Readings in Methodology

A collection of articles
on the teaching of English as a foreign language

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Contents

This textbook is for the exclusive use of the students of Pázmány Péter Catholic University.

Are teachers born or made?
Penny Ur

The phrase 'a born teacher' is not usually meant to be taken literally. People who use it do not seriously mean that someone is born with a certain teaching DNA configuration in their genes. They are, rather, referring to stable personality characteristics, resulting from a combination of innate and environmental influences, that the teacher brings to their professional practice and that produce something that looks like a natural bent for teaching.

Is there such a thing?
What evidence do we have for the existence of 'born teachers'?

The existence of the phrase
First there is the actual existence of the phrase as an immediately recognisable collocation in English. Compare *born engineer* or *born scientist.* The mere fact that the expression is a recognisable cliché that slides easily off the tongue implies that the concept is popularly accepted and based on folk wisdom.

What the professionals say
But beyond folk wisdom, what do professionals think? I asked two groups of teachers, a group of 20 novices and a group of 25 experienced, competent professionals whether they thought there was such a thing, and if so, whether they were themselves 'born teachers'. The inexperienced teachers were almost unanimously positive in their answers to both questions. The experienced teachers were more cautious, though still a majority (80%) thought there was indeed such a thing; but only 32% thought they were definitely born teachers themselves, 28% said they weren't and 40% were uncertain. So in general: yes, teachers think there is such a thing.

Research
A third piece of evidence in favour of there being some truth behind the expression 'a born teacher' is research. There is, of course, no research on the topic as such: researchers prefer to look at more quantifiable or at least observable phenomena. So I went to the literature on good, or expert, teaching, to see what I could find. Three factors other than 'born teacherness' have been discussed as potentially important contributors to good teaching: methodology; training; experience.

Methodology: It is almost impossible to prove that one method is superior to another through research, because of the immense number of other variables in any teaching situation. You cannot isolate methodology and say that it is the critical variable (Ellis 1994). We can, however, reach some more useful conclusions about methodology if we approach the topic from the opposite point of view, trying to falsify rather than to prove: is there any evidence that methodology does **not** matter?

An interesting study of successful teaching (not ELT) in elementary schools in Colorado (Clarke, Davis Rhodes & Baker, 1997) studied three outstandingly successful teachers, each of whom used an entirely different methodology. They were equally successful. The researchers did find various characteristics that these teachers had in common - but method was not one of them. This suggests that we may be able to discount the choice of a particular methodology as a critical variable in successful teaching.

Training: Most of the teachers I asked stated that their professional preparation courses were valuable. My informants came up with statements like 'My training courses refined my own ideas, gave them a reason (theory behind it) and put things that I guessed were there into a framework', and 'Without training, professional knowledge, you may remain ineffective and inefficient, even though you may have good rapport with the kids'. But even with the most effective training programmes, some trainees do not manage to learn; or they do well on the courses and then for some reason do not succeed in the classroom.

In another broader survey I asked several hundred teachers in Brazil what their major source of learning was. They answered almost unanimously that it was experience (Ur, 1996). Pre-service training scored fairly low, and in-service rather higher. But the same teachers also said that initial training had been very important for them, particularly at the beginning of their careers.

Experience: Many researchers have documented the difference in expertise between novice and experienced teachers and defined the ways in which this is expressed (Peterson & Comeaux, 1987; Richards, Li & Tang *1995;* Richards, *1997).* The implication is that what matters is not what you are born with, but the amount of experience you have.

However, this does not account for the phenomenon of experienced teachers who are not expert: and they do exist. Bereiter and Scardamalia *(1993)* looked at the behaviour of experts and non-experts (not necessarily teachers) with similar periods of experience. They found that both had developed high degrees of automatisation of routines over the years and were able to do the same jobs far more quickly and efficiently than novices. The difference was that the experienced non-experts simply took less time on the job, and had more free time as a result; whereas the experts used the freed-up time to try out new ideas, develop further, and work out better procedures. So that time spent on the job, for the experts, never in fact got any less: it was, however, used more efficiently, with better results and constant personal progress.

Interim summary 1
Of the three factors I have looked at that contribute to the good teacher, methodology probably contributes very little; training is a significant but not decisive factor; experience (and reflection on it) are probably the most important single factors. But even experience does not account for everything: there are significant differences in the level of expertise of teachers with similar experience. We are left with *x,* some quality or qualities which cannot be accounted for by method, training or experience: 'born-teacherness'. Let us call this the *t*-factor.

T as a multiple intelligence
Through discussions with teachers, it has become clear to me that there is no one *t*-factor that makes for 'born-teacherness'; it is a kind of multiple intelligence, composed of a number of distinguishable, though sometimes overlapping, qualities. We can, perhaps, distinguish further between general abilities that would make a person competent at a number of professions – medicine or counselling, for example, and specific teaching abilities.

General qualities
General qualities might include the following:
- content knowledge: the knowledge of the theory and practice of the relevant field of knowledge (Shulman, *1987);*
- intelligence: in particular the ability to think rationally and creatively, to generalise from specifics and vice versa, to solve problems;
- inter-personal relationships: the ability to get on with people in general; tact, empathy, warmth; organisation: the ability to think systematically, to organise items in real time and space;
- responsibility: the ability and willingness to take on responsibility for people and processes;
- confidence: a good self-image and belief in your own worth and abilities;
- motivation: the drive to succeed, to do your job well;
- a sense of mission: a strong belief in the value of what you are doing;
- enjoyment: satisfaction and personal fulfilment from doing your job;
- desire to learn: the urge to find out things, improve, progress;
- industry: the ability and willingness to work hard, not necessarily for an immediate reward;
- charisma, leadership: the ability to get people to listen to you, to do what you want.

These all appear, incidentally, in the profiles of the three successful but different teachers described in the research by Clarke et al., referred to earlier. Some are certainly more important than others, and individuals possess them to varying degrees.

Specific qualities
What are the personal qualities that contribute to *t*, that would not necessarily apply to doctors, nurses, counsellors or managers, but are teacher-specific? Here are some suggestions. It is interesting that I have found it very difficult to encapsulate these in single abstract nouns as I did the previous list:

- I sense where the learner is at, what their problem is; I feel what they know and don't know;
- I know how to transform what I know about the language into a form that is accessible to my learners;
- I know how to design and administer activities and exercises that will foster learning;
- I know when learning is and is not happening by the way the learners behave; I don't need tests;
- I get my 'buzz' from when the students succeed, learn, progress.

Interim summary 2
There is such a thing as a 'born teacher', in the sense that there are some people who come to teaching with certain personality characteristics that make them particularly fitted for the teaching profession. These *t*-characteristics are multiple, each individual will therefore vary in how many they have and to what degree they have them. Probably some are more essential than others.

Related questions
If we accept the above as a working hypothesis, a number of questions need to be asked.

Can teachers with a very high *t*-factor teach well without training? Without experience?
It has been claimed by at least one respected educationist that a teacher with the necessary qualities needs no training (Haberman, 1995). But some of the *t*-qualities (motivation, desire to learn, awareness of learning processes) actually make a teacher particularly able to benefit from good training courses (those that make use of the teacher's own experience and critical reflective faculties, as well as providing input). Though some brilliant teachers can manage without training, their performance is likely to be enhanced by it.

With regard to experience, the answer is even more definite. Even a 'born teacher' with all the qualities mentioned will always benefit from experience. Quite apart from the important process of automatising essential routines, and developing clearer perceptions of classroom processes, experience is also the main source of overall professional learning and progress. In fact, I would say, that 'born teachers' will not be able to exploit their qualities to the full without it. Quite how much they do benefit from their experience depends, of course, on the *desire to learn* item listed previously.

Paradoxically, some very gifted 'born teachers' actually learn less because so much comes naturally: they find they can produce the kind of teaching behaviours almost by instinct that most of us have to learn through reflection on experience: so the necessity to learn to do better is not so obvious. In one sense they are lucky; on the other hand, they may reach a ceiling and cease to progress, while other less naturally gifted teachers continue to advance, and eventually overtake them. Such teachers are also unlikely to make good trainers: because so much of what they do is intuitive, they may find it difficult or impossible to explain to others how it is done.

Are there born non-teachers?
In my opinion, the answer to the question *Are there born non-teachers?* is yes. And if the deficiencies are deep enough and the person does not have the ability or motivation to remedy them, they will fail as a teacher and probably drop out or the profession fairly fast. If they do not, they and their learners have a problem!

Can people acquire *t*-characteristics through training and experience?
Some aspects of personality are extremely stable and hard to change. It is very difficult, for example, for someone to change their basic value system or personal motives for action. However, it is easier to learn the language better, to learn how to explain or elicit, to learn, perhaps, how to get on with people better.

Assuming that the person is reasonably intelligent, I would say that the only characteristics which you cannot do without are the motivation, industry and desire to learn. Intuitions about where a learner is at, and how to shape material in order to make it available to them – these are, I think, learnable through a combination of experience and reflection.(***)

Summary
There are people who come to teaching with a certain built-in propensity or disposition that makes them take to teaching more readily than others. However, this propensity is composed of not one but a number of *t*-factors, some of which are common to practitioners of a number of professions, some of which are teaching-specific. If they are not naturally possessed, some of these *t*-factors are difficult, sometimes impossible, to learn. People who lack some or all of these qualities may never become good teachers, or only with the greatest difficulty.

The *t*-factors on their own are not enough, however. Experience and some form of teacher training and/or development are necessary, and in fact more significant: so a teacher with all the necessary initial qualities who does not learn, does not reach the same level of expertise as one who is less initially talented but who develops. People who possess these qualities to a high degree, and then proceed to enhance them through experience and learning are those we call 'born teachers'. So 'born teachers' are not necessarily eventually good teachers. And good teachers may not have been outstanding 'born teachers' to start with. Natural talent is no substitute for experience and professional development. It does give you a head-start; as in a marathon race, eventual success does not depend on where you started, but on how far and how fast you run.

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Language learning in the classroom
Donn Byrne

The task of the language teacher

Why is it so difficult to teach a foreign language? To a large extent, it is because we are attempting to *teach in the classroom* what is normally ─ and perhaps best ─ learned *outside it.* The classroom is of course a convenient place for imparting information and for developing many educational skills, but our main concern as language teachers is not to *inform* our students *about the language* but to develop their ability to *use the language for a variety of communicative purposes.* In order to develop the skills needed for this, especially the oral ones of understanding and speaking, we have to cope with a number of obstacles, such as:

- the size of the class (often thirty or more learners);
- the arrangement of the classroom (which rarely favours communication);
- the number of hours available for teaching the language (which cannot and should not all be spent on oral work);
- the syllabus itself, and particularly examinations, which may discourage us from giving adequate attention to the spoken language.

Under these conditions it is not easy to provide effective oral practice, especially in large classes. That is why it is important to have a clear understanding and a firm grasp of the wide range of techniques and procedures through which oral ability can be developed. These techniques and procedures are *a way of accommodating language learning to the unfavourable environment of the classroom.*

The role of the teacher

What, then, is your role as a language teacher in the classroom? In the first place your task, like that of any other teacher, is to *create the best conditions for learning.* In a sense, then, you are a means to an end: an instrument to see that *learning takes place.* But, in addition to this general function (or perhaps we should say in order to implement it), you have specific roles to play at different stages of the learning process. We will look at these stages

- *presentation* (when you introduce something new to be learned)
- *practice* (when you allow the learners to work under your direction)
- *production* (when you give them opportunities to work on their own)

from a conventional standpoint first of all.

The presentation stage: the teacher as informant

At the presentation stage, your main task is to serve as a kind of *informant. You know* the language; *you select* the new material to be learned (using the textbook normally but supplementing and modifying it as required) and you *present* this in such a way that the meaning of the new language is as clear and memorable as possible. The students listen and try to understand. Although they are probably saying very little at this stage, except when invited to join in, they are by no means passive. At this point of the lesson, then, you are at the centre of the stage, as it were! It is a role that many teachers find attractive, and there is a danger of spending too much time presenting (sometimes because you want to make sure that your students have really understood) so that the students do not get enough time to practise the language themselves.

The practice stage: the teacher as conductor and monitor

At the practice stage it is the *students'* turn to do most of the talking, while *your* main task is to *devise and provide the maximum amount of practice,* which must at the same time be both *meaningful and memorable*). Your role, then, is radically different from that at the presentation stage. You do the minimum amount of talking yourself. You are like the skilful conductor of an orchestra, giving each of the performers a chance to participate and monitoring their performance to see that it is satisfactory.

The production stage: the teacher as manager and guide

It is a pity that language learning so often stops short at the practice stage (or at least does not regularly go beyond it). Many teachers feel that they have done their job if they have presented the new material well and have given their students adequate, though usually controlled, practice in it. All the same, no real learning should be assumed to have taken place until the students are able to use the language for themselves, and unless opportunities are available for them to do this *outside* the classroom, provision must be made as part of the lesson. At any level of attainment, from elementary to advanced, the students need to be given regular and frequent opportunities to use language freely, even if they sometimes make mistakes as a result. This is not to say that mistakes are unimportant, but rather that free expression is more important, and it is a great mistake to deprive students of this opportunity. For it is through these opportunities to use language as they wish, to try to express their own ideas, that the students become aware that they have learned something *useful to them personally,* and are encouraged to go on learning – perhaps the most vital factor of all in helping to keep the interest in language learning alive. Thus, in providing the students with activities for free expression and in discreetly watching over them as they carry them out (which is of course one of the best ways of finding out whether the students are really making progress), you take on the role of manager and guide (or if you like, adviser). (***).

An alternative approach

The sequence described above – *presentation→ practice→ production* – is a well-tried approach to language learning which we know to be effective in average (i.e. non-privileged) classroom conditions. It should not of course be interpreted too literally: these stages are not *recipes* for organising all our lessons. In the first place, the actual 'shape' of a lesson will depend on a number of factors e.g. the amount of time needed for each stage. Activities at the production stage in particular can vary a great deal in length. Also, stages tend to overlap and run into one another e.g. some practice may form part of the presentation stage.

However, a more important point is that we need not follow this sequence too rigidly, especially at the post-elementary level, where the students already have a foundation of language. Since our main aim is to get the learners to communicate, we can reverse the sequence outlined above by first setting them tasks which will require them to communicate as best they can with the language at their disposal and then using the outcome as a way of deciding what new language needs to be presented and perhaps further practised. The diagram below shows how we can preserve an essentially three stage view of the language learning process (simply because this is a valuable way of looking at what goes on in the classroom) and yet take a more flexible view.

Presentation

Production   **Practice**
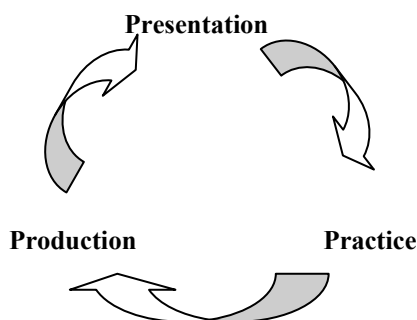
This model incorporates both the 'traditional' and 'progressive' view of the three stages of learning because we can move either from presentation to practice to production or from production to presentation to practice according to the level of the students, their needs and the type of teaching materials being used.

So far we have drawn attention to teacher roles that relate closely to the three stages of learning. However, there is one other key role that cuts across these three stages: namely, the teacher as *motivator.* Whatever you are doing in the classroom, your ability to motivate the students, to arouse their interest and involve them in what they are doing, will be crucial. Some key factors here will be your own 'performance' – your mastery of teaching skills, often dependent on careful preparation; your selection and presentation of topics and activities (it may often be necessary to *make* them interesting!) and, of course, your own personality, which in language teaching must be flexible enough to allow you to be both authoritative and friendly at the same time.

The learners

No class of learners is more than superficially homogeneous, however skilfully it has been formed on the basis of intellectual ability (real or imputed) and language aptitude (or, at the post-elementary level, language attainment). In many classes, especially in state schools, there are considerable differences not only in attainment but also in language skills, aspirations, interests, background and above all, personality. One question is, then: can you afford to ignore these differences? But then we can also ask: why *should* we want to? It is true that we cannot take these differences into account at every moment of the lesson but, unless teaching is viewed as a shaping process from start to finish, these differences need not be either to your disadvantage or to that of the class as a whole. They can in fact be made to *contribute* to language learning in the classroom. Of course we have to make some compromises: this is part of the problem of accommodating language learning to the classroom. Most probably this will be at the presentation stage, where you are selecting and presenting language material for the class as a whole. At the practice stage, too, some things will have to be done with the class as a whole, but here we can begin to take individual differences into account, through pairwork activities, for example. It is at the production stage, however, when the learners will be working for the most part in groups, that individual differences begin to play an important part. The activities at this stage not only *permit* the students to express themselves as individuals; to a large extent, they *depend* on this for their success.

In a few cases, because we know why students are learning a language, we are able to specify more or less exactly what they will need to learn both in terms of language and skills. For most students, however, language learning is a long-term process, with goals that cannot be satisfactorily defined. Often, when they *are* defined, goals are unrealistic, failing to take into account factors such as the amount of time available, classroom conditions (etc.). For many students the only reality is a final public examination with a probable emphasis not on skills that are truly needed but on those that can be measured through a written examination. A poor reward for many years of language learning! In such circumstances we must try to help the learners in the most realistic way possible. Ultimately, as we have acknowledged, they will need the language for the purpose of communication. How can this best be achieved? First, it is clear that they must master as much of the language system as they reasonably can: that is, its grammar, its vocabulary and its phonology. However, we must at the same time remember:

- that learning the language system is not an end in itself, only a means to an end;
- that the students do not need to work their way through the 'whole' system. There are many items which they will not need to learn in order to be adequate users of the language;
- that learning the language system need not and should not be boring. What we need are ways of giving the learners essential items of language economically and enjoyably.

Secondly, it is equally clear that the learners need opportunities to try out language for themselves: in other words, to experience within the classroom ways of communicating through the language. Here again we must keep certain points in mind:

- that communication in the classroom is not quite the same as 'real life' (although the classroom has its own reality). In a sense, everything is contrived or the result of things that have been contrived. This does not mean, of course, that the students will perceive it in this way or that they will benefit less from it.
- that communication will often seem a little less than adequate. The students are all the time learning the language as they try it out and, since we cannot postpone these activities which are essential in building up communication skills, we must be satisfied with what they *try* to do and overlook their shortcomings.

These two goals can be summed up by saying that we would like the learners to be able to use the language both with *accuracy* – which depends on mastery of the language system – and with *fluency* – which derives from experience of trying the language out for oneself. Our task, in trying to meet the needs of learners, particularly in non-privileged classroom conditions, is to strike a balance between these two goals so that, in the end, the learners are able to *communicate adequately*. In practice, getting this balance is not difficult. There are, on the one hand, activities which clearly contribute to a mastery of the language system and others, on the other hand, which are clearly designed to promote fluency. They belong, respectively, to the practice and production stages of learning, which, from the standpoint of the learners provide the necessary 'ingredients' for communicative adequacy. For we cannot communicate unless we know essential bits of the language system. Equally, these are no use to us if we do not know how to use them appropriately for certain

purposes. We can in the classroom, through different types of activities, provide an environment for both these kinds of learning.

