘the ways that words and sentences are written in English is very different from the ways that they are spoken’. Other sections are more useful, with advice on how to cope with dyslexic students and mixed level classes. The second section of the book is essentially the standard resource pack of additional communication tasks. The tasks have been well-chosen, with several inclusions also my favourite activities for practising those language points.

The Challenges suite does not stop there. There is also a Test CDROM, with editable tests for each module and for combined modules, with both short tests and longer versions, and listening recordings as well. But wait there’s more! There is also a companion website – unfortunately I can’t review its contents because the computers in my Chinese office crashed at the overload of new technology. There is apparently also a DVD and DVD Workbook but by this stage, I am over the challenge!

The Challenges series appears to be designed to ease teacher pressure by offering everything short of an actual ESL teacher who pops off the page and runs the class for you. The irony is that such comprehensive support requires a serious amount of teacher planning just to orient yourself and manoeuvre through such an immense array of material.

However, the topics are well-suited to engage teenagers with regular characters who appear episodically and a good variety of up-to-date cross-curricular reading and writing input (emails, text messages etc). My only real quibbles are that it is quite British-centric with only tokenistic attempts to introduce other accents/English-speaking country input, and target vocabulary is introduced through the use of boxes with word lists and a reference to the picture dictionary. These areas might have been further exploited.

Everything, and I mean everything, is available on the class CD, including vocabulary drilling and all of the reading texts that appear in the book. Even the module revision answers can be checked on CD.

There has evidently been a great amount of planning and work put in to create Challenges 2, and I like the array of material. I think it would work best in a school environment where regular classes are held throughout the week. A final word of warning before using it the classroom … make yourself a tall coffee, put your feet up and spend the time to get to know everything Challenges 2 offers before sweeping into the classroom with it. To get the best results, it warrants this time.