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PRACTICE
……………………………………………
Whole class
and pairwork
activities to develop
mastery  of the
language
system                    Pair and group
                          activities to
                          develop fluency
              ……………………………………
                  PRODUCTION
```
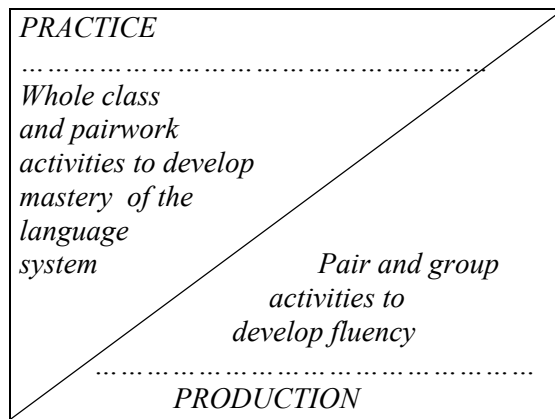
What we cannot know is how different learners will respond individually to these two types of activity and how they will benefit from them. Some, for example, are likely to need more practice in order to master the language system; others may 'pick up' the language system through fluency-type activities. Some, whatever we do, will turn out to be fluent but inaccurate communicators; others will communicate painstakingly and accurately but with modest fluency. Such diversity is typical of an average class of students. By taking a balanced approach we are at least trying to cater for the widest range of needs and, within the constraints of the classroom, giving the learners some opportunities to learn in the way best suited to themselves.

Second language acquisition research and task-based instruction
Peter Skehan

from Willis, J. and Willis, D.1996. *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching.* Heinemann

Contrasting notions of learning

The traditional approach to language teaching is PPP: presentation, practice and production. A focused presentation stage is followed by practice activities. These practice activities are designed to enable learners to produce rapidly and easily the material which has been presented. In the production stage opportunities are provided to use language freely and flexibly in the expectation that this will consolidate what is being learned and extend its range of applicability.

Such an approach has a number of advantages. First of all, it is very comforting for the teacher. The teacher is in charge of proceedings, and has a clear professional role which, in general, it is relatively easy to organize, since it requires the teacher to take the 'structure of the day' and do whatever is necessary to ensure that that structure is learned. The PPP approach comes 'bundled' with a range of techniques (Rivers 1968). These techniques enable the teacher to orchestrate classroom behaviour, ie to use a defensible methodology thought to promote learning, while at the same time maintaining authority, ie by using the bundled techniques to show to students exactly who is in charge. And these techniques are eminently trainable, with the result that the teachers have the reassurance of being able to apply what was the main part of their training while, as Hubbard et al (1983) point out, generations of trainers are simultaneously provided with gainful employment.

Second, the approach lends itself to accountability, since there will be clear and tangible lesson goals, which can then be evaluated. There is a belief that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught. The units used and the ordering of those units are therefore open to the teacher or syllabus writer to control (White 1988). The emphasis is on product, with the result that testing is generally straightforward, assessments of adequate syllabus coverage are non-problematic, and there is an easy route to the current buzzwords of 'quality assurance'.

Finally, there is the possibility of clear connection with underlying theory. Learning is focused on rules which are then automatized as a set of habits. This viewpoint seems to accord with a great deal of learning theory as described in Hilgard and Bower (1975) that was particularly influential in North America.

With the passage of time, however, these arguments have become less and less powerful. Two major reasons account for this. First of all, the evidence in support of such an approach is unimpressive. Levels of attainment in conventional foreign language learning are poor, and students commonly leave school with very little in the way of usable language (Carroll 1975; Stern 1983). In other words, most language learning is associated with relative failure. Only the gifted learners achieve impressive levels of proficiency (Skehan 1989). Comparative studies, similarly, suggest that up to now methodological factors have had relatively little impact on general levels of success (Stern 1983). For example, one of the most influential 'comparative' studies suggested that instruction has no effect on language learning. A comparison was made between a group of instructed learners (in an ESL context) and a group of uninstructed learners, matched for length of time in the target language country. The two groups did not differ in level of achievement (Fathman 1976). This led to the claim that it would be wiser, if one is going to the country where the target language is spoken, to spend one's money having a good time and interacting, rather than on language course fees!

But the second reason why PPP approaches are inadequate is equally powerful. The underlying theory for a PPP approach has now been discredited. The belief that a precise focus on a particular form leads to learning and automatization (that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught) no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology (Brumfit and Johnson 1979; Ellis 1985). Instead, the contemporary view of language development is that learning is constrained by internal processes. Learners do not simply acquire the language to which they are exposed, however carefully that exposure may be orchestrated by the teacher. It is not simply a matter of converting input into output.

Learners do, however, use the language they experience to make inferences, hypotheses and generalizations about the language system as a whole. In other words, we can be sure that learners will make use of the language they experience, but we cannot be sure *how* they will make use of it. These processes are hidden. They are not amenable to teacher control. But the teacher cannot ignore the impact of such processes or of the learner's contribution to learning, as we will see in the following paragraphs.

But the point must be made now that it is curious to see how resistant to change the PPP approach has been. Given that there is little *evidence* in its favour, or *theory,* it is surprising that it has been so enduring in its influence. To account for this, we must return to the points which were made regarding its convenience for the teaching profession. It has served to perpetuate a comfortable position for teachers and for teacher trainers. The attraction has been that to implement a PPP approach is simultaneously satisfactory for:
- the professional techniques a teacher is seen to command the power relations which operate within the classroom
- the role that teacher trainers have in perpetuating familiar, but outmoded, methodologies
- the accountability mechanisms which can be seen to operate.

Clearly these institutional reasons for continuing with such a teacher-focused approach have proved more influential than the approach's lack of success, its lack of theory and its lack of explicit concern with the learner.

However, a contrasting approach to language learning has emerged in recent years. This approach emphasizes the fact that language input, however provided, simply offers raw material on the basis of which learners may review their picture of the target language system. Second language acquisition (SLA) research (Ellis 1985, 1994) has established that teaching does not and cannot determine the way the learner's language will develop. The processes by which the learner operates are 'natural' processes. Teachers and learners cannot simply 'choose' what is to be learned. To a large extent the syllabus is 'built in' to the learner.

This applies to learner error also. Learners often go through a developmental sequence which does not go directly to the target form, but involves a number of errors on the way. And these errors are not simply the result of first language interference. They are often common to learners from a wide variety of L1 backgrounds. Finally there is variability in language performance (Lightbown 1985). Learners seem to have control of a particular system under some circumstances, perhaps when they have time for conscious processing, yet not under other circumstances. The notion of learning is, then, a very complex one. It is certainly not a smooth progression – the elements of the target language do not simply slot into place in a predictable order.

A major concern for SLA research has therefore been to take account of such changed views on language and to explore their implications for language teaching. Early accounts stressed that input was the key factor. The important thing for teachers was to provide high quality and 'tuned' language input. Learners should be exposed to language which was varied in form and which was at the edge of their comprehension – comprehensible, but only with careful processing. Given this, the learner's language system would automatically develop without language-focused instruction (Krashen 1985). This account, and in particular the implication that instruction is irrelevant, has been severely criticized (Swain 1985; Gregg 1984), and later researchers have emphasized the roles of instruction and interaction. Long (1983, 1988), for example, has demonstrated that instruction does have an effect (in spite of the findings of Fathman 1976, cited above) but that this effect is indirect and non-immediate. He argues it is important for learners to pay careful attention to language form in general. But this does not mean that we need to focus on a particular form in a particular lesson. So it *is* of importance to provide instruction for learners, but one should not expect to see the immediate and specific impact of any particular 'bit' of instruction on any particular 'bit' of language. Instructed learners, that is, make faster progress than uninstructed learners and reach higher levels of ultimate attainment. But they do this in their own way, following their own developmental sequence, not a sequence imposed by a teacher (Long 1988).

Findings such as these are two-edged. They respond to the critique (Fathman 1976) mentioned earlier in that they do demonstrate that instruction is, globally, a good thing. But what they do not do is clarify how instruction can be most effectively managed. This first phase of SLA research, which took us up to something like 1985, demonstrated clearly that a PPP approach is misguided, but did not give a very clear idea about what should be done instead. From around the mid-1980s, however, this situation was corrected

somewhat. Researchers began to look at what kind of classroom interaction would promote learning most rapidly and efficiently (Duff 1986; Doughty and Pica 1986). As teachers began to develop communicative activities in the classroom so researchers began to evaluate the effectiveness of those activities and towards the end of the 1980s a consensus began to emerge.

The teachers' concern for meaning-based activities and the researchers' investigation of patterns of interaction suggested a task-based approach to foreign language instruction. Tasks, in this viewpoint, are activities which have meaning as their primary focus. Success in the task is evaluated in terms of achievement of an outcome, and tasks generally bear some resemblance to real-life language use. So task-based instruction takes a fairly strong view of communicative language teaching. It is the task which drives the learner's system forward by engaging acquisitional processes (Long and Crookes 1993). It is the task which is the unit of syllabus design (Long and Crookes 1991). A PPP approach looks on the learning process as learning a series of discrete items and then bringing these items together in communication to provide further practice and consolidation. A task-based approach sees the learning process as one of learning through doing – it is by primarily engaging in meaning that the learner's system is encouraged to develop.

But if we regard these moves towards task-based learning as beneficial, in that they support an approach to teaching which avoids the problems of PPP, several problems nonetheless remain. To some extent, these problems are unavoidable, as the details of operating a relatively new approach to language instruction are worked out. But some of the problems are more deep-seated, and need to be addressed with care. The present chapter will examine the following questions relating to task-based approaches:

- What dangers are there in taking such a perspective?
- What goals should underlie the use of task-based approaches?
- How can tasks be sequenced?
- How can tasks be implemented...
    ...to minimize dangers?
    ...to achieve goals?
    ...to be adaptable to different contexts and different learners?

Dangers in task-based instruction
L1 speakers have developed a range of strategies to make meaning primary in their communication. These strategies can be for production or for comprehension (Skehan 1992). In each case, the language user is able to draw upon knowledge of the world, or of the immediate context, or of preceding discourse. This enables users to predict meanings, and therefore to reduce the need to focus on form, on grammar and lexis, without compromising the capacity to express or comprehend meanings. In production, incomplete utterances may be sufficient to keep the interaction moving along successfully, providing that the participants can draw upon other knowledge sources to fill in the gaps, so to speak. When we deal with L2 learners, the situation is not terribly different with respect to their capacity to express meanings contextually and resourcefully – the difference is largely that they have a lower level of language proficiency, and so, when faced with tasks to transact, may rely even more on strategic competence (Bachman and Palmer, in press) to express meanings. Examples of task transaction of this sort are commonplace, with words and gestures substituting for language in, for example, the transaction of information gap tasks (Bygate 1988). Speakers may know that they have not produced impressive language, either for complexity or accuracy, but if they expect that their interlocutors will understand anyway, then to fumble with form would be disruptive for the meanings which underlie a developing conversation. In comprehension, similarly, inferencing skills are required all the time (Wilson 1994) to work out what has not been explicitly stated: in the case of limited form, the inferencing skills simply have to work a little bit harder (Anderson and Lynch 1988).

But there is another factor which has importance in such communicative encounters. Although much of language teaching has operated under the assumption that language is essentially structural, with vocabulary elements slotting in to fill structural patterns, many linguists and psycholinguists have argued that native language speech processing is very frequently lexical in nature (Lewis 1996). This means that speech processing is based on the production and reception of whole phrases, units larger than the word (although analysable by linguists into words) which do not require any internal processing when they are 'reeled off'. Pressure comes from the need to produce and comprehend language in real time. The central issue is how to

plan (or decode) the linguistic and the conceptual content of messages while time is passing, and while other

members of an interaction might take the floor, steal turns, leave rooms empty, etc.

The claims that have been made in this area (Bolinger 1975; Pawley and Syder 1983; Widdowson 1989) are that to cope with the complex mental procedures that real-time language use requires, we use lexicalized modes of processing. We make use of prefabricated phrases and manipulate these in minimal ways to meet the demands of real-time communication. Using lexical units in this way requires less in the way of mental resources and so leaves us free to deal with other aspects of communication. The claim, in other words, is that we are able to store in our memories many chunks, such that the same lexical element may appear in several chunks (making for an inefficiently organized but rapidly usable memory system). In this way, the several chunks can, when required, be processed and produced faster and with greater ease.

Now, as native speakers, we engage in such lexicalized language processing continually, relying on phrases such as 'if you see what I mean', 'the thing is'. We can, if we choose, express our meanings with great precision. On the other hand we can operate to some extent by stringing together prefabricated phrases incorporating prefabricated meanings. We operate a sort of dual-mode system (Skehan, in press), in which we can shift from one mode to the other, as appropriate to communicative pressures, to the need to be precise, etc. When analysis and precision are important, we indulge them: when real-time communication is pre-eminent, we resort to more lexicalized forms.

We can now put these points together, and relate them to task-based approaches to instruction. Native speakers have a dual-mode system available to them. They can move with great flexibility between what Widdowson (1989) has termed accessibility and analysability. On the one hand under pressure of time language users rely on considerable background knowledge and shared assumptions. In these circumstances they can deploy a readily available and effective lexicalized system. On the other hand native speakers do have recourse, when necessary, to language structure, to a rule-governed system, and to the capacity to generate creative language. Given sufficient time and processing capacity they can use the system to tailor meanings more precisely.

The central problem for the foreign language learner, taught by task-based means, is that learners operate under pressure of time and under the need to get meanings across. This approach places a premium on communication strategies linked to lexicalized communication. These strategies provide an effective incentive for learners to make best use of the language they already have. But they do not encourage a focus on form. They do not provide an incentive for structural change towards an interlanguage system with greater complexity. The advantages of such an approach are greater fluency and the capacity to solve communication problems. But these advantages may be bought at too high a price if it compromises continued language growth and interlanguage development. Such learners, in other words, may rely on prefabricated chunks to solve their communication problems. But such solutions do not lead them to longer-term progress, even though they do lead to resourcefulness in solving such problems.

Three pedagogic goals for task-based approaches
The central point we are dealing with here is that the information processing systems available to language learners have limited capacity. Learners do not have the resources to attend to man things at the same time. We can distinguish between three goals and, as we will see later, achieving an effective compromise between these three goals is more likely to lead not only to the capacity to be an effective communicative problem solver but also to longer-term linguistic development. The three goals are accuracy, complexity/restructuring and fluency:
- Accuracy, fairly obviously, concerns how well language is produced in relation to the rule system of the target language.
- Complexity concerns the elaboration or ambition of the language which is produced. How far do learners rely on prefabricated phrases and established routines, and how far do they need to expand their language resources to meet the communicative challenge? The process which enables the learner to produce progressively more complex language is restructuring, ie a willingness and capacity, on the part of the learner, to reorganize their own underlying and developing language system, to frame and try out new hypotheses and then to act upon the feedback which is received from such experimentation.
- Fluency concerns the learner's capacity to produce language in real time without undue pausing or hesitation. It is likely to rely upon more lexicalized modes of communication, as the pressures of real-time speech production are met only by avoiding excessive rule-based computation (Skehan 1994).

It is fundamental for the designer of task-based instruction to engineer situations which maximize the chances that there will be a balance between these different goals when attentional resources are limited.

It is assumed here that these three goals are in some degree of mutual tension. We cannot give our full attention to each of these goals. This means that the pursuit of one of these goals can easily be at the expense of the others. To put this another way, it is assumed that it is desirable that the learner should not emphasize one of the goals for any extended period of time at the expense of the others, and that it is desirable, from a pedagogic point of view, to ensure that attention is divided between them as effectively as possible. In other words, it is important to arrange situations such that a balance is struck between syntactic and lexical modes of communication, on the one hand, and between conservative and ambitious syntactic use on the other. The first of these tensions balances restructuring and accuracy against fluency. The second tension balances restructuring against accuracy.

Sequencing tasks

These considerations now enable us to address, in a more principled way, the question of how tasks can and should be sequenced. The aim of effective sequencing is to ensure that the demands on language are of the right level. On the one hand excessive task difficulty should not lead the learner to rely on lexicalized communication. Such a reliance carries the danger of fossilization and may produce only routine solutions to communication problems, rather than tailor-made solutions. On the other hand, tasks should not be so easy that no extension of interlanguage development or consolidation is achieved. So it is of importance that some means is found for analysing the difficulty of tasks to enable a reasonable balance between the different goals.

Given that tasks, by definition, make meaning primary, but require language to enable meanings to be communicated, Skehan (1992, 1994) proposes that the difficulty of tasks can be analysed using the two general categories of language factors and cognitive factors. In detail, they can be broken down, in turn, into:

Language factors
- syntactic complexity and range
- lexical complexity and range

Cognitive factors
- *familiarity of material in the task,* ie does the task simply require learners to produce well-organized language from memory, in ready-organized chunks, or does it require new or less-organized material to be drawn on?
- *nature of material: abstract vs. concrete,* ie are real-world referents involved, or does the learner have to deal with generalizations, abstractions, etc, eg working with LEGO models compared to making judgements, or giving advice (Brown et al 1984)?
- *reasoning operations required,* ie does the task require a number of mental operations for its completion, with material involved needing to be transformed or manipulated in some way, eg collaborative solving of some sort of mental riddle (Prabhu 1987; Brown et al 1984)?
- *degree of structuring contained,* ie is there inherent structure because of the requirements of a task, eg a narrative in which beginning, middle and end are reasonably clear, or a description based on some clear underlying schema, eg a tour of a house?

In a study illustrating the operation of such factors with L2 speakers, Foster and Skehan (1994), for example, report that the three tasks of Personal Information Exchange, Narrative, and Decision Making/Choice lead to different levels of complexity in the language which is produced, and also have an effect on the level of accuracy attained. Similarly, Brown et al (1984) show that a range of different tasks, when analysed by categories such as those given above, produce a general ranking in terms of difficulty. Research studies such as these enable more principled decisions to be made as to which tasks to use with given groups of students to achieve the right level of challenge.

Implementing tasks

To approach task selection in this way is really to take on the familiar syllabus problem of sequencing, but with different sorts of units. The central goal is to have some idea of task difficulty so that the particular task which is chosen is appropriate for a given group of learners and pitched correctly at their level of competence. But simply to analyse and select tasks does not automatically determine task difficulty,

although it does constrain it. There are also a number of influences which may modify the difficulty that the task produces, and which may also lead to more productive language use. How a task is implemented can have a strong effect on task value. In this respect, it is worth noting, in passing, that we have moved on to consider issues of methodology. As it happens, some proponents of task-based approaches to instruction, eg Nunan (1989), regard the distinction between syllabus and methodology as no longer relevant since they regard tasks as containing their own methodology, ie a communicative approach to language teaching. The present section, by demonstrating how important implementational decisions are, will attempt to show that there may be life in this distinction yet!

We can distinguish between three stages in task implementation: pre-, during and post.

Table 1: Stages in task implementation

	Purpose of phase	*Examples*
Pre-task	Cognitive: ease subsequent processing load	*foregrounding, eg introduction to topic or task* *observing similar tasks* *doing similar tasks* *planning*
	Linguistic: introduce new forms into attention	*explicit teaching* *implicit teaching* *consciousness-raising*
During task	Manipulate pressure: influence processing balance	*speed, deadlines* *stakes* *number of participants*
	Calibrate: influence processing balance	*provide visual support* *introduce surprise elements*
Post-task	Retrospect: remind learners of importance of form	*public performance* *analyse* *consciousness-raise*

At the pre-task stage, two broad alternatives are possible: an emphasis on the general cognitive demands of the task, and/or an emphasis on linguistic factors. Attention is limited in capacity, and it is needed to respond to both linguistic and cognitive demands. If one looks at attention in this way, then engaging in activities which reduce cognitive load will release attentional capacity for the learner to concentrate more on linguistic factors. There is then a greater possibility of learners using strategies which are likely to extend the language system. Table 1 suggests that the cognitive activities which reduce cognitive load in this way are foregrounding; observing similar tasks; doing similar tasks; and planning.

All of these activities serve to prepare the learner for handling the cognitive demands that a task contains and enable the channelling of attentional resources towards language form. Foregrounding directs attention to the task topic and simply activates relevant knowledge that the learner already possesses, in the same way that this operates as a pre-reading or pre-listening stage (Grellet 1981). The learner, as a result, does not have to devote so much energy to the retrieval of information from long-term memory 'on-line' during task completion and, in addition, the task is likely to contain greater naturalness and authenticity. Observing and doing similar tasks allows the learner to draw more, during the actual completion of a task, on planned discourse (Ellis 1987), such that less time is spent wondering what task requirements are or how the task may need to be structured. As a result, attention can be directed to the more micro-activity of the detail of the language which is being used.

Finally, planning has considerable potential for easing the task of using attentional resources during task completion, ie of releasing people from having to think of too many things at a time when both composing thoughts and producing speech. Crookes (1989) reported that planning time was associated with greater complexity of syntax and a wider variety of lexis. Developing this line of research, Foster and Skehan (1994) confirmed the strong effects of planning time on complexity of syntax; variety of syntax; breadth of vocabulary; and, very strongly, the fluency and naturalness with which tasks were done. Skehan and Foster (1994) also report that, in contrast with Crookes' results, planning was associated with greater accuracy. However, this was a complex relationship (see Foster, Paper 12).

The second pre-task category from Table 1, linguistic preparation, refers to the amount of language work that takes place. This may involve an explicit focus on specific language forms believed to be useful in the coming task. It may be more indirect involving, for example, a consciousness-raising activity dealing with communication problems which may occur in the task. Whatever the language focus may be, two things must be borne in mind. First, there is no guarantee that the language worked on in the pre-task phase will be used in the task. Second, there can certainly be no guarantee that the language focus will lead to learning in the short term. One should regard any pre-task focus on language as a useful stage, but one which may not reliably lead to learning – only create the conditions under which it may occur. The intention is that this focus on language should come to fruition at some stage in the future. The impact of working with attention in this way, hoping that conditions have been set up which make the use of a particular form more likely, may take time to show itself.

So we see that there is a considerable range of useful things that can be done at the pre-task stage (which will come as no surprise to teachers). But there are also choices which can be made during task completion. The most important of these, probably, is simply to get the level of the task right, (as was discussed in the earlier section of task sequencing and difficulty assessment). But beyond this, Table 1 makes it clear that there are other ways in which the attentional demands of a task can be manipulated. This will probably have an effect on issues such as accuracy and complexity and on the extent to which attention is devoted to these goals as opposed to simply achieving task completion.

First of all, there are methods of influencing the communicative pressure for task completion. Let us look briefly at three factors which will affect language production:

- Pressure of time will force learners to make use of language that can be readily accessed rather than to attempt to create language in real time. There will be a minimal concern with accuracy and no incentive for learners to extend their existing language system.
- A pre-task focus on specific language forms may induce a particular mind set in learners. The more pressure is put upon learners (a) to conform to the use of certain structures (Willis 1993) and (b) to use these accurately, the less likely it is that learners will achieve acceptable levels of fluency and use 'cutting edge' and riskier language structures.
- The greater the number of participants there are in a task (Brown et al 1984), the greater the pressure on those transacting a task, and the greater the likelihood that fluency will predominate as a goal over accuracy and complexity/restructuring.

There are also methods of adjusting task difficulty during task completion. To make tasks easier, one can try to provide visual support to ease the processing load that is required. Many tasks have a potential visual component, and it is easier while doing such tasks to have access to some visual representation so that less information needs to be kept in working memory, and more shared assumptions can be presumed. In this way, more attentional resources can be used elsewhere. On the other hand, to make tasks *more* difficult, one can introduce surprise elements. Learners may think they have clear expectations about what will happen in a task, (and may have prepared accordingly), but unforeseen elements may emerge because they have been 'designed in' by the (Machiavellian) author of the task. In some ways, one could regard the approach to listening tasks taken by Anderson and Lynch (1988) as fitting in to this viewpoint, in that learners are provided with materials which contain deliberate discrepancies which are meant to provoke a more active approach to listening. In such cases, ie surprise elements or deliberate discrepancies, the intention is to avoid learners (of presumably reasonable proficiency) being able to take a comfortable strategy to tasks which are well within their capacity. The task designer believes that learners need to be stretched through the communicational demands of the task itself, and to have their communicational problem-solving competence extended.

Finally, one can consider how post-task activities can be used to promote pedagogic goals. The methodological cycle may incorporate a post-task public performance. This requires one of the groups or pairs who have transacted a task to repeat the task, or to engage in a similar task which is a development of the original. This extension of the initial task would be carried out not in the security of a small group, but publicly, in front of an audience (Willis and Willis 1988). For example, if the different members of a group produced several narratives, the post-task could be a justification of the best narrative which was produced. The 'audience' may consist of other students; the teacher; a video camera; or even, the other students while watching the video recording! In this way, learners doing tasks know that they may be called upon to do the

same thing in less private circumstances, and that when such a public performance is required, members of the audiences concerned may well focus on correctness and the complexity of the speech used. So, if, when actually doing a task, learners think ahead to the later possible public performance, they will not prioritize task-completion to the exclusion of other goals. In other words, without having to resort to explicit monitoring and correction, (which would defeat the object of using a task-based approach), the teacher can insinuate a concern for form into the way the task is being done.

When we examined the danger of approaching a task with the exclusive goal of completion we saw that a consequence could be that fluency is prioritized at the expense of accuracy and complexity. Obviously, pre-task activities (as discussed earlier) can reduce the chances of this happening. In the pressure to get a job done, one cannot control how learners will use their attentional capacities. If task focus predominates, (as, in a sense, it is very likely to, given that tasks, by their nature, emphasize meaning), problems may develop. Accuracy may suffer, and the language used may be restricted so that it is well within the learners' established repertoire. But if post-task activities are used regularly, and if learners know that they are to come, this may change the way that a task is actually transacted. It may lead learners to switch attention repeatedly between accuracy and restructuring and fluency. So post-task activities provide another means of inducing effective use of attentional resources during tasks, and of balancing the various goals that are desirable. These activities all have the goal of focusing attention more clearly on language itself, so that when subsequent tasks are done, the knowledge of what is to come, and the connection that has been made with such activities in the past, will alert learners to the need to attend to form during tasks.

We also need to consider what sort of actual operations will take place as part of the public performance. Students themselves, as when they were doing the main task, are likely to make meaning primary, with the result that careful procedures are necessary to bring the focus back to language. The first such procedure to consider is that of analysis. Clearly, a range of possibilities present themselves here. For example, teacher and students may consider the initial performance of a task and analyse it from the point of view of:

- accuracy
- complexity
- use of particular structures
- accuracy of particular structures

In each case, attention is directed to a targeted area, whose importance should therefore be raised for the learner. The value of the exercise is to demonstrate to learners that what they were doing in a task issusceptible to analysis. They will soon learn that in future they should give some attention to linguistic considerations. They need to be well prepared so that if their group is chosen for public performance that performance will stand up well to the process of analysis! So a focused post-task activity of this sort should linger in memory and have an impact on how future tasks are done.

But if post-task analysis is the high-profile method of directing attention, one can also consider less painful, and possibly, in the longer term, more enduring and self-directed methods. One might, that is, try to induce individuals to reflect on the nature of their performance on a routine basis. In other words, one would like to raise consciousness *after* a task is done just as much as before it. To do this, the individual learner has to be encouraged to reflect upon the language which has been used, to relate this language to the goals which have been established, and to consider the alternative ways of expressing meanings which have been used. At one level this requires the development of metacognitive skills on the part of the learner (O'Malley and Chamot 1990). At another, it requires a willingness to become involved with language itself, and to direct attention to this area so that emerging structures can be internalized more effectively (Hulstijn and De Graaf 1994).

Specific structures, individual learners and the role of teachers
We can now turn to two of the issues in task-based instruction that are most difficult to resolve: the extent to which one can target individual structures, and the extent to which instruction can be adapted to individual learners. In the first case we are dealing with the problem teachers face in deciding what impact instruction might have. In the second, we have the issue of how far teaching plans can be designed for learners in general, or, on the other hand, how far they need to be specific in order to take account of learner differences.

Earlier, we saw that the evidence on second language acquisition is not encouraging to the proposition that one can target and teach individual structures in whatever order a pedagogic or syllabus plan may decree. Teachers are constrained by the power of internal learner processes. Equally, it seems to be the case that an

unremitting diet of task-based instruction may not pressure effectively for underlying language change or language accuracy, since lexicalized language and strategy use may be proceduralized. This creates something of a problem, since neither focused instruction nor acquisition-oriented activities can be guaranteed to produce results. Yet teachers have to act, and to have a principled basis for how they plan their teaching. So it is unrealistic to expect predicted learning of specific items to occur. It may, however, be possible to arrange conditions to produce *probable* learning of a range of structures. It is possible for the language teacher to direct learners' attention to particular forms, and noticing forms is an important preliminary to their internalization. The three-phase approach to task implementation presented in Table 1 is intended to maximize the chances of achieving two goals: some degree of control of the quantity of pressure on attentional resources (cf calibrating task difficulty, planning effectively beforehand); and the manipulation of attentional focus (assuming that some degree of *spare* attentional capacity has been achieved) so that there is a focus on both accuracy and complexity of language (Van Patten 1994). If the approach is successful in these respects, then what one is doing, through instruction, is pushing certain aspects of language into prominence before the task, (pre-teaching, consciousness-raising), so that they will be more available during the task, (given the assumption of attentional capacity and disposition to focus on form). There is no guarantee that specific targeted language will be incorporated into actual language use, but these conditions make it more likely. This greater probability is magnified by the post-task activity which is almost totally directed towards a focus on form.

Whatever the focus on form, it does not follow that the language that is targeted will become part of the learner's repertoire as the result of a particular lesson. It is, however, more likely that over a block of time, targeted forms will be incorporated into a developing interlanguage system. The teacher, in other words, can be more forceful regarding his or her aims of what learners will notice, but cannot be certain that what is brought into attention and noticed is then internalized (Schmidt 1990, 1994) and becomes part of the learner's repertoire. But this approach does allow the teacher to design instruction such that there is a plan of what should be noticed within blocks of time allowing pedagogic goals to be set, but in looser terms than used to be considered feasible with structural syllabuses.

Finally, we need to consider how the individual learner can be accommodated to this approach to task-based instruction. We have seen that in organizing task-based approaches to instruction, there needs to be a balance between a focus on form (with this dividing, in turn, into accuracy and complexity), and a focus on communication (prioritizing real-time processing, lexicalized language and fluency). The goal of instruction is to contrive a better balance between these different forces. But what is relevant in this regard is that it has been argued that learners, too, can be regarded as oriented towards analysis or synthesis (Skehan 1986, 1989). Some learners are drawn to language-as-pattern, while others are more concerned with achieving the expression of meaning. Some learners, other things being equal, are likely to focus their attention on form, on 'cracking the code' because they enjoy analysing verbal material and finding patterns. Others are more inclined to treat the task of language learning as one of memory, with the need to assimilate a wide repertoire of functional expressions which can then be used as ready-made chunks. Then, in an ideal world, analytic learners would need to synthesize and integrate language, while the memory-oriented learners would benefit from analysing their wide repertoire of memorized language.

But now we need to consider the relationship between learner orientation and type of instruction. An optimistic perspective would suggest that matching learners and instruction, (eg analytic learners with an analytic methodology), will result in happy learners who will feel in tune with the instruction they are receiving since they are being asked to do what they are naturally good at. A pessimistic interpretation, though, would suggest that matching learner and instructional orientation in this way, rather than playing to strengths, simply consolidates weaknesses. Analytic learners will be allowed to concentrate on what they are good at, and, as a result, not have to deal effectively with areas of weakness, ie communication, and a fluency-orientation to language. Memory-oriented learners, similarly, will be confirmed in their attitude to language. They will achieve communication, but will not be required to explore areas which do not come naturally. They will not be obliged to focus on more complex forms to achieve a given communication, or on the need for accuracy. Similarly, one could regard 'mismatches' between learner orientation and type of instruction as good and bad: good, since they force learners to deal with areas of weakness, thus preventing the narrow perspectives on language and learning which would otherwise occur; bad, since learners might be alienated by the unfamiliarity of the methodological approach.

This account simply places even more responsibility upon the teacher in task-based approaches to instruction. What it means is that in addition to the processing constraints on balancing the goals of accuracy, complexity and fluency that have been covered already, the teacher has to try to engineer some degree of self-awareness on the learner's part so that there is avoidance of the danger of only playing to one's strengths and never addressing one's weaknesses. There is also the need, when designing, sequencing and implementing tasks, to take account of learner factors in deciding what emphases to place on the different aspects of instruction.

One can generalize here and say that the teacher, in a task-based approach, needs to command a significantly wider range of skills than in more structural approaches. These include:

- an ability to select and sequence tasks for supplementary activities
- the competence to organize, appropriately, pre- and post-task activities
- a willingness to adapt task difficulty during the actual task phase
- a sensitivity to individual differences and the capacity to adapt tasks to take account of differences in learner orientation.

Above all, though, what the teacher has to try to achieve is to channel the attentional focus of his or her learners, in such a way that it is more likely that they will balance the three goals of accuracy, complexity and fluency. In other words, the teacher has to contrive a situation in which learners are simultaneously alert to language-as-form and language-as-meaning. The teacher has also to switch attention between these two areas rapidly to ensure that the one does not lead to development at the expense of the other. An excessive focus on meaning during task completion runs the risk of learners becoming confined to the strategic solutions they develop without sufficient focus for structural change or accuracy. An excessive focus on form will not push learners to integrate language structure into effective on-going communication. So, if one is using a task-based approach to instruction, it is necessary to design into the materials ways in which attention is directed to form, to capitalize on learners' own ability to internalize new language when it is brought into the focus of their attention.

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A task-based approach to oral work
Peter Moor

In this article Peter Moor of International House London sets out to provide a working definition of what is meant by 'oral tasks', discusses what makes a task productive or useful for students and offers practical advice on how to make them work better in class.

Talk and Tasks
Silence, as anyone who has ever watched a late-night horror film will know, tends to be a bit scary; for EL teachers it seems particularly so, as silence so often indicates confusion, a lack of interest or, perish the thought, inactivity on the part of our learners. After all, students repeatedly proclaim that they 'want to speak' so it seems only fair that we give them maximum opportunities to do so. This has led to something of a *keep'em busy* and, above all, *keep'em talking* culture among ELT trainers and teachers, who have for so long regarded S.T.T. (Student Talking Time) as *a good thing* and, conversely, T.T.T. (Teacher Talking Time) as *a bad thing*. As I remember one trainee teacher admonishing his students "I wanna hear plenty of chatterin' right?". Well, yes, we do want to hear plenty of chattering, certainly, but the main questions should surely be *what is the point of this chattering* and *what should the students actually be chattering about*?

The danger is that student talk comes to be seen as good for its own sake – the students are talking, the teacher isn't, so learning must be taking place, the thinking goes. In certain cases it may be true that 'just talking' is enough, for example when learners have little or no opportunity to use English outside class, or are particularly reticent when they are in class. But there is a danger that we end up with of the kind of activity which one writer has tartly described as *'turn to the person next to you, whom you hardly know and like even less and talk about any damn thing that comes into your head while the teacher wanders around trying to look useful'*. Certainly students need to talk and will do this casually in the course of every lesson (one hopes in English) and in many cases in the coffee bar and outside the school. But in order for the students to obtain maximum benefit from oral activities, I believe that a more structured, task-based approach is useful.

An oral task, according to my definition, is a spoken activity which leads to some kind of recognisable outcome or product. This might be in the form of a mini-talk to be given in front of the class, reporting back to the class on a group discussion which has led to some sort of decision or agreement, or recording a spoken activity onto video or audio tape. The danger of the kind of activity described above is that it enables the learner to coast along using the language they already know, even, on occasions, simplifying it in order to get the message across quickly. A **task**, on the other hand, should encourage learners to stretch themselves linguistically.

What makes an oral task successful?
(Note: a list of possible oral tasks is included at the end of this article. See Appendix 1)
I believe a worthwhile oral task should have a number of characteristics:

1. Intrinsic interest
It should go without saying that an oral task should be something which is worth doing *in itself*. Of course, topics cannot be guaranteed to be of universal interest (as anyone who has tried to lead a heated debate on the topic of the environment of the environment will attest), but there are certain ones (personal anecdotes, favourite stories, discussions where there is a problem to be resolved , for example) which are tried and tested and seem to work well in most cases. Searching for gimmicky, 'different' things for students to talk about can be counter-productive. Although it is desirable for oral tasks to reflect real-life language use where possible (as is the case with relating an anecdote, for example), it is worth noting that the 'real-lifeness' does not itself guarantee interest: the familiar 'Solve the Murder' role-play, found in *Headway Upper Intermediate* (and just about everywhere else it seems) is utterly unrealistic, but in my experience usually engages students, whereas doing a role-play in a shoe shop is (for learners in an English-speaking

environment at least) more realistic, but can appear somewhat unengaging, unless they are particularly interested in shoes.

2. The existence of an outcome or end product

As mentioned above, the task needs to have some kind of end product which the students work towards. The problem with much oral interaction (particularly conversations in pairs which the learners do not report back on) is that a few minutes after the conversation we cannot remember what was said, or how, or what (if anything) was decided. If the task is recorded, however, (in the class, the laboratory, or by the students themselves at home), or if it is performed in public, there are two important implications.

Firstly, students should be able to measure their progress more accurately, particularly if they have a learner's cassette on which they record themselves speaking regularly. Students are often unaware of the progress they are making in their oral work because they cannot 'hear themselves'. The achievement of specific oral tasks provides more objective proof of whether or not they are actually progressing.

Secondly, using the language becomes more of an 'event'. Although giving talks in front of the class or recording ones voice may prove to be too daunting for some, I have found that the 'gentle application of pressure'✱ can produce surprising results. Students may actually welcome this kind of pressure and respond positively to it; it may even be a feature of their own educational system.

3. Provision for language input

Language input can come from a variety of sources at any point during the preparation stage as long as sufficient time is given over to it. As well as providing thinking time, preparation can involve asking the teacher about any language points which require clarification, rehearsing the task with a partner/the teacher or both (depending on time constraints), and receiving feedback which they can put into practice later. In this way language input might be obtained from a variety of sources, including the teacher, reference books and fellow students.

Unlike the 'Solve the Murder' role play mentioned before (which is clearly geared towards producing past modals of deduction), the oral task should not, in my opinion, be freer practice of a particular grammatical point which the teacher presented earlier. In task-based learning the language is geared to the task rather than the task to the language, and the onus for providing language input comes much more from the learner. If we ask the student to, for example, give a short presentation to the class about their favourite hobby, the actual language they will need to do this is only partly predictable; certainly you can bank on phrases like 'I'm keen on', or 'I spend a lot of time …ing' coming up, but many of the other items will be personal to the learner. Doing this task once with an Elementary class, two of the items the students needed to know were *lace making* and *bonsai trees* - not items usually found in Elementary coursebooks, but words which were, nevertheless, important to these learners and consequently more easily retained and used by them. There should, however, be a balance between tasks of this type which are personalised, and those which require no 'personal' input.

4. Opportunities for silence, spontaneous speech and prepared speech

Students need silence in order to reflect on what they need to say and how they are going to say it. This brings us back to that fear of silence I mentioned at the beginning of this article. Teachers used to a constant hubbub of comforting conversation may find recourse in the odd music tape here! Students will also feel less inhibited about asking questions if there is something to break the silence while they plan what they are going to say.

Just as a successful communicator will rehearse what they are going to say when making an important phone call, or a successful writer produce various drafts of her work before reaching a final end product, so giving time to plan their speech should produce more ambitious language. Too often teachers assume that learners have instant access to their thoughts and ideas - just a few moments to think before any speaking activity can make a lot of difference.

Case Study: An Oral Task In Action

To conclude, I would like to give a brief account of one task-based lesson which I have used, as this may help to clarify some of the points made earlier. The particular task I have chosen is simple, provides what I

hope is a clear illustration of the task cycle in action and (in case teachers care to try it for themselves) provides about 90-120 minutes of lesson for a few minutes of preparation. The task itself is to 'Tell the story of a childhood memory' and was done with a rather weak Early Intermediate multi-lingual group at IH London. The task cycle itself looks like this:

The basic task cycle

MODEL	PLANNING/REHEARSAL INPUT	TASK
This is a short model of the what the students will be asked to do later; it could be given by the teacher, or in the form of a listening or reading text.	The students are given time to plan **their** version of the task, either singly or in groups. During this time, students are encouraged to ask about how to say things or check if their language is correct. If time, the students may have a chance to rehearse their task (or supply a rough draft in the case of a written task) and seek peer or teacher correction.	Here the students "go public", either in speech or in writing, and present their task either in groups or to the rest of the class. The element of public performance of the task seems to give students a greater concern for accuracy at the planning stage.

Model
I gave the model myself based on one of my own childhood memories of falling off a bicycle, and how this helped my relationship with my class teacher. (Sorry, but further details are strictly between me and my Early Intermediate A class). Of course teachers could find some published material to fulfil the same aim, but it is less likely to be of real interest to their students. In planning and giving the model a few things are worth pointing out:

i)   I explained that I was going to tell them a story about my own childhood and that, later in the lesson, they would be asked to do something similar. This helped them to see the relevance of the story and to focus their attention on certain aspects of presentation.
ii)   I spent less time planning it than I would give to the students (no more than 5 minutes) and worked only from a piece of paper with brief notes and a few key words which I showed to the students. This helped convince them it wasn't necessary to plan every word. The talk should be no more than about 4 or 5 minutes.
iii) The telling of the story should not be too slick or polished as this may intimidate students. On the other hand, it should be interesting enough to hold their attention and spark ideas in their own minds.

Planning/Input/Rehearsal
On being told they will be asked to do something similar, students may often appear reluctant or daunted. I have found that patience and keeping a cool head can pay dividends here. Of course it may take time for the students to dredge up a childhood memory (or at least one that they are prepared to tell the others!) but nearly everybody comes up with something in the end. In order to structure their anecdote more I gave them the option of writing some key words on paper and suggested a way of organising the anecdote into five sections: a short statement of what the story will be about; an introduction to the characters, setting etc.; the main event; how it was resolved; and 'the moral'✷. It was up to the students to decide whether or not to use this structure. I gave the students a maximum of 30 minutes to plan their anecdotes - on reflection this was probably too long as some finished early. During this time they were free to ask me about how to say particular things or to check if things were right. Predictably, some students were very concerned with accuracy and wanted to check everything, while others wanted to get on with telling their story almost immediately. Dealing with the students' questions can be quite taxing for the teacher; among questions I was asked by this particular class were: *'Can I say mudballs?'* (if you can have snowballs, why not!); *'How do I say when animal crosses road and car goes...*(sound effects: splat!)...*the cat was...*?' ('run over' seemed to be the appropriate word here). As part of the rehearsal students were then able to try out their talk with a partner or me. The listener in each case was asked to provide feedback, particularly in pointing out aspects of the story which were unclear or confusing, rather than listen for individual errors.

Task

Once the half hour had elapsed it was time for the students to go public and give their talk to an audience. I chose on this occasion to have a number of students give their talk to the whole class, rather than tell their stories in small groups, and then select the best, partly to see what effect this 'pressure' would have on individuals. My entirely random selection of students meant that a learner I shall call *Yumiko*, who had seemed very shy in the first few lessons, was chosen to do the first talk. Despite much embarrassment and nervous giggling, she acquitted herself well, with a touching, if rather morbid, recollection about how the apparently constant premature deaths of her childhood pets led to her becoming a medical student. I was surprised by a number of points:

i) In her diary Yumiko noted that *'When I spoke at front of class I felt stress, pressure. It was good experience for me'*. Here at least was one student who seemed to respond well to the 'gentle application of pressure'.

ii) Her language was far more ambitious than anything I had heard her produce previously (including the phrasal verb *run over*, the significance of which now became clear to me).

iii) In a public situation this student was far more willing to reveal information which was quite personal to her, and did not 'freeze' as one might have expected.

Obviously, it would be wrong to read too much into what was one individual case, but this did bring home to me what seem to me to be some of the most important features of applying this model of task-based learning to oral work:

- Firstly, that if the learners are not coming up with ideas and language **immediately**, the teacher should not panic. Planning and reflection time are crucial if learners are to produce a worthwhile end product, and too often I feel that I have not allowed them enough of this.
- Secondly, the product of a task-based lesson will never be the same with two different classes. I have done the Childhood Memory Story with students (and trainees) in a variety of different contexts, and because the stories have never been the same, I have never got bored with it.

Finally, students (particularly in the context of IH London) frequently complain about lack of challenge in lessons, which may be a response to the fact that when they are already familiar with the language that is being 'presented', they feel that they 'know it' (whether or not they can use it correctly and appropriately!). With a task-based lesson it is up to the learner how challenging the lesson is, since it is she, rather than the teacher, who decides what she wants to say. That is probably worth several minutes of silence.

Part 2:Implementing a task-based approach: who, ME??

1. *'I think it's just as valid to decide what the students want or need to do and provide them with the language to do it, as it is to select a particular language point for presentation and then look for ways to practise it.'*
2. *'At certain points in the lesson, I prefer to "go with the flow" and respond to language students produce or ask for, rather than have a pre-ordained set of language which they're going to learn.'*
3. *'I/my students like a "hands-on" approach in lessons, giving short talks, conducting surveys and questionnaires, designing posters or texts to be stuck on the wall, writing or recording class magazines, videos etc.'*

If you find yourself agreeing - at least in part - with any of the statements above, you may have a task-based approach to teaching, at least *some* of the time! Point *1* above highlights what is, to me, a fundamental tenet of task-based learning, one which sharply differentiates it from the Presentation and Practice approach: that the language flows from the *task* and not vice-versa. Not even in my wilder moments would I suggest that we abandon grammatical/ lexical syllabuses altogether – it's my belief that a task-based approach should boperate **alongside** the comforting familiarity of presentation and practice of grammar, vocabulary and functions, as a contrasting but necessary complement to it.

In a task-based lesson, Point *2* refers to the stage where students have time to plan, prepare and possibly rehearse their task, and are encouraged to ask for language and seek feedback as they do so. This stage is

essential if the students are to stretch themselves linguistically and not just use any old language to achieve the task (the problem of so-called strategic competence was discussed more fully in my previous article). The approach seems genuinely learner-centred in that it makes greater use of learner-generated language, but it can provide some bizarre moments, as when a French student asked 'How do I say zis?'' and proceeded to impersonate a mussel - a tricky little vocab item of vital importance in describing her local culinary speciality. It does however provide teachers with useful training in dealing with the unexpected (a welcome change to the still distressingly prevalent "I am going to teach you these 12 items of furniture vocabulary whether you need them or not" approach) and I have a feeling that a learner will remember an item she has asked for more readily than one which the teacher has chosen for her.

Point *3* reflects the now well established popularity among teachers of getting students to *do things* rather than sit on their hands. The 'hands on' approach is one that seems very widespread nowadays if classroom walls are anything to go by. At the end of the lesson, many students (not all, but a significant number) like to feel they've **done** something, and this is a trend which I feel lends itself particularly well to a task-based approach.

Finding task-based materials
But whether you are a convert to task-based teaching or merely a curious onlooker, you are confronted with the need for actual task-based materials to take into the classroom. So where are these materials? Scan the back cover of any mainstream ELT textbook and you can be sure to find certain things: that the grammar sections will be 'clear' and 'step-by-step'; the topics will be 'motivating', 'up-to-date' and, most likely, 'universal'. Interestingly, you will also increasingly find the word *task*, although what is meant by this is not always entirely clear - does it refer to just *anything* you do in the classroom or to something more specific? A quick look at a couple of books currently in use in IH London, reveals their tasks to be 'highly original', 'involving', 'stimulating', 'relevant', 'stimulating' *again* (no wonder our students look tired), and 'enjoyable'. (*Thinks... One day a rogue ELT editor will describe the grammar section of the book as 'impenetrable', the topics 'frankly tedious and the approach to vocabulary as 'haphazard'. It will probably sell by the million).* What you will **not** find at present is a book which describes itself as "task-based". There could be a variety of reasons for this, one of which might be that no-one seems to really know what the term means. However, this does not mean that a teacher looking to implement a task-based approach needs to sit up till the small hours preparing lessons from scratch. Mainstream ELT course books can provide a rich source of task-based material if you are prepared to adapt what is on the page and use a little imagination. In the rest of this article, I will look at four ways in which a teacher can adapt published materials to a more task-based approach. Before doing this it might be useful to recall the basic cycle which I proposed in my previous article *(see chart below)*.

1. From language practice to task
ELT textbooks nowadays usually have plenty of good ideas for practising specific language points - sometimes so good that they can almost overshadow the language points themselves. A familiar case in point is the old favourite 'Alibi' game - a sure-fire winner and usually much more successful than the actual presentation of past continuous and past simple. However, for such activities to be seen as *tasks* rather than further freer language practice, some adaptation and supplementation may be needed, particularly since the MODEL and PLANNING/ INPUT/REHEARSAL stages may be lacking. Often upgrading language practice into a *task* is a question of providing a model, giving the students time to plan, and making the final task into more of an event. Look out for language practice activities which can be expanded in this way: *Language in Use Intermediate* (1) features an engaging idea for freer practice of superlative adjectives - students are asked to think who or what they would nominate for a series of awards (such as "Musician of the Year", "Best Night Spot" etc.) and choose a winner: although intended as freer practice of language, it is obvious that the potential of the activity would be more fully realised - and the activity would take longer! - if the students were given a model of a nomination speech (which the teacher could do live, or record prior to the lesson), and the students were given time to plan what they were going to say and check for linguistic and factual correctness.

Other ideas
There are a number of classic activities, like alibi, which always seem to work and yet always seem to be linked to the practice of a particular structure rather than left to stand alone, recognised as having enough intrinsic interest in themselves to be tasks and not just language practice. Drawing and verbalising a life-line

representing your personal biography is a good example of a task which can easily proceed from a teacher model to a student-centred stage, where there is ample opportunity for the teacher to feed in language as the students request it in preparing their own biographies, and where there is clear product at the end.

2. Fluency activities into tasks

Some of the questions designed to create interest in lessons with a receptive skills focus, particularly those which begin *'What do you know about...'*, can lead to unanimated discussions of up to fifteen seconds with some classes: on other occasions, however, it has often struck me that this lead-in/interest-creation chat at the beginning was actually the best part of the lesson, making the actual text come as a distinct let-down, leading me, in some cases, to abandon it altogether. Look out for sections labelled 'Speaking' or 'Discussion' which can be adapted to the a task-based model. One simple way of extending an activity where the students are asked to talk about questions like "What are the age laws for smoking/alcohol etc. in your country? Do you agree with them?" (as in *Pre-Intermediate Choice* (2)) is first to briefly answer the questions yourself, thereby providing a model for students of what they will have to do, then to give them some time to collect their thoughts, perhaps make some notes and ask you for useful words and phrases, before comparing in pairs/groups. You might finally choose one or two students to "go public" in front of the whole class. More ambitious discussion lessons seem to benefit from students being recorded or having to present some kind of public summary at the end.

Other ideas

In a number of books, for example *Reflections* (3), students are asked to write a class newspaper, or record a short film or audio tape. Although it may take longer than a single lesson for the students to produce their final product, this is a good example of how a task can go beyond mere 'fluency' practice and be geared towards a product which students can actually take home with them. The language that the students will require is also highly unpredictable, making the input/planning stage particularly important. Examples done with previous classes can provide a model here, and the admonition "I'm sure you can do better than this" can be quite effective!

3. Texts as models for written tasks

The use of reading texts as models for a subsequent writing activity is a familiar one. Clearly not all texts can easily be imitated by students (the extract from Shakespeare's 'As You Like It' in *Headway Upper Intermediate* (4) as a model for the students to write twenty-eight lines of their own blank verse on 'Seven Ages of Man', for example). But there are many which are suitable. One example is the 'Tour of your country' idea. A suitable model text is available in *Think Ahead to First Certificate* (5); the text on 'Australia in 14 days' is only used for comprehension work, but it is an excellent springboard for students (particularly in a multi-lingual class with students working in nationality groups for once) to produce a 5-day tour of their own country for other members of the class. Each group produces a map of their country (an atlas can prove useful here for the less geographically-gifted students) with a suggested itinerary and a short text about the places to visit - this usually produces lively discussion and awakens intense regional rivalries which should (if possible) be resolved in English. The tours can then be presented to the rest of the class as a whole, or in smaller groups. With monolingual groups, the task works better if the students are given either a region of their country other than the place where they are studying, or they are given a specified group to design the tour for (the teacher's family for instance).

Other ideas

Less ambitious reading text-types which might lend themselves to students producing a parallel text are questionnaires and quizzes. There is a very simple example in *Headway Elementary* (6) which could be used as a model at almost any level - just bring in a couple of encyclopaedias, do the quiz quickly, then tell the students to produce a similar quiz for another class of the same level in the school and get ready to feed in language as requested. There is often scope for incorporating other elements from reading texts in order to produce a more effective written task. Use can also be made of the visual elements of a text, such as use of colour, layout, organisation and pictures - all these can be exploited to give the final product a more satisfying appearance.

Once you have built up a collection of previous written tasks from students (such as the 5-day tours of a country mentioned above, which have a strong intrinsic interest and are often visually attractive) these can be used as models for future students to work from.

4. Ready-made tasks

There are several books I have used time and time again as sources for ready-made tasks which seen to require little or nothing in the way of adaptation to produce a task-based lesson. Here is a short selection:

- Many of the 'English into Action' sections at the end of each unit of *Pre-Intermediate Choice* (7) provide excellent ideas for task-based lessons: particularly in line with the approach outlined above are 'Conducting a Survey about Relationships' (p16) and 'Talking about a hobby' (p38).
- *The Non Stop Discussion Workbook* (8) provides some good oral tasks for Intermediate and Advanced students, but supplementation is needed in terms of models.
- *The Q Book* (9), although ostensibly a book for practising questions, contains a great variety of questionnaire/survey activities which can be extended into tasks.

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✸The phrase used by **Batston, R** in his talk *Teachers' Grammar and Learners' Grammar: Bridging the Gap,* given at IH Teachers' Centre, March 1995

✸See **McCarthy, M**: *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers,* C.U.P. 1991

(1) Doff & Jones (1994) *Language In Use: Intermediate* (Cambridge) p62

(2) Mohamed & Acklam (1993) *The Pre-Intermediate Choice* (Longman) p87

(3) Farthing & Pulverness (1993) *Reflections*: The Macmillan Short Course Programme, Level 3 (Macmillan) p63

(4) Soars & Soars (1987) *Headway: Upper Intermediate* (OUP) p11

(5) Naunton (1997) *Think Ahead to First Certificate* (Longman) p98

(6) Soars & Soars (1993) *Headway Elementary* (OUP) p92

(7) Mohamed & Acklam (1993) *The Pre-Intermediate Choice* (Longman) pp16,38

(8) Rooks (1981) *The Non-Stop Discussion Workbook* (Newbury House)

(9) Morgan & Rinvolucri (1988) *The Q Book* (Longman)

Appendix: A list of oral tasks suitable for Intermediate level
- Interview and introduce a fellow student to the rest of the class
- Tell a story about a childhood memory
- Choose the best candidate for a job and prepare a short statement
- Make a radio programme, perhaps on a particular theme such as entertainment, reviews etc.
- Explain a list of social DOs and DON'Ts for visitors to your country
- Give a short talk about an object which is special to you, or something you would particularly like
- Tell a story to the class from a menu of possible sources (folk tales, personal anecdotes, résumé of a short story etc.)
- A radio phone-in where a panel of experts give advice to callers

Some misconceptions about communicative language teaching
Geoff Thompson

Although communicative language teaching is accepted by many applied linguists and teachers as the most effective approach among those in general use, there are still a number of misconceptions about what it involves. This article sets out four of the main misconceptions, discusses why they have arisen, and why they can be so described. In doing this, the article attempts to define some important characteristics of communicative language teaching as it is practised at present.

Introduction
Whatever the situation may be as regards actual teaching practices, communicative language teaching (CLT) is well established as the dominant theoretical model in ELT. There have been recurrent attempts to take stock of CLT and to identify its characteristic features (e.g. Richards and Rodgers 1986), and in areas such as teacher training the principles of CLT are largely treated as clearly understood and accepted (see, for example; Harmer 1991 (1)).

Despite this apparent unanimity, many teachers remain somewhat confused about what exactly CLT is. At the more abstract end, there is general agreement that CLT involves an emphasis on communicating by means of the foreign language (the way in which this idea is expressed tends, as here, to be so vague as to make it difficult to disagree with); at the practical classroom end, CLT is strongly associated with a number of particular activity types, such as problem-solving and pair work. But in the middle ground, the area where theory meets practice, things become less certain. For example, what exactly does CLT set out to teach? Is there such a thing as a communicative language syllabus? If so, what does it consist of? Is it simply a notional-functional syllabus under a new name? Or does CLT only exist as a methodological approach, a way of helping learners to practise the skills needed to put their knowledge of the foreign language into use?

In working with colleagues around the world, with teachers and trainees on MA and initial TEFL courses, and with modern languages teachers in the UK, I am constantly struck by the very disparate perceptions they have of CLT. There are, I think, a number of reasons for the confusion, not least the fact that CLT has developed extremely rapidly over the past fifteen or so years and has now moved a considerable distance from its original practices (though without substantially changing its original principles).

I believe that an 'orthodox' and practical form of CLT has emerged, not only in the writings of applied linguists such as Littlewood (1992) and McDonough and Shaw (1993) but, perhaps more importantly, in mainstream language textbooks, such as the Headway series and the New Cambridge English Course, which represent good contemporary practice. However, certain misconceptions about CLT continue to survive, making it difficult for many teachers to see clearly what is happening and to identify the useful innovations that CLT has brought. A surprisingly large number of teachers that I have spoken to criticize or reject CLT for what seem to me to be the wrong reasons. In this article, I would like to set out the four misconceptions that I most frequently hear voiced, discuss why they have arisen, and explain why I think that they are misconceptions.

Misconception 1: *CLT means not teaching grammar*
This is the most persistent – and most damaging – misconception. It must be admitted, however, that there are good reasons for its existence. There have been a number of applied linguists who have argued strongly and in theoretically persuasive terms that explicit grammar teaching should be avoided. One line of argument is that grammar teaching is impossible because the knowledge that a speaker needs in order to use a language is simply too complex (Prabhu 1987). Another is that grammar teaching is unnecessary because that knowledge is of a kind which cannot be passed on in the form of statable rules, but can only be acquired unconsciously through exposure to the language (Krashen 1988).

For most teachers, the effects of these ideas have been felt through their practical application in language textbooks and syllabuses. In the early days of CLT, pioneering textbooks such as *Functions of English* included no explicit teaching of grammar (although *Functions of English* was aimed at students who had typically already been through a more conventional grammar-based course). Syllabuses were developed (and are still in force in many places) which expressed the teaching aims purely or predominantly in terms of what the learners would learn to do ('make a telephone call to book a hotel room'; 'scan a written text to extract specific information'), and which ignored or minimized the underlying knowledge of the language that they would need to actually perform those tasks.

However, the exclusion of explicit attention to grammar was never a necessary part of CLT. It is certainly understandable that there was a reaction against the heavy emphasis on structure at the expense of natural communication. It is worth looking back with hindsight at textbooks such as *New Concept English*, in its day – the late 1960s and the 1970s – enormously and deservedly popular, to see how narrow and constraining the approach was in many ways. But there have always been theorists and teachers pointing out that grammar is necessary for communication to take place efficiently, even though their voices may for a time have been drowned out in the noise of learners busily practising in pairs. This is such self-evident common sense that, from the vantage point of the present, it seems odd that it should ever have been seriously questioned.

Learning grammar through CLT: a retrospective approach
Of course, the question of how learners are to learn the necessary grammar remains. Although, in the consensus view of CLT that I have mentioned, it is now fully accepted that an appropriate amount of class time should be devoted to grammar, this has not meant a simple return to a traditional treatment of grammar rules. The view that grammar is too complex to be taught in that over-simplifying way has had an influence, and the focus has now moved away from the teacher covering grammar to the learners discovering grammar.

Wherever possible, learners are first exposed to new language in a comprehensible context, so that they are able to understand its function and meaning. Only then is their attention turned to examining the grammatical forms that have been used to convey that meaning. The discussion of grammar is explicit, but it is the learners who are doing most of the discussing, working out – with guidance from the teacher – as much of their new knowledge of the language as can easily and usefully be expressed. Behind this strategy lies the recognition that the learners may well have 'understood' more about the language than they – or the teacher – can put into words. If the new language were introduced in the form of an apparently all-embracing (but actually pitifully incomplete) rule from the teacher, this would convey the unspoken message that the learners had nothing further to understand about the language point and simply needed to practise it. If, on the other hand, talking about grammar is postponed until the learners themselves can contribute by bringing to light what they already in some sense 'know', the unspoken message is that the process of acquiring the new knowledge is one which takes place inside them and over which they have some control. Indeed, with the recent emphasis on training learners to learn efficiently, this message is likely to be explicitly discussed.

This 'retrospective' approach to grammar is a natural development from the original CLT emphasis on viewing language as a system for communication; it also takes into account the fact that learning is likely to be more efficient if the learners have an opportunity to talk about what they are learning. Ellis (1992) argues that while looking explicitly at grammar may not lead immediately to learning, it will facilitate learning at a later stage when the learner is ready (in some way that is not yet understood) to internalize the new information about the language. The retrospective approach also has the advantage that, if the lesson is conducted in English, it encourages the learners to communicate fairly naturally about a subject that is important to what they are doing: the language itself.

Misconception 2: *CLT means teaching only speaking*
Again, there are reasons why this misconception is fairly widespread. CLT was influenced, as earlier approaches had been, by the general movement in linguistics towards giving primacy to the spoken language. In addition, a focus on encouraging learners to communicate leads naturally towards thinking about what they will need to communicate about, and why; this is part of the wider tendency in CLT to look beyond the classroom. For many learners, the main uses that they are likely to make of the language are oral: getting around in the foreign country if they visit it, talking to visitors from that country, etc. Even if they are unlikely in reality to use the language outside the classroom, learners are often willing to suspend their

disbelief and act as if they might need the language for personal contacts. (2) Therefore, the emphasis is likely to be on speaking and listening skills.

A further reason for this misconception is that CLT stresses the need for the learners to have sufficient practice, of an appropriate kind. This is often translated, especially by teacher trainers, into the principle that TTT (teacher talking time) is to be reduced, and STT (student talking time) is to be maximized – chiefly by putting students into pairs and telling them to talk to their partners. At the same time, while the slogan 'TTT bad, STT good' almost certainly represents a useful (though perhaps rarely attained) goal for most teachers, it is also important to recognize that communication does not only take place through speech, and that it is not only the speaker (or writer) who is communicating. Communication through language happens in both the written and spoken medium, and involves at least two people. Learners reading a text silently to themselves are taking part in communication (assuming that the text has something of relevance to them) just as much as if they were talking to their partner.

No doubt this seems too obvious to be worth saying; and yet I have heard the complaint that CLT ignores written language surprisingly often, from experienced teachers as well as trainees. Learners are probably likely to talk more in a successful CLT class than in classes using 'traditional' approaches; but a glance at recent mainstream textbooks will immediately show that they are also likely to be reading and writing a more varied range of texts than those in more traditional classes. CLT involves encouraging learners to take part in – and reflect on – communication in as many different contexts as possible (and as many as necessary, not only for their future language-using needs, but also for their present language-learning needs). Perhaps, rather than student talking time, we should be thinking about the broader concept of student communicating time (or even just student time, to include necessary periods of silent reflection undistracted by talk from teacher or partner).

Misconception 3: *CLT means pair work, which means role play*
The misconception here is not so much in the emphasis on pair work itself as in the narrowness of the second assumption concerning the ways in which it is used. Role play can certainly be a useful technique – though personally my heart sinks a little when I see yet another instruction along the lines: 'One of you is the shopkeeper/hotel manager/doctor's receptionist; the other is the customer /guest /patient. Act out the conversation'. However, pair work (and group work) are far more flexible and useful techniques than that suggests.

One of the constant themes of CLT is that learners need to be given some degree of control over their learning (since language is a system of choices, the learners must be given the opportunity to learn how to make choices). Looking back, again with hindsight, at popular textbooks of even the fairly recent past, such as *Kernel Lessons Intermediate* from the 1970s, it is immediately noticeable that the content of what is said by the learners is controlled at every point by the book: make a question using these prompts; answer these questions about the text; read this dialogue, and so on. Even when pair work is used, the learners never choose what to say, they simply work out how to say what they are told to say. (3)

The use of pair work is a physical signal of some degree of control and choice passing to the learners; but that needs to be complemented by real choice – which role play, particularly at simpler levels, may not encourage as much as other uses of pair work. It is helpful to start from considering how learners working together can actually help each other. They can provide each other with a relatively safe opportunity to try out ideas before launching them in public: this may well lead to more developed ideas, and therefore greater confidence and more effective communication. They can also provide knowledge and skills which may complement those of their partners: this can lead to greater success in undertaking tasks.

Alternative uses of pair work
Instead of just seeing pair work as a useful follow-up, a way of getting everyone practising at the same time after a new language point has been introduced, we can see it as a potential preliminary stage to any contribution from the learners. They can work together to do a grammatical exercise, solve a problem, analyse the new language structures in a text, prepare a questionnaire for other members of the class, or agree on the opinion they want to present to the class. Once pair work is seen as a preparation as well as (or more than) an end-point, the range of possibilities increases dramatically. It is less a question of: 'When in my lesson do I get to the freer practice stage so that I can fit in a role play in pairs?' and more a question of

'Is there any reason why I can't use pair work as part of whatever I'm planning to do now?' (Of course, one reason for not using it may be simply variety – even the best techniques can be overused.)

Misconception 4: *CLT means expecting too much from the teacher*
It is perhaps cheating to label this a misconception, since there is a great deal of truth in the argument – voiced most persuasively by Medgyes (1986) – that CLT places greater demands on the teacher than certain other widely-used approaches. Lessons tend to be less predictable; teachers have to be ready to listen to what learners say and not just how they say it, and to interact with them in as 'natural' a way as possible; they have to use a wider range of management skills than in the traditional teacher-dominated classroom. In addition, non-native speakers of English probably need a higher level of language proficiency – or rather, a different balance of proficiency skills – to be able to communicate with ease, and to cope with discussing a broader range of facts about language use than they are accustomed to. Perhaps most importantly, teachers may have to bring to light deeply-buried preconceptions about language teaching (mostly based on their own language learning experiences at school and university), and to compare them openly with alternative possibilities that may be less familiar but perhaps make better pedagogic sense.

In some ways, there is no answer to these points. It is certainly difficult, for example, to ignore the charge that CLT is an approach developed by and for native speaker teachers. Nevertheless, the label of misconception is perhaps valid for two reasons. Firstly, the points are presented as defects of CLT, as reasons for rejecting it, but they can equally well be presented as reasons for embracing it. Teachers have the opportunity to re-evaluate their beliefs and practices; they have an incentive to develop their skills; they are encouraged to enjoy themselves in their work, to avoid dull repetition of the same predictable set of materials, activities, and answers year in, year out. This view may appear unduly optimistic to some, but there seems no reason to assume that the majority of teachers do not welcome such opportunities – if they are recognized as such.

Secondly, the extent of the demands can easily be exaggerated – indeed, this misconception may sometimes be fostered by teachers who may have other reasons for not wishing to change their current practices. Even Medgyes (1986), in order to make his point more forcefully, ends up by describing as the CLT norm an unrealistically superhuman teacher that few CLT teachers would recognize. It can, admittedly, be difficult to use a communicative approach if you are obliged to use resolutely uncommunicative materials; but that is increasingly not the case. Many textbooks now provide very practical, straightforward CLT guidelines and activities which place few demands on the teacher beyond a willingness to try them out with enough conviction. The majority of non-native teachers of English that I have worked with have a high enough level of proficiency to cope fairly easily with the required shift towards more fluent and less pre-planned use of the language. And it seems very odd for language teachers to argue that listening responsively to what other people say is not part of their job – perhaps teachers who do argue that should be thinking of going into politics instead?

Conclusion
Given the fairly dramatic change in attitudes not only to language but also to learners and teachers that came with the development of CLT, it is not surprising that it has taken some time to work out the implications for all aspects of the teaching/learning process. It is, however, worrying that many people's perceptions of CLT seem to have got stuck at its early stage of questioning and experimentation (admittedly sometimes over-enthusiastic), before some of the key issues were fully resolved.

CLT is by no means the final answer – no doubt the next 'revolution' in language teaching is already under way somewhere. But whatever innovations emerge, they will do so against the background of the changes brought about by CLT, and will need to accommodate or explicitly reject those changes. Certain of them are too important to lose: the concern with the world beyond the classroom, the concern with the learner as an individual, the view of language as structured to carry out the functions we want it to perform. In order to ensure that these changes are not pushed aside in future developments, it seems essential to attempt to clear away misconceptions that might otherwise be used to damn them and CLT as a whole.

Notes
1 Interestingly, Harmer rejects the term 'communicative' for the approach outlined in his book. He prefers to call it a 'balanced activities approach', because of the inclusion of controlled, non-communicative activities as an integral part of

learning. However, since the approach takes communicative activities as the point towards which the other activities are designed to lead, there seems no reason not to accept Littlewood's (1992) term 'pre-communicative' for the controlled activities, and to keep 'communicative approach' as the general term.

2 An alternative approach to setting up goals for language learning is to hold out as the final destination some kind of abstract mastery of the language (perhaps with a structure-oriented examination as the final validation). This runs counter to the basic principles of CLT because it treats the language merely as a classroom-bound object of study, a pedagogic dead-end. Another alternative, which does provide an outside, authentically communicative goal, is to teach the language as a means of preparing to read literature. This is still accepted as the main aim in many university courses in particular. However, it represents a demoralisingly difficult and remote goal for a great many learners. Conversation has the advantage that it is possible to take part in it reasonably successfully at many levels, including elementary.

3 This is essentially no different from the way in which translation is used in the grammar-translation method: the sentence or text to be translated provides the content, and learner and teacher only have to worry about how to express that content. This control of content simplifies the teacher's task, of course, in that he or she does not need to judge-or respond to the appropriacy, interest, relevance, etc., of what the learners say, but only whether or not the responses are grammatically correct (see Misconception 4).

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Method, antimethod, postmethod
B. Kumaravadivelu

The purpose of this paper is to deconstruct the existing concept of method, describe the prevailing antimethod sentiments, and delineate the emerging postmethod condition. The paper is divided into three parts. in the first, I present a critical appraisal of the limited and limiting nature of the concept of method. In the second, I describe how widespread dissatisfaction with established methods created and sustained antimethod sentiments among teachers and teacher educators. In the third, I discuss how a state of heightened awareness about the futility of searching for the right method has resulted in the emergence of what I have called a postmethod condition. I conclude the paper by presenting the essentials of a postmethod pedagogy, and by pointing out the potential it has for shaping and reshaping the fundamental character of second and foreign (L2) language teaching and teacher education.

Method
The concept of method in language teaching is perhaps as old as the history of language teaching itself. It has for long guided the form and function of every conceivable component of language teaching, including curriculum design, syllabus specifications, materials preparation, instructional strategies and testing techniques. All of us hear and use the term *method* very often. Yet, we hardly pause to think about its meaning.

What does method actually mean? Nearly forty years ago, William Mackey asked the same question and lamented that the word *method* 'means so little and so much' *(*1965:139*)*. The reason for this, he said, 'lies in the state and organization of our knowledge of language and language learning. It lies in wilful ignorance of what has been done and said and thought in the past. It lies in the vested interests which methods become. It lies in the meaning of method' (ibid). What he said nearly four decades ago is still true today.

We generally use the term *method* to refer to the theoretical principles and classroom practices that we read about in methods textbooks. We also use the term to refer to what practising teachers actually do in their classrooms. What the books say is different from what the teachers do, even though we use the same term, *method,* to refer to both. In this paper, I use the term *methods* to refer to prototypical methods that are conceptualized by theorists, not those that are actualized by teachers in their classrooms.

The exact number of methods conceptualized by theorists is not clear. A book published in the mid-sixties, for instance, provides a list of fifteen 'most common' types of methods ,still in use in one form or another in various parts of the world' (Mackey 1965: 151). Two books published in the mid-eighties (Larsen-Freeman 1986 and Richards & Rodgers 1986) – the ones that are widely prescribed for methods classes in the United States provide, between them, a list of eleven methods that are currently used. They are (in alphabetical order): Audiolingual Method, Communicative Methods, Community Language Learning, Direct Method, Grammar-Translation Method, Natural Approach, Oral Approach, Silent Way, Situational Language Teaching, Suggestopedia, and Total Physical Response.

Each established method is supposed to have a specified set of theoretical principles and a specific set of classroom practices. One might think, therefore, that the eleven methods listed above provide eleven different paths to language learning and teaching. That is not so. In fact, there is a considerable overlap in their theory and practice. As Wilga Rivers rightly points out, what appears to be a radically new method is more often than not a variant of existing methods presented with 'the fresh paint of a new terminology that camouflages their fundamental similarity' (1991:283).

While theorists produced and promoted a succession of methods, teachers found it impossible to implement any of them as designed and delivered to them. In fact, even the authors of the two textbooks on methods

widely used in the United States were uneasy about the efficacy of the methods they selected to include in their books, and wisely refrained from recommending any of them for adoption. 'Our goal,' Jack Richards and Ted Rodgers (1986: viii) told their readers, 'is to enable teachers to become better informed about the nature, strengths, and weaknesses of methods and approaches so they can better arrive at their own judgments and decisions.' Diane Larsen-Freeman (1986:1) went a step further and explicitly warned her readers that 'the inclusion of a method in this book should not be construed as an endorsement of that method. What *is* being recommended is that, in the interest of becoming informed about existing choices, you investigate each method' (emphasis as in original).

The disjunction between methods as conceptualized by theorists and methods as actualized by practitioners is the direct consequence of the inherent limitations of the concept of method itself. First and foremost, methods are founded on idealized concepts geared towards idealized contexts. Since language learning/teaching needs, wants and situations are unpredictably numerous, no idealized method can visualize all the variables in advance in order to provide situation-specific solutions that practising teachers sorely need to tackle the challenges they confront every day in their professional lives.

Secondly, as a predominantly top-down exercise, the conception and construction of method have been largely guided by a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach that assumes a generic clientèle with common goals. Preoccupied with their potential global reach, methods have lacked an essential local touch. Clearly, methods that are manufactured and marketed as usable in all learning/teaching contexts cannot be useful to any learning/teaching context.

Thirdly, not anchored in any specific learning/teaching context, and caught up in the whirlwind of fashion, methods tend to drift wildly from one theoretical extreme to the other. These extreme swings create conditions in which certain aspects of learning/teaching (such as grammar or meaning) get overly emphasized, while certain others are utterly ignored, depending on which way the wind blows.

Finally, the concept of method is too inadequate and too limited to satisfactorily explain the complexity of language teaching operations. Concerned primarily and narrowly with classroom instructional strategies, it ignores the fact that the success or failure of classroom instruction depends to a large extent on the unstated and unstable interaction of multiple factors such as teacher cognition, learner perception, societal needs, cultural contexts, political exigencies, economic imperatives and institutional constraints, all of which are inextricably interwoven.

The limitations of the concept of method gradually led to the realization that 'the term method is a label without substance' (Clarke 1983: 109), that it has 'diminished rather than enhanced our understanding of language teaching' (Pennycook 1989: 597), and that 'language teaching might be better understood and better executed if the concept of method were not to exist at all' (Jarvis 1991:295). This realization is at once the result of and a reason for the emergence of what might be called antimethod sentiments.

Antimethod
Teachers and teacher educators have expressed their antipathy to method in different but related ways. Studies by Swaffar, Arens & Morgan (1982), Nunan (1987), Kumaravadivelu (1993/1996) and others clearly demonstrate that even as the methodological band played on, practising teachers were marching to a different drum. Collectively, these studies show that (a) teachers who are trained in and swear by a particular method do not conform or confine themselves to its theoretical principles and classroom procedures, (b) teachers who claim to follow the same method often use different classroom procedures, (c) teachers who claim to follow different methods often use the same classroom procedures, and (d) over time, teachers develop and follow a carefully delineated task-hierarchy, a weighted sequence of activities not necessarily associated with any established method.

Justifiable dissatisfaction with established methods inevitably and increasingly led practising teachers to rely to a great extent on their intuitive ability and experiential knowledge. As Henry Widdowson observes: 'It is quite common to hear teachers say that they do not subscribe to any particular approach or method in their teaching but are „eclectic". They thereby avoid commitment to any current fad that comes up on the whirligig of fashion.' (1990: 50) He further asserts that 'if by eclecticism is meant the random and expedient use of whatever technique comes most readily to hand, then it has no merit whatever.' (ibid) While there

have been frequent calls for teachers to develop principled eclecticism based on their own understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of established methods, teacher education programmes seldom make any sustained or systematic effort to develop in prospective teachers the knowledge and skill necessary to be responsibly eclectic.

The difficulties faced by teachers in developing enlightened eclectic methods are not difficult to find. Stern pointed out some of them: 'The weakness of the eclectic position is that it offers no criteria according to which we can determine which is the best theory, nor does it provide any principles by which to include or exclude features which form part of existing theories or practices. The choice is left to the individual's intuitive judgment and is, therefore, too broad and too vague to be satisfactory as a theory in its own right.' (1992: 11) The net result is that practising teachers have neither the comfort of a context-sensitive professional theory that they can rely on nor the confidence of a fully developed personal theory that they can build on. Consequently, they find themselves straddling two methodological worlds: one that is imposed on them, and the other that is improvised by them.

Teachers' efforts to cope with the limitations of method are matched by teacher educators' attempts to develop images, options, scenarios, tasks or activities based on a fast-developing knowledge of the processes of second language acquisition and on a growing understanding of the dynamics of classroom learning/teaching. For instance, drawing 'from a wider range of methods – some old, some new, some widely used, some relatively unknown', Stevick (1982: 2) attempted to aid teachers in identifying and evaluating many of the alternatives that are available for their day-to-day work in the classroom. Looking at second language learning and teaching from a perspective in which proficiency is the organizing principle, Omaggio advocated a proficiency-oriented instruction that focuses on 'a hierarchy of priorities set by the instructor or the program planners rather than a "prepackaged" set of procedures to which everyone is expected to slavishly subscribe' (1986: 44). Di Pietro proposed strategic interaction with scenarios that motivate students 'to converse purposefully with each other by casting them in roles in episodes based on or taken from real life' (1987: 2).

Several other scholars tried to nudge the profession away from the concept of method. David Nunan sought to assign 'the search for the one right method to the dustbin' by helping teachers to 'develop, select, or adapt tasks which are appropriate in terms of goals, input, activities, roles and settings, and difficulty' (1989: 2). Dick Allwright propagated the concept of exploratory teaching that teachers can pursue in their own classroom settings (see, for instance, Allwright & Bailey 1991). Chiding the profession for its obsession with method, Stern proposed 'teaching strategies' based on intralingual-crosslingual, analytic-
experiential, and explicit-implicit dimensions. His comprehensive and coherent approach to language teaching is derived from 'flexible sets of concepts which embody any useful lessons we can draw from the history of language teaching
but which do not perpetuate the rigidities and dogmatic narrowness of the earlier methods concept' (1992: 278).

What have gradually emerged over the years, and in an accelerated way during the last decade, are critical thoughts that question the nature and scope of method,. and creative ideas that redefine our understanding of method. Having witnessed how methods go through endless cycles of life, death and rebirth, we now seem to have reached a state of heightened awareness – an awareness that as long as we are caught up in the web of method, we will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution, an awareness that such a search drives us to continually recycle and repackage the same old ideas, and an awareness that nothing short of breaking the cycle can salvage the situation. Out of this awareness has emerged what I have called a 'postmethod condition' (Kumaravadivelu 1994).

Postmethod
In a nutshell, the postmethod condition signifies a search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method. There may very well be several alternatives to method. I offer one such alternative in the form of what I have called a postmethod pedagogy (see Kumaravadivelu 2001 for more details). I visualize postmethod pedagogy as a three-dimensional system consisting of three parameters: particularity, practicality and possibility.

The parameter of particularity

The first parameter deals with the notion of particularity. It is based on the firm belief that all pedagogy, like all politics, is local. To ignore local exigencies is to ignore lived experiences. A language teaching programme, therefore, must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular socio-cultural milieu. A pedagogy of particularity, then, is completely antithetical to the idea that there can be one set of learning and teaching goals realizable through one set of theoretical principles and classroom practices.

Any pedagogy that is not sensitive to the local individual, institutional, social and cultural contexts in which learning and teaching take place becomes irrelevant, and is doomed to failure because it is the critical awareness of local conditions that triggers the exploration and achievement of a pedagogy of particularity. This critical awareness starts with practising teachers, either individually or collectively, assessing local needs, observing their teaching acts, evaluating their outcomes, identifying problems, finding solutions, and trying them out to see once again what works and what doesn't. Such a continual cycle of observation, reflection and action is a prerequisite for the development of context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge. Since the particular is so deeply embedded in the practical, and cannot be achieved or understood without it, the parameter of particularity is intertwined with the parameter of practicality.

The parameter of practicality

The parameter of practicality refers not only to the practice of classroom teaching, but also to a much larger issue that directly impacts on classroom teaching, namely, the relationship between theory and practice. There is at present an unfortunate and unproductive division of labour between the theorist and the teacher: the theorist is supposed to produce knowledge; the teacher is supposed to consume knowledge. Teachers are seldom enabled to conceive and construct their own personal theories; instead, they are often encouraged to understand and apply professional theories produced by others.

What the parameter of practicality aims for is a personal theory of practice generated by the teacher. This assertion is premised on a rather simple and straightforward proposition: no theory of practice can be useful and usable unless it is generated *through* practice. A logical corollary is that it is the practising teacher who, given adequate tools for exploration, is best suited to produce such a practical theory.

A theory of practice develops, as van Manen (1977) observes, when there is a union of action and thought, when there is action in thought and thought in action. Based on their action and thought, teachers develop an unexplained and sometimes unexplainable awareness of what constitutes good teaching. Such an awareness has been given different labels by different scholars. Van Manen calls it 'sense-making'. Prabhu (1990) calls it a 'sense of plausibility'. Freeman (1996) calls it a 'conception of practice'. Hargreaves (1994) calls it 'the ethic of practicality'. They all refer to the same thing, namely, a teacher's powerful sense of what works and what doesn't.

A teacher's personal theory of practice does not involve any grand theorizing, nor does it involve complicated experimental studies, for which teachers have neither the time nor the energy. Rather, it involves keeping one's eyes and ears and mind open in the classroom to see what works and what doesn't, with what group(s) of learners, for what reasons, and assessing what changes are necessary to make instruction achieve its desired goals.

A personal theory of practice is created and recreated when teachers extend their intuitive ability and conduct a more structured and more goal-oriented exploratory research based on the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility. It is doable if it is not separated from and is fully integrated with day-to-day teaching and learning. It involves continual reflection and action. It is formed and re-formed not only by the pedagogic factors governing the microcosm of the classroom, but also by the socio-political forces emanating from outside. In this sense, the parameter of practicality metamorphoses into the parameter of possibility.

The parameter of possibility

The parameter of possibility is derived mainly from the critical pedagogy advocated by Paulo Freire and his followers. Critical pedagogists such as Simon (1988) and Giroux (1988) take the position that pedagogy, any

pedagogy, is implicated in relations of power and dominance, and is implemented to create and sustain social inequalities. For them, educational institutions are not simply instructional sites; they are, in fact, arenas where various ideological, cultural, and social forms collide with each other.

Classroom reality is socially constructed and historically determined. What is therefore required to counter the social and historical forces that strive to maintain the status quo is a pedagogy of possibility that empowers participants to critically appropriate forms of knowledge outside their immediate experience. Such a pedagogy of possibility would take seriously the social and historical conditions which create the cultural forms and interested knowledge that give meaning to the lives of teachers and learners.

The lived experiences participants bring to the classroom setting are shaped not just by the learning/teaching episodes they have encountered in the past, but also by a broader social, economic and political environment in which they grow up. These experiences have the potential to alter classroom practices in ways unintended and unexpected by policy planners or curriculum designers or textbook producers. We often hear stories about how L2 learners, motivated by their own cultural and historical backgrounds, appropriate the English language and use it in their own terms according to their own aspirations, needs and values.

In the process of sensitizing itself to the prevailing sociopolitical reality, the parameter of possibility is also concerned with individual identity. More than any other educational enterprise, language education provides its participants with challenges and opportunities for a continual quest for subjectivity and self-identity. As Weedon points out, 'language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed.' (1987: 21)

This quest for self-identity assumes greater importance these days because of fast-emerging economic and cultural globalization. As a recent United Nations Report points out, 'Contacts between people and their cultures – their ideas, their values, their way of life ─ have been growing and deepening in unprecedented ways' (United Nations, 1999: 30). And English, being the global language, carries with it and transmits cultural meanings that some people consider a threat to local cultural identity. L2 teachers, therefore, cannot afford to ignore the global sociocultural reality that influences identity formation in the classroom, nor can they afford to separate the linguistic needs of learners from their social needs. In other words, they cannot hope to fully satisfy their pedagogic obligations without at the same time satisfying their social obligations.

To sum up, I have suggested that one way of conceptualizing a postmethod pedagogy is to look at it in terms of parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility. The boundaries of the particular, the practical and the possible are inevitably blurred. They interweave and interact with each other in a synergistic relationship where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. How do we translate the essentials of a postmethod pedagogy into a workable proposition in a classroom context? For that, I believe we need a coherent pedagogic framework. I present below one such framework ─ a macrostrategic framework.

Macrostrategic framework
The macrostrategic framework for language teaching consists of macrostrategies and microstrategies. I define macrostrategies as guiding principles derived from theoretical, empirical and experiential insights related to EFL learning and teaching. A macrostrategy is thus a general plan, a broad guideline on the basis of which teachers will be able to generate their own situation-specific, needs-based microstrategies or classroom techniques. In other words, macrostrategies are made operational in the classroom through microstrategies. Based on my own experiential knowledge as a teacher and teacher educator, and on my understanding of theoretical and empirical research in the field of English as a second language and foreign language learning and teaching, I have derived ten macrostrategies. I have framed them in operational terms to denote their operational character. The choice of action verbs over static nouns to frame these macrostrategies should not be misunderstood as an attempt to convey any prescriptive quality. Let me briefly outline each of these ten macrostrategies:

1 maximize learning opportunities: This is about teaching as a process of creating and utilizing learning opportunities, a process in which teachers strike a balance between their role as managers of teaching and their role as mediators of learning.

2 Minimize perceptual mismatches: This is about recognizing potential mismatches between teacher intention and learner interpretation, and what to do about them.

3 Facilitate negotiated interaction: This is about ensuring meaningful learner-learner and learner-teacher classroom interaction in which learners are entitled and encouraged to initiate topic and talk, not just react and respond.

4 Promote learner autonomy: This is about helping learners learn to learn, and also learn to liberate; how to equip them with the means necessary to self-direct and self-monitor their own learning.

5 Foster language awareness: This is about creating general language awareness as well as critical language awareness; how to draw learners' attention to the formal and functional properties of the language as well as how to make them aware of the insidious power of language.

6 Activate intuitive heuristics: This is about providing rich textual data so that learners can infer and internalize the underlying rules governing grammatical usage and communicative use; how to help learners in the process of their grammar construction.

7 Contextualize linguistic input: This is about how language usage and use are shaped by linguistic, social and cultural contexts.

8 Integrate language skills: This is about the need to holistically integrate language skills traditionally separated and sequenced as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

9 Ensure social relevance: This is about the need for teachers to be sensitive to the societal, political, economic, and educational environment in which EFL learning and teaching take place.

10 Raise cultural consciousness: This emphasizes the need to treat learners as cultural informants so that they are encouraged to engage in a process of classroom participation that puts a premium on their power/knowledge, on their subjectivity and identity.

These macrostrategies are general operating principles. What shape and form each will take will vary from country to country, from context to context, and in fact, from teacher to teacher. Teachers can use the macrostrategic framework to begin to construct their own theory of practice. They can also use it to self-observe, self-analyze and self-evaluate their own teaching acts (see Kumaravadivelu 2002 for details).

In closing
Pointing out the limited and limiting nature of the concept of method, and the dissatisfaction it has created among teachers and teacher educators, I have argued for the development of a postmethod pedagogy founded on the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility. Consistent with that conceptual foundation, I have suggested a macrostrategic framework derived from theoretical, empirical and experiential knowledge. The macrostrategic framework has the potential to help teachers develop the knowledge, skill, attitudes and autonomy necessary to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent and relevant personal theory of practice that is grounded in the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility. While the purpose of such a framework is to help teachers become autonomous decision-makers, it should, without denying the value of individual autonomy, provide a set of operating principles so that their teaching acts may come about in a principled fashion.

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Ten basic propositions
Marion Williams and Robert L. Burden

from Williams, M. and Burden, R.L. 1997. *Psychology for Language Teachers*. Cambridge University Press

The authors present ten basic propositions that they consider to be crucial for language teachers within a social interactionist framework.

1 There is a difference between learning and education

(***) This statement implies that in order to be of value, a learning experience should contribute to a person's whole education as well as to their learning of an aspect of the language'., This is true whether the experience is an information-gap task, telling a story, acting out a situation, working out how a particular language form operates or discriminating between minimal pairs in pronunciation. In the first example, the information-gap task could be related to a topic that is relevant to the learners' lives, could help develop their co-operative skill (itself a life-skill), and could require a level of thinking that stretches them intellectually. In the second example, the story could provide an interesting trigger for discussion of life-issues, and could lead to a consideration of individuals' own viewpoints.

An important aspect of an educative experience is that the learners perceive the value of the task for themselves and their own development. Thus mediation plays a crucial role in helping individuals to see the significance to them of what it is they are required to do, as well as the value of the experience beyond the here and now.

There is possibly no situation in which the necessity of an educational value for learning experiences is so apparent as in schools. Too often children in schools are faced with a barrage of isolated learning tasks which they have no wish to do, cannot see the value of to them personally, and, which do not to them add up to a coherent whole.

However, we would maintain that the same applies to adult learning. It could be argued by many teachers that the role of language schools providing courses for adults is to simply provide instruction for examinations such as IELTS or Cambridge Proficiency in English. However, we would argue that it is important for teachers also to incorporate aims of a more lifelong nature such as learning to work as a group, learning to respect each other, learning about another's culture, or learning skills that will be of use for the future, if they are to attempt to incorporate educational value and principles into the process of learning a language. If the passing of an exam is seen as a short-term goal, but one that is embedded within longer-term goals and a more holistic attitude to learning involving the development of the whole person, then a more educational stance is being adopted.

2 Learners learn what is meaningful to them

A constructivist view of learning tells us that learners are engaged in actively making sense of the information provided to them. However, this is not necessarily always a conscious process. Each individual will construct a different message from the input provided. For language teachers it is important to be aware of the fact that whatever language input is provided, we cannot predict what each individual will learn, or how the learner's language system will develop.

Individuals will tend to learn what they think is worth learning, but this will also differ from one person to another. Some people will consider learning a particular language is valuable; others will see no value in it. At a narrower level, some language learners will consider it important to develop a wide vocabulary, whilst for others a more narrow technical vocabulary will be seen as far more valuable. Some will place great emphasis upon the quality of their accent, whilst others will see their priority as becoming conversationally fluent, no matter how poor their accent might be. Unless teachers have a sound grasp of what their learners see as important and meaningful, they will not possess all the information they need to make their courses truly motivational.

3 Learners learn in ways that are meaningful to them

One of our basic premises is that each learner is different, and will bring to the learning process a unique set of personal attributes, preferred ways of learning and learning strategies. Learners will make sense of the learning situation and learning tasks in ways that are personal and unique to them. A teacher, therefore, cannot assume that all the learners will go about any particular task in the same way. Teachers, therefore, need to provide a variety of language learning activities which allow for different learning styles and individual preferences and personalities: some visual, some auditory, some involving movement, some interactive and some analytic. It is also important that teachers realise the need to help learners to shape their learning strategies in ways that are meaningful to them, to encourage them to find their own style, to identify their own strengths, and to develop their own self-knowledge.

4 Learners learn better if they feel in control of what they are learning

(***) we have stressed the importance of individuals making choices about what they do, of setting their own goals, of feeling that they can originate and be in control of their actions. For teachers, there is a need, therefore, to encourage learners to talk about their aims and set goals for themselves regarding learning the language, to help them to make choices and to encourage a sense of personal responsibility for actions. For language learners this might involve selecting books or texts to read, finding ways to record and learn vocabulary, seeking out opportunities to use and practise the language, making good use of grammar references, monitoring their own progress against their goals, or discussing their aims in learning the language.

5 Learning is closely linked to how people feel about themselves

An individual's self-concept will have considerable influence on the way in which he or she learns. If a person has a negative self-concept as a language learner, then it is likely that he or she will feel a sense of embarrassment at using the language and will avoid risk-taking situations or initiating conversations in the second language. If individuals feel positive about themselves, they are likely to set themselves more optimistic goals, to engage in situations which involve risks and to seek out opportunities to use the language. We have, however, pointed out the danger of an over-inflated or unrealistic self-concept.

6 Learning takes place in a social context through interaction with other people

If we take an interactionist view of learning, we see the nature of the interactions that take place as a key to learning. This is especially apparent in the case of learning a language, where using language is essentially a social activity, and interaction in the target language is an integral part of the learning process. Teachers need to be particularly aware of the impact of the interactions that occur in the classroom. These interactions can foster a sense of belonging, they can enhance sharing behaviour, they can encourage personal control and foster positive attributions. Particularly, the nature of the interaction in the target language will influence the quality of learning that language.

7 What teachers do in the classroom will reflect their own beliefs and attitudes

Teachers' actions in the classroom and their interactions with their learners will mirror, either implicitly or explicitly, their own beliefs about learning, their views of the world, their self-views, and their attitudes towards their subject and their learners. Thus, whatever methodology teachers purport to adopt, whatever coursebook or syllabus they are following, what goes on in their classrooms will be influenced by their beliefs about the learning process. Even if a country or an institution adopts a communicative syllabus and coursebooks, what actually goes on in the classroom will reflect a combination of teachers' and learners' beliefs about learning the language and the ultimate purpose of education, as well as the unique way in which a particular lesson is socially constructed by teacher and learners.

8 There is a significant role for the teacher as mediator in the language classroom

The role of the teacher in fostering language acquisition has frequently been in question, often limited to the provider of tasks that generate circumstances where interaction between two or more learners will occur. However, the theory of mediation presented in this book maintains that the teacher can play an important part in promoting effective learning in other significant ways. Rather than being peripheral, the teacher is vital in fostering the right climate for learning to take place, for confidence to develop, for people's individuality to be respected, for a sense of belonging to be nurtured, for developing appropriate learning strategies, and for moving towards learner autonomy.

9 Learning tasks represent an interface between teachers and learners
The learning activities that teachers select, and the way in which they present them, reflect their beliefs and values; learners in turn will interpret these activities in ways that are meaningful to them. Thus learning tasks represent an interface between teachers and learners. They are more than simply what is provided by the coursebook or the syllabus. Tasks are continuously reinterpreted by teachers and learners so as to render the making of any generalisation about different types of language learning tasks extremely difficult. Nevertheless, teachers need to be clear in their minds what their learning goals are, and attempt to implement these through the tasks they provide.

10 Learning is influenced by the situation in which it occurs
As we have seen, the whole context has a significant influence on any learning that takes place. This applies not only to the immediate context of the classroom, learning centre, or home where it is important to establish a supportive physical environment together with facilitative personal interactions. It applies also to the broader social, educational and political context within which language learning experiences are occurring. In addition, the cultural background of the learners will influence the sense they make of the learning situation, and their view of the culture to which the foreign language belongs.

Breaking taboos
Guy Cook

Ideas about language learning have proliferated over the last hundred years and the classroom consequences have been far reaching. Usually this history is viewed as one of progress, broadening horizons and liberating teachers. It is also possible, however, to see its net effect as a reduction of options, a narrowing of outlook and an undermining of professional freedom. Many perfectly valid teaching and learning strategies have become taboo. So strong is the academic and commercial hype behind this process, however, that teachers are often scared to re-assess rationally what has been lost. I would like first to consider five such strategies, and then suggest that, despite their apparent disparity, there is one overriding misguided idea that lies behind their designation as 'taboo'.

Taboo one: *Teacher talk, student silence*
Many teachers believe that they should at all times reduce their own talking time and increase that of their students. But why is this necessarily a good thing in every lesson? Students are not rats who only learn by doing. They have the human capacity for passive learning through attention, observation and reflection. Judging by favourite leisure activities (film, theatre, television, reading), people very much enjoy listening to other voices, and can learn a great deal while doing so. When and why did teachers lose confidence in their ability to instruct and inspire? This is not to say that every lesson should be a teacher monologue, nor that every teacher monologue is a good one. It depends on what is said, not who says it, on inner mental activity rather than outward behaviour. Making a monologue interesting is part of the art of teaching; outlawing monologue attacks that art and undermines professional autonomy. The current preoccupation with group and pair work, the outlawing of whole-class address, not only diminishes variety, it can also sometimes subject students to a flow of uninformative and incorrect language – from their classmates!

Taboo two: *Dictation*
As a demanding, form-focused activity in which the teacher does all the talking and students write in silence, reproducing somebody else's words, dictation must rank as the most unreal and uncommunicative exercise imaginable, to be eliminated from any up-to-date classroom. How strange then, that it is still widely regarded as effective in promoting confidence and accuracy. How can something so bad in theory work out so well in practice? The reasons are instructive. Firstly, dictation obliges learners to use forms which they might avoid when communicating in their own words, thus gaining through imitation. Secondly, paradoxically, its highly artificial focus on forms and components is a very authentic general learning strategy, similar to the kind of thing we would do when learning to drive (manoeuvring in safe environments) or to play an instrument (practising scales and arpeggios). Thirdly, copying down spoken words accurately is involved in many real-world tasks: both work-related (eg minute taking) and for pleasure (eg copying a song). Lastly, the fact that it is undeniably hard work, demanding conscious effort, should not disqualify it for serious learners (except perhaps the very youngest). Though it has been in the marketing interests of publishers and private language schools to claim that a second language can be picked up effortlessly, learning a new language entails hard work. Students know this, and can get pleasure from the knowledge of what that work will lead to.

The taboo on dictation is part of a larger problem. Implicit in many communicative materials, is the message that spoken language is more basic and important than reading and writing. The assumption in early communicative textbooks was that every English language learner had no more pressing need than to buy a cup of coffee without drawing attention to themselves as a foreigner. One indication of this bias towards speech is the failure of almost all EFL textbooks to address one of the most pressing needs of many of the world's English language learners (Japanese, Chinese, Arab and many others), which is to master a new writing system. This is something which needs painstaking practice and instruction. As with the fetish for student talk, though, the assumption is that if students are not chattering, they are not learning.

Taboo three: *Repetition and rote learning*
These two related activities are generally described as both artificial and boring, and pejoratively dismissed as 'regurgitation' or 'mere' imitation. The criticism, however, usually focuses upon specific materials for memorisation, rather than the nature of the activity itself. Of course, as with any activity, it is possible to make repetition boring and purposeless, by inappropriate choices and insensitive enforcement. If the activity itself were intrinsically boring, however, it would be hard to explain the universal and spontaneous delight which almost everyone takes in knowing a favourite piece of language by heart. What child does not gleefully repeat rhymes, jokes and playground nonsense? What adult has not sung their favourite songs a thousand times? In a wide range of genres (from prayers, plays and poems, to sports chants and jokes) repetition and rote learning typify the most enjoyable and valued human language activities. (On the other hand, when did anyone recite for pleasure the words of a dull task like buying a ticket?)

There is good reason behind our pleasure. Recitation develops and reinforces a sense of community, which is one of the main functions of language. It gives an illusion of being more proficient with the language than we actually are. It is also an effective learning strategy. Far from imitation being 'mere', it is a highly complex skill, much more developed in humans than other animals, and at the heart of our learning capacity. That is why children are so obsessed with, and so proficient at, imitating the words of others, even when they do not understand their sense. For children (unlike the theorists of communicative and task-based approaches) have no hang-ups about enjoying the form of words.

Taboo four: *Translation*
Since the early 20th century, translation has been so out of fashion in ELT that it has rarely been discussed, either as a means or an end. It is simply assumed to be wrong, and has attracted all the usual insults. It is boring, artificial, the last refuge of the incompetent teacher. It has been regularly and explicitly forbidden in materials, curricula and instructions to teachers – sometimes even upon pain of dismissal.

All this is strange. Firstly, translating is a needed skill – and not only by professional translators and interpreters. 'Real-world' foreign language use is full of translation, whether it be explaining the menu to monolingual friends in a restaurant, arbitrating between relatives in a bilingual family, or negotiating between firms to achieve a business deal. Both socially and at work, successful language learners need to mediate between speakers of their own language and speakers of the language they have learned. This only reflects the truism, overlooked by so many monolingual Anglo-American theorists, that, for the majority of the world's population, switching and negotiating between languages is part and parcel of everyday language use. There is nothing remotely artificial or academic about it.

In addition, for those teachers who can do it (and that of course means that they must be bilingual themselves), translation is an indispensable teaching tool. This is true both for grammar, where it compels students to use structures which might otherwise be avoided, and – pre-eminently – for vocabulary. Direct method purists are fooling themselves when they claim to have explained words through mime and context. The obvious fact is that almost all students use bilingual dictionaries which provide – by definition – translations.

The usual objections to translation as a pedagogic tool are twofold: that it encourages a sense of false equivalence between the two languages, and that it impedes automatic and fluent language use. Both views are silly. Assessed by a good teacher, a translation which preserves the grammatical construction of the first language or is misled by a *faux ami* (English *sympathetic* for Italian *simpatico*, for example) would be criticised, with consequent explanation. As for the impediment to automaticity, this is just assertion without evidence – belied by the millions of successful language learners who, having begun the study of a language through translation, go on to become fluent speakers without recourse to an interlingual equivalent.

The outlawing of translation not only reflects the monolingual mind-set of the English-speaking world, it has also – in a more sinister way – been to its political and commercial advantage. Monolingual native-speaker teachers have been privileged, and the status of 'local' experts undermined. Private language schools have treated students from different languages and cultures as all the same. Publishers have marketed monolingual textbooks globally. The classroom has become, in microcosm, a world where English is the only language, rather than one integrated with others.

Taboo five: *Invented examples*

The standard argument, religiously reiterated in nearly every recent textbook and dictionary, is that invented examples are dead and artificial, demotivating students and misrepresenting how the language is actually used. In addition, they are damned by association with grammar-translation and graded-structure teaching. The cult of 'real language' demands that every example must be drawn from databanks – generally held, in practice, by academics and publishers. Faced by this heavy pressure, and unable to match these resources with their own, teachers have been scared away from making up their own examples. They react rather as they do with translation. They continue to use invented sentences, but guiltily and with a sense of inadequacy.

But why? As with so many other discredited practices, there is confusion between the practice and its misuse. It is true that traditional textbooks were crammed with tedious invented examples, but they do not necessarily have to be of this kind. The 'real' examples in fashionable textbooks and dictionaries can be just as deadly. They are someone else's, and no longer 'real' by the time they reach the classroom.

The important issue is not the 'reality' of examples, but whether they are useful, interesting and relevant. The best examples are surely those invented by teachers, isolating important points of vocabulary and grammar, and adjusted with wit and sensitivity to the level and interests of their students. If they are bizarre and unreal, all the better – it will make them memorable.

Well handled, they can be both enjoyable and instructive, livening up the lesson and promoting good relations. Again, it is not possible to legislate how this can be done. It is part of the art of teaching.

How to be a boring teacher
Luke Prodromou

If you follow this course you can guarantee the Optimum Level of Boredom (OLB) in your classroom.

I started out to teach English as a foreign language, I fell under the influence of a remarkable teacher. Before sitting at his feet I had read all his books and they made a deep impression on me. They shaped the way I saw not only English language teaching, but life itself. Imagine my excitement when I discovered that my guru was coming to town to give the opening plenary at our annual conference of English teachers. I secured a place in the front row of the huge auditorium and watched spellbound as my hero stepped onto the podium. He took one sapient look at the audience, put a sheaf of papers on the lectern in front of him, put his head down and began to read, his hands clutching the sides of the lectern as if he were hanging on to a lifeboat.

My heart sank as for the next 90 minutes he read out his text in a monolithic monotone, scholarly references and all: Guru (1956), Guru (1965), Guru (forthcoming). At the same time, we had a perfect view of the top of his head, which had already shed most of its natural covering. For 90 minutes we watched ourselves in the shining dome of my gurus head. And I thought of Hamlet when he says the aim of all lectures by experts on English language teaching was and is, as it were, to 'hold a mirror up to the teaching profession'.

So taking my cue from my guru, let me begin my course in BTM (Boring Teacher Methodology).

Do people drift away from you as you are talking? Do people look abstractedly into the distance as you wax lyrical about one of your pet subjects? Do your interlocutor's eyes glaze over blankly as you earnestly explain some fine point of Chomskyan linguistics? Does the punchline of what you think is one of your funniest jokes fall flat as a pancake? Are your invitations to parties becoming few and far between? Do you wish you too were an exciting, scintillating, magnetic teacher, whom students worship and give Christmas presents to? If you answered 'yes' to all of these questions then you will not need to attend the following crash course in How to be a Boring Teacher.

Let students do nothing
That's right. Do all the work yourself. Take the register yourself. Explain what you did the previous lesson yourself. Read out the text from the coursebook yourself. Read out the comprehension questions from the book yourself. Answer the questions yourself. Write the answers on the board yourself and then rub the board clean yourself. Just get the students to listen to your lovely voice, droning on, showing them how clever you are. After all, it is not for nothing that you went to university. Do not keep your light under a bushel. Let them see how much you know.

Teach the book
Start from page one and go straight through to the last page of the textbook. Lesson after lesson. Unit after unit. Do not by any means introduce any extraneous material into the lesson. Remember: the textbook is your Bible. It is not to be tampered with, questioned or rewritten. It is complete and self-contained, in no need of supplementation. After all, what kind of religious freak would write his or her own Bible? Textbook writers are omniscient; they know everything. You are benighted; you know nothing (Socrates). And your students don't know nothing neither (Bob Dylan).

Be right all the time
Armed with the infallible textbook, there is no excuse for not being right all the time. You have all the answers and you correct all the mistakes. Let no-one infringe on your right to be right. Remember, the aim of all good teaching was and is to demonstrate to the learner what he or she does not know. To confront them, as it were, with deserts of ignorance. This will produce in them a thirst for knowledge, which only you can quench (with the help of a good teacher's book which gives all the correct answers so you don't have to think

too hard). Your power lies in your possession of the right answer, and its revelation to erring students. Be a TEFL fundamentalist and you will never go wrong. A word of advice: when students commit errors or make mistakes, jump on them (the mistakes, not the students).

Assume students know nothing
Explain everything in full laborious detail. Do not assume the students have done any English before, or have heard of English grammar. Do not by any means draw on their experience of life, their knowledge of the world or other school subjects. Your students are a blank sheet of paper, or as Locke said, 'tabula rasa'. You're a full vessel, they are empty vessels. This explains why you may find them a bit noisy at times; the emptier your students are, the more noise they will make. This is known as having a discipline problem. It is nothing to be alarmed about. All boring teachers have one; so ensure you have stern disciplinary measures in reserve. Do not let yourself be deceived into indulging in permissive modern methods such as eliciting. Rest assured that in some teaching contexts eliciting in class is frowned upon as time-wasting and even immoral. When beginning a new listening or reading text, go straight into it. Do not shilly-shally around asking students what they might or might not know about the subject they are going to listen to or read. Do not procrastinate. Remember the English proverb: he or she who hesitates is lost. So get on with it.

Sit still
Before you can achieve any of the above basic principles of BTM you need to appreciate the importance of body language, so make yourself comfortable at your desk at the front of the class and stay put. This is called 'ensconcing yourself' and it is quite easy to learn. Do not stand up if you can possibly avoid it. And do not fidget. Your place is in your chair, not wandering aimlessly round the room, standing in this corner or that.

Students should know where to find you when they want to speak (to each other – or cheat in a test). You shouldn't be popping up unpredictably in odd places in the classroom. Some very unconventional teachers have been known to stand at the back of the room where all they can see is the back of students' heads. In some extreme cases, they have even been known to stand on the desk itself. Such behaviour reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution (Wilde).

Be predictable
It emerges naturally from what has been said above that you should in all things, wherever possible, try and be predictable. You should have a fixed routine for doing everything so students know exactly what is coming. Your lesson should have a beginning, a middle and an end, in that order, not as in some new-fangled methods beginning with the end and going backwards. Always begin with 'Presentation'; always follow this with 'Practice' and always finish with 'Production'. That is why the letters 'PPP' appear in that order! Stick to PPP and you will never come unstuck.

Speak in a monotone
You should not vary the pitch in your voice if you can possibly help it. You should try to achieve the most tedious monotone your vocal cords are capable of producing. Say everything in the same dull way. Do not distinguish between explanations and questions, instructions and asides, the beginning or the end of your discourse, the serious bits and the funny bits, the important and the trivial (not that you will have many funny or trivial bits). All of your utterances, whatever their function, must sound the same. God gave you one voice – you should not make yourself another *(Hamlet)*.

Make sure students are idle
Whatever else you do, watch your timing. Do not expect that students might finish an exercise at different times and do not have any activities in reserve for early finishers. Early finishers, like the mixed-ability ideology which has given rise to this pernicious concept, is a figment of teacher trainers' vivid imagination. They too have to make a living. All classes are of the same level and all students work at the same pace, in the same way. If by any chance some learners do finish a task early, do not burden them with extra exercises or tasks. Give them a chance to relax and see what's going on outside the window or in the room next door. Do not be a tyrant: students should be left alone now and then so they can chat idly to their neighbour, preferably in their own language. This is the time for the mother tongue, rather than during the lesson per se. After all, why should students have to speak a foreign language all the time? Remember, they have a language and culture of their own, which can help fill any unexpected gaps in the lesson. So: hands off those early finishers; hands off the mother tongue.

Lose your students

This strategy does not refer to the annual trip to Britain to see the sights, Big Ben, Madame Tussauds, and whatnot. The truly boring teacher never agrees to trips of any kind, long or short. The boring teacher's private life is his or her own – he or she should not be expected to squander it in the company of students, who no doubt have their own private lives. No. Losing your students means making sure students do not know what it is you're talking about. In no circumstances should you pause to check that they are still with you. If they have not understood, that is their problem, not yours. Do not speak slowly to ensure all students are following: if they can't stand the heat, they should get out of the kitchen (George Bush).

Keep talking

Related to the previous point is the very important principle of keeping the flow of teacher talk going non-stop. If you are not fluent, who is? And how on earth are students going to develop fluency if they do not have a good model to imitate? Remember, as Pavlov said, *'Imitation is the mother of learning'* and as Skinner added, *'Parrots learn best'*. So keep talking and never be at a loss for words.

Nonsense

A lot of nonsense has been written in recent years by armchair experts in ELT about the need to motivate students and involve them in the process of learning. Students, they tell us, are the centre of the language learning process and our ultimate objective is the autonomy of the learner. This is the waffle of people who haven't been inside a classroom for years, who have lost touch with reality. They are the fantasies of frustrated revolutionaries who wouldn't recognise a large mixed-ability class if they saw one. And *they* have the cheek to tell us what to do! It is time we stood up for tradition and what we know works in the classroom.

If I could end on a lyrical note: the teacher is the centre of a Copernican classroom and the students, like so many planets, orbit around the teacher in their eternal, chaste beauty. When the students know their place and move in harmony around the teacher's authority and wisdom you will hear a divine music emanating from this dance of the classroom galaxy. Students are so many strings on the teacher's bow: untune those strings and hark what discord follows *(Troilus and Cressida)*.

If you follow the few words of advice given in this short course on BTM you can guarantee the Optimum Level of Boredom (OLB) in your classroom. You are guaranteed to turn your students against you and against the school and against learning of every kind. You will soon be in a position to advise other teachers on how to be boring and you could even set up Boredom Support in Groups (BSIGs) where you can, together with other boring teachers, share boring experiences. I would welcome letters from boring teachers everywhere on their most memorable and successful attempts to bore the pants off their students. Write to me, care of ETp.

The role of group dynamics in foreign language learning and teaching
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> [In a language course] success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom. (Stevick 1980:4)

In our quest to discover the nature of effective teaching and learning, we have come to agree more and more with Earl Stevick's statement (quoted above) concerning success in language learning. Consideration of the 'between people' factors led us to ask the following questions:

- What does, in fact, go on between people in a classroom?

- How does this affect the learning process?

- Will an understanding of the 'between people' factors provide clues to why some of our groups are easy and comfortable to work with and others more difficult?

- What can we, as teachers, do to influence positively what goes on between people in a classroom?

(***)we attempt to address these questions from the perspective of group dynamics, which, as we will argue, is potentially very fruitful for the language teaching profession. The basic assumption underlying the chapter is that group processes are a fundamental factor in most learning contexts and can make all the difference when it comes to successful learning experiences and outcomes. As teachers, we have all experienced occasions when something 'went wrong' with the class and the La course became a nightmare where teaching was hard, if not impossible. As Tiberius (1990:v) states in the introduction of his unique trouble-shooting guide to small group teaching, 'Unless teachers are singularly fortunate or exceptionally oblivious, they become aware of problems in their teaching from time to time. For example, a class is bored, hostile, uncomprehending, or simply not learning'. On the other hand, the L2 classroom can also turn out to be such a pleasant and inspiring environment that the time spent there is a constant source of success and satisfaction for teachers and learners alike. What is happening in these classes?

Our past experience and a consensus in the research literature indicate that group events are greatly responsible for:

- the participants' attitudes toward and affective perception of the learning process (Ehrman and Dörnyei 1988);
- the quantity and quality of interaction between group members (Levine and Moreland 1990);
- the extent of co-operation between students and the degree of individual involvement (Johnson and Johnson 1995);
- the order and discipline in the classroom (Jones and Jones 1995);
- students' relationships with their peers and the teacher (Ehrman and Dörnyei 1998);
- a significant proportion of the student's motivation to learn the L2
- student and teacher confidence and satisfaction (Dörnyei and Malderez 1997)*;*

Thus, we see group-related issues as being very much at the heart of the affective dimension of the L2 learning process. Regardless of whether or not the group leader – that is, the language teacher – pays attention to them, learning is strongly influenced by such group properties as structure, composition, cohesiveness, climate, norms, roles and interaction patterns, to name a few. Knowledge of these will allow the teacher to interpret group events, to intervene at the right time and with a clear purpose, and thereby consciously facilitate the emergence of harmonic and organic learning groups. As Jones and Jones (1995:101) point out:

> It is important to realize that groups, like individuals, have needs that must be met before the group can function effectively. If the classroom group is to function in a supportive, goal-directive manner, teachers must initially set aside time for activities that enable students to know each other, develop a feeling of being included, and create

diverse friendship patterns. Only after these feelings have been developed can a group of students proceed to respond optimally to the learning goals of the classroom.

In sum, a group-centred approach looks at what goes on 'between people' and, to a certain extent, how that affects what goes on 'inside' them. We see the L2 teacher as a juggler rushing to keep the various plates of 'skills', 'pace', variety', 'activities', 'competencies', etc. all spinning on their sticks. Yet this job is doomed to failure if the affective ground in which the sticks are planted is not firm. We would suggest that an awareness of classroom dynamics may help teachers establish firm footing; the time and effort invested in establishing a solid 'affective group ground' will pay off in the long run as it will lead to an experience that is rewarding interpersonally, linguistically, pedagogically and developmentally for teacher and students alike.

In this chapter after providing a brief overview of the discipline, our main focus will be on the *development* of groups. We will also touch upon the effects of various *leadership styles*.

What is 'group dynamics'?

Although groups vary in size, purpose, composition, character, etc., there are two simple but basic facts that have led to the formation of a discipline within the social sciences – *group dynamics* – to study them:

1. A group has a 'life of its own', that is, individuals in groups behave differently than they would do outside the group.
2. Even the most different kinds of groups appear to share some fundamental common features, making it possible to study *the group* in general.

The systematic study of the dynamics of groups was initiated in the United States by the social psychologist Kurt Lewin and his associates in the 1940's, and group issues have been studied since then within many different branches of the social sciences – social, industrial, organizational and clinical psychology, psychiatry, sociology and social work – that is, in fields which involve groups of various kinds as focal points around which human relationships are organized. Interestingly, educational researchers and practitioners have been somewhat slow in realizing the relevance of group dynamics to teaching, even though most institutional instruction takes place within relatively small groups. This is partly due to the different research traditions: educationalists interested in the psychology of classroom events have tended to focus on a more static concept, describing the social psychological climate of the learning context, the *classroom environment* (***).

A second reason for underutilizing the knowledge offered by group dynamics is that apart from certain special school types (e.g. private language schools where a student goes to only one class), class group boundaries lack the firmness necessary for autonomous group functioning and development, and group composition is often somewhat unstable (Ehrman and Dörnyei 1998). In most schools in the world, class group membership fluctuates continuously: the group is regularly split up into smaller independent units based on gender, competence or interest. Even with fairly steady class groups, at least one key member, the teacher, usually changes regularly, according to the subject matter.

In spite of the above, group theory has an important contribution to make to understanding what goes on in classrooms. Certain aspects of the classroom, such as the relationship patterns among students or the dynamic developmental progress of class groups, simply cannot be understood fully without a focus on classroom group processes. In the last two decades the growing popularity of *co-operative learning* (see Crandall, this volume; Dörnyei, in press) has also highlighted the relevance of group theory to education, since this instructional approach is entirely based on the understanding and positive exploitation of classroom dynamics.

The development of class groups

A great body of research suggests that groups move through similar stages during the course of development even in very diverse contexts (cf. McCollom 1990a; Wheelan and McKeage 1993). As Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998) contend:

> The development of groups ... has similarities from one group to the next that make it possible to describe a group's evolution in terms of phases, each of which has common patterns and themes. This generalizable change over time within groups has great practical implications for choosing appropriate interventions, whether by a therapist or by a teacher. It is therefore no wonder that group development is one of the most extensively studied issues in group research.

Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998) suggest that in educational contexts it is useful to distinguish four primary developmental stages: *group formation, transition, performing* and *dissolution.*

Group formation
Let us start our exploration of classroom dynamics at the very beginning: the first few lessons of a newly formed group. As a starting point, we must realize that the process of group formation is far from easy for the would-be members. On the first occasions participants meet, an element of tension is present in the interaction: people typically experience unpleasant feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and a lack of confidence (McCollom 1990b). They must deal with people they hardly know. They are uncertain about what membership in the group will involve, and whether they will be able to cope with the tasks. They observe each other and the leader suspiciously, trying to find their place in the new hierarchy. They are typically on guard, carefully monitoring their behaviour to avoid any embarrassing lapses of social poise. The first few classes spent together, then, are of vital importance to the future functioning of the group. Development proceeds rapidly and much structuring and organization occurs in this period. Fairly quickly, the group establishes a social structure that will prevail for a long time. Aspects of this group formation process which are particularly relevant for L2 teachers are the promotion of the development of *intermember relations* and *group norms* and the clarification of *group goals.*

Intermember relations
When discussing peer relations, we must distinguish between initial attraction towards and acceptance of others. According to Shaw (1981), initial interpersonal attraction is a function of physical attractiveness, perceived ability of the other person, and perceived similarity in attitudes, personality and economic status. This type of relationship is very different from 'acceptance' – a term introduced by humanistic psychology, referring to a non-evaluative feeling that has nothing to do with likes and dislikes, but involves rather an 'unconditional positive regard towards other individuals as complex human beings with all their values and imperfections. It is, in a way, the 'prizing of the learner as an imperfect human being with many feelings, many potentialities' (Rogers, 1983:124). It could be compared to how we may feel toward a relative, for example an aunt or an uncle, whom we know well and who has his or her shortcomings but who is one of us.

A key concept in group dynamics is the understanding that group development can result in strong cohesiveness based on intermember acceptance *regardless* of the initial intermember attractions. This implies that even negative initial feelings may turn into understanding and affection during the course of the group's development, and that 'one may like group members at the same time as one dislikes them as individual persons' (Turner 1984:525).

How can we, teachers, promote acceptance in our classes? There are several factors that may enhance intermember relations and acceptance. By far the most crucial and general one is *learning about each other* as much as possible, which includes sharing genuine personal information. Acceptance is greatly furthered by knowing the other person well enough; enemy images or a lack of tolerance very often stem from insufficient information about the other party.

In addition to getting to know each other, there are some more concrete factors that can also enhance affiliation (cf. Dörnyei and Malderez 1997; Ehrman and Dörnyei 1998; Hadfield 1992; Johnson and Johnson 1995; Levine and Moreland 1990; Shaw 1981; Turner 1984):

- *Proximity,* that is, physical distance (e.g. sitting next to each other), which is a necessary condition for the formation of relationships.
- *Contact,* referring to situations where individuals can meet and communicate (e.g. outings and other extracurricular activities, as well as 'in class' opportunities).
- *Interaction,* referring to situations in which the behaviour of each person influences the others' (e.g. small group activities, project work).
- *Co-operation* between members for common goals (e.g. to accomplish group tasks). As Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1995:19) summarize, 'Striving for mutual benefit results in an emotional bonding with collaborators liking each other, wanting to help each other succeed, and being committed to each other's well-being'.
- *Successful completion of whole group tasks* and a sense of group achievement.

- *Intergroup competition* (e.g. games in which groups compete), which has been found to bring together members of the small groups.
- *Joint hardship* that group members have experienced (e.g. carrying out a difficult physical task together), which is a special case of group achievement.
- *Common threat,* which can involve, for example, the feeling of fellowship before a difficult exam.

Group norms

Teachers and students alike would agree that there need to be certain 'rules of conduct' in the classroom to make joint learning possible. Some of these behavioural standards, or *group norms,* are constructed by the learners themselves, often following influential peers, but in educational settings *institutional norms* which are imposed from or mandated by the leader are also very common (e.g. special dressing and behavioural codes). The developing norm system has an immense significance: norms regulate every detail of classroom life, from the volume of speech to the extent of cooperation. Most importantly from an educational perspective, group norms regarding learning effort, efficiency and quality will considerably enhance or decrease the individual learners' academic achievement and work morale.

It is important to realize that institutional rules and regulations do not become real group norms unless they are accepted as right or proper by the majority of the members; ideally, members should internalize a norm so that it becomes a part of the group's total value system, as a self-evident precondition of group functioning (cf. Forsyth 1990; Levine and Moreland 1990). Therefore, it might be useful to include an explicit norm-building procedure early in the group's life by formulating potential norms, justifying their purpose, having them discussed by the group, and finally agreeing on a mutually accepted set of 'class rules'. The advantage of well-internalized norms is that when someone violates them, the group is likely to be able to cope with such deviations. This may happen through a range of group behaviours – from showing active support for the teacher's efforts to have the norms observed, to expressing indirectly disagreement with and dislike for deviant members, and even to criticizing them openly and putting them in 'social quarantine'. We should not underestimate the power of the group: it may bring significant pressures to bear and it can sanction – directly or indirectly – those who fail to conform to what is considered acceptable. Cohen (1994a) summarizes the significance of internalized norms well:

> Much of the work that teachers usually do is taken care of by the students themselves; the group makes sure that everyone understands what to do; the group helps to keep everyone on task; group members assist one another. Instead of the teacher having to control everyone's behaviour, the students take charge of themselves and others. (p. 60)

It must be emphasized that learners are very sensitive to the teacher's attitude towards the group norms. In a way the teacher, in the position being the group leader, embodies 'group conscience'. If the members feel that you as the teacher do not pay enough attention to observing the established norms or having them observed, they are quick to take the message that you did not mean what you said, and consequently tend to ignore these norms.

Group goals

The extent to which the group is attuned to pursuing its goal (in our case, L2 learning) is referred to as *goal-orientedness.* As Hadfield (1992:134) emphasizes, 'It is fundamental to the successful working of a group to have a sense of direction and a common purpose. Defining and agreeing on aims is one of the hardest tasks that the group has to undertake together':

Whereas in the 'real world' groups are often self-formed for a voluntarily chosen purpose, in school contexts the overwhelming majority of classes are formed for a purpose decided by outsiders – policy and curriculum-makers. Thus the 'official group goal' (mastering the course content) may well not be the only group goal and in extreme cases may not be a group goal at all; furthermore, members may not show the same degree of commitment to the group goal. Indeed, we have found that when participants of a new course shared openly their *own* personal goals, this has usually revealed considerable differences that lead to a negotiation process; this process, in itself, is a valuable form of self-disclosure that enhances intermember relations, and the successful completion of a set of 'group goals' is a good example of 'whole-group' achievement.

We find it particularly important, therefore, that the group agree on its goal by taking into account *individual goals* (which may range from having fun to passing the exam or to getting the minimum grade level required for survival) and *institutional constraints* ('you're here to learn the L2, this is the syllabus for this year!'), as well as the *success criteria.* Traditionally, these latter have been to do with exams and marks, but other communicative criteria can often be a better incentive, e.g. to be able to understand most of the word of the songs of a pop group, or other specific communicative objectives.

Further development of the group: transition, performing and dissolution
The development of a group is a continuous process; that is, after the ice has been broken and an initial group structure has been formed, the group enters into an ongoing process of change which carries on until the group ceases to exist. In fact, as Hadfield (1992:45) states, 'Forming a group is relatively easy: the initial stage of group life is usually harmonious as students get to know each other and begin to work together. Maintaining a cohesive group over a term or a year is far more difficult'.

The initial group formation phase is usually followed by a rugged transition period for the group to work through. As Schmuck and Schmuck (1988:42) state, 'It appears inevitable in classrooms that students will test their degree of influence with the teacher as well as with other students'. Indeed, at this stage of group development, differences and conflicts become common, stemming from disagreement and competition among members and between the group and the leader. These early struggles, however, are not necessarily detrimental to development; the turbulent processes usually elicit counter-processes involving more negotiation regarding goals, roles, rules and norms. Gradually a new awareness of standards and shared values emerges, and a finalized system of group norms is adopted with the explicit goal to eliminate tensions and increase productivity.

Stage 3, *performing,* involves the balanced, cohesive group in action, doing what it has been set up for. This is the work-phase, characterized by decreased emotionality and an increase in co-operation and task orientation: the group has reached a maturity, which enables it to perform as a unit in order to achieve desired goals. That is, the performing phase represents the point at which 'the group can mobilize the energy stored in its cohesiveness for productivity and goal achievement' (Ehrcltan and Dörnyei 1998). It should be emphasized that even during this stage group functioning is somewhat uneven: phases of *emotional closeness* (co-operation, intimacy) and *distance* (competitive impulses, status differentiation) recur in alternation. However, due to the group's increasing self-organization, the intensity of these phenomena decreases and affective energies are increasingly channelled into the tasks, as a result of which work output rises (Shambough 1978).

The last stage of a group's life is *dissolution,* which is an emotionally loaded period for most educational groups, demonstrated by the great number of reunion events often planned at the break-up of a group. This is the time to say goodbye and to process the feeling of loss, to summarize and evaluate what the group has achieved, pulling together loose ends, and to conclude any unfinished business. Learners may want to find ways of keeping in touch with each other, and they will also need guidelines and advice about how to maintain what they have learnt or how to carry on improving their L2 competence. Group endings, then, need to be managed as deftly as their beginnings.

Group cohesiveness
Group cohesiveness, the principal feature of a fully matured group, can be defined as 'the strength of the relationship linking the members to one another and to the group itself' (Forsyth 1990:10); that is, cohesiveness corresponds to the extent to which individuals feel a strong identification with their group. In a review of the literature, Mullen and Copper (1994) list three primary constituent components of cohesiveness: *interpersonal attraction, commitment to task* and *group pride.* Interpersonal attraction refers to the members' desire to belong to the group because they like their peers. Task commitment concerns the members' positive appraisal of the group's task-related goals in terms of their importance and relevance, that is, 'group feeling' is created by the binding force of the group's purpose. Group pride involves a cohesive force stemming from the attraction of membership due to the prestige of belonging to the group.

Cohesiveness has been seen as a prerequisite and predictor of increased *group productivity* (Evans and Dion 1991; Gully, Devine and Whitney 1995; Mullen and Copper 1994). This may be due to the fact that in a cohesive group there is an increased obligation to the group, members feel a moral responsibility to contribute to group success, and the group's goal-oriented norms have a strong influence on the individual. In

cohesive groups, therefore, the likelihood of 'social loafing' and 'free-riding' (i.e. doing very little actual work while still reaping the benefits of the team's performance) decreases. Furthermore, Clement, Dörnyei and Noels (1994) also found that perceived group cohesiveness contributes significantly to the learners' L2 motivation, which again enhances learning success.

How can cohesiveness be achieved? The following factors have been found effective in promoting the development of a cohesive group (cf. Ehrman and Dörnyei 1998; Forsyth 1990; Hadfield 1992; Levine and Moreland, 1990):

- *Positive intermember relations;* this means that all the factors enhancing intermember relations (discussed earlier) will strengthen group cohesiveness as well.
- *Amount of time spent together* and *shared group history:* as part of their natural developmental process, groups with a longer life-span tend to develop stronger intermember ties.
- *The rewarding nature of group experience* for the individual; rewards may involve the joy of the activities, approval of the goals, success in goal attainment and personal instrumental benefits.
- *Group legends:* as Hadfield (1992) points out, successful groups often create a kind of 'group mythology', which include giving the group a name and inventing special group characteristics (e.g. features of dress) in order to enhance the feeling of 'groupness'.
- *Investing in the group:* people tend to become more favourable toward their group – and thus cohesiveness increases – if they invest in it, that is, spend time and effort contributing to the group goals.
- *Public commitment* to the group also strengthens belongingness.
- *Defining the group against another:* emphasizing the discrimination between 'us' and 'them' is a powerful but obviously dangerous aspect of cohesiveness.
- *Leader's behaviour*: the way leaders live out their role and encourage feelings of warmth and acceptance can also enhance group cohesiveness. Kellerman (1981:16) argues that a prerequisite for any group with a high level of cohesiveness is a leader whose presence is continuously and strongly felt: `highly cohesive groups are those in which the leader symbolizes group concerns and identity and is personally visible to the membership'. Indeed, one of the surest ways of undermining the cohesiveness of a group is for the leader to be absent, either physically or psychologically.

The role of the teacher as group leader
Although there are a number of factors that contribute to successful outcomes for groups, according to N. W. Brown (1994), none is more important than the group leader. In educational contexts the designated leaders are usually the teachers, and the way they carry out leadership roles has a significant influence on the classroom climate and the group processes. Stevick (1996) expresses this very clearly:

> On the chessboard of academic-style education, the most powerful single piece is the teacher. Society invests him or her with authority, which is the right to exercise power. The personal style with which she or he wields that authority is a principal determinant of the power structure of the class. (p. 180).

The teacher affects every facet of classroom life (see Ehrman and Dörnyei 1998, Wright 1987). However, we will restrict our discussion here to one aspect of leadership which has a direct impact on group development, leadership style. In a classic study, Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939) compared the effects of three leadership styles – *autocratic* (or 'authoritarian'), *democratic,* and *laissez-faire.* The autocratic leader maintains complete control over the group; the democratic leader tries to share some of the leadership functions with the members by involving them in decision-making about their own functioning; a laissez-faire teacher performs very little leadership behaviour at all. Lewin and his colleagues found that of the three leadership types the laissez-faire style produced the least desirable outcomes: the psychological absence of the leader retarded the process of forming a group structure, consequently the children under this condition were disorganized and frustrated, experienced the most stress, and produced very little work. Autocratic groups were found to be more productive (i.e. spent more time on work) than democratic groups, but the quality of the products in the democratic groups were judged superior. In addition, it was also observed that whenever the leader left the room, the autocratic groups stopped working whereas the democratic groups carried on.

From a group-perspective, the most interesting results of the study concerned the comparison of interpersonal relations and group climate in the democratic and autocratic groups. In these respects democratic groups exceeded autocratic groups: they were characterized by friendlier communication, more

group-orientedness, and better member-leader relationships, whereas the level of hostility observed in the autocratic groups was thirty times as great as in democratic groups and aggressiveness was also eight times higher in them.

These pioneering results have been reproduced by a great number of studies over the past 50 years, and, based on these, we can say with some conviction that from a group developmental perspective a democratic leadership style is most effective. The authoritarian teaching style does not allow for the group to structure itself organically, nor for the members to share increasing responsibility, and thus it is an obstacle to group development. Consequently, as Schmuck and Schmuck (1988) argue, autocratic classes are often unable to 'work through' the stages of development and, as a result, frequently 'get stuck' and become stagnant: interpersonal relationships become formalized, distant and fragmented, dominated by cliques and subgroups rather than overall cohesiveness based on peer acceptance, and the group's learning goals and goal-oriented norms are not shared by the students.

An authoritarian role, together with highly structured tasks, however, does appear to many teachers as safer and more efficient than leaving the students, to a certain extent, to their own devices – and indeed the Lewin *et al.* (1939) study did point to the greater productivity of autocratic groups. Also, as Shaw (1981) points out, it is much *easier* to be a good autocratic leader than to be a good democratic leader: it is relatively simple and undemanding to be directive and issue orders, but rather difficult to utilize effectively the abilities of group members. All this means that, as in many cases in education, we have a conflict between short-term and long-term objectives: a tighter control over the students may result in a smoother immediate course and better instant results, whereas actively seeking student participation in all facets of their learning programme pays off in the long run.

Practical implications
In this last section we present ten practical suggestions which may be helpful in facilitating group development (the list is partly based on Dörnyei and Malderez 1997, which contains further ideas).

1. *Spend some time consciously on group processes.* This is likely to pay off both in terms of L2 learning efficiency and student/teacher satisfaction.
2. *Use 'ice-breakers' and 'warmers'.* Ice-breakers are activities used at the beginning of a new course to set members at ease, to get them to memorize each others' names, and to learn about each other. 'Warmers' are short introductory games and tasks used at the beginning of each class to allow members time to readjust to the particular group they are now with (reestablish relationships, implicitly be reminded of goals and norms, and at the same time 'switch' from the mother tongue into thinking in and articulating in the L2).
3. *Promote peer relations* by enhancing *classroom interaction* (using activities such as pair-work, small group work, role-play, 'mixer' classroom organization which not only allows, but encourages people to come into contact and interact with one another, as well as helping to prevent the emergence of rigid seating patterns) and by *personalizing the language tasks* (choosing, when possible, activities with a genuine potential for interpersonal awareness-raising to allow members to get to know each other).
4. *Promote group cohesiveness* by including small-group 'fun' *competitions* in the classes, by encouraging (and also organizing) *extra-curricular activities,* and by promoting the creation of *a group legend* (establishing group rituals, bringing up and building on past group events, creating a semi-official group history, encouraging learners to prepare 'group objects' and symbols such as flags, coats of arms, creating appropriate group mottos/logos, etc.).
5. *Formulate group norms explicitly, and have them discussed and accepted by the learners.* Include a specific 'group rules' activity at the beginning of a group's life, perhaps as a negotiated pyramid discussion. Specify also the consequences for violation of any agreed 'rule'. It may be a good idea to put group rules (and the consequences for violating them) on display, and, as and when necessary, re-negotiate them. Then, make sure that you observe the established norms consistently and never let any violations go unnoticed.
6. *Formulate explicit group goals* by having the students negotiate their individual goals, and draw attention from time to time to how particular activities help attain them. Keep the group goals 'achievable' by re-negotiating if necessary.
7. *Be prepared for the inevitable conflicts or low points in group life.* These are natural concomitants of group life which every healthy group undergoes, and you may welcome them as a sign of group

development (much as L2 teachers welcome creative developmental language errors), rather than blaming yourself for your 'leniency' and resorting to traditional authoritarian procedures to 'get order'.

8. *Take the students' learning very seriously.* We must never forget that the commitment we demonstrate toward the L2 and the group, the interest we show in the students' achievement, and the effort we ourselves make will significantly shape the students' attitudes to their group and to L2 learning.

9. *Actively encourage student autonomy* by handing over as much as you can of the various leadership roles and functions to the group (e.g. giving students positions and tasks of genuine authority, inviting them to design and prepare activities themselves, encouraging peer-teaching, involving students in record-keeping, and allowing the group to make real decisions).

10. *Prepare group members for the closing of the group.* The adjourning or closing stage should not be simply about saying goodbye but also giving members some continuity and helping them to prepare for their new phase of learning after the course. This might include agreeing on a reunion, discussing long-term learning objectives, and checking whether anyone needs any support for taking the next steps.

Conclusion

We have found group dynamics a very 'useful' discipline with many practical instructional implications. One basic assumption underlying this chapter has been that a real 'group' is a desirable entity, one which will affect the learning outcomes for each group member in the short-term as well as the long term. It is desirable because a cohesive group:

- means established acceptive relationships between all members, which allows for unselfconscious, tolerant and 'safe' L2 practice;
- allows each member to feel comfortable in the sense of knowing the rules of the game, which shifts the burden of 'discipline' from the teacher alone, to the group as a whole;
- encourages positive feelings as group goals and individual goals are simultaneously achieved and 'success' is experienced;
- acknowledges the resources each member brings, which can provide the 'content' for an infinite number of L2 practice activities of the information, opinion or perception-gap variety.

Valuing what everyone has to offer encourages all members (teacher included) to accept the challenges for their own learning that every group member's contribution can make. In other words, belonging to a cohesive learning group can help members take control of their own learning, as the teacher can neither know, nor 'control' the input from everyone. Learning, here, is viewed in a constructivist sense as 'concerned with how learners self-organise their own behaviour and experience to produce changes which they themselves value' (Thomas and Hari-Augstein 1985); in this sense groups are stepping stones, training grounds for autonomous continuous learning.

Our second assumption has been that as teachers it is valuable to learn more about the 'group', this powerful entity, which can have such an effect on the productivity, quality and impact of learning. By understanding how a group develops, and consciously striving to create and maintain one, we can make classroom events less threatening and more predictable. This is true both for ourselves and the students. In addition, we will develop more efficient methods of classroom management as well as learn from and with our students. Working on the group and with the group puts the excitement back into teaching.

Suggestions for further reading:
Dörnyei, Z. and **A. Malderez.** 1997. Group dynamics and foreign language teaching. *System, 25, 65-81.*
Ehrman, M. and **Z. Dörnyei.** 1998. *Interpersonal Dynamics in Second language Education: The Visible and Invisible Classroom.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Forsyth, D. R. 1990. *Group Dynamics.* (2nd ed.) Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
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Schmuck R. A. and **P A. Schmuck** 1994. *Group Processes in the Classroom.* (7th ed.) Madison, WI: Brown and Benchmark.

Classroom management
Marilyn Lewis

From Richards, J.C. and W.A. Renandya. 2002. *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice.* CUP

Teachers' concerns
Language teachers are familiar with the intended outcomes of Communicative Language Teaching, namely, for students to use the new language in speech and in writing for a variety of purposes and in a range of contexts. Teachers also have access to many textbooks setting out activities for doing this. What they often struggle with in their own classes is how to manage classroom learning to achieve these ends. The following comments are grouped into three broad categories: motivation, constraints, and the teacher's role.

Some teachers are concerned about *students' motivation:*

> *Students in our school are learning English because they have to. It makes motivation really difficult for the teacher.*

> *Students don't want to use English in class when they can say the same thing faster in their own language. What do other teachers do if one or two students refuse to speak?*

For others, *constraints* are things that teachers believe are stopping them from managing an ideal learning atmosphere:

> *How can we organize group work when the desks are all fixed to the floor in rows?*

> *Our classes are huge. Whenever I organize tasks, things get messy, such as some students finishing ahead of the others and wasting their time.*

> *How do experienced teachers manage when all the students are at different levels?*

> *We have to achieve examination results. Anything that doesn't lead there is not valued by the school or the parents.*

> *It's hard to access authentic materials for my teaching.*

Finally, some comments relate to *new roles for teachers* in language classrooms.

> *In this school, the tradition is for the teacher to be at the front by the board all the time, but in our teacher-training course they mentioned walking around the room. How could I keep control if I did that?*

> *I was trained to teach in a traditional way and now the government has decided to introduce Communicative Language Teaching. My English isn't good enough to answer students' questions.*

Elsewhere in this volume, writers address general principles and approaches to language teaching. This chapter deals with the "how" of classroom management. The concerns just cited are discussed in three sections: motivating students, managing constraints, and managing the teacher's role. The situation will be presented first, followed by some solutions.

Motivating students
The situation
The statement about learning in general, that it "never takes place in a vacuum" (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 188), is even more true in the language class. When it comes to creating a classroom climate for language learning, Williams and Burden point to three levels of influence: national and cultural influences on the language being learned, the education system where the language is being learned, and the immediate classroom environment. Influences on the language being learned are already determined, as is the education system. School policy, the textbook, and a national curriculum all influence the way students feel about language learning in general and about learning English in particular. However, teachers do influence the classroom environment by motivating unmotivated students. There are many ways in which students can be

"off-task": They fail to take part by sitting in silence, they distract other students by talking off the topic, and they provide "nonlanguage" entertainment. All of these call for teachers' management skills. Even taking into account differences from country to country and class to class, teachers of a range of learners and subjects believe that they can make a difference, as the examples that follow show.

Teachers' responses
In language learning, motivation is more specific than in a content-based subject. The history teacher can motivate students to take an interest in the subject, but the language teacher is looking for more than interest. Language is a skill, and a skill needs to be applied, not just stored in the head or admired at a distance.

Teachers encourage language use through both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Some students have strong intrinsic motivation; they know the benefits of learning a particular language. Others need to be reminded of where success could lead. For example, in societies where studying literature is an important part of the education system, teachers emphasize the benefits of being able to read English poetry, short stories, and novels in the original. In other contexts, teachers build on the career and commercial benefits to students: Fluent speakers of English are employed as interpreters, they travel abroad on business, and they work in tourism. Reminding students about the jobs waiting for fluent language speakers can be an important part of motivation.

Extrinsic motivation can come through rewards. Teachers supply interesting additional reading materials, they show a video to follow a difficult language task, or they invite guest speakers so that students can use the new language in an authentic way. Occasionally, though, rewards can take over and destroy enjoyment, as van Lier (1996) reports from one of his classes. He had organized a grammar game involving two teams as a means of motivating students, but unfortunately the teams became so competitive that they argued over every point and were quickly diverted from the grammar point.

In monolingual classes teachers report particular difficulty in persuading students to speak English. The following ideas have worked in small and large classes in different countries:

> Native-speaking visitors answer questions on specific topics
> Role-play, with one student taking the role of a foreigner
> Pen friends, by mail or E-mail
> Group presentations of topics students have researched
> Interclass debates
> Speech competitions
> Concerts with plays and singing

An ongoing aspect of motivation is dealing with the behavior of particular students. Experienced teachers usually have a scale of responses to off-task behavior, which helps them decide whether to ignore or attend to the problem. Here are three examples of how a teacher might move through stages in managing a particular type of behavior.

CASE 1: THE BACK-ROW DISTRACTOR
The same student always sits at the back and distracts others.

> Use eye contact while continuing to speak.
> Stop mid-sentence and stare until the student stops.
> Talk with the student after class to investigate the cause.

CASE 2: THE NONPARTICIPANTS
Several students are not taking part in the assigned activity.

> Ignore them if they are not distracting others.
> Walk past their desks and ask if there is a problem.
> Ask colleagues how the same students participate in other classes.

CASE 3: THE OVEREXUBERANT STUDENT
In a language class, teachers want students to speak. Sometimes, though, the pleasure of hearing the language in use sours when one outgoing student dominates question time, comment time, and all the rest of

the talking time. This calls for tact, because the person is often a good language model for others.

> Interrupt with "Thanks for that" and call on someone else to continue.
> Remind the student that there will be more talking time soon in groups.
> Talk to the student individually later.

In summary, making quick decisions on what to do about a problem depends on answers to questions like the following:

> Does the behavior hinder other students' learning?
> Is this just a single occurrence not worth wasting time on?
> Is it a whole-class problem or specific to one or two people?

Teachers also know that if large numbers of students are failing to attend to the lesson, there could be a problem with the lesson itself. The task may be too difficult, or it may have continued for too long, or the content may be boring. On the other hand, the problem may not be within the class at all. A forthcoming sports match or even unusual weather can change the mood of a class and signal to the teacher the need for a change of activity.

The suggestions in the rest of this chapter are intended to prevent off-task behavior before it starts.

Managing constraints

The situation

There are very few contexts in which students learn English only for the purposes of listening and reading, without any need to interact with others in speech or writing. When it comes to giving students opportunities to talk, constraints such as large, multilevel classes with fixed furniture, traditions of learning ("Games are for children. This is an adult class"), an examination-oriented curriculum ("We have to pass exams. Exams are not about group work"), and difficulty in accessing resources all seem to stand in the way of organizing talk. Resources frequently head the list of constraints. Some teachers have no photocopiers or no funds to make copies for the whole class, no tape recorders or video recorders, and their students have no source of interesting reading material, even in a library. The teacher may have a single copy of a useful article, colored photographs relevant to the topic but too small to be seen at the back of a large class, or half a dozen copies of commercial readers at the right level for a class of forty students. Managing with scarce resources is a challenge, but rather than abandoning these great resources, teachers often find ways around the problems.

Teachers' responses

Reading the many accounts of how other teachers have overcome constraints is one practical way of picking up ideas. For example, the encouraging news about group work despite large numbers and fixed furniture is that it happens in many parts of the world. The journal *English Teaching Forum* is a good source of articles, many of them written about classroom contexts where conditions seem less than ideal. Teachers have described how they organize groupwork in large classes with benches fixed to the floor by asking students to turn around and form groups of four with the students sitting in the row behind. Sometimes the group leader scrambles over desks to reach the teacher to discuss progress.

If traditions of learning make students reluctant to join in group work, then the first step is to overcome their preconceptions and "sell" the idea of groups. Explain that groups are a chance to speak without the teacher noticing mistakes. When students complain about having to listen to all the other students' bad English when they get into groups, point out that communication involves listening to everyone and making sense whether people speak slowly or fast, formally or informally.

- Make the activities age-appropriate. Avoid the word games with older learners.
- Make the purpose of each activity clear beforehand.
- Call for student feedback on group activities. What went well? What could be changed?
- Start with self-selected groupings, so that students are working with people they know or like.
- Show connections between group activities and the rest of the program to overcome the belief that group work is an extra.

In some cultures, students are very anxious about making mistakes in front of others. Oxford (1999) suggests a number of ways of reducing anxiety, including talking about the problem and minimizing conditions that

might increase it. In particular, she recommends laughter and music as antidotes to anxiety.

To overcome photocopying constraints, a single article can be photocopied just once and cut up so that each bstudent has one sentence. This becomes the basis of a "divided information" communicative activity. Colored photographs and a limited number of readers can be supplemented by self-access worksheets so that students work through the tasks and materials individually or in pairs on different days. Another resource is the blackboard sketch. Observation in many classrooms in different countries suggests that teachers underestimate their own artwork, whereas students enjoy it. Quick drawing while talking can enliven a dialogue, illustrate word meaning, or prompt student talk

If the barrier to group work is managing large numbers, the teacher could experiment with different types of group work which call for different management skills: free discussion, projects, and the particular type of group work described as "tasks." In free-discussion groups, the teacher can use the multilevel nature of the class to advantage by appointing specific roles to avoid problems such as having one student dominating the group and others sitting passively. A chairperson invites people to speak and holds back those who have talked long enough; a timekeeper watches that the group moves on to the various stages of the activity; a reporter takes notes ready for reporting back.

Another type of group work is the project. Projects involve collating material from a number of sources – inanimate and human. The teacher needs to check out availability beforehand with librarians and specialist informants. The informants could be students from other language classes, in which case time-tabling needs to be checked, or other teachers whom students interview between classes. E-mail informants also appreciate hearing from the class teacher before spending time answering questions from students.

The most specific type of small-group activity in the language class is the task. Tasks are described in detail elsewhere in this volume, but the concern here is how to manage them in large classes. A task requires input data, procedures, goals, and specific roles for teachers and learners, all of which need to be explained to the class. If photocopying facilities are limited, an alternative is to use the board or an overhead transparency. For example, a collection of words which students have to categorize and label can be written up in just a couple of minutes. Some teachers play music as the task input. Procedures can also be listed on the board, or, if they are short enough, the teacher can dictate them.

Whether the group activity is a discussion, a project, or a more specific task, it can have a variety of goals, which students select depending on their level and their interest. In a multilevel class, goals can be graded for different members of the group, according to their language competence, by modifying:

the topic (more abstract or more applied) the language difficulty (two versions of the same text) the amount of input the graphic support (more or fewer pictures) the time taken to finish the level of language students are expected to use for the same purpose the length of the final "product" the amount of support from the teacher and from other students

Because some groups finish before others, teachers often organize an individual activity to follow, and return to a discussion of outcomes when everyone has finished. May (1996, p. 8), in his book *Exam Classes,* suggests:

- different word limits for different groups of students, since it takes the same amount of homework time for individual   students to complete different amounts of material.
- providing more able students with different extra tasks rather than just more of the same.

An alternative is not to treat the discussion of goals as a whole-class activity, but to discuss with students group-by-group how their goals have been reached.

As with any other form of organization, group work can be overdone. The teacher's challenge is to decide which class activities can best be done individually, which work well in pairs or groups, and which call for whole-class work. Creative thinking will show teachers on a particular day with a particular class which form of organization to choose for activities such as the following:
- marking homework
- solving a word puzzle

- practicing new language
- answering students' questions
- listening to tapes
- writing a letter

Managing the teacher's role
The situation

The final aspect of classroom management is the role of the teacher. Teachers sometimes fear losing their central classroom role as practiced in the traditional classroom, where students asked questions that teachers could answer. In communicative language classrooms, on the other hand, they may ask how to say something that the teacher or textbook has not yet introduced or even that the teacher cannot answer.

The teacher's role includes relationships with colleagues. A typical situation is that one teacher is encouraging everyone to talk in pairs, and the talk is so successful that the teacher next door complains. Often it is not a question of actual noise level. Anyone who has taught next to a room where fifty students are chorusing drills loudly will know what noise is. It is more a question of the type of noise that people are accustomed to. When a whole department operates by the same approach, there are fewer misunderstandings.

Teachers' responses

One way of considering a teacher's role is in terms of metaphors. The teacher of a traditional grammar-based class could be described as a tap pouring water into an empty vessel. The teacher has all the knowledge about the new language and the empty vessels have to be filled with the grammar rules and the meaning of words. Then, in situationally based classrooms, where there was an emphasis on memorizing fixed dialogues, the teachers' roles changed. They became conductors of orchestras, bringing in the different players in turn and stopping the orchestra from time to time when someone hit the wrong note. In communicative language classes, there is far more scope for imagination in finding a metaphor: for example, the teacher is a gardener, supplying materials for growth (resources, encouragement) and rearranging the environment (the furniture) for this to happen. Stevick (1996, p. 180) uses the metaphor of a chessboard on which the teacher is "the most powerful single piece." According to this metaphor, the teacher is the most powerful player in classroom dynamics and determines the class structure.

Whatever the metaphor, the teacher has to manage a number of situations, predictable as well as unpredictable. Let's consider two aspects of classroom management: one being the way time is managed, and the other the managing of students' questions. These two are selected because the former is an example of something which can be planned, whereas the latter involves more spontaneous management skills.

One way of managing the large, multilevel class is to plan for the teacher to work with different groups of students at different times during the lesson. An example of this has been reported elsewhere (Lewis, 1998). In summary, four time slots can be used as follows:

Organization	Activity	Purposes
whole class	theme-based building on individual interests	social, language input, fluency
class in two halves, one with self-access materials, the other with the teacher	1. independent tasks 2. direct teaching	language practice, self-assessment preparation for independent work
as above, reversed	1. communicative tasks 2. independent work	focus on meaning follow-up to direct teaching
individual, pairs, or small groups	choice of tasks	one-to-one interaction with teacher and other students

In this model, the teacher has different roles at different times. For example:

• answering or asking questions
• up-front roles or supporting individuals
• language informant or eliciting language
• congratulating or encouraging individuals
• designer of tasks or materials

In detail, the lesson could flow like this: When the class arrives students work together on something that builds group dynamics. For example, the teacher might show graphics (on the overhead projector, for example) of a theme of common interest. Because of the graphics, the topic is accessible to everyone. The language input is oral and comes from both teacher and students. At the second, divided phase, each group builds on the theme that has been introduced. The more advanced group works independently on extra reading, on a traditional exercise, or in the computer laboratory. Meanwhile, the more elementary group is with the teacher, receiving further input on the theme.

At the third phase, this elementary group is ready to work independently, either individually or in pairs, practicing the language that has been introduced, while the advanced group has direct teaching from the teacher. Students in both groups could start by reviewing whatever they were doing at Phase 2 or they could move on to new work. Finally, everyone in the class is working at materials and tasks at their own level. This gives the teacher freedom to move around the room, responding to questions and identifying needs.

A second, and unplanned, aspect of classroom management is dealing with students' spontaneous questions. Teachers have to make quick decisions about whether to answer, postpone, or dismiss a question. As usual in classroom-management decisions, there are many possible responses. Being honest about why a question is not being answered can give students information about the learning process. Saying "Let me look that up so I can check all the details" is a reminder that everyone, teachers as well as students, should make use of reference material. Postponing the question is something teachers do whether or not they need to look it up. They might say, "That's an important question, but if I answer it now I think it will muddle you about the grammar point we are looking at today. Let me come back to that next week." Making a scribbled note of the question as the students watch lets them see that the teacher is taking the question seriously. If a student asks a question about a point the teacher has just explained, the first step is to gauge whether others too need further explanation ("Please put your hands up if you would like to hear the answer to that"). A huge show of hands suggests that more explanation is needed. If only a few hands go up, the teacher can ask those students to listen later when most of the class has started an exercise.

Many themes run through current interpretations of Communicative Language Teaching: cooperative learning, authenticity, and task-based syllabuses, to name just three. Underpinning them all is the ability of a teacher to manage students and the environment to make the most of the opportunities for learning and practising language.

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Interaction in the second language classroom
Jack C. Richards and Charles Lockhart

from Richards, J.C. 1994. *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classroom.* Cambridge University Press

A common theme underlying different methods of language teaching is that second language learning is a highly interactive process. A great deal of time in teaching is devoted both to interaction between the teacher and the learners, and to interaction among the learners themselves. The quality of this interaction is thought to have a considerable influence on learning (Ellis 1985). The focus in this chapter is on the nature of classroom interaction and how teachers can influence the kind of interaction that occurs in their own classrooms. These issues will be explored through examining the teacher's action zone within the class, learners' interactional competence, learner's interactional styles, and the effects of grouping arrangements on classroom interaction.

The teacher's action zone
The following notes were written by a teacher after teaching a lesson.

> Today I taught a lesson around a discussion on an environmental issue. The lesson went very well. First, I introduced the topic by talking about environmental problems in our city and got students to give examples of the major environmental problems we face. This got lots of comments from the class and everybody had an opportunity to say something and express an opinion. After ten minutes I divided the students into small groups and asked them to come up with a solution to one of the problems we talked about. During this time I moved around the class, monitoring the students' language use and giving feedback. After twenty minutes I got the group leaders to report their groups' recommendations and I wrote key points on the board.

The following comments on the same lesson were written by an observer:

> When you were speaking to the whole class, the students in the middle front row seats answered most of your questions.
> When you moved around the class you spent much more time with some groups than with others.

These different perceptions of a lesson highlight the fact that despite a teacher's best intentions, teachers sometimes interact with some students in the class more frequently than others. Although teachers generally try to treat students fairly and give every student in the class an equal opportunity to participate in the lesson, it is often hard to avoid interacting with some students more than others. This creates what is referred to as the teacher's *action zone*. An action zone is indicated by:
- those students with whom the teacher regularly enters into eye contact;
- those students to whom the teacher addresses questions; and
- those students who are nominated to take an active part in the lesson.

These students are located within the teacher's action zone and are likely to participate more actively in a lesson than students who fall outside the action zone. n many classrooms, this zone includes the middle front row seats and the seats up the middle aisle. If a teacher is teaching from the front of the class, students seated there are more likely to have the opportunity to participate actively in the lesson because of their proximity to the teacher (Adams and Biddle 1970). However, teachers often have their own personal action zones. For example, a teacher may:

- look more often to the right hand side of the class than to the left,
- call on girls more often than boys,
- call on students of one ethnic background more often than those of another,
- call on students whose names are easy to remember,
- call on brighter students more often than others, or
- in a mainstream class containing students with limited English proficiency, tend to focus attention on the

first language speakers in the classroom and to make relatively few demands on the others (Schinke-Llano 1983). (***)

Learner interactional patterns
The concept of interactional competence refers to the rules that students are expected to follow in order to participate appropriately in lessons. However, because of individual differences in learners' personalities and their individual cognitive styles, different patterns of interaction can, often be observed among learners in any one class. Good and Power (1976) describe six different interactional patterns. (***)

Task-oriented students (c.f. Concrete Learning Style). These students are generally highly competent and successful in completing academic tasks. They enter into learning tasks actively and generally complete tasks with a high degree of accuracy. They enjoy school and learning. They seldom need a teacher's help, but if they feel they need it they do not hesitate to ask for it. They are cooperative students and create few discipline problems.

Phantom students (c.f. Analytical Learning Style). These students may not often be noticed or heard in the classroom, although they are generally good students who work steadily on classroom tasks. However, they participate actively in lessons only infrequently, and rarely initiate conversation or ask for help. Because they do not disrupt the class or other students, teachers and other students do not know them very well.

Social students (c.f. Communicative Learning Style). These students place a high value on personal interaction. Although they are competent in accomplishing classroom tasks, they tend to value socializing with friends more than completing class assignments. They enjoy tutoring others in the class and participate actively in the lesson, although their answers may not always be correct. They tend to be popular with their classmates, but they may be less popular with their teachers because their approach to learning can create classroom management problems. They sometimes talk too much and do not hesitate to seek assistance from the teacher or other classmates when they need it.

Dependent students (c.f. Authority-oriented Learning Style). These students need the teacher's support and guidance to complete class tasks and tend not to maintain engagement on tasks without frequent reinforcement and support. They need structure and guidance in completing tasks and tend not to work well in large groups. They often depend on the teacher or other students to tell them if their learning has been successful and if not, how to remedy the problem.

Isolated students These students set themselves apart from others and withdraw from classroom interactions. They may avoid learning situations by turning away from activities such as peer or group work. They show reluctance to sharing their work with others or allowing others to respond to it. Consequently they tend to be less proficient in completing learning tasks.

Alienated students These students react against teaching and learning, and are often hostile and aggressive. They create discipline problems and make it difficult for those around them to work. They require close supervision, and their learning problems are often related to personal problems.

While classifications such as these capture some useful generalizations about student interaction patterns in the classroom, most systems of this kind are somewhat arbitrary, and students may not be classified easily in one category or another. They may favor one interactional style for one particular learning task and then adopt a different style for a different task, for example. The usefulness of classification systems such as this, is simply to serve as a reminder that individual students may favour different interactional styles and that there is no single interactional style that can be regarded as ideal for all students. (***)

Grouping arrangements
While learners may have individual preferences for the kind of interactional style they favour in the classroom, the interactional dynamics of a classroom are largely a product of choices the teacher makes about the learning arrangements he or she sets up within the lesson. Most teachers use the following learning arrangements depending on the kind of lesson they are teaching, though teachers use some more frequently than others.

Whole-class teaching The teacher leads the whole class through a learning task. For example, the teacher conducts a class discussion of an article from a newspaper, asking questions about it and eliciting comments around the class.

Individual work Each student in the class works individually on a task without interacting with peers or without public interaction with the teacher. For example, students complete a grammar exercise by going through a worksheet.

Pair work Students work in pairs to complete a task.

Group work Students work in groups on learning tasks.

Choosing grouping arrangements that are appropriate for specific learning tasks is an important decision. Some of the factors which affect grouping arrangements will now be considered.

Whole-class teaching

Research on teaching suggests that whole-class instructional methods are the most commonly used models in public school teaching, particularly for the beginning of a lesson. In whole-class activities the teacher typically begins a lesson by reviewing prerequisite material, then introduces and develops new concepts or skills, then leads the group in a recitation or supervised practice or application activity, and then assigns seatwork or homework for students to do on their own. The teacher may occasionally teach small groups rather than the whole class (especially for beginning reading instruction) and may provide a degree of individualized instruction when 'making the rounds' during individual seatwork times. (Good and Brophy 1987: 353)

Researchers of classroom interaction have developed observational systems to describe and classify patterns of student-teacher interaction in teacher-led whole-class activities. A well-known observation scheme developed for observing teacher-student interaction in mainstream classes uses seven categories for describing verbal exchanges (Brown 1975:67):

TL *Teacher lectures* – describes, explains, narrates, directs

TQ *Teacher questions* – about content or procedure, which pupils are intended to answer.

TR *Teacher responds* – accepts feelings of the class; describes past feelings and future feelings in a   non-threatening way.
      Praises, encourages, jokes with pupils.
      Accepts or uses pupils' ideas. Builds upon pupil responses.
      Uses mild criticism such as "no, not quite."

PR *Pupils respond* – directly and predictably to teacher questions and directions.

PV *Pupils volunteer* – information, comments, or questions.

S *Silence* – pauses*,* short periods of silence.

X *Unclassifiable* – confusion in which communication cannot be understood. Unusual activities such as reprimanding or criticizing pupils. Demonstrating without accompanying teacher or pupil talk. Short spates of blackboard work without accompanying teacher or pupil talk.

When this system is applied to the description of what happens in whole class teacher-led activities, the findings from both second language classrooms and first language classrooms are the same: about 70% of the classroom time is taken up by the teacher talking or asking questions (Chaudron 1988). (***)

There are both advantages and disadvantages to whole-class teaching in language classes. Among the advantages are:

- It enables the teacher to teach large numbers of students at the same time. In some countries, classes of up to fifty or sixty students are common, necessitating the use of many whole-class activities.
- In situations where a mainstream classroom contains a number of ESL students, the ESL students can feel that they are a part of the mainstream group and are functioning under equal terms with them rather than being singled out for special treatment.
- It can serve as a preparation for subsequent activities which can be completed individually or in groups.

However, critics of whole-class teaching have pointed out a number of disadvantages.

- Such instruction is teacher-dominated, with little opportunity for active student participation.
- Teachers tend to interact with only a small number of students in the class, as is seen from studies of teachers' action zones.
- Whole-class teaching assumes that all students can proceed at the same pace. However, slower students may be lost, and brighter students may be held back.

Although teachers can adapt whole-class activities to encourage more student participation (for example, by stopping from time to time during an activity and asking students to compare a response with a partner), teachers need to include other types of teaching in their lessons to provide learners with a variety of opportunities for communication and individual language use within the classroom.

Individual work
Individual work, or "seatwork," is generally the second most frequently used teaching pattern in classrooms. It includes such activities as completing worksheets, reading a comprehension passage and answering questions, doing exercises from a text or workbook, and composition and essay writing. Among the advantages of individual work are:

- It provides learners with the opportunity to progress at their own speed and in their own way.
- It provides learners with opportunities to practice and apply skills they have learned.
- It enables teachers to assess student progress.
- It enables teachers to assign different activities to different learners based on individual abilities and needs.
- It can be used to prepare learners for an up-coming activity.

Among the disadvantages are:

- It provides little opportunity for interaction, both with the teacher and with other students.
- It is sometimes difficult to monitor what students are actually doing during individual work.
- Students may complete a task at different times and run out of things to do, creating a classroom management problem.

For individual work to be accomplished successfully, a number of characteristics of successful individual work have been identified (Good and Brophy 1987: 233-4):

- It should be planned so that it relates to other kinds of learning arrangements, rather than being an isolated 'filler' activity.
- Students should be given specific tasks with clear goals. There should be monitoring and follow-up to determine if students understand the task or are completing it accurately.
- Tasks should be at the right level of difficulty. Students should know what to do when completing an activity. (***)

Pair work
Despite the need for whole-class teaching and individual work in language classrooms, it has often been emphasized that without other kinds of interaction, students are deprived of many useful and motivating opportunities for using and learning the new language. Various alternatives have been proposed which emphasize the use of pairs and small groups in the classroom (e.g., Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Communicative Language Teaching). Through interacting with other students in pairs or groups, students can be given the opportunity to draw on their linguistic resources in a non-threatening situation and use them to complete different kinds of tasks. Indeed, it is through this kind of interaction that researchers believe many aspects of both linguistic and communicative competence are developed. "One learns how to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally, out of this interaction syntactic structures are developed" (Hatch 1978: 404).

Both Long (1983) and Krashen (1985) have argued that when second language learners interact focusing on meaningful tasks or exchanges of information, then each learner receives (a) comprehensible input from his or her conversational partner, (b) a chance to ask for clarification as well as feedback on his or her output, (c) adjustment of the input to match the level of the learner's comprehension, and (d) the opportunity to develop new structures and conversational patterns through this process of interaction (see Figure 3). Long argues that use of carefully designed pair work tasks can help learners obtain 'comprehensible input,' that is, language that is at an appropriate level to facilitate acquisition. This input is obtained through the interactive negotiation learners take part in as they complete the task.

The following factors influence the nature of pair work tasks:

Information flow. For pair work tasks to promote better interaction, both students need to have different information that they are required to share in order to solve a problem or complete a task. Tasks with this type of information flow have been described as two-way tasks, while tasks in which one student has new information and presents it to his or her partner have been described as one-way tasks.

Product focus. Tasks are often more motivating if the result of the negotiation or interaction is some kind of product, such as a list, a map, a completed diagram, or a chart.

Choice of partner. Many different kinds of pairings are possible: for example, by mixed ability levels, shared ability levels, or mixed ethnic or language background. The need to change pairings from time to time is also an issue when pair work activities are used routinely.

Roles of partners. For some tasks both students may share a common role; for other tasks, one partner may serve as a peer tutor.

Group work

The use of group work activities is another frequently cited strategy for changing the interactional dynamics of language classrooms. In addition to the benefits of pair work activities, group work has a number of additional advantages.

- It reduces the dominance of the teacher over the class.
- It increases the amount of student participation in the class.
- It increases the opportunities for individual students to practice and use new features of the target language.
- It promotes collaboration among learners.
- It enables the teacher to work more as a facilitator and consultant.
- It can give learners a more active role in learning.

Successful group work activities involve decisions about the following factors:

Group size. An optimum size for group work needs to be determined based on the kind of task students are carrying out. If the group is too large, student interaction is affected; only a few students may participate, the others remaining silent or passive.

Purpose. Group activities need a goal, procedures, and a time frame to accomplish them, if they are to be focused and productive.

Roles. Decisions need to be made concerning the different roles of group members. Will they all have the same role? Are a group leader and secretary required? Will students take on different personas in completing a task?

The interactional dynamics of a lesson can thus be viewed as resulting from the interplay between the teacher's and the learners' interactional styles, the moment-to-moment demands of instruction, and the grouping arrangements that have been set up to facilitate teaching and learning. Lessons thus have a constantly changing interactional structure, which can either hinder or support effective language learning. (***)

How do I organise my students into groups?
Nick McIver

The classic teaching format of the teacher standing in front of the class can be useful, for example, when invigilating an examination, giving instructions or teaching a new structure. We've all experienced it, we all do it, and it doesn't really need much explanation, except to give one word of warning: don't give out handouts until you're ready for people to look at them. (We've all made that mistake too!)

However, it makes good teaching sense to use other formats – a change every 20 minutes is recommended to enhance learning – and all other formats require a little classroom management. As with any aspect of teaching, it's worth giving some consideration to how you will manage different activities before you find yourself confronted by a room full of people.

Giving instructions
The most important thing to remember when you ask students to focus anywhere but on you is to give clear instructions before you lose their attention. You also need to institute a procedure for getting students' attention back. This might be at the end of the activity, or when you need to interrupt them to give additional instructions if something goes wrong, as happens regularly, even with experienced teachers. It's almost impossible to foresee all the ways students have of not understanding what to do!

Shouting over the noise of the students is usually the least effective way of attracting attention (unless it is something you very rarely do). A small bell can be quite effective, but a standard procedure requiring no props is to clap your hands (which should attract the attention of a proportion of the class) and then put your hand in the air. If students see your hand in the air, they put their hands in the air and stop talking. As the quietness spreads round the class, more and more people realise what's happening and join in. In addition, with any activity, make sure students know:
- what the task is
- how long (approximately or precisely) they have to complete it
- how they will know when they have finished (what the required result is)
- how to do it

This is not as complex as it sounds. A simple example might be:

> *You've got ten minutes to work with your partner on Exercise 12. Write the answers in your own books. Do at least eight questions, and do all of them if you can. Put up your hand if you want my help.*

Reporting back
An alternative to the potentially tedious procedure of someone telling the class what their group talked about is to ask groups to write their main ideas on a sheet of paper. Everyone then goes round the class at their own speed to see what other groups have written possibly with one person from each group staying behind to answer questions about their group's ideas.

1 Pairs
Apart from changing the focus of a lesson by using video or cassettes, the simplest way of altering the format and adding variety is to organise students into pairs. The instruction *'Work with the person sitting next to you'* requires little thought or preparation, and it effectively gives students the chance to confirm their understanding (or otherwise) of what's going on, as well as, importantly, to say some of the things unrelated to the lesson that have been blocking their concentration.

Even when furniture can't be moved (the most common 'defence' against pairwork), you can vary this formula by asking alternate students to turn round and work with the person behind them.

Changing partners
To get a little more variety into the pairs, each pair nominates who is A and who B (ask all As to put up their hands, just to confirm that this crucial instruction has been followed, before the potential for chaos is realised with the next step). All As stand up and move to a new B. Ideally change pairs again during the same lesson and ask all Bs to move to a new A they haven't worked with before, just so that everyone has a chance to stretch their legs.

Odd numbers
In case you share the concern of a trainee in a teacher training course I once gave, if you have a student left over when all the others are in pairs, you can either work with one student yourself (advantage: you can give individual attention to students that need it; disadvantage: you can get 'stuck' with one student), or you can rotate the 'odd' person, who either works alone or in a group of three.

2 Groups
It can often be very profitable to have students working in groups – the optimum size usually being between five and seven students.

Forming groups
One of the simplest ways of organising students is to have self-selecting groups, in which case all you need to do is have a preliminary session when students practise responding quickly and quietly to instructions. Make it a competition, and students put up their hands when they are sitting in the required group format:

- *Get into groups of five.*
- *Get into groups of four with at least one boy and one girl in each group.*
- *Arrange yourselves in a line in alphabetical order of first names. Now get into groups of four starting from both ends.*
- *Arrange yourselves in line in order of your birthdays. Now get into groups of five, starting from both ends.*

Random groups
If you want students to get into three (four, five, six) big random groups, particularly if you want to move them away from the people they normally sit next to, ask them to count off round the room, one person saying the next number in sequence: *one, two, three (four five, six), one, two, three (four five, six)*, etc. Before they begin, tell them to remember their number. Then ask all the number ones to sit together in one place which you designate, all the twos to sit together, etc.

3 Triads
Having students work in groups of three is worthy of a separate note as it is an excellent number for having an observer for short roleplay activities. Students often run out of steam in roleplaying activities, sometimes because they don't understand the structure, sometimes because they get embarrassed or they run out of ideas, or they don't have the language. The following structure sorts out all of these problems.

Rotating roleplays
If you have a dialogue between a shop assistant and a customer, for example, students work in groups of three and decide who is A, who B and who C. In the first 'round', A is the assistant, B the customer and C the observer. A and B perform their dialogue and the observer's role is to listen and report back to the class on what ideas the assistant introduced (eg cutting the price). This gives everyone ideas about what they can say when it's their turn. In the second round, A is the customer, B the observer and C the assistant. A and C perform their dialogue and the observer notices and reports back on how many times they introduce the target language (which may be written on the board). In the third round, each person takes the role they haven't had before and the observer gives the assistant a grade out of ten for their success in selling.

4 Pyramids
This cumulative format is an excellent way of practising the language of persuasion and/or having a class discussion. Students start by working in pairs (giving their point of view, putting a list in order, making suggestions to solve a problem, etc). Pairs then get together to continue the activity in groups of four. Fours then get together as eights. One person from each group of eight then reports back to the class.

5 Mingles
This is potentially the most chaotic format (if you don't set it up clearly), but it is also one of the most efficient ways of giving everyone maximum language practice in minimum time. The basic format is that everyone stands up and interacts with as many other people as possible in the available time. It works well for matching activities.

Different pictures
Hand out several slightly different versions of a picture (with three copies of each version). Students describe their picture to different people until they have found two others with the same picture. Groups then take their pictures to the teacher for confirmation. Since there is a perverse law which says that one group will find one another within five seconds, make sure that you have at least one extra full set of the pictures so that you can say 'Congratulations! Here's another picture for each of you. Continue with the activity and find your new groups!'

Questions and answers
Alternatively, you can have a swapping system. You have practised a series of questions and responses. Print out all the questions onto separate slips of paper. Demonstrate with one student before you start. You hold one of the questions and give one to the student. You ask your question and the student gives the response. The student then asks you their question and you give the response. You and the student then swap questions and turn away, each with a new question, to repeat the sequence with two other people. (Give question slips to the next two students just to make sure they've understood the system.) Give out question slips to everyone and let them mingle! You are free to circulate ─ to make sure everyone understands what to do, to make sure people are on task, and to help with language which is going awry.
Mingles also work well for completing questionnaires or for conducting surveys.

The biggest obstacle to organising students into groups is usually fear ─ the teacher's fear of losing control. In fact, it is much easier to exert control from within the group than from outside, and students usually react much more positively to 'freedom' than they do to control. Stick to the simple instruction rules given above and then give it a try.

It's rather like swimming. The hardest part is taking your foot off the ground the first time, but when you trust the water, you can't remember what you were afraid of ─ and the feeling of release is wonderful!

Implementing cooperative learning
George M. Jacobs and Stephen Hall

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Introduction

In the last decade there has been a growing interest among ESL/EFL teachers in using cooperative learning activities. With cooperative learning, students work together in groups whose usual size is two to four members. However, cooperative learning is more than just putting students in groups and giving them something to do. Cooperative learning principles and techniques are tools which teachers use to encourage mutual helpfulness in the groups and the active participation of all members.

These principles can be seen in the cooperative learning technique *Numbered Heads Together* (Kagan, 1992) that can be used, for example, in an ESL/EFL reading class. There are four steps in doing *Numbered Heads Together:*

1. Each student in a group of four gets a number: 1, 2, 3, or 4.
2. The teacher or a student asks a question based on the text the class is reading.
3. Students in each group put their heads together to come up with an answer or answers. They should also be ready to supply support for their answer(s) from the text and/or from other knowledge.
4. The teacher calls a number from 1 to 4. The person with that number gives and explains their group's answer.

Numbered Heads Together encourages successful group functioning because all members need to know and be ready to explain their group's answer(s) and because, when students help their groupmates, they help themselves and their whole group, because the response given belongs to the whole group, not just to the group member giving it.

A good deal of research exists in other areas of education suggesting that cooperative learning is associated with benefits in such key areas as learning, self-esteem, liking for school, and interethnic relations (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993; Slavin, 1995). In second and foreign language learning, theorists propose several advantages for cooperative learning: increased student talk, more varied talk, a more relaxed atmosphere, greater motivation, more negotiation of meaning, and increased amounts of comprehensible input (Liang, Mohan, & Early, 1998; 0Isen & Kagan, 1992).

However, implementing cooperative learning is not like waving a magic wand: Just say a few magic words, and *whoosh!* everything is working great. In fact, in planning and executing cooperative learning, teachers have many decisions to make.

In the planning stage of cooperative learning, there are many philosophical questions to think about, such as whether to stress intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (Graves, 1990), how much choice to give students in such matters as how, about what, and with whom they will collaborate, and how tightly to structure activities to help encourage effective cooperation (Sapon-Shevin & Schniedewind, 1991). These questions demand the attention of all teachers interested in cooperative learning. However, the focus of this article is the more mechanical aspects of actually executing cooperative learning in the classroom.

From our experience doing workshops and courses for teachers about cooperative learning, we have chosen ten of the most commonly asked nuts-and-bolts questions. The suggestions listed come from our own ESL and EFL classes, ideas from colleagues and from the teacher participants in our cooperative learning workshops and courses, and books and articles in the field.

This article presents a wide range of options. Readers will want to choose those options which match their own teaching styles and their learners' backgrounds and needs. You may well come up with ideas not mentioned here. (If so, please send them to us. We will add them to our list.) If cooperative learning is new to you and your students, remember that you all may need time to adjust. We suggest that you explain to students why you are using cooperative learning; start slowly, be patient, and be persistent.

How big should groups be?
1. Even two people are a group.
2. Generally speaking, the smaller the group, the more each member talks and the less chance there is that someone will be left out. If time is short, smaller groups can usually do an activity more quickly. Smaller groups also require fewer group-management skills. Thus, when starting with cooperative learning, groups of two or three may be best.
3. Larger groups are good because they provide more people for doing big tasks, increase the variety of people in terms of skills, personalities, backgrounds, and so on, and reduce the number of groups for the teacher to monitor.
4. Many books on cooperative learning recommend groups of four. For example, Kagan (1992) suggests foursomes and uses many cooperative learning techniques in which students first work in pairs, and then the two pairs of the foursome interact with one another.

How should groups be formed?
1. Most experts on cooperative learning suggest that teacher- selected groups work best, at least until students become proficient at collaboration. Teacher- selected groups usually aim to achieve a heterogeneous mix. Such a mix promotes peer tutoring, helps to break down barriers among different types of students, and encourages on-task behavior.
2. In creating teacher-assigned teams, factors to consider include language proficiency, first language, sex, race, and diligence.
3. An effective way to set up mixed-proficiency groups is to band the learners' names into, say, four proficiency clusters from high to low and then select randomly from within each band so that groups will involve learners with a range of proficiencies. Other criteria, such as sex, race, and diligence, can be considered when deciding whom to choose from which band.
4. Random grouping is quick and easy and conveys the idea that one can work with anyone.
5. Many ways exist for randomizing groups. The most common is counting off. Take the number of students in your class, divide by the number of students you want per group, and the result will be the number students should count to. For example, if there are 56 students in the class and you want groups of 4, divide 56 by 4, which is 14; so, students should count to 14.
6. Other ways to set up random groups include using playing cards, giving out numbered pieces of paper. and distributing cards with different categories on them and letting students group themselves according to the category. An example of the latter procedure would be to have some cards with names of animals, others with names of plants, others with names of countries, and so on. All the animals would find each other and form a group, all the plants would look for the other plants, and so forth.
7. The number of students in the class may not fit evenly with the number of students per group. For example, if there are forty-seven students in the class, and you want groups of four, three students will be left over. It might be best to from eleven groups of four and one group of three.
8. When students become good at cooperative group work, they can group themselves for example, by interests - for self-directed projects (Sharan & Sharan, 1992).

When students are working in their groups, how can the teacher get the class's attention?
1. A signal can be used to tell students that groups should quickly bring their discussions to a temporary halt and face the teacher. One popular signal is the teacher raising a hand. When students see this, they are to raise their hands also, bring their discussion to a close, alert other students who have not seen the teacher's raised hand, and face the teacher. One way to remember this is RSPA (Raise hand, Stop talking, Pass the signal to those who have not seen it, Attention to teacher).
2. Other possible signals include ringing a bell, playing a musical instrument, blowing a whistle, snapping one's fingers, and flicking the lights on and off. One teacher we know starts to sing! Another puts two signs on the board, one to stop working and face the teacher, and the other to continue but more quietly. She knocks on the board to get students' attention and then points to the

appropriate sign.
3. Some teachers play music in the background as groups study together. In this case, turning off the music can be me attention signal (Saeki, 1994).
4. When students lead class activities, they can use the same signal.
5. One student in each group can take the role of group checker with the responsibility of watching out for the teacher's signal and being sure the group responds to the signal quickly. Many other types of roles can be used to facilitate group functioning (Ilola, Power, & Jacobs, 1989).
6. If some groups are not responding quickly to the attention signal, rewards, such as praise, can be given to encourage this component of smooth-functioning group activities.

What can be done if the noise levele becomes too high?
1. One student per group can be the noise monitor or quiet captain whose function is to urge the group to collaborate actively, yet quietly.
2. The closer together students sit, the more quietly they can talk. Having students sit close together not only helps reduce the noise level, but also helps foster cooperation and minimizes the chance of someone being left out.
3. Along with sitting close together, students can use special quiet voices. for example, "6-inch" voices or "30-centimeter" voices.
4. A signal similar to the one used to get the class's attention (see the preceding section) can be used as a sign to continue working but a bit more quietly. For example, for "Stop working," the signal might be hand raised straight up, and for "work more quietly," the signal could be hand raised with arm bent at elbow.
5. Kagan (1992) suggests stoplight cards. A green card goes on the desk of groups if they are working together quietly. A yellow card indicates they need to quiet down a bit. When a red card is put on their desk, the group should become completely silent, and all should silently count to ten before starting work again.

What if a student does not want to work in a group?
1. Discussing the advantages that students can derive from learning in groups may help overcome resistance to group activities. These potential advantages include learning more, having more fun, and preparing for tasks away from school in which collaboration is necessary.
2. Students may look more favorably on cooperative learning if they understand that talking with others is a language learning strategy that they can apply outside of class as well (Oxford, 1990).
3. Students should realize that studying in groups is only one of several ways of learning that will go on in the class.
4. Group games may encourage students to look forward to other group-leaming activities. Many enjoyable games also teach academic and social skills.
5. Start with pairs and tasks that require exchange of information (Nation, 1990). Provide language support in terms of useful vocabulary and structures, so that students are more likely to succeed (Richards, 1995). Success here will build confidence in the ability to work in groups.
6. Students who do not want to study in groups can be allowed to work on their own. In our experience, after a while, they will want to take part in the group interaction and will ask to join a group.

What if some groups finish earlier than others?
1. Check to see if the groups have done the assignment properly.
2. Have groups that finish early compare what they have done with other groups that also finished early.
3. Have groups discuss how they worked together. Then, because sometimes smooth-functioning groups can provide good models for others, you might want to have exemplary groups explain their group process. This might help all groups work together more efficiently.
4. Develop one or two "sponge activities." Sponge activities are short activities, related to the main task, that soak up the extra time between when the first and last groups finish.
5. Set time limits to discourage groups from dawdling. These time limits are flexible. If groups are working well, but need more time, the limit can be extended.
6. Ask students to help other groups that have not yet finished.
7. Groups that finish early can work on homework or other assignments.

What if a few students are frequently absent?
1. Assign these students as extra members of groups. For example, if students are working in groups of four, add such students as the fifth member of groups.
2. Assign tasks that can be accomplished in one class period.
3. Being a member of a group may give such students a feeling of belonging and a reason to come to school that they did not have before. Groups may also help them to be more successful in school, and thus to enjoy being at school more.
4. Coach students in how to use appropriate peer pressure to encourage frequently absent members to come to school and to complete their portion of group tasks. (In some cases, of course, absent students may have family obligations or other nonschool reasons for missing class.)
5. If a group is working cooperative Jigsaw activities (Kagan, 1992), give the missing piece to the whole group.
6. Make sure that groups have contingency plans in case members are missing. Learning to make such plans is an important group skill, because absences are also a common problem in groups outside of school.
7. In an ongoing activity, ask groups to update absent members when they return to school. This encourages students to develop peer-tutoring skills.
8. Let groups be responsible for contacting absent members to inform them of what they missed and to make sure that they know what the assignments are.
9. Be prepared to adjust grading if such students leave their groups in a lurch, giving absent student a lower mark.

How long should groups stay together?
1. Keeping groups together for fairly long periods, 4 to 8 weeks, gives them a chance to become comfortable with one another, allows them to form a group identity and bond, and gives them the opportunity to learn how to overcome difficulties they have working together. This is where spending time during or after cooperative activities to have groups process their interaction comes in handy (Dishon & O'Leary, 1993).
2. Groups that stay together for at least a few weeks facilitate long-term projects, such as those using the cooperative learning method Group Investigation (Sharan & Sharan, 1992).
3. Try to resist the temptation to disband groups that are not working well. Stress to students that we need to learn to be able to work with all sorts of people, including those whom we, at least initially, do not like. Use team-building activities and instruction in collaborative skills to help create a spirit of togetherness in groups (Kagan, 1992).
4. Forming heterogeneous groups according to such criteria as proficiency, sex, first language, and personality is a lot of work for teachers. Therefore, one would not want to do that too often.
5. Even while students are in long-term groups, short one-shot activities can be done with different grouping configurations. This may add a bit of variety.
6. Avoid keeping groups together if they begin to become cliquish (Dishon & O'Leary, 1993).

How should groups be ended?
1. All groups can end with statements by learners and the teacher not only about the content learned, but also about the learning process.
2. When long-standing groups are disbanded, there should be some kind of closure activity for members to thank each other for their help and to sum up what has been learned about working in groups. This can be in oral or written form.
3. Groupmates can write "letters of reference" to be given to members of the person's new group.
4. Group pictures can be taken.
5. Group products can be posted or published. This aids a sense of achievement and gives credibility to the group's work. Also, group products can serve as vehicles for assessment by individuals, groups, and teachers.

What percentage of the time should cooperative learning be used?
1. No one suggests that the class be organized in cooperative groups all the time.

2. Many cooperative learning activities combine a group component with components in which the teacher lectures or demonstrates, and others in which students work alone (e.g., Slavin, 1995).

3. When students and/or teachers are unfamiliar with cooperative learning, it is best to start slowly. Use one cooperative learning technique, such as Three-Step Interview or *Numbered Heads Together* (Kagan, 1992) several times to allow students to become accustomed to collaboration.
4. Discuss with students the whys and bows of learning together.
5. Making cooperation a content theme helps students tune in to working together. For example, once we asked students to write individually about a successful group experience in which they had participated. Then, groups were used to provide feedback.
6. Interact with colleagues for support and ideas.
7. Find the right balance of teaching modes according to your philosophy of education, your reading of the research (including your own research), students' preferences, and what seems to be working best. Students need to know how to cooperate, compete, and work alone.

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Mixed-ability classrooms:
Turning weakness into strength
Diana Hicks

from Littlejohn, A. and Hicks, D. 1997. *Cambridge English for Schools, Teacher's Book Three.* Cambridge University Press

Differing strengths and weaknesses

All classes with more than one student are 'mixed ability' so, in a class of 25 or 30 students, there will be a range of abilities, proficiencies, strengths and weaknesses as there is in any group of 25-30 people. Such heterogeneity in the classroom is often thought of as something to be avoided if possible. The description 'mixed ability' often carries with it negative overtones: many year-groups are 'streamed', usually by means of entrance tests, to try to create a feeling of homogeneity so that all the strong (or 'good') students are kept together and the weaker (or 'bad') students work together. The problem is that strengths displayed in an entrance test, which is often a series of grammar-based gap fill items, may mask weaknesses in other areas. These will gradually reveal themselves over the course of the term or year. Differing strengths and weaknesses, abilities and proficiencies emerge and the class inevitably becomes more and more heterogeneous. This is the 'normal' classroom situation in every school, in every country in the world. So, what are the weaknesses?

Some 'weaknesses' and some suggestions

It is not likely that all 25 students will be able to understand a new structure at the same time because individual students bring to the lesson a range of experience and different areas of knowledge. Perhaps some students have learned this structure elsewhere before, or perhaps others find it hard to hear the explanation, or others find it difficult to be engrossed in the task. The fact that some students, and these may be different ones each time, do not 'catch on' as quickly as some others means that the teaching approach we adopt and the pace we work at have to cater for these differences.

Increasing student confidence and interest

In language learning, increasing the confidence and interest of all the students in the class will automatically lead to real homogeneity. First, confidence can be increased if students know in advance what the next few lessons will be about. Research shows that if we know what we are going to learn, we are more confident and so understand better and more efficiently. Allowing time at the beginning of a lesson for students to look ahead through the next few pages of the coursebook, looking at the pictures, picking out certain kinds of exercises and so on, will make students feel more comfortable about what is going to come. Also, it is often worth setting homework which allows students to preview the next unit rather than concentrating only on follow-up work for homework. This would be particularly appropriate for lessons which focus on a new structure or have reading passages.

Preview time

'Preview' time also gives students the opportunity to bring more of themselves to the lesson and will enable the lesson to start from the students themselves rather than from an external point of reference which may be difficult for some students to 'hook into'. In this way, all students, irrespective of ability or proficiency, will be able to contribute something to the start of the lesson. Perhaps the starting point for each unit can be the students asking questions about the topic or text or language area rather than answering questions posed by the book or the teacher. For example, asking the question 'What do you know about the Present continuous/the moon/life in the USA?' will produce, possibly, some answers from a few students and guilt from the others. However, changing the question slightly to 'What DON'T you know about the Present continuous/the moon/life in the USA?' will create a greater feeling of confidence amongst all students and a sense of community enquiry.

Why am I doing this?

If students know why they are doing something, they become more confident. Many students do tasks without fully understanding why they are doing them. Spending a few minutes at the beginning of a unit asking them to pick out some grammar or vocabulary tasks or tasks which require more accuracy than fluency or vice versa will encourage confidence. The more choice students have over the kinds of task they do to practise new grammar or vocabulary, the more likely they will be to feel confident about their own learning.

Mistakes

All students need to feel comfortable with the fact that they will make mistakes or forget and confuse things. New words, structures and irregular verbs can easily slip through everyone's mind. 'Getting it right' is often an obstacle to 'having a go' and gaining valuable practice. (***) In other words, students do not need to feel guilty because they have made a mistake.

The second concern with mixed-ability classes is the difference in student pace: some students seem to work more quickly than others.

Keeping up the pace

Most lessons work at the teacher's pace: the teacher decides what should be covered in the space of the lesson and how much time should be spent on each task, but, generally, students do not share this information. If students know how long they have to do a task, perhaps by negotiating the time with the teacher, they are more likely to feel confident about tackling the task and will avoid the feeling of guilt associated with not finishing a task on time. Perhaps if the exercise has the traditional ten questions, students may be allowed to decide which six questions they will answer in the time allocated.

Often we find that students are 'slow' at one kind of task but much faster at another. If the students work on a range of different open and closed tasks which use all the skills over a period of, for example, ten lessons, obvious individual variations of pace will emerge. It is always interesting to carry out a case study of three students of different levels and to watch their pace and performance on a wide range of tasks over a specified period. There may be interesting variations in both speed and achievement depending on variables such as the subject matter of the task, the skill required, the way of working (alone, in pairs or groups) and with whom, the position of the task in the sequence or unit (whether it comes at the beginning, middle or end), how much choice the student exercised in doing the task and how positive the teacher felt about how the student would accomplish it.

Variety of task type

Teachers, already overworked, often spend evenings and weekends creating supplementary materials for different levels of student proficiency. However, students who have 'easier' worksheets feel guilty because they are not 'good' enough to do the more difficult ones. Part of the problem is that many language learning tasks consist of questions which require one correct answer. The students who, for whatever reason, find it more difficult than the others to provide this one correct answer will soon become disillusioned. However, tasks which allow students to provide a range of open answers will appeal to more students more of the time.

For example, after reading a text, instead of answering true/false or comprehension questions, students could be asked to use the text as a basis for creating their own questions. Or students could be asked to 'vandalise' the text in some way: perhaps they could jumble up the sentences in one paragraph or the words in some of the sentences, or perhaps they could add words, such as adverbs or adjectives to individual sentences and ask their partners to find the changes they have made. Perhaps they could add whole sentences to a paragraph. The purpose of this type of task is to involve all the students in tasks which not only require them to use language they already know, and to do something which is different from the other students, but also to make decisions about how they will do a task. They do not feel guilty that they have not done the same as the other students because that is not the aim of the exercise.

Who is slow at what?

Many students feel that they are 'bad' at English. However, it is unlikely that they will be 'bad' at every aspect of language learning. The term 'mixed ability' more safely refers to the mixture of abilities which we all have. We may be very good at cooking main courses, for example, but not so good at making cakes or vice

versa. We cannot accurately describe ourselves as 'bad at cooking' if that is the case. We are more likely to say 'I'm hopeless at making cakes but my lasagne always tastes good'.

Within one domain, we all have strengths and weaknesses: even within the domain of our own second language use, there will be areas of strength and weakness. If students learn more precisely where their strengths and weaknesses are in English they will be more likely to judge themselves like this:

> *My spelling is pretty good, but my pronunciation needs practice.*
> *I'm very good at the listening exercises, but I'm not so good at reading.*

Conclusion

Once they are aware of their individual weaknesses, students will understand that all the other students have weaknesses too and will be less likely to dismiss themselves as guilty of being 'bad at English'. Every student is 'mixed ability' and every class is 'mixed ability'. Lockstep teaching, where each student has to move ahead at the same time as the others, draws attention to the negative aspects of heterogeneity. Allowing room for the students to display their strengths in different skills draws attention to the positive aspects of individual variations.

Motivation:
Where does it come from? Where does it go?
Andrew Littlejohn

In recent years, I have had the privilege of visiting many classes around the world, to talk to teachers and sit in on their lessons. I remember very clearly one experience in particular which started me thinking about the whole question of motivation.

I was visiting a secondary school, and my first visit was to a first-year class of 11-12 year olds, early in their school year. As soon as you opened the door, you could feel and see the motivation to learn in these students. They had bright eyes and smiles, and were eager to show what they had learned. They had been looking forward to the visit by 'the Englishman' and now the moment had arrived. Their bubbling energy was overwhelming, and so too was their desire to learn English.

Next lesson, I went a little further along the corridor to visit a second-year class, a year older. Here, the tone was very different – more purposeful, but more subdued, with none of the spark that I had seen just before. Their eyes no longer had a twinkle and the smiles were now replaced by a somewhat expressionless look on the faces of some students. We had a pleasant encounter, and they read short pieces of their work to me, but the overall tone was rather polite.

Next, I visited a third-year class, and here I found a quite different atmosphere. At the front of the class, there were a few students who were clearly interested in my visit. We talked about the things they liked and disliked in learning English, and their interests. It was, however, always the same students who talked, and most of the class remained silent throughout. More significantly, there were two students who clearly couldn't care less – or so it appeared. One of them, sitting at the back of the class, had his feet on the edge of his desk, not a book, a pen or a piece of paper near him. He was removing what looked like motor oil from his nails. Every so often he would shout something out to another student, and receive a glare from the teacher. The other student, also at the back, was asleep, with his head flopped over his desk and no sign of any school equipment near him.

Many teachers, I am sure, will recognise the scenarios here. They are, in fact, situations that I have since seen time and time again in my visits to schools. Many teachers, too, will also recognise the sketch of the 'couldn't care less, don't want to learn' students. The most striking thing for me, however, was the transition from the first-year students – all seemingly eager and energetic – to the third-year class, with some students now apparently completely negative about their learning. Assuming that the third-year class had once been like the first-year class, what had happened in the intervening years? Where did the students' initial motivation come from? And where did it go?

Sources of motivation
It would be difficult, if not impossible, to point to a single factor which accounts for the apparent changing levels of motivation and involvement that I had witnessed. As all teachers know, (***), there are many, many factors which affect students' commitment to study. Many things – perhaps most are beyond our control as language teachers, and fall outside the confines of the few lessons that we have with them in a week. Home background, physical tiredness, events in their personal life, health, previous educational experience, personality and the onset of adolescence are just some of the factors that can affect how individual students appear to us in our classes. Nevertheless, I believe that in many cases, the explanation of why the smiles disappear from the faces of some students, whatever their age, may indeed lie in their experience of their English classes – in short, in how their classes are organised.

In very general terms, educational psychologists point to three major sources of motivation in learning (Fisher). Simply put, these are:

The learner's natural interest: *intrinsic satisfaction*
The teacher/institution/employment: *extrinsic reward*
Success in the task: *the combination of satisfaction and reward.*

Intrinsic satisfaction

Sad though it may be, we must, I believe, recognise that only a relatively small number of students get a sense of *intrinsic satisfaction* from learning English. For the vast majority of people, language is not, in itself, very interesting, and it is unlikely to spark, and still less to sustain, motivation. For some older students, the satisfaction of learning and using a foreign language may be connected to what Gardener has called an 'integrative motivation' – a desire to identify with the culture of the foreign language. However, this is not widespread and it is not likely to be the case with younger students. Some teachers of younger students endeavour to relate to what they see as their pupils' sense of intrinsic satisfaction by using games, songs and puzzles in the class. Often these have a positive impact in raising the motivation of the students, but the effect is usually temporary, and once they return to normal classroom work, the effect wears off. In general, then, the student's natural interest is not something which we can rely on to generate sustained motivation in language learning.

Extrinsic reward

Aware of this, many teachers, and indeed whole educational systems, turn to a second source of motivation: extrinsic reward, and its opposite, extrinsic punishment, as a means of motivating students. In the classroom, for example, teachers may reward students with good marks, or, in effect, punish other students with low marks. 'Better' students may be rewarded by being given more advanced work to do, or by being placed in a higher level group, which increases their sense of self-worth. The principal problem with this approach, however, is that rewards only lead to sustained motivation if you actually receive them. For the failing student, unlikely to be rewarded, it does not take long to work out that it is always someone else who gets the rewards – no matter how hard you work. The reward system itself can, therefore, be demotivating for the weaker students. The increase in the motivation of the better students is more or less proportional to the decrease in motivation of the weaker students.

Success in the task

While teachers and school systems have drawn on both of the first two sources of motivation, the third source is perhaps under-exploited in language teaching. This is the simple fact of success, and the effect that it has on our view of what we do. As human beings, we generally like what we do well, and are therefore more likely to do it again, and put in more effort.

If we put in more effort, we generally get better, and so this sustains our motivation. Feelings of being able to do something and feelings of sustained motivation can, therefore, be linked into an upward spiral which causes us to commit ourselves to what we are doing, and to improve.

Perceptions of failure

Unfortunately, for many students, this spiral relationship between motivation and ability can function in reverse. Few people like to fail and we generally avoid circumstances in which we anticipate failure. In the classroom, this can mean that students who develop an image of themselves as 'no good at English' will simply avoid situations which tell them what they already know – that they aren't any good at English. Feelings of failure, particularly early on in a student's school career, can therefore lead to a downward spiral of a self-perception of low ability → low motivation → low effort→ low achievement → low motivation → low achievement, and so on. It is the existence of these upward and downward spirals in the motivation-ability relationship that explain a situation commonly found by teachers. In many classes where there are differing levels of student ability, the gap between the 'weaker' students and the 'stronger' students appears to get wider and wider over time, as some students thrive in an upward spiral, whilst others actually deteriorate in a downward spiral.

The attempt by some students to avoid recurring failure suggests that we need to rethink some of the beliefs that we may have about them. While it may be true that the students with their feet on the desk at the back of the class really aren't interested in learning, it may equally be true that what they are actually trying to do is to avoid repeated failure – by pretending that they don't care. It is their sense of self-esteem that is at stake here. By pretending that they aren't interested and don't want to learn, they can protect themselves from

seeing themselves as failures. Such extreme displays of lack of interest or rejection of learning are probably at the bottom end of a downward motivation-ability spiral. For many students, the spiral will have begun long before, as they learned to see themselves as failures, and then began to engage in various kinds of avoidance strategies – sitting at the back of the class, choosing a seat where they wouldn't be noticed, misbehaving, pretending illness at crucial moments such as tests, and blaming failure on the teacher or the school or other students.

Self-esteem and confidence
What all this points to, I think, is that we shouldn't underestimate the importance of self-esteem and a sense of competence in language learning as crucial factors affecting motivation. For the failing student, in particular, it is important that we try to develop their sense of success and a feeling that they can do something, rather than a feeling that they can't.

In practical terms, this means that we need to be sensitive to the psychology of language learning. When we plan a lesson, devise a test, or use a particular type of exercise, we should ask ourselves a very important question: how will the weaker students feel if they can't do this? Let me give an example. One of the commonest exercises used in language classrooms is the gap-fill. This is a text with every seventh or so word missing, which the students have to supply. Confident, motivated students who have a history of success are likely to approach such an exercise feeling that they have done it before and, as they have usually done well, they will probably be able to do this one too. And, if they do complete the exercise successfully, they will have in front of them confirmation of what they already knew, and their confidence and motivation will be renewed again. Weaker students, however, may have exactly the opposite experience. Previous failure may create a lack of confidence as they approach the task, and if they find that they can only complete one or two of the gaps correctly, then once again they are presented with a picture of what they can't do – and so the spiral relationship of motivation-ability takes another step downward.

I do not want to suggest by this that we should never use gap-fill exercises. Used appropriately, they can serve a very useful purpose. The basic point I do wish to make, however, is that there is a psychology involved in everything we do in the classroom, and that this is concerned with the students feelings of success/failure, high/low self-esteem, high/low confidence, and this has a direct impact on motivation. Viewed in this way, we may be able to understand some of the reasons why, over time, motivation may fail, and explain the differences in the three classrooms I described at the beginning of this article. It suggests that where we see students beginning to fail and beginning to lose motivation, one route to repairing the situation may lie in choosing tasks which we believe the students can do, in order to develop a sense of competence and confidence. It also suggests that all students need to feel a sense of progress and that their efforts actually lead to results.

Feedback
One important element in shaping the students' view of themselves is the feedback that we give them. Research has shown that even very young children, in their first years at school, are able to identify who the 'clever' students are and who the 'not very clever' ones are. They do this by monitoring the teacher's oral feedback, and develop a fairly clear picture of where they stand in the classroom league table. The importance of this in shaping the students' self-esteem, feelings of competence and, therefore, motivation cannot be underestimated. It suggests that we need to be very careful about how we give feedback, who gets praise and who doesn't. It also suggests that we need to be careful about the type of feedback that we give students, and whether it recognises and values effort, content, ideas and potential.

To end, here is a list of some practical suggestions which you may like to experiment with.(***) There is no 'magic formula' for sustaining motivation in learning. As the first point in the list says, we need to experiment and take risks. The starting point, however, should be to try to understand why some students are not motivated, and not simply to blame them for not being interested. If we start from the assumption, which I believe is true, that all human beings in the right circumstances are naturally motivated to learn, we need to ask ourselves: where does that motivation go?

Maintaining motivation

1 Experiment, take risks.
Vary the kinds of things you do in the classroom. See what different students respond to best. For example, try short stories, films, classroom drama, songs, projects, grammar exercises, dictations.

2 Choose 'larger' tasks.
 Choose tasks that give students more 'psychological space' to plan their own work, set their own pace and make their own decisions about how and what they do. For example, process writing and simulations.

3 Choose open-ended tasks.
Set tasks that different people can respond to in different ways, where the absence of a 'single right answer' means that everybody's work can be valued. For example, making posters, writing poems, creating designs and describing them.

4 Provide choice.
If people are involved in deciding what to do, they are usually more committed to it. Instead of saying 'do this', say 'you can choose exercise 3, 5 or 9. Or if you'd like to do something else, ask me.'

5 Involve students in classroom decision-making.
Many of the decisions that teachers make can often be shared with the students, without any risks to the course as a whole. You might be able to share decisions about when homework is set, how long they will spend on a particular task, what they will do next lesson and so on.

6 Find out what students think.
Find out if students have suggestions of their own, if they think they need more practice, if they find things easy or difficult, boring or interesting. You could place a 'suggestion box' in your class, write an open-ended letter that students could complete with their ideas, or devise short questionnaires.

7 Think about your feedback.
Consider how you give feedback and what you give it on. If you can identify students who are beginning to sink, try to identify aspects that you can praise and encourage. Instead of just giving low marks, explain to the students, in concrete terms, what they could do to improve their marks next time.

8 Communicate a sense of optimism.
Communicate a belief that everyone can learn. Encourage students to try, to take risks without fear of losing marks or feeling stupid. Give help when they ask for it and show them how much they have learned.

Student anxiety
Renata Nascante

I have heard students of all ages complaining about how anxious they feel about learning English. It can be even more stressful for teenagers, who are going through a particularly difficult period of their lives. I am going to describe some strategies I used to diagnose and deal with anxiety in a group of 12 intermediate-level ESL students, aged between 14 and 16.

Anxiety will be considered as a group of feelings of resistance, insecurity and discomfort, associated with the process of learning English.

Anxiety and ELT
Allwright and Bailey explain that despite its negative aspects, anxiety is not necessarily a bad thing in itself. Scovel distinguishes between *debilitaling anxiety*, which creates difficulties in learning and performing, and *facilitating anxiety*, which actually helps people to do better than they might otherwise. If we know that success is attainable but not guaranteed, we may do better precisely because our anxiety has spurred us on. On the other hand, if we feel that, no matter how hard we try, we are going to fail, then our anxiety might discourage us from doing our best. Another possible source of debilitating anxiety is the fact that learning a foreign language makes people feel, to some extent, in a foreign land, with all the cultural implications of this situation.

Scovel also makes a distinction between *trait anxiety*, which is a relatively permanent personality feature, and the less stable *state anxiety*, which is evoked by a particular set of temporary circumstances. State anxiety is an acknowledged feature of language learning, whether as cause, effect or both. But why should anxiety be a special problem for language learners? Aren't students anxious about other school subjects? Why should language learning be different? One possible answer is that in most language learning situations, students are required to perform in the target language, which deprives them of their normal means of communication and behaviour. When forced to use the language they are learning, they constantly feel that they are representing themselves badly, showing only some of their real personality and intelligence. This sort of deprivation breeds anxiety about communicating with others, both in class and outside it, thus these learners will not fully profit from practising the language which has been learned.

The diagnosis
I used four strategies to diagnose my students' anxiety: observation, questionnaires, diaries and interviews. I observed my own lessons with the target group during their first term, making detailed notes about them. I then prepared a questionnaire, which was tested on other groups and modified and improved, before being given to the target group. In addition, I asked the students to write a diary. Finally, I interviewed each student in the group, focusing on the points which were not completely clarified by the questionnaire and the diary.

Observation and questionnaires
I had been informally observing my students' anxieties and feelings of uneasiness for a long time. From these preliminary observations, I identified the areas which might be responsible for their anxiety. These were: the students' previous language-learning experiences, motivation, classroom interaction and dynamics, homework, error correction and tests. These areas provided the basis for the questions on the questionnaire.

Diaries
At the beginning of the term, I decided to start a teaching diary to record my observations of the teenage group. I also wanted the students to keep diaries, although I was convinced that they would not maintain them on a regular basis. So I started asking them to give me some feedback at the end of some of the lessons. They wrote their diaries in a variety of ways: individually, in pairs, in groups, answering specific questions or just writing two or three sentences about the lesson. Sometimes, they helped me to write my teaching diary, providing one sentence each.

Interviews

The points which were not totally clarified by the observation, questionnaires and diaries were used to plan a semi-structured interview in which some basic questions were asked, and then the interviewees were encouraged to talk spontaneously, according to their own thoughts and experiences.

The results

Motivation

Only two of the students said they did not like English. Most of them said that their main reason for studying English was because they liked it (intrinsic motivation). Another major reason cited was the importance of English for their professional futures (instrumental/extrinsic motivation). All the students displayed some degree of facilitating anxiety about learning the language.

Previous experiences

Four students had had distressing previous experiences with English. It seemed that at the very beginning, in the first weeks of lessons, they were a bit nervous about how they would perform in a new environment. Their concern was mainly about not being able to understand instructions in English and being laughed at by peers or by the teacher. They had felt very uncomfortable in their previous learning situations and the reasons given were mostly related to interaction with their peers and the perception that the learning process had not been properly conducted by the teacher or the school.

Perceived difficulty

Most students had thought that learning English would be more difficult than it actually was:

'I thought that it would be very, very, very difficult; that I would not understand anything; that the teacher would talk to me and, as I wouldn't understand anything, the other students would laugh at me.'

As Scovel says, anxiety is likely to improve a student's performance in the later stages of the learning process (facilitating anxiety), but it may hinder academic performance in the earlier stages (debilitating anxiety). Now that these teenagers were at an intermediate level, anxiety could enhance their learning, making them study more attentively for tests, for instance. However, it might have been a hindrance to their learning at the very beginning.

Working with teachers

All the students were happy with their teachers, saying that they felt very comfortable in the classroom. One student said that she felt uncomfortable and shy when teachers praised her in front of her classmates. Others said they felt uneasy about doing roleplay activities. Some claimed to feel very uncertain working with each other, rather than speaking to the whole group because of the fear of being laughed at. In spite of this, most students preferred to work in pairs or small groups. They thought they could help each other and correct their own mistakes:

'I like to learn in pairs when I can choose the pairs. It is easier to work with people that you have something in common with.'

Interaction would seem to be a key issue in the students' feelings of well-being in the classroom. Some of them said that they felt it was completely unproductive when they had to work with classmates they either did not like or considered lazy or even who were of the opposite sex.

Homework

Some students seemed to be very uncomfortable when they did not do their homework, so I decided to question them about this. They all answered that homework should be compulsory, and four of them declared they felt anxious when they did not do homework. They explained that they were concerned about homework because they knew that it was very important for their learning. Here, we can clearly see facilitating anxiety in action.

Error correction

All but one student preferred immediate teacher correction. They thought that if it occurred afterwards, they might forget it. They also felt that immediate correction meant that other students could learn from the correction.

> *'It is important to be corrected. It doesn't matter how or when, provided the person who has been corrected does not suffer any kind of humiliation.'*

> *'It's good because then the other students do not make the same mistakes, but I am afraid that the other students might tease me; I always think that because I am a bit shy and insecure.'*

Although students recognise that cognitively it is better for them to be corrected immediately, in front of their colleagues, they may not be emotionally prepared for it. A relaxed classroom atmosphere combined with a variety of error correction techniques might be a way to handle this problem.

Classroom atmosphere
Most students' replies showed that they regarded a friendly and harmonious atmosphere as the main source of a feeling of well-being in the classroom. Understanding the teacher and understanding listening passages seemed to please them too. Reasons they gave for becoming angry were essentially related to not being able to understand something.

Their statements show the link between the cognitive and affective aspects of learning the language. While 'understanding' things makes students feel comfortable, the opposite makes them angry. Students feel at ease when they know they can do things well when there is the prospect of being successful. Rapport and clear instructions are essential for a comfortable classroom atmosphere.

Tests
Tests were not the main focus of this group's anxiety. Probably they were not anxious about them because they had been in the school long enough to know the assessment system well. They did have some concerns over oral tests. Some students' feelings were related to facilitating anxiety, making them do their best to get a good mark. Others felt so anxious about oral tests that they could not perform properly in them:

> *'The teacher makes us feel secure, but even so, this security is not total.'*
> *'I do well in the oral test when I take it with a friend.'*

From this we can see the importance of the teacher and group interaction for the security of each individual student.

Students displayed feelings of discomfort about a wide range of issues related to classroom management, interaction, dynamics, methodology and materials. It seemed that they had a need to know what was actually going to happen to them. The course was like walking in a dark corridor – they knew that we, the teachers, were there to hold their hands and they felt our presence. However, they needed more from us; they needed to have an idea where our teaching was going to take them.

It also became clear that it would help students to build self-confidence if we, their teachers, could work on a more student-centred basis, taking into consideration their previous experiences with the language.

The strategies used to identify students' anxieties about learning English were not only able to diagnose the problem, but became, in themselves, ways of dealing with it. For example, after they were interviewed, the students reported that they felt very good when talking about their experiences of learning English, because they were able to unload their feelings of discomfort about it. I believe that all the information collected indicated possible actions which could be taken to overcome student anxiety. Furthermore, information collected from students in this way can raise teachers' awareness of the affective dimension of their classroom procedures. This can help them to adapt these to their students' affective as well as cognitive needs.

Teachers' questions
Jack C. Richards and Charles Lockhart

from Richards, J.C. and Lockhart, C. 1994. *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge University Press

Research suggests that questioning is one of the most common techniques used by teachers. In some classrooms over half of class time is taken up with question-and-answer exchanges (Gall 1984). There are several reasons why questions are so commonly used in teaching:

- They stimulate and maintain students' interest.
- They encourage students to think and focus on the content of the lesson.
- They enable a teacher to clarify what a student has said.
- They enable a teacher to elicit particular structures or vocabulary items.
- They enable teachers to check students' understanding.
- They encourage student participation in a lesson.

Second language researchers have also examined the contribution of teachers' questions to classroom second language learning. They have proposed that the questions play a crucial role in language acquisition: "They can be used to allow the learner to keep participating in the discourse and even modify it so that the language used becomes more comprehensible and personally relevant (Banbrook and Skehan 1989: 142)".

Types of teacher questions
There are many different ways to classify questions (Mehan 1979; Sinclair and Brazil 1982; White and Lightbown 1984), and as researchers have observed, it is sometimes difficult to arrive at discrete and directly observable categories (Banbrook and Skehan 1989). For the purposes of examining the role of questions in the classroom, three kinds of questions are distinguished here – procedural, convergent, and divergent.

Procedural questions
Procedural questions have to do with classroom procedures and routines, and classroom management, as opposed to the content of learning. For example, the following questions occurred in classrooms while teachers were checking that assignments had been completed, that instructions for a task were clear, and that students were ready for a new task.

> *Did everyone bring their homework?*
> *Do you all understand what I want you to do?*
> *How much more time do you need?*
> *Can you all read what I've written on the blackboard?*
> *Did anyone bring a dictionary to class?*
> *Why aren't you doing the assignment?*

Procedural questions have a different function from questions designed to help students master the content of a lesson. Many of the questions teachers ask are designed to engage students in the content of the lesson, to facilitate their comprehension, and to promote classroom interaction. These questions can be classified into two types – convergent questions and divergent questions, depending on the kind of answer they are intended to elicit (Kindsvatter, Willen, and Ishler 1988).

Convergent questions
Convergent questions encourage similar student responses, or responses which focus on a central theme. These responses are often short answers, such as "yes" or "no" or short statements. They do not usually require students to engage in higher-level thinking in order to come up with a response but often focus on the recall of previously presented information. Language teachers often ask a rapid sequence of convergent questions to help develop aural skills and vocabulary and to encourage whole-class participation before

moving on to some other teaching technique. (***) For example, the following questions were used by a teacher in introducing a reading lesson focusing on the effects of computers on everyday life. Before the teacher began the lesson she led students into the topic of the reading by asking the following convergent questions:

> *How many of you have a personal computer in your home?*
> *Do you use it every day?*
> *What do you mainly use it for?*
> *What are some other machines that you have in your home?*
> *What are the names of some computer companies?*
> *What is the difference between software and hardware?*

Divergent questions
Divergent questions are the opposite of convergent questions. They encourage diverse student responses which are not short answers and which require students to engage in higher-level thinking. They encourage students to provide their own information rather than to recall previously presented information. For example, after asking the convergent questions above, the teacher went on to ask divergent questions such as the following:

> *How have computers had an economic impact on society?*
> *How would businesses today function without computers?*
> *Do you think computers have had any negative effects on society?*
> *What are the best ways of promoting the use of computers in education?*

Questioning skills
In view of the importance of questioning as a teaching strategy, the skill with which teachers use questions has received a considerable amount of attention in teacher education. Among the issues that have been identified are the following:

The range of question types teachers use
It has often been observed that teachers tend to ask more convergent than divergent questions. These questions serve to facilitate the recall of information rather than to generate student ideas and classroom communication. Since convergent questions require short answers, they may likewise provide limited opportunities for students to produce and practice the target language. Long and Sato (1983) compared the number of "display questions" (questions that teachers know the answer to and which are designed to elicit or display particular structures) and "referential questions" (questions that teachers do not know the answers to) in naturalistic and classroom discourse. They found that in naturalistic discourse referential questions are more frequent than display questions, whereas display questions are much more frequent in whole-class teaching in ESL classrooms.

Student participation
In many classrooms, students have few opportunities to ask questions on their own, although they may be given the opportunity to answer questions. Even when teachers give students opportunities to ask and answer questions, they may address their questions to only a few of the students in the class – those lying within their action zone. Jackson and Lahaderne (1967) found that some students are twenty-five times more likely to be called on to speak in a class than others. In language classrooms, where students may be of different levels of ability, the fact that some students have much more difficulty answering questions than others may lead the teacher to call on only those students in the class who can be relied upon to answer the question in order to maintain the momentum of the class. This reinforces the teacher's tendency to direct questions to only certain students in the class.

Wait-time
An important dimension of a teacher's questioning skills is wait-time, that is, the length of time the teacher waits after asking the question before calling on a student to answer it, rephrasing the question, directing the question to another student, or giving the answer (Rowe 1974, cited in Kindsvatter et al. 1988). Teachers often use a very short wait-time (e.g., one second), which is rarely sufficient to enable students to respond. When wait-time is increased to three to five seconds, the amount of student participation as well as the

quality of that participation often increases (Long et al. 1984).

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DOGME:Teaching Unplugged
Scott Thornbury

Ever seen the Danish film called The Idiots? Or one called Celebration? Or Mifune? If so, then you may have heard of Dogme 95. In 1995 a group of Danish film-makers signed a "vow of chastity". Their intention was to rid cinema of an obsessive concern for technique and rehabilitate a cinema which foregrounded the story, and the inner life of the characters. They rejected the superficiality and "trickery" of mainstream film-making. Dogme 95's first "commandment", for example, is that :

Shooting should be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where the prop is to be found)

Films made according to Dogme 95 prescriptions (such as Lars von Trier's The Idiots) typically have a rough, gritty, even raw, quality and are certainly a far remove from the slick artifice and technical virtuosity of Hollywood. You may not like Dogme films, but they are not easy to forget.

It has been my belief that it's time to apply similar, Dogme-like, principles to the language classroom. The wealth of materials now available for the teaching of English, coupled with the wide range of classroom techniques and procedures recommended on training courses, may have blinded us to "the story" - that is, the essential conditions for language learning. Where, for example, is real communication? More often as not, it is buried under a weight of photocopies, visual aids, OHP transparencies, MTV video clips, board games, and what have you. Somewhere in there we may have lost the plot.

Think about it: how many of your best lessons just happened? For example, a really good discussion cropped up, and you let it run. And run. Or something that had happened to a student in the weekend became the basis of the whole lesson. Or, because you missed the bus, or because the photocopier wasn't working, you had to go in unprepared. But the lesson really took off.

On the other hand, how many really memorable and engaging lessons have you given that were based on slavishly following the coursebook? And how many times have you spent hours preparing material for a lesson, only to see it fizz and splutter, like a damp sky rocket?

In her inspirational book, *Teacher*, the New Zealand primary school teacher, Sylvia Ashton-Warner records a similar frustration with materials:

I burnt most of my infant room material on Friday. I say that the more material there is for a child, the less pull there is on his own resources (…) I burnt all the work of my youth. Dozens of cards made of three-ply, and hand-printed and illustrated. Boxes of them. There will be only the following list in my infant room:

Chalk Books Blackboards Charts Paper Paints Pencils Clay Guitar Piano

And when a child wants to read he can pick up a book with his own hands and struggle through it. The removal of effort and denying to the child of its right to call on its own resources . . . . (I was sad, though, seeing it all go up in smoke.) But teaching is so much simpler and clearer as a result. There's much more time for conversation . . . communication. (You should have heard the roaring in the chimney!)

If time for conversation and communication was considered so important in a primary school class, how much more important must it be in a language class. Language, after all, is communication. So here is the first "commandment" for a "Dogme of ELT":

Teaching should be done using only the resources that teachers and students bring to the classroom - i.e. themselves - and whatever happens to be in the classroom. If a particular piece of material is necessary for

the lesson, a location must be chosen where that material is to be found (e.g. library, resource centre, bar, students' club…)

(See below for the full Dogme ELT "Vow of Chastity")

It was with the intention of exploring the implications of a pedagogy based on this and related principles that a small but growing group of teachers around the world set up an internet discussion group called dogme ELT, (www.egroups.com/group/dogme) with the by-line: For a pedagogy of bare essentials. By this means we were able to share our beliefs and practices, and at the same time broadcast them to a wider audience. A lively - and often heated - discussion developed, and a number of common themes started to emerge. Concepts that cropped up again and again included such things as engagement, relevance, interaction, talk, voice, dialogue, emergence, classroom dynamic, autonomy, empowerment and liberation.

Here, for example, is Graham (in Newcastle), describing an experience in which he found himself liberated from the materials:

I was teaching on an Cambridge First Certificate course (in which, by chance, about half the class worked in the health sector) in Hungary, where the exam took place a couple of weeks before the end of the paid-up semester meant we had a few lessons in which we were free from the pressure of the exam, its syllabus, and related coursebook. What subsequently emerged was a period of time in which the learners explored (among other things) more intricate/intimate vocabulary for parts of the body; the connotations of vocabulary previously heard but not fully understood; the workings, advantage and disadvantages of the British medical system compared to the Hungarian; discussion of whether they would like to work abroad (related to Eastern European salaries)etc. The discussions of their work (and, for the non-health professionals, the use of these services) was relevant well-beyond the classroom. Not too much grammar emerged, but after a semester of First Certificate practice, the learners seemed to welcome the chance to exchange relevant stories and opinions, and the vocabulary generated was their main aim and outcome (one of the most memorable vocabulary sessions I, and hopefully the learners, can remember). It was perhaps the first time I stepped away from text-books/materials for any length of time. I'm not medical expert and learned a lot from the students. The point, it seems to me, is that really, it was the learners who generated these 2 or 3 lessons and the learning opportunites within them, talking about themselves, their lives, and as a result, finding the English language necessary to achieve this.

Another teacher, Kevin, in Barcelona, discovered his teenagers really wanted just to talk:

We have done three more classes consisting of everyone sitting in a circle and "just talking". I have been surprised how many really interesting things we've discussed and how well the students have reacted to these lessons. I certainly get the feeling that the students can learn a lot in these type of lessons, one reason being that they are so interested in what's being said.

A teacher in Romania (Carmen) commented that many of her colleagues confess to the fact that the teaching they enjoy most takes place in the two months at the beginning of the school year - before the coursebooks have arrived!

And a teacher in Scotland (Olwyn) described a writing class in which the content of the class came from the "people in the room" :

My writing class wrote about the conference I had just attended. I gave them the first sentence and said they could ask me any questions they liked so long as they were a) written down and b) grammatically correct. I handed back any incorrect questions for reformulation. After an initial uncertainty, questions flew thick and fast from the writing groups. After half an hour they had to organise the material they had collected into an essay and had an opportunity at the end to fill in any gaps. The students commented that the questions helped them to write a lot more than they normally would and they felt supported in the writing task by the error correction of their questions. Next week we'll look a little bit more at how they organised the mass of answers into a coherent text.

The implications for teacher training have also been explored. Neil, a teacher trainer in Barcelona, noted a mismatch between trainee teachers' attitudes and students' expectations:

I have recently started a CELTA (Certificate) course and I set my 12 trainees the task of deciding which of the three teacher roles was the most important - the social, the educational, or the organisational. The final result was that they could not decide whether educational was more important then organisational and vice versa, but they were unanimous that the social role was the least important. With my Advanced A group of students I did the same task. Again they were undecided about organisational vs educational and unanimous about the social - but that this was the most important.

What, then, makes a Dogme lesson? A Dogme lesson is one that is grounded in the experience, beliefs, desires and knowledge of the people in the room. It is a lesson that is language-rich but where language is not used for display but for meaningful exchange. It is a lesson where the learners are motivated not by the need to pass a test or to earn a tick, but by the commonly felt need to express their membership of a small and interdependent culture. It is a lesson where the teacher is simply another member of the group - somewhat more knowledgeable when it comes to the target language - but who asserts her authority only in order to facilitate the group's common purpose - to extend the frontier of the second language, to turn learners into users.

Is Dogme a dogma? No, I hope not. I think, rather, that Dogme is more like a state of mind, a stance, that inevitably permeates all of one's classroom practice and one which will (must) adapt to local conditions. In that sense it is not a dogma. It may even be compatible with a coursebook. But the principle - or belief - that must hold true is the foregrounding of the "inner life" of the learner - and teacher for that matter. And if there are rules, they are not so much prescriptive as facilitative: as Lars von Trier said in an interview: "That's the whole point of these rules - they are a tool to be used freely".

1. Teaching should be done using only the resources that teachers and students bring to the classroom - i.e. themselves - and whatever happens to be in the classroom. If a particular piece of material is necessary for the lesson, a location must be chosen where that material is to be found (e.g. library, resource centre, bar, students' club…)
2. No recorded listening material should be introduced into the classroom: the source of all "listening" activities should be the students and teacher themselves. The only recorded material that is used should be that made in the classroom itself, e.g. recording students in pair or group work for later re-play and analysis.
3. The teacher must sit down at all times that the students are seated, except when monitoring group or pair work (and even then it may be best to pull up a chair). In small classes, teaching should take place around a single table.
4. All the teacher's questions must be "real" questions (such as "Do you like oysters?" Or "What did you do on Saturday?"), not "display" questions (such as "What's the past of the verb to go?" or "Is there a clock on the wall?")
5. Slavish adherence to a method (such as audiolingualism, Silent Way, TPR, task-based learning, suggestopedia) is unacceptable.
6. A pre-planned syllabus of pre-selected and graded grammar items is forbidden. Any grammar that is the focus of instruction should emerge from the lesson content, not dictate it.
7. Topics that are generated by the students themselves must be given priority over any other input.
8. Grading of students into different levels is disallowed: students should be free to join the class that they feel most comfortable in, whether for social reasons, or for reasons of mutual intelligibility, or both. As in other forms of human social interaction, diversity should be accommodated, even welcomed, but not proscribed.
9. The criteria and adminstration of any testing procedures must be negotiated with the learners.
10. Teachers themselves will be evaluated according to only one criterion: that they are not boring.

What is a good task?
Andrew Littlejohn

from English Teaching *professional, 1996/97/98.*

The various tasks and exercises that students do, based on material in their coursebook, are the students' main interaction with the language in the classroom. Many teachers often find it difficult to select or decide how to adapt activities for their own classes. In this article, I want to describe some of the ways I use as a teacher and materials writer to identify and choose the most effective task.

I use the word 'task' here to refer to any language learning activity that the students do in their classes, whether it is a language game, a drill, comprehension questions, a gap-fill exercise, a simulation, or a project.

The importance of 'tasks'
In most English language classes, the amount of time that teachers and students spend communicating *directly* with each other is usually quite low. Often, this is limited to 'management' language (e.g. 'Have you got your book?') or brief exchanges about the teacher's or student's personal life ('Are you feeling better today?').

Most of what teachers and students say to each other is shaped by the tasks that they are doing. We can say then, that tasks are an 'interface' between teachers and students; it is through a task that they communicate with each other. To take an example, imagine that a teacher sets the following task for the class:

> *'Read the text on page 64. Don't worry about difficult words, just read it all the way through without stopping.'*

If, when the class begins reading, one student keeps asking the meaning of vocabulary items, the teacher will consider those questions inappropriate at that moment. Rather than reply to the student's questions, the teacher might say, 'Don't worry about that now. Just read it. We can look at individual words later'.

Clearly, tasks are important in determining *what* students are permitted to say, and in shaping *who* teachers and students can be in the classroom. This means that it is very important to look closely at what tasks require teachers and students to perform. In order to do this, we can compare two very different types of task. The first type of task is, I am sure, a familiar one. The second type, perhaps less so.

Two types of task

TASK 1: A trip to the museum

For this first type of task, imagine that the students have just been learning about Present Simple question forms. The teacher now divides the students into pairs. One student in each pair is A and the other B. Each student is then given a role card, shown in Figure 1.

Student A

You want to go to the museum
You want to know the following.

- what time the museum opens
- what time it closes
- how much a ticket costs
- if there is a restaurant

You ring the museum to find out.

Student B

You work at the museum.
Here is some information.

CITY MUSEUM

Admission: £2.00; children free

Open: 10.30 – 5.30 Mon - Sat
10.30 - 12.30 Sunday

The restaurant closes 30 minutes later.

Does it look familiar? In the modern day 'communicative' classroom, this is probably one of the most common types of task: 'the information gap'. Students begin working in pairs, asking and answering questions guided by their role cards. On completion, they exchange roles and begin again. Through the task, the students get plenty of practice with question forms and in answering questions. To this extent, the task is very successful. But is it completely satisfying? Before we discuss this question, let's look at a very different type of task.

TASK2: A question poster

Imagine that the class of secondary-school-aged learners has just been working through a unit in their coursebook on the theme of animals.. They have learned the names of some animals, talked briefly about what animals they can see in the pictures and then listened to some sounds on the cassette, guessing which animal makes that sound.

The teacher then sticks a large piece of paper on the wall, draws a large circle on it, writes 'Animals' in the centre, and adds a question on a line from the circle, 'What do whales eat?' The teacher then says to the class:

'Look at the pictures in your book. What questions do you have about the animals? What would you like to know about them?'

How long do elephants live?

What do giraffes eat?

ANIMALS

What is the biggest animal?
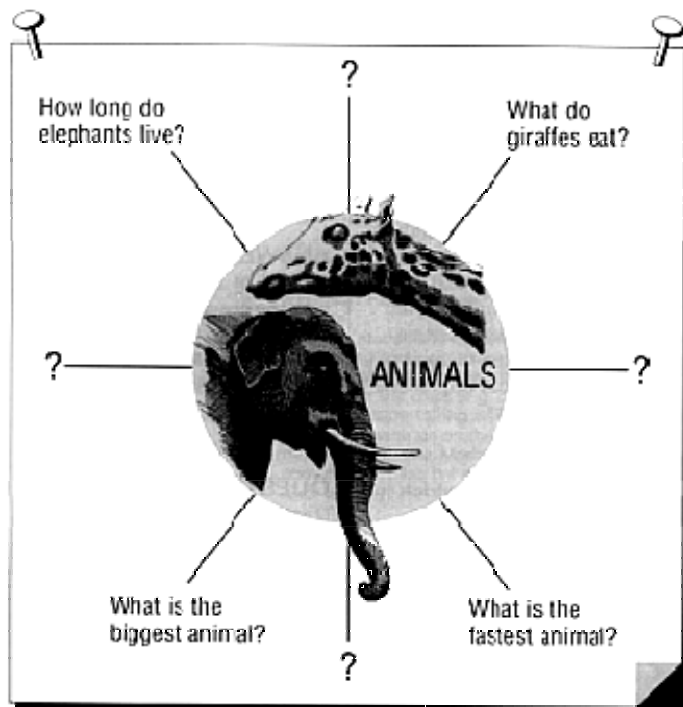
What is the fastest animal?

Fig 2: A question poster (from Cambridge English for Schools, Teacher's Book 1, page 51)

Students then begin suggesting questions. Initially, many of these come in their mother tongue, but as the teacher writes them up in English, the students start suggesting their own questions in English. The teacher points to the use of 'do' and 'can' and question words in the questions on the board, and encourages the students to form their own questions in a similar way. Figure 2 shows an example. When quite a few questions are on the board, students copy them into their files and the teacher says:

'During the next few weeks, we will be doing a lot of work about animals. Look at these questions. I want you to try to find the answers. Ask your friends, look in books, ask your parents, ask your other teachers. See what you can find out. At the end of every lesson we can spend five or ten minutes to see what answers you have found.'

Over the next few lessons, the teacher asks the students what answers they have. Individual students write these answers in simple English on a piece of paper, and stick them next to the question on the question poster.

Different roles for teachers and learners
As you can see, the tasks are very different. How would you answer these questions about each task?

- What is the aim of the task?
- Where do the ideas and language come from?
- How personally involving is the task?
- What happens to what the students produce?

You might like to think about your answers before you read my own.

TASK 1: A visit to the museum
There is no doubt that information gap tasks such as the 'museum' example are very useful. They provide good opportunities for language work and allow students to progress at their own pace. They do have some important limitations. The aim of the task is purely a language one: to provide practice in question forms. Once the students are already fairly proficient in using question forms, *the task will have little or no value.*

The task is also quite tightly structured and all of the ideas in it are provided by the role cards. The language too, mainly comes directly from the role cards; students simply have to apply the grammatical rule they have been learning in order to construct questions around it. Once the task is over, the precise details of it can be forgotten; its sole purpose is to practise question forms. It would be very unlikely, for example, that the teacher would begin the next lesson with the question, 'What time does the museum open?' The level of prolonged personal involvement is quite low. If you were to do the task with different classes, even in different countries, the result would be almost identical in each case. We can say then, that the task produces a 'standardised classroom'.

TASK 2: A question poster
If we think about the question poster task in terms of the same four questions, we get a very different set of answers. We can see immediately that the aim of the task goes beyond language learning. While the students get exposure to and practice in using question forms (as in Task 1) they are also developing wider *educational* abilities: drawing on their own knowledge, formulating genuine questions, and researching. The task therefore will continue to have value even when students become proficient in question forms. They are more personally involved in what is going on; the questions all come from them.

This places the teacher in a different role. In the 'museum task', we can say that the teacher's role is mainly what I call 'the language policeman', checking that the students are producing language correctly. In the question poster task however, the teacher's role is one of supporting the students, helping them to say what they want to say. This means then, that every time a class does the task, the outcome will be different: the task produces a 'unique classroom', shaped by the unique individuals who are in it.

By comparing these two tasks, we can see some key elements that we can use to judge how much 'value' a task has. When I look at tasks then, I ask myself the following questions:

- Does the task have value *beyond* language learning?
- Are students *personally* involved?
- Is the student's personal contribution significant?
- Will the task produce 'a unique classroom'?

If the answer to most, or all, of these questions is 'Yes', then I know that I have a task that is often preferable to another task that practises the same language point.

Does this mean that tasks such as 'A trip to the museum' have no value? Not at all, because with a little bit of imagination, it is possible to make simple changes to 'standardised' tasks that will turn them into 'unique' tasks. In a future article, I want to show you how I think we can do this. It will give you many more practical examples of tasks which provide language practice and incorporate wider educational values.


Part 2: Making good tasks better
English Teaching *professional*, April 1997.

(***)Dimensions of tasks
Looking closely at the museum task and the question poster task, we can see some important differences. We can draw these together in what I call 'dimensions' of tasks which will help us to see what a task offers – and how we can improve it.

Value beyond language learning
The first dimension measures the value that a task might have in addition to language learning. At one end, we can place 'language specific goals' – that is, the students will mainly be learning language – so much so that if they are already proficient in the language area of the task (e.g. question forms) then *the task will have no value.* At the other end, we can place a much broader value: 'wider educational goals', which will mean that even if the students are proficient in the language area of the task, *the task will still have value.* Tasks might fall anyway between these two points, although in the museum and question poster tasks we can see examples of each of the end points – if the students are already proficient in the question form, for example, then there would be no point doing the museum task but the question poster task would still be worthwhile.

Value beyond language learning
Language specific goals --Wider educational goals
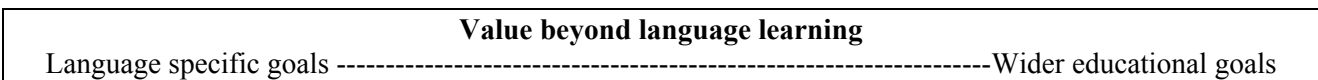
Looking at tasks in this way, we see clearly that we can improve a task if we can give it educational value. We might do this, for example, by using more educational content (instead of a fictional museum, for example, students might be asking about important real places) or by making students search for answers.

The role of the learner
One of the most striking things about the museum task is that the students hardly have to think at all. Everything is supplied by the task and all the students have to do is apply a grammatical rule to make questions and read the information from the book.   In contrast, the question poster task asks the students to supply almost everything. Thinking of the tasks in this way, we suggest two more points to analyse tasks.

The role of the learner	
consumer--producer	
ideas and language	ideas and language
supplied by the task	supplied by the learners
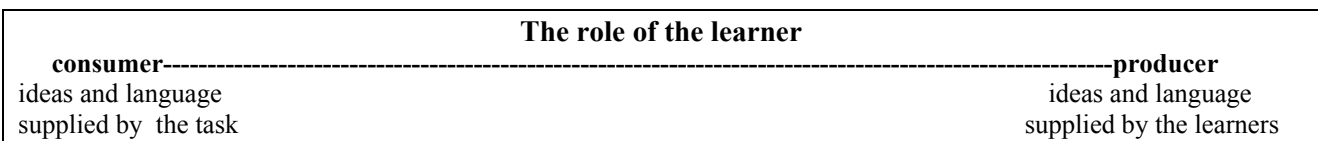
Again, we can see immediately that we might be able to improve a task if we can increase the amount of ideas and language that the students are expected to produce. In the museum task, for example, instead of giving the students everything, we might ask them what questions they would ask and ask them to invent the

information. We could also say, "Imagine you are going to a big city tomorrow. Where would you go? What questions would you need to ask in each place?".

Free and controlled work
My final two dimensions look more closely at the design of a task. Every task has two elements: *what*, that is, the content or topic (e.g. museums, animals, etc.) and *how* (e.g. information gap in pairs, brainstorming with the whole class). For each element, we can see how much 'freedom' or 'control' there is for the student. We can then we put these two elements next to each other, and build a graph, like this:

```
   Control
      |
      |            A  MUSEUM TASK
      |
      |
WHAT  |            B  QUESTION POSTER
      |
      |_____
   Freedom          HOW          Control
```

Thinking about the museum task, for example, we can see that there is a lot of control over *what* the students say and *how* they work. This means that, on the graph, we can probably put it at point A.   The question poster task, however, is rather different. There is still some control over what they say (they must ask about animals, for example) and some control over how they produce the questions and find the answers, but the task gives the students a lot more freedom.   We might then say that the task is probably about point B on the graph.

The aim of language teaching
At this point we can ask ourselves an important question: *What is the ultimate aim of language teaching?* There are many ways in which we can answer that question but most teachers would probably agree that we hope that students will be able to understand and produce the language that they want or need to. In other words, we can say that the ultimate aim of language teaching is *to develop the student's autonomy in language use.* If we think about this in terms of the graph, we can see that what we are aiming for is 'freedom' in language use in terms of both 'how' and 'what' – that is that the students can use and understand language without the need for any external control or support.
The implication of this is that in the classroom we need to be working towards the bottom left of the graph – 'freedom' in language use. Rather than focusing on ways of controlling the language and ideas that students produce we should always be looking for ways to 'free things up'.   This also means that we should be looking for ways to move the students from a role as a 'consumer' in the classroom towards a role as 'producer'. In doing this, we are also likely to move away from 'language specific' work and instead involve the students in broader educational processes.

Practical ideas
To end this article, I want to show five simple ideas that begin to make these changes in classroom work. These are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Practical ideas

1 Do a task, make a task
After doing an exercise, students write a similar exercise for other students (for example, a matching exercise). They can exchange exercises or the exercises can be kept in a box so that students can take one if they have time to spare.

2 Do a test, make a test
After doing a simple test, students can write part of a test themselves. With the teacher, they can agree what they have covered during the last few lessons. Different groups can take responsibility for writing different parts of the test. The teacher can collect the parts of the test, correct them, put them together and give them back to the students as their test.

3 Stimulate the students' questions first
Before reading or listening to a text, the students can suggest questions that they would like the text to answer – i.e. they can produce their own 'comprehension questions'.

4 Stimulate answers first
If a text comes with comprehension questions, the students can try to answer the questions *before* they read the text. Usually this means that they will have to invent details. They can then read the text to compare ideas.

5 Do a task, share outcomes, make a questionnaire.
If the students produce a short text about something (e.g. a paragraph about their favourite animal), they can write a few questions about it (e.g. 'Where does my parrot live?' or 'What is the name of my cat?'). The teacher can then collect these questions and put them on the board ('Where does Cristina's cat live?' etc). The students' texts can then be stuck on the wall and the students can move around the classroom trying to find the answers to each question.

Each of these ideas involves very small changes in classroom work but we can see that in each one, the students are making a step from 'consumer' towards 'producer', from 'language specific' work towards 'wider educational' goals', and are moving from the top right of the graph towards the bottom left – from control towards freedom. None of these ideas implies a 'revolution', but they each offer significant changes in classroom work. In a future article in this newsletter I will take some of these ideas further and show how we can strengthen the 'educational' value of language teaching.

Part 3: Language learning tasks and education
English Teaching *professional,* January 1998.

In two previous articles I asked the question 'What is a good task?' and showed some ways in which we can answer that question. I explained, for example, how we can analyse tasks according to different 'dimensions' (such as whether they have 'language specific' or 'wider educational' goals, and whether students are given roles as 'consumers' or as 'producers') I also showed how we can analyse tasks in terms of how much control they propose over content ('what' students will talk about) and methodology ('how' students will work). In this way, I showed how we can often 'make good tasks better' by making small, but significant changes in the way we organise classroom work. In this article, I want to take these ideas further and now look at how we can make our teaching more educational generally.

On the margins of education
For a long time, much of English language teaching has been on the margins of education. Indeed, some teachers will actually say that they are *only* responsible for teaching the language, and not for the general educational development of the student. This, however, is an illusion. Whether we are aware of it or not, students will always learn more in their language classes than just language. They will also learn their role in the classroom and (to a greater or lesser extent) pick up values and attitudes from the texts they use. They will also learn a lot about themselves as learners, about what language learning involves, and whether they should consider themselves 'good learners'. In all likelihood, the work we ask them to do in the classroom will contribute to habits in learning that will remain with them their entire lives. As language teachers, we are perhaps not always fully aware of what our impact can be but it can be considerable. It is important then to think beyond 'just language' and reflect on how our teaching does – or does not – enrich the lives of the students.

Four principles
There are many different ways in which we can talk about making our teaching more educational, but here I would like to list just four principles which I have found helpful in my work as a teacher and coursebook writer. It is often a very salutary experience to look back on a series of lessons or coursebook units and see how far each of these principles have been met.

1 Make teaching coherent
Language teaching often has a very 'bitty' feel to it. Frequently, texts and sentences are only presented together because they exemplify the same language form. For example, students might be asked to read about buildings, animals, wealthy people, fast cars and so on because each description includes 'comparatives and superlatives'. Language teachers might have no problem in seeing how these texts belong together, but for most students, who are more interested in *what* a text says rather than *how* it says it, this random choice of topic actually makes it more difficult to learn the language, as there is nothing coherent to make the language memorable. One solution to this is to ensure that classroom tasks link together around a common topic which lasts the whole lesson or extends over a series of lessons. In this way, the content will stay with the learner longer – and with it, the language.

2 Content worth learning about
If we look at any task, we can usually easily identify the 'learning content' – for example, a grammar point – and the 'carrier content' – the topic that is used to present or 'carry' the language. A text about 'Henry Smith's day' for example might be used to introduce the Present simple. Normally, we expect students to remember the learning content, but to forget the carrier content. This is an enormously wasted opportunity. If we make sure that **all** content is worth learning – that is, that we use topics and themes that are significant – we can enrich our teaching enormously – and make language learning more effective.

3 Use the students' intelligence
The more we ask students to *think*, the more engaged they will be, and the deeper and long-lasting language learning will be. Many language tasks actually require extremely little thought – simple repetition, matching for meaning, pattern practice, for example. There are many ways, however, in which we can engage our students' intelligence – or 'intelligences'. If we focus on a coherent, significant topic, for example, we can ask students to draw on their background knowledge to answer questions or produce their own questions which they can investigate. We can also ask them to hypothesise and speculate ('What if X happens?' 'What would you do if you were Y?). We can involve them in planning, reviewing and evaluating their work around the topic. We can involve them producing tasks and making tests for others. The key is to find ways which require *thought* in working with language.

4 Foster autonomy
I said in an earlier article (Et*p* Issue 3) that the ultimate aim of language teaching is to develop the students' autonomy in language use – that is, that they can express or understand the language that they need or want. If we think about language teaching as education, however, we can say that an additional aim is to help students manage their own learning, and indeed their own lives. This is a very broad aim in which we can only contribute in a very small way – but we can contribute. In our teaching we can look for ways in which we can involve the students in decisions about what they are doing ("Would you like to do this in pairs or alone?" "How long shall we allow for this task?") or require them to take responsibility ("For homework, produce a plan of your revision for the test." "Look back on the units we have done. Make a list of the areas where you need more practice.").

If we apply these principles to classroom work, then we will be beginning to make our teaching more educational, more memorable and also more effective in terms of language learned. We can find out how far we are doing this by looking back on a recent series of lessons and asking ourselves four questions:

> 1 Was there a coherent topic, within each lesson and over lessons?
> 2 Did the students learn things worth learning in addition to English?
> 3 Did classroom tasks require the students to think?
> 4 Were there opportunities for students to take more control over their learning?

If the answer to each of these questions is 'yes' then I believe that we are on the road towards making language teaching more educational.

Listening in
Jonathan Marks

For a lot of teachers, 'doing listening' means using cassettes. Certainly the widespread availability of cassette material has been valuable in giving teachers and learners access to a much wider range of listening material than the teacher's live voice can provide – more than one speaker, both sexes, different ages, different accents, different voice qualities, different background noises, and so on. And in life outside the classroom, there are some common situations where people listen to disembodied voices – train announcements, radio news and weather forecasts – when they *act on* the key information provided without being able to *interact with* it. This seems a good justification for classroom listening tasks which require learners to identify key points and simulate responses, such as deciding which platform to go to, what to wear, or how to spend the day. Here, learners are simulating the role of 'addressee'.

The role of the listener
Other types of recorded material cast learners in the role of 'eavesdroppers' on other people's interactions. With this type of material, too, the emphasis of listening tasks is typically on identifying key points, specifically the key points for the participants in the interaction. An activity based around a listening text set in a restaurant, for example, might draw the learners into the situation with the question, *'Where are they?'* and move on to a task related to the content of the interaction, such as ticking off the dishes the customers order from a menu. In asking learners to perform such a task, we are actually asking them to simulate the role of the waiter in the restaurant scenario, and overlooking an opportunity for them to listen as themselves in their role as language learners. It wouldn't be surprising if a learner objected: *'What do I care what these imaginary people in this invisible restaurant want to eat?'* What might be of deeper interest is the language that's used to do the ordering. In the utterance *'I think I'll have the vegetable lasagne',* the vegetable lasagne is certainly the most important element for the a real waiter, but for a language learner, the phrase '*I think I'll have the ...'* is probably more worthy of attention. It may go largely unnoticed, though, if the task directs them to focus on the dishes ordered. Key points for language learners aren't necessarily the same as key points for the real or imaginary participants in a listening text.

Similarly, it might occur to a learner, while doing a listening task which involves tracing the route to a pub on a map of an imaginary town, that it doesn't really matter where the pub is, since they aren't going there anyway, and it might be more interesting to notice whether the voice on the cassette says *'Turn to the left', 'Take the turning on the left', 'Turn left',* or something else.

Perhaps it isn't so surprising, then, that even when learners are told, *'Don't worry about understanding every word – just get the main ideas',* they still ask questions about matters which the activity has tried to relegate to the realm of irrelevant linguistic detail. *'What does... mean?' 'What was that word she said?'* In this way, learners sometimes define their own purposes for the listening activity, and subvert the ostensible aims set by the teacher or materials writer.

Real interest
This is all very relevant to the questions of interest and motivation. In teaching contexts where learners have fairly well-defined listening needs (this would include a lot of EAP and ESP contexts), these needs will suggest the types of texts and tasks to be used. In other contexts – such as school systems, where children learn English simply because it's on the curriculum, or general English courses for adults – texts and tasks are more likely to be chosen on the basis of what is likely to interest learners, usually on the basis of topic and content. They can never be sure, however, that any topic will interest all members of a particular class on a particular day. As well as, or even instead of, concentrating on the potential appeal of the topic of a listening text, teachers might more usefully try to tap the interest which learners have, as language learners, in the language that constitutes the text. With this focus, any listening text, whatever the topic, can be interesting and motivating for an individual, and learners can be engaged in, rather than curiosity about the taste and behaviour of strangers ordering meals, giving directions, and so on. Listening in to other people's

conversations may not normally be acceptable, but language learners might profitably be encouraged to continue doing it outside the classroom!

Conversation
Apart from eavesdropping and being the addressee, which offer no scope for interaction, there is a third type of listening, which in real life is the most common. It's the listening that happens in the context of conversation, where the roles of speaker and listener are constantly in flux. Learners get classroom experience of this in pairwork and groupwork and practise the skills of negotiating meaning with each other. What they perhaps don't get, in some classrooms, is much experience of 'interactive listening' with speakers whose English is more developed than theirs. Generally, the people who can most easily act as a source of this kind of listening practice are teachers. But ironically, they sometimes withhold it, because they've been told to minimise teacher-talking-time, and because they want to maximise learners' opportunity to practise by using lots of groupwork.

The teacher's voice
The live voice of the teacher in the classroom can fulfil two valuable functions. Firstly, it can provide listening practice where the listeners can see and interact with the speaker verbally, but also through facial expression; the speaker can respond to the ongoing feedback from the listeners – especially expressions which indicate a lack of comprehension – by repeating, reformulating, adding, changing direction, and so on. Secondly, it can provide exposure to, and opportunities to notice, new and half-familiar items of language. For example, in telling a story, a teacher might deliberately include certain words and phrases which the class have recently encountered, to give them a chance to hear them used in a new context; or might deliberately include several instances of the past perfect, in order to draw attention to its use in subverting chronological sequence in narrative.

Good listening
The question is, should the teacher point out such language explicitly? The current message seems to be that we acquire language when we understand messages. But this may not be enough. Learners may also need to 'notice' the language that carries the message. It might therefore be advisable for teachers to prime learners to listen out for certain language, or to draw attention to it as it occurs. This requires a delicate balancing act on the part of the teacher. On the one hand, it means a certain amount of planning and modification of language to suit the level and perceived learning needs of the class. But at the same time it is important not to lose an overall sense of naturalness, improvisation and normal articulation.

A further, frequently overlooked, aspect of listening in the classroom is that it doesn't only happen during 'listening activities'. Whenever someone is speaking, there should also be listening – the kind of respectful listening needed in any co-operative venture. In life outside the classroom, we are sometimes aware that certain people are 'good listeners' – perhaps meaning that they are attentive, empathetic, patient and not inclined to interrupt – while others aren't. The development of these general listening skills might not seem to be a primary aim of a foreign language learner, but in fact they are crucial to an optimally-functioning, co-operative classroom. In particular, teachers often find that learners are unwilling to listen to each other with the same degree of respect that they accord the teacher, and this can have a detrimental effect on the outcome of activities that rely on co-operation, not to mention group dynamics.

Equally, though, teachers themselves sometimes fail to listen to learners with sufficient care. They may, for instance, interrupt and finish an utterance that a learner is struggling to produce, without actually knowing what the learner is trying to say. Or they may focus on listening to the accuracy or inaccuracy of a learner's English to such an extent that they don't hear the meaning behind the words, so they respond to the medium rather than the message.

Awareness
The idea that 'listening means cassettes' leads us to neglect the potential of the classroom to provide interactive listening practice. Conversely, the thought that listening must be 'authentic' and reflect 'real life' may lead us to neglect tasks which may be more suitable to those still learning the language. Classroom listening can, and should, take account of learners' motivation, not only to practise strategic listening skills, but also to encounter, notice and assimilate elements of the language they are learning.

Perhaps it would be helpful to think of classrooms as zones of heightened awareness, where full attentiveness to *what* is said (the messages people convey) – as well as *how* it is said (the language in which messages are embodied) – enables learners to get the most out of the time they spend in lessons, especially since most classroom activities depend to some extent on listening. In this way, we are also helping students develop the skills they need if they are to get the most out of the opportunities for listening that come their way outside the classroom.

The changing face of listening
John Field

There was a time when listening in language classes was perceived chiefly as a way of presenting new grammar. Dialogues on tape provided oral examples of structures to be learned, and this was the only type of listening practice which most learners received. Ironically, a large amount of effort was committed to training learners to express themselves orally.

From the late 1960s, practitioners recognised the importance of listening and began to set aside time for practising the skill. A relatively standard format for the listening lesson developed at this time:

> **Pre-listening**
>> Pre-teaching of all important new vocabulary in the passage.
>
> **Listening**
>> Extensive listening (followed by general questions establishing context)
>> Intensive listening (followed by detailed comprehension questions)
>
> **Post-listening**
>> Analysis of the language in the text *(e.g. Why did the speaker use the Present Perfect?)*
>> Listen and Repeat. Teacher pauses the tape, learners repeat words.

Over the past 30 years, many teachers have modified this procedure considerably. It is worthwhile reminding ourselves of the rationale behind these changes. In doing so, we may come to question the thinking at certain points. We may also conclude that perhaps the changes do not go far enough.

Pre-listening
Critical words
Pre-teaching of vocabulary has now largely been discontinued. In real life, learners cannot expect to have unknown words explained in advance; instead they have to learn to cope with a situation where parts of what is heard will not be understood. It may be necessary for the teacher to present two or three critical words at the beginning of the listening lesson – key words without which any understanding of the text would be impossible. But these should ideally be restricted to two or three. 'Critical' means absolutely indispensable.

Pre-listening activities
Most teachers now feature some kind of pre-listening activity, involving brainstorming vocabulary, or reviewing areas of grammar, or discussing the topic of the listening text. This phase of the lesson usually lasts longer than it should. Quite apart from the fact that a long pre-listening session considerably shortens the time available for listening, it is often counter-productive. Excessive discussion of the topic may mean that too much of the content of the listening passage has been anticipated; revising language points before listening will only encourage learners to focus on these items in the passage sometimes at the expense of global meaning.

The ideal is to set oneself two simple aims in the pre-listening period:
a. to provide sufficient context to match that which would be available in real life
b. to create motivation (perhaps by asking learners to swap predictions about what they will hear). These can be achieved in as little as five minutes.

Listening
The intensive/extensive distinction
Most practitioners have retained the extensive/intensive distinction, and, on a similar principle, international examinations usually specify that the recording is to be played twice to candidates. Some theorists have argued that this is unnatural – that in real life one only gets one hearing. But the argument is a false one: the whole situation of listening to a cassette in a language classroom is highly artificial. Furthermore, it is easy to

overlook the fact that listening to a strange voice (especially a strange voice speaking in a foreign language) requires a process of normalisation – of adjusting to the pitch, speed and quality of the voice. An initial playing of the cassette for extensive listening provides an opportunity for this.

Pre-set questions
Checking comprehension has changed. We now recognise that learners listen in an unfocused way if questions are not set until after the passage has been heard. Unsure of what they will be asked, they cannot judge the level of detail that they are supposed to be heeding and their answers are likely to be as dependent upon memory as upon listening skills. If we pre-set comprehension questions, we can ensure that learners listen with a clear purpose, and will use listening skills and not just memory.

Questions or tasks?
Better than setting traditional comprehension questions is the current practice of providing a task. Learners are required to do something with the information they have extracted from the text. Tasks can be as simple as carrying out a set of instructions; they typically involve:
- labelling (e.g. buildings on a map)
- selecting (e.g. choosing a film from three trailers)
- drawing (e.g. symbols on a weather map)
- form-filling (e.g. a hotel registration form)
- completing a grid.

Task-based activities of this kind reflect much more closely the type of response that might be given to a listening experience in real life. They also provide a more reliable way of checking understanding by reducing the amount of reading and writing involved. A major difficulty with listening work is that, in order to find out how much a learner has understood, one has to involve other skills. Are the reasons for any wrong answer actually due to listening? For example, if learners give a wrong answer to a written comprehension question, it may be because they have not understood the question (reading) or because they cannot formulate an answer (writing) rather than because their listening is at fault.

The third benefit is that tasks demand individual responses. Filling in forms, labelling diagrams or making choices obliges every learner to try to make something of what they are hearing. This is especially effective if the class is asked to work in pairs.

Authentic materials
Another development has been the increased use of authentic materials. Texts which were not specially prepared with the language learner in mind reflect the rhythms of natural speech in a way that scripted ones cannot, however good the actors. They also provide an experience of something like real-life listening because the language they contain has not been simplified to reflect the presumed knowledge of the learners. It is vital that learners gain practice in dealing with texts where they understand only part of what is said.

It is, therefore, strongly advisable to introduce authentic materials relatively early on in a language course. Some teachers fear this will discourage students. However, the reverse is usually found to be the case: provided learners are told in advance not to expect to understand everything they hear, they find it motivating to discover that they can extract information from an ungraded passage. The essence of the approach is: instead of simplifying the language of the text, one simplifies the task that is demanded of the student. If the text is above the language level of the class, then one demands only shallow comprehension. One might play a recording of a real-life stallholder in a market and simply ask the class to write down all the vegetables that are mentioned.

Students often have difficulty in adjusting to authentic conversational materials after hearing scripted ones. We tend not to give sufficient thought to this problem. It is a good idea to introduce your learners systematically to those features of conversational speech which they may find unfamiliar – hesitations, stuttering, false starts and long, loosely structured sentences. A good approach is to choose a few examples of a single feature from a piece of authentic speech, play them to the class and ask them to try to transcribe them.

Listening as strategy

Authentic materials may involve a very different type of listening from those that are graded and scripted. In real life, listening to a foreign language is a strategic activity. Learners recognise only part of what they hear, (my research suggests a much smaller percentage than we imagine). They then construct guesses which link these fragmented pieces of text. Learners need practice and guidance in this process. Those who are cautious need to be encouraged to take risks and to make inferences based upon the words they have managed to identify. Natural risk-takers need to be encouraged to check their guesses against new evidence as it comes in from the speaker. And all learners need to be shown that making guesses is not a sign of failure: it is a normal part of listening to a foreign language – at least until a very high level of second language competence.

Post-listening

Identifying functions

We no longer spend time examining the grammar of the listening text; that reflected a typically structuralist view of listening as a means of reinforcing recently-learned material. However, it is often worthwhile to pick out any functional language and draw learners' attention to it. ('Susan threatened John. Do you remember the words she used?'). This seems to be quite rarely done – yet listening texts often provide excellent examples of functions such as apologising, inviting, refusing, suggesting, and so on.

The Listen and Repeat phase has been dropped as well, on the basis that it was tantamount to parroting. This is not entirely fair: in fact, it tested the ability of learners to achieve lexical segmentation – to identify individual words within the stream of sound. But one can understand that it does not accord well with current communicative thinking.

Inferring meaning

After listening, many teachers favour getting learners to infer the meaning of new words from the contexts in which they appear – just as they do in reading. They write the target words on the board, replay the sentences containing them and ask learners to work out their meanings. Teachers are deterred from this activity by the difficulty of finding the right place on the cassette. The solution is to copy the sentences to be used onto a second cassette.

To summarise, then, the format of a good listening lesson of today is considerably different from that of 30 years ago:

Pre-listening:
        Set context
        Create motivation
Listening:
        Extensive listening (followed by questions on context, attitude)
        Pre-set task / Pre-set questions
        Intensive listening
        Checking answers
Post-listening:
        Examining functional language
        Inferring vocabulary meaning

Where do we go from here?

Listening methodology has changed a great deal, but some would argue that many of the changes have been cosmetic, and that what is really needed is a rethinking of the aims and structure of the listening lesson. Here are some of the more important limitations of our current approach.

We still tend to test listening rather than teach it

This is often said, but the truth is that we have little option but to use some kind of checking procedure to assess the extent of understanding which has been achieved. What is arguably wrong is not what we do, but how we use the results. We tend to judge successful listening very simplistically in terms of correct answers to comprehension questions and tasks. We overlook the fact that there may be many ways of achieving a

correct answer. One learner may have identified two key words and made an intelligent guess; another may have constructed meaning on the basis of 100% recognition of what was said.

We tend to focus upon the product of listening when we should be interested in the process – what is going on in the heads of our learners.

Wrong answers are more informative than right ones. Spend time asking learners where and how understanding broke down. Make listening diagnostic, then construct remedial tasks. If it is evident that learners are finding it difficult to recognise weak forms (***) , a series of sentences containing examples of these forms can be dictated, to ensure that the next time they occur, students recognise them and interpret them correctly. Remedial exercises can also be used to develop higher-level skills: distinguishing important pieces of information, anticipating, noticing topic markers and so on.

Teaching listening, rather than testing it, involves a change in lesson shape. Instead of the long pre-listening period which some teachers employ, it is much more fruitful to allow time for an extended post-listening period in which learners' problems can be identified and tackled.

We do not practise the kind of listening that takes place in real life.
If we are to use authentic texts (and there is every reason why we should), it is pointless to work on the assumption that learners will identify most of the words they hear. We need a new type of lesson where understanding of what is said is less than perfect. The process that non-native listeners adopt seems to be:

- Identify words in a few fragmented sections of the text. Feel relatively certain about some; less certain about others.
- Make inferences linking the parts of the text about which you feel most confident.
- Check those inferences against what comes next.

This kind of strategy is not confined to low-level learners; my evidence suggests that it is used up to the highest levels. We very much need to reshape some (not all) of our listening lessons to reflect this reality. Let us encourage learners to write down the words they understand, to form and discuss inferences, to listen again and revise their inferences, then to check them against what the speaker says next. In doing this, we not only give them practice in the kind of listening they are likely to do in real life; we also ensure that guessing is not seen as a sign of failure but something that most people have to resort to when listening to a foreign language.

Listening work is often limited in scope and isolating in effect.
Our current methodology reinforces the natural instinct of the teacher to provide answers. We need to design a listening lesson where the teacher has a much less interventionist role, encouraging learners to listen and re-listen and to do as much of the work as possible for themselves. On the other hand, we should also recognise that listening can prove an isolating activity, in which the liveliest class can quickly become a group of separate individuals, each locked up in their own auditory efforts.

The solution is to get learners to listen to a short passage, then to compare their understanding of it in pairs. Encourage them to disagree with each other - thereby increasing motivation for a second listening. Play the passage again, and let the pairs revise their views. Ask them to share their interpretations with the class. Resist the temptation to tell them who is right and who is wrong. When the class has argued about the accuracy of different versions, play the text again and ask them to make up their minds, each student providing evidence to support his/her point of view. In this way, listening becomes a much more interactive activity, with learners listening not because the teacher tells them to, but because they have a vested interest in justifying their own explanation of the text. By listening and re-listening, they improve the accuracy with which they listen and, by discussing possible interpretations, they improve their ability to construct representations of meaning from what they hear.

The methodology of the listening lesson has certainly come a long way, but let us not be complacent. Unless we address the three problem areas outlined earlier, our teaching will remain hidebound and we will be missing out on what should be our true aim – not simply providing practice but producing better and more confident listeners.

Speaking activities: five features
Paul Nation

This article proposes that speaking activities for language teaching make use of a limited and describable number of features to make them interesting and relevant. The author suggests that by understanding these features, teachers can improve the speaking activities they use, and that they can create their own activities, based on individual features and on combinations of them.

Speaking activities in second-language learning usually involve language functions which are common in native speakers' use of the language outside the classroom. However, in most cases they differ from these 'outside' activities in that they contain features that are there to make them successful classroom activities. Here, these features are called *roles, outcomes, procedures, split information,* and *challenges.* They are seen as performing two tasks: they help achieve the learning goal of the speaking activity; and they motivate the learners and encourage them to join in the activity.

The following description of the various forms that each feature can take is intended to show how each feature can affect a speaking activity, and how teachers can make use of the descriptions in order to construct and improve their own speaking activities.

Roles: The adoption of roles by learners has an effect on the learning goals of a speaking activity, and an effect on participation in the activity. It affects the learning goals, because it allows the use of language that might not normally occur in the classroom. Roles affect participation in an activity, because if each learner has a role to play, then each learner knows what to do in the activity, and others expect them to play their role. For example, in the *I say, waiter!* activity, learner A is a customer at a restaurant. He or she selects a complicated meal and gives the order to the waiter (learner B**).** The waiter tries to remember it and then gives the order to the chef (learner C). The chef writes down the order and sends the 'meal' (the written description) to the customer. It makes it more interesting if the waiter can 'forget' parts of the order; the chef can say that certain food is not available, or even send out the wrong food. The customer can change his or her mind.

So, in this single activity learners can practise the language functions of requesting, clarifying, correcting and complaining, as well as using vocabulary associated with restaurants. If roles were not used, then the activity would be one of the *'What would you say if . . . '* variety, which would not be interesting for very long. Consider the effect of roles on the following activity. The topic is 'Safety in the home'. Instead of having a discussion about the causes of accidents in the home, the teacher has decided to make the activity more effective by having a role play. Here is a possible situation.

> *Mr and Mrs Brown have no children. They live with Mrs Brown's elderly father in a two-storey house. Mr Brown's sister, Janet, has come to stay with them for two weeks. She has two children aged two and five who are very active. Janet is worried that the Browns' house is not arranged for young children and that the children might hurt themselves or other people.*

Can you think of individual role descriptions for each character? For example, Mrs Brown's father smokes and is rather careless about leaving things around. He thinks children are tough and do not need to be protected.

One variation of roles is to assign tasks to the learners. For example, in a discussion group all learners are expected to contribute to the discussion, but one learner can have special responsibility for actively seeking the views of the learners in the group about the topic, that is, encouraging each learner to speak. Another learner can have special responsibility for periodically summarizing the views of the learners who have spoken. Another has the job of keeping the learners on the topic. Another has the job of raising problems ('But what if . . . '), to keep the discussion going. These tasks may be known to all the learners in a group, or

some of them may be hidden. That is, only the learner doing the task knows what his or her task is. Other tasks include criticizing the way the discussion is organized, disagreeing with what others say, and making others feel happy and confident. Because each learner has a task, he or she must contribute to the discussion.

Outcomes: But speaking activities like describing, discussing, telling stories, and explaining do not necessarily lead to any observable outcome. Yet having a clear outcome can increase interest in the activity by giving learners a purpose. They can see what work needs to be done in order to complete the activity. The nature of the outcome affects the language functions that may occur, so it is useful and important to devise for students an appropriate range of outcomes. The limited amount of research in this area shows that specific language functions can be elicited by choosing suitable activities and outcomes (Staab 1983). A list of typical outcomes for speaking activities includes the following:

a. Providing directions: This involves giving a set of directions that others must follow in order to draw something, build a model, or follow a route on a map.

b. Completion: Typical activities include orally completing a picture or a picture story, and describing the consequences of actions, or the reasons for them. Learners can be required to use factual knowledge, opinion, or their imagination to do the completion.

c. Ranking, ordering or choosing: Learners are given a list of items and they have to order them or choose from them as a result of agreement among the learners. Nation and Thomas (1979) give suggestions for such exercises.

d. Listing implications, causes or uses: These activities often make use of 'brainstorming', where learners think of as many possible answers without being critical about the suggestions. Here is a typical exercise.

> *You are on a desert island and have a paper clip. How many ways can you make use of this paper clip?*

The outcome is as comprehensive a list of possibilities as the students can come up with.

e. Matching, classifying, distinguishing: These involve the search for similarities and differences, and then decision-making based on the results. For example, the learners are given ten or more pictures and have to make pairs from them, i.e. match them, and justify the matching. Another possibility is that the learners arrange several pictures into three or four groups, using classification criteria that they decide on themselves. Distinguishing exercises involve deciding if two items are substantially the same, or if they are different. Locating the differences in two pictures is another version of distinguishing.

f. Data gathering: Learners seek information from other learners or other people. The most typical exercises are the interview (Nation, 1980) and the oral questionnaire (Ladousse, 1983).

g. Problem solving: The problem may be presented either in written or spoken form, for example, *Stop thief!*

> *You see one of your classmates put something in his/her pocket in a shop. It is clear that she intends to take it out of the shop without paying. You think that his/her action has been seen by a store detective. What should you do?*

The problem could also be in the form of a diagram. For example, the learners are given a diagram showing the layout of a piece of land containing four houses, several trees, a small lake, etc. They are told that the land must be divided up amongst four people so that each will feel that they have been given a fair share. The learners have to draw the dividing lines on the diagram.

h. Producing material: Speaking activities of this type include preparing a radio programme, preparing to perform a play, preparing for a debate, and producing some written work. The speaking activity occurs as a means to achieve a goal which may also involve speaking, but need not do so.

Procedure: A procedure divides the speaking activity into steps. It increases the amount of speaking involved in the activity, and in some cases makes sure that each learner in the group will participate in the activity. In this way a procedure is like tasks, except that all learners follow all steps of the procedure.

One of the most useful procedures is the movement from individual to pair to group to whole class activity. In a ranking exercise this involves learners working on their own for five minutes to make their own personal ranking. This ensures they bring some definite ideas to the later group discussion. Then learners join together

in groups of four or five members to reach a single rank order for the group, on which each member more or less agrees. Finally, all the learners come together and try to reach an agreed ranking for the whole class. This procedure can be applied to a very wide range of activities, such as doing written exercises where learners do them individually, compare their answers in pairs or small groups, and then decide on the correct answers as a whole class.

There is an added benefit if a procedure is a formalization of a learning or speaking strategy. For example in the *You said ...* procedure, two learners talk to each other, but before a learner can respond to what was said, he or she must paraphrase what the previous speaker just said. This is a formalization of a negotiation strategy, namely seeking confirmation. It not only increases participation in a speaking activity, but also gives practice in a valuable communication strategy.

Other procedures include giving short answers and extra information to questions (Nation, 1980), using De Bono's (1973) thinking procedures like considering the Plus, Minus and Interesting aspects of a topic, and classroom organization procedures (see for example Danserau, 1987).

Split information: Most definitions of communication include the conveying of information that the receiver does not have. In teaching activities this is often called an information gap. One of the most effective kinds of information gap occurs where each person in an activity has information that the others need but do not have. That is, the information needed to reach an outcome is split (evenly or unevenly) between the participants.

This splitting of information has several effects. First, it gives each person a reason to participate. Second, it makes it important for each person to understand what the others say. Third, it gives a strong feeling of group cohesiveness, because each is dependent on the others. The splitting of information can be easily introduced into many speaking activities and is particularly effective for increasing the amount of negotiation of meaning in an activity (Long and Porter, 1985). Here is an example. In *Complete the chart,* two learners are each given a different report on the same incident. The reports could be taken from rival newspapers. The learners tell, but do not show, each other what is in their reports and complete a chart by filling in the information. The chart is prepared by the teacher so that any one of the reports does not have enough information to complete all the chart.

The information in an activity can be split in several ways. The most balanced ways involve splitting the text or pictures that the learners are working with. Here are some examples.

a. The learners describe a picture to their partners. The information in this activity can be split by giving one learner a picture with some parts blanked out, and the other learner has the same picture with different parts blanked` out. By describing their pictures to each other they complete their picture or locate the differences.

b. The information can be split by getting learners to read different parts of the same text. Learner A also has questions which relate to Learner B's text. Learner B has questions which relate to Learner A's text. Instead of questions, an information-transfer diagram may be used.

Challenges: Challenges are added to teaching activities in order to make it more difficult (and as a result more interesting) for learners to achieve the outcome of the activity. However, the challenge must be carefully thought out, so that the learners can see that it is possible to achieve the outcome although special effort may be necessary. Here are four kinds of challenges, each of which gives activities some game-like features, thus resulting in a high degree of interest and involvement by students.

1. *Competition:* Some activities involve competition between pairs or groups. This is an essential part of activities where groups compete to bring buyers or listeners to their point of view.
2. *Limitation of time or quantity:* In *4/3/2* learners repeat the same talk to different listeners with one minute less each time to say their ideas.
3. *Memory:* In a chain story, or activities involving a messenger, learners hear quite a long story which they must remember in order to retell it to other learners.

4. *A hidden solution:* Many questioning activities, like *Twenty questions* or *What am I?* involve one person knowing the answer but not giving it directly. The questioners must therefore use the clues that are provided, such as the answers to Yes/No questions, to work out the solution. This kind of challenge has some of the features of a split-information activity, in that the clues to find a solution are spread equally amongst the learners, and must be combined.

Using the five features together: one example
The following activity contains examples of most of the five features: roles, outcomes, a procedure, split information, and challenges. It comes from *Nine Graded Simulations* (Jones, 1984), and is called *Front Page.* The learners work in groups of four people. Their job is to prepare the front page of a newspaper. They are given stories, each consisting of two to five paragraphs. They must choose the stories they want to put in the limited space on the front page, decide which will be the main story, decide on the number and order of the paragraphs in each story, and write headlines for each story they choose. The headlines have to fit within given restrictions on the total number of letters allowed, and the preparation of the front page must be completed by a certain time to meet the printing deadline.

In essence, the activity involves a discussion based on the speakers' opinions. To some degree, the speakers adopt *roles* as newspaper editors. As in true simulations these roles do not involve a change in attitude and character, but nevertheless during the activity the learners are pretending to hold a job they do not really have. Besides the feature of role, the activity also has an *outcome.* That is, the learners have to produce a complete front page. So, their discussion has a purpose. They discuss in order to agree about choosing and ordering the material they are working with. The third feature present in the activity is *a procedure.* This is not very strongly defined for this activity, but the learners receive instructions, before the editing process begins, telling them that *they* have to (1) choose the most suitable news items, (2) decide where these items will appear on the front page, (3) choose and order the most useful paragraphs for each item, and (4) write the headline. This provides steps for the learners to follow to reach a successful outcome and to encourage participation. The activity does not however involve *split information,* because all the learners in a group have equal access to all the information. (It would be possible to divide the stories amongst the learners of a group and make each of them the sole source of information about a story, but that could prove irritating in practice.) Finally, the activity involves several *challenges* for the learners. The most important challenge is the time restriction. The front page must be produced by a certain time. Another challenge is the restriction on the number of letters (including between-word spaces) allowed in the headlines, and the number of paragraphs allowed on a page.

The best way to see the effects of these features on the activity is to think what the activity would be like without them. Perhaps the activity would be like this: 'Discuss the kinds of stories you would expect to see on the front page of a newspaper. How do editors decide which stories to give prominence to? An interesting discussion might result from this topic, but that would depend largely on how the learners feel, their relationships with each other, the success of the grouping, and the way the teacher has prepared the learners for the topic. By adding features to the activity the teacher can be more certain about its success.

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TAB or 'Why don't my teenagers speak English?'
David Spencer and David Vaughan

When one of the authors of this article was doing his initial teacher training course he was warned about the problem of TAB amongst teenagers. What was it, he wondered. Some kind of illness? Almost. TAB means Task Avoidance Behaviour. Underneath the euphemistic jargon, lies the fact that, when working in pairs or small groups, teenagers notoriously play about, chatter in their own language, make paper planes, or do anything but what they are supposed to be doing: speaking the target language.

Unfortunately, TAB often has a strong and lasting effect on many teachers. They may try to do one or two oral activities with their class, see a number of their students chatting in their own language about plans for next weekend, and so decide bitterly to abandon oral work forever. This is not being fair to our students; no English course is complete without writing or grammar. Speaking is another essential strand of the language which cannot simply be omitted. We should not let a minority in the class deny the rest of the class the chance to speak.

Let us firstly analyse the reasons why some students avoid getting involved in speaking activities. We can then consider positive steps to limit those reasons. Although we can never realistically expect all students to speak in English all the time, we can make pair and groupwork in English a more productive and rewarding experience.

Why teenage students are reluctant to speak
Age-related factors
It is easy to forget, being adults and having successfully learnt English, that speaking English can be quite an embarrassing and threatening experience when you are a teenager. Why use foreign sounds to ask your best friend what she did last weekend ? Apart from anything else, the students have probably already discussed these things when they met each other at the school gates on Monday morning.

It is frustrating to be unable to express yourself clearly because you cannot remember vocabulary, how to pronounce words or how to form a particular tense. Add this to the natural shyness of, say, a thirteen-year old, who is still forming his or her own concept of him/herself in the mother-tongue and it is obvious why some students will find it easier to play around than speak English, especially if the topic of conversation is personal.

If the topic is a 'world' topic (e.g. ecology) as opposed to a personal topic it is possible that students have not yet formed an opinion. Silence might be less an act of rebellion than a genuine response to the question! We can try to encourage students with the fact that one day they might need English to get a job but, obviously, long-term motivation is usually irrelevant for young students.

Peer pressure adds to the problem. Two students may want to work on a task but if the third student wants to 'hijack' the activity, the other two will be easily persuaded. Nobody wants to look like the 'teacher's pet'; the more the teacher angrily insists, 'In English!' the less likely it is that students of this age will take notice.

Task-related factors
Pairwork and groupwork are types of interaction that students rarely experience in other subjects at school. In many subjects students might never be asked to formulate or express their own opinions on topics; speaking might be discouraged or even forbidden by other teachers. Suddenly, in our classes, students are asked to get together and chat and some students will interpret this freedom as a licence for bad behaviour. We, as teachers, need to train our students gradually to work first in pairs and then in progressively larger groups, moving slowly from very controlled to freer activities.

Students quickly lose interest when there is no clear purpose to an activity, no tangible task to realize or only artificial reasons to communicate with one another. Sometimes clear purposes are given but activities don't work since the instructions from the teacher are not 100% clear. If students do not know what language to use, once they are working independently from the teacher, the chances of success are minimal. Some tasks may even demand a level of cohesion and coherence that the students are still developing in their own language.

Designing and selecting speaking activities
There is not one particular type of activity that will always work, but we believe that a good speaking activity will display the following qualities:

Task-based: Activities that work well tend to include a task with a clear, achievable end product. A task such as 'Find out about your partner's likes and dislikes' is not very well defined in terms of length (how many questions to ask) or purpose (why they are finding out about their partner's likes and dislikes). Say instead, 'Find five things you have in common' and the task immediately becomes more achievable, there is a reason to exchange information and a quantified goal.

Controlled: Information gap tasks define the context and limit the task. It is easy for students to measure their success.

Relevant to the students' lives: It is important for students to see a link between activities and their own lives – whether school, town, family or interests. By drawing on their experience, the students are not at a loss for something to say.

Setting up speaking activities
Activities, however good they are, often go wrong when students are not sure what they are supposed to be doing, in what order, or how to record their findings. With a group of adults, this may result in mild bewilderment and some resourceful attempts to rectify the matter, but with a class of teenagers the outcome may be total chaos. Writing instructions clearly on the OHT, board or slips of paper is the most effective way of anticipating problems at this stage.

When activities need a series of instructions, group them into stages rather than give all the instructions simultaneously. It is often a good idea to demonstrate activities, particularly with young learners. The cue to start the activity should only be given when each student knows what to do. With adult students it is common practice to explain the objectives of activities at the setting-up stage. There is no reason why this should not be done with teenage students. Excessive emphasis on 'games for games' sake' can be short-sighted. Adolescent students, like any others, need to make visible, quantifiable progress.

During a speaking activity
Monitoring is one of the most efficient ways of reducing TAB, since students realise that the teacher is checking their work. Monitoring teenage students also gives the teacher the opportunity to offer all-important individual encouragement, and to help students with specific difficulties. It is clearly impossible to monitor every student in the course of one activity but individual attention can be given over a series of activities and lessons. If it is clear that the whole class is having problems during an activity, the teacher should not be afraid to stop the activity, and set it up again.

At the feedback stage
Students should receive feedback on how they tackled the activity. There is a danger in showing interest only in the language aspect of the activity and not the information that they communicate. During feedback ask the students how well they thought they performed, what they found difficult and what they enjoyed. By asking them to evaluate critically we are encouraging a sense of responsibility that might lead to more active participation in class.

The move towards successful oral pairwork is neither fast nor easy. However, once students do become familiar with the dynamics and aims of pairwork, groupwork and freer activities, they are more likely to be productive. The problem of long term motivation is countered by tasks with immediate goals, which also provide enjoyment and interest. Finally – a mathematical point. Divide 50 minutes by 25. Even if students don't work well in pairs and groups, they will probably speak for more than the 2 minutes spoken by 25 students in a 50 minute class who never do pair or group work!

Intensive reading
Jeremy Harmer

from Harmer, J. 2001. *The Practice of English Language Teaching.* Longman.

To get maximum benefit from their reading, students need to be involved in both extensive and intensive reading. Whereas with the former a teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they read and to do so for pleasure and general language improvement, the latter is often (but not exclusively) teacher chosen and directed, and is designed to enable students to develop specific receptive skills. (***)

Intensive reading: the roles of the teacher
In order to get students to read enthusiastically in class, we need to work to create interest in the topic and tasks. However, there are further roles we need to adopt when asking students to read intensively:

Organiser: we need to tell students exactly what their reading purpose is, and give them clear instructions about how to achieve it, and how long they have to do this. Once we have said 'You have four minutes for this' we should not change that time unless observation (see below) suggests that it is necessary.

Observer: when we ask students to read on their own we need to give them space to do so. This means restraining ourselves from interrupting that reading, even though the temptation may be to add more information or instructions.

While students are reading we can observe their progress since this will give us valuable information about how well they are doing individually and collectively, and will tell us whether to give them some extra time or, instead, move to organising feedback more quickly than we had anticipated.

Feedback organiser: when our students have completed the task, we can lead a feedback session to check that they have completed the task successfully. We may start by having them compare their answers in pairs and then ask for answers from the class in general or from pairs in particular. Students often appreciate giving paired answers like this since, by sharing their knowledge, they are also sharing their responsibility for the answers.

When we ask students to give answers we should always ask them to say where in the text they found the information for their answers. This provokes a detailed study of the text which will help them the next time they come to a similar reading passage. It also tells us exactly what comprehension problems they have if and when they get answers wrong.

It is important to be supportive when organising feedback after reading if we are to counter any negative feelings students might have about the process, and if we wish to sustain their motivation.

Prompter: when students have read a text we can prompt them to notice language features in that text. We may also, as controllers, direct them to certain features of text construction, clarifying ambiguities, and making them aware of issues of text structure which they had not come across previously.

Intensive reading: the vocabulary question
A common paradox in reading lessons is that while teachers are encouraging students to read for general understanding, without worrying about the meaning of every single word, the students, on the other hand, are desperate to know what each individual word means. Given half a chance, many of them would rather tackle a reading passage with a dictionary (electronic or otherwise) in one hand and a pen in the other to write translations all over the page!

It is easy to be dismissive of such student preferences, yet as Carol Walker points out, 'It seems contradictory to insist that students "read for meaning" while simultaneously discouraging them from trying to understand the text at a deeper level than merely gist' (1998:172). Clearly we need to find some accommodation between our desire to have students develop particular reading skills (such as the ability to understand the general message without understanding every detail) and their natural urge to understand the meaning of every single word.

One way of reaching a compromise is to strike some kind of a bargain with a class whereby they will do more or less what we ask of them provided that we do more or less what they ask of us. Thus we may encourage students to read for general understanding without understanding every word on a first or second read-through. But then, depending on what else is going to be done, we can give them a chance to ask questions about individual words and/or give them a chance to look them up. That way both parties in the teaching-learning transaction have their needs met.

A word of caution needs to be added here. If students ask for the meaning of all the words they do not know and given some of the problems inherent in the explaining of different word meanings – the majority of a lesson may be taken up in this way. We need, therefore, to limit the amount of time spent on vocabulary checking in the following ways:

Time limit: we can give a time limit of, say, five minutes for vocabulary enquiry, whether this involves dictionary use, language corpus searches, or questions to the teacher.

Word/phrase limit: we can say that we will only answer questions about five or eight words or phrases.

Meaning consensus: we can get students to work together to search for and find word meanings. To start the procedure, individual students write down three to five words from the text they most want to know the meaning of. When they have each done this, they share their list with another student and come up with a new joint list of only five words. This means they will probably have to discuss which words to leave out. Two pairs join to make new groups of four and once again they have to pool their lists and end up with only five words. Finally (perhaps after new groups of eight have been formed – it depends on the atmosphere in the class) students can look for meanings of their words in dictionaries and/or we can answer questions about the words which the groups have decided on.

This process works for two reasons. In the first place students may well be able to tell each other about some of the words which individual students did not know. More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that by the time we are asked for meanings, the students really do want to know them because the intervening process has encouraged them to invest some time in the meaning search. 'Understanding every word' has been changed into a cooperative learning task in its own right.

In responding to a natural hunger for vocabulary meaning both teachers and students will have to compromise. It is unrealistic to expect only one-sided change, but there are ways of dealing with the problem which make a virtue out of what seems – to many teachers – a frustrating necessity.

How do I help students read?
Nick McIver

How do you read a newspaper? Personally, I scan the headlines for any major world news, check ongoing stories, review the sports pages, and then glance through the rest, maybe reading the beginning of any article whose headline catches my eye. Unless it's a weekend, or I'm stuck on a train, I rarely read any of the articles in full (until I'm about to throw them away or use them for packing).

When I watch students pick up an English newspaper, though, almost invariably they start reading in the top left-hand corner of the front page, and continue systematically as if it were a book. They rarely get halfway through the first article before giving up.

Most, if not all, of our students can already read in their first language, and already have strategies for dealing with the huge amounts of written material with which we are bombarded every day. Our task, therefore, is not to 'teach reading' as such, but to encourage students to transfer existing skills into coping with a new language.

For reasons of space or time, many of the reading texts in coursebooks are aimed at revising, practising or teaching new vocabulary or grammar. These are worthwhile aims in themselves, but they have little or nothing to do with the skills of reading – which are my focus in this article.

Choosing a text
What do our students read, for pleasure, in their first language? You, the teacher, will know what is appropriate for your students (or you can ask them), but I sense that the following will be the sorts of things we should be looking for.

- Newspaper articles. Journalistic language presents some initial challenges, but articles tend to fall into established categories, many stories continue over a period of time without adding significantly to the vocabulary load, and most people are interested in current affairs.
- Pop-psychology, eg magazine questionnaires *(Will you be rich? Are you a good friend?),* horoscopes, 'analyse your own handwriting' and similar.
- Cartoons. These can be particularly useful since students can often understand the words from the pictures.
- Subjects of topical interest, such as sport, music and fashion, for teenagers. But beware! There's nothing more disastrous than the wrinkly teacher enthusiastically presenting a text on last year's band!
- Good stories and anecdotes. You can build up a collection of your own from books and magazines, and there are some excellent graded readers available these days.

The first rule, really, is to choose a text which is intrinsically interesting.

Grading
Our aim should be to show students that reading in English can be enjoyable and not too much of a struggle. We mustn't fall into the trap, at this stage, of insisting that students read 'improving' texts. Texts should be lexically and structurally easy enough for students to understand. I am not saying that all words should be known – indeed, I'm much in favour of a few rogue items that will assist them in the skill of coping with the unknown.

This certainly does not mean that authentic materials are ruled out for lower-level students. There are some excellent stories at all levels (if it's a good enough story, students are prepared to make much more effort to

understand), and then menus, timetables, photographs with simple captions and so on, are all useful for building reading skills.

In addition to taking account of language level, we should also remember that students have different speeds of reading, as well as abilities to extract the relevant information, in their first language. We cannot, then, expect them all to acquire the same proficiency in a foreign language. If we impose arbitrary time limits, we will only succeed in penalising and demotivating slower readers.

We read different things for different reasons and in different ways. A novel, for instance, is primarily for enjoyment. It therefore needs to be read at a comfortable and probably fairly rapid speed. If we need frequent recourse to a dictionary, then we won't achieve the even flow of reading necessary for enjoyment. An academic or technical text, on the other hand, will usually be taken at a slower pace, since we are reading primarily for information. But even with a complex text, readers will fail to grasp the overall meaning if they have to struggle through word by word.

Questions

Traditionally, reading texts are accompanied by questions, and there has been much debate as to whether comprehension questions should be asked before or after students have read the text. The answer, of course, depends on your purpose. In an examination, the aim is clearly to test students' level of comprehension, but is this approach justifiable as a teaching technique?

In my view, it is sound practice to stimulate students' interest before they read. This can be done by giving them the title of the piece and asking them to brainstorm what they expect it to be about – or simply to give them the questions in advance. This latter technique approximates more to a realistic situation, and it is more likely to build appropriate reading skills. (Incidentally, I would always recommend to students sitting examinations that they start by reading the questions carefully.) Check that your questions are at the same level of relevance. Don't ask them to retrieve detail and, in the same breath, demand that they understand gist. I recall a text from earlier days about the sinking of the Titanic, where the questions included:

> *1 How much did the Titanic weigh?*
> *2 What happened to her?*
> *3 What would you have done if you'd been on the ship?*

This is the equivalent of asking not only how Sherlock Holmes solved the murder, but what he had for breakfast on the previous day, as well as the irrelevant (in terms of reading) matter of how we would have worked it out ourselves! All these questions may well be relevant, but not all at once.

If, on the other hand, students have been reading an interesting anecdote or a newspaper article for pleasure, then I might not ask questions in advance. Instead, the sorts of questions I might ask afterwards are:

- *Which three things about the story do you remember most strongly? Sit quietly until you've identified three things, and then compare your response with a partner.*
- *Which aspects of the story did you find (a) exciting (b) interesting (c) inspiring (d) sad?*

The important thing is that the students focus on the things which are most relevant to them, so there are no right or wrong answers, and somehow, since individuals pick on different things, it usually transpires that most people have understood most of the text by the end of our follow-up discussion. In any case, this approach does encourage students to ask if there's something they haven't understood.

Tasks

Material is only as useful and motivating as the teacher makes it. If you are not in the ideal position of having material that students really want to read, you can enliven most texts with some kind of activity – a pair of scissors can transform even the dullest prose. Students need to understand enough of the text to complete the following activities, so it is not necessary to ask traditional comprehension questions as well (although if they are in the coursebook, you could use them for homework).

- Ask the questions as a competitive team event.
- Ask individuals or teams to set questions for others.
- Ask individuals or teams to set questions on specific parts of the text and to answer them on other parts.
- Give students only some of the text – give them the first part and they guess how it ends, or they read the end and guess how it begins.
- With a longer text, write a summary sentence or title for each paragraph. Ask students to match your sentence with the correct paragraph.
- Ask students to write a summary sentence or title for each paragraph for others to match up.
- Cut up longer texts into paragraphs for students to rearrange in the correct order.
- Cut up shorter texts into lines or sentences for students to rearrange in the correct order. Students can either work in pairs at a desk, or in groups, in which case each student has one line, and they physically arrange themselves in the order of the story.
- With text interviews, ask students first to match the correct question and answer, and then to put the interview into the most suitable order.

Reading is a skill worth teaching in its own right. Where possible, choose interesting and relevant texts. Make sure that the text is at an appropriate level. Devise activities, even if only pre-set questions, that turn the comprehension into a task.

Happy reading!

The secret of reading
Philip Prowse

Would you like to know a way for your learners to improve their English enjoyably and effectively without you having to do any work? How about a way for learners to learn on their own, in their own time, at their own pace, without teachers or schools?

Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? Yet there is now a substantial body of research which supports these claims for extensive reading. The benefits of encouraging our learners to read for pleasure are now a matter of fact, not belief. Pleasure is the key word here. We are not talking about having a class reader, although that may be the springboard for many useful language activities. We are talking about students reading on their own, in or out of class. This is about students reading for pleasure.

The research
A good starting point for looking at research into extensive reading is Stephen Krashen and his *The Power of Reading.* Krashen reviews research studies worldwide and comes up with this typically understated conclusion:

> *'When (second language learners) read for pleasure, they can continue to improve in their second language without classes, without teachers, without study and even without people to converse with.'*

So where is the evidence? Krashen summarises studies comparing the achievements of students who received traditional reading comprehension classes with those who simply read on their own. His conclusion is that in 38 out of 41 comparisons (93%), those students who just read did better than those who were taught reading. Even though the research was done on students learning their first language, not a foreign language, it still looks pretty convincing. What Krashen shows here is what Christine Nuttall, in *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language,* calls 'the virtuous circle of reading'. Successful reading makes successful readers. The more students read, the better they get at it. And the better they are at it, the more they read. Contrast the vicious circle of reading failure where lack of success (often associated with forced reading) leads to lack of interest in reading.

Primary school pupils
What about the primary second language classroom? Warwick Elley has reported on 'book floods' in the primary classroom in Fiji and Singapore. In Fiji in 1980/81 the research involved 500 9-11 year olds in 12 schools (eight experimental and four control). The control schools followed their normal audiolingual classes, while the experimental schools used 250 story books (largely illustrated) with students either reading for pleasure 20-30 minutes a day, or having a 'shared book experience' with their teacher who read aloud and discussed the books with them. After two years, there were extensive tests and, in Krashen's words, the experimental groups were *far superior in tests of reading comprehension, writing and grammar.'*

In 1985 in Singapore, a similar study of 3,000 6-9 year olds was carried out by Elley over three years and Krashen summarises his results thus: children in the experimental classes

> *'outperformed traditionally taught students on tests of reading comprehension, vocabulary, oral language, grammar, listening comprehension and writing'.*

Elley himself says:

> *'In contrast to students learning by means of structured audiolingual programs, those children who are exposed to an extensive range of high-interest illustrated story books, and encouraged to read and share them, are consistently found to learn the target language more quickly. ... Perhaps the most striking finding is the spread of the effect from reading competence to other language skills – writing, speaking and control over syntax.'*

The two significant points here are that reading improved all the language skills and that these experiments contrasted using a textbook with reading programmes.

Secondary school students

The results seem fairly conclusive at primary level. But what about secondary schools? Can we do away with the secondary textbook, or were the primary results something to do with child development? We stay in Singapore and look at a project called PASSES, reported by Colin Davis in the *ELT Journal* in 1995. The project was very straightforward and involved 40 of the weakest secondary schools in the country. PASSES included a number of components, of which extensive reading was the most significant. In each school, students read silently for 20 minutes a day and had an extensive reading lesson a week for more reading and talking about the books (which could also be borrowed for home reading). After five years (1985-90) the project was assessed by checking the schools' English language examination pass rate and it was found that these 'weakest' schools now had results above the national average. Colin Davis concluded:

> *'Pupils developed a wider active and passive vocabulary. They used more varied sentence structure, and were better at spotting and correcting grammatical mistakes in their writing and speaking, They showed an overall improvement in writing skills and increased confidence and fluency in speaking.'*

Very convincing proof and note that here reading was used to supplement the textbook rather than replace it.

Adult learners

And adults? Is there any evidence there? Inevitably less, because adults are often outside formal education and are therefore less likely to be experimented on. However there is one fascinating, and controversial, study into vocabulary acquisition for us to look at. This is the famous 'Clockwork Orange Study' of 1978 by Saragi, Nation and Meister. Briefly the experimenters gave a group of American adults copies of Anthony Burgess' novel *A Clockwork Orange* and asked them to read it in their own time and return a few days later for a comprehension test and a literary discussion. The key thing about the novel is that Burgess' teenage characters use an invented (although heavily Russian-based) slang called 'nadsat'. There are 241 nadsat words in the book, repeated on average 15 times. This extract gives the flavour:

> *'I opened the door of 10-8 with my own little klootch, and inside our malenky quarters all was quiet, the pee and em both being in sleepland, and mum had laid out on the table a malenky bit of supper – a couple of lomticks of tinned spongemeal with a shive or so of kleb and butter, a glass* of *the old moloko.'* (Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*)

When the readers returned, instead of the comprehension questions and literary discussion they were expecting, they were given a multiple choice vocabulary test on nadsat. The results were stunning, with scores of between 50 and 96 per cent – and an average of 76 per cent. Just by reading, these adults had learnt the new words from context without any effort. There have been attempts subsequently by Krashen and others to replicate these 'Clockwork Orange' results in a foreign language context with limited success, and others have criticised the study by pointing out that the nadsat words are set in English syntax. The latest challenge comes from Horst, Cobb and Meara. They report an experiment where teachers read aloud to 34 lower intermediate university students in Oman who followed the printed text of a simplified version of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. On conclusion the students were given a 45 item multiple-choice test and a 13-item word-association test, which showed that from the 21,232 words in the book, the students had learnt on average only five words which were new to them. They therefore conclude that extensive reading is not a time-efficient way for learners to acquire vocabulary. It is my view, however, that the methodology of the experiment may have influenced the result. Being read to aloud in class is not the same as reading in your own time at home, and more significantly there is a massive cultural gulf between the Omani students and the setting of the novel in 19th-century English west country society. Contrast the gripping nature and modern relevance of *A Clockwork Orange* and draw your own conclusions.

Examination success

One further study is worth mentioning, as it links extensive reading with successful examination results. Gradman and Hanania report that extensive reading was 'a strong predictor of TOEFL scores'. This is something that teachers preparing students for FCE and CPE have always known intuitively, but it is nice to see it proved through research. And that is where we came in! Research shows that extensive reading works. But how are we going to get this keyboard-obsessed, video-game playing generation to start reading? As a teacher commented to me, *'They don't read in their own language. How on earth can I get them to read in English?'.*

Part 2: Get out of the way!
from ENGLISH TEACHING *professional* Issue Sixteen July 2000.

The aim of an extensive reading programme is simple: to get learners to read as many books as possible. Any activities must support this aim and not stand in the way of it. A good starting point is to discuss with students (and, where relevant, their parents and your colleagues and superiors) the benefits of extensive reading. It is important to get across the idea that time spent reading in class is not time wasted. At the same time we want to encourage students to take books home to read. An understanding of the sound reasons for extensive reading facilitates this.

Choice

How do you choose the books for your students to read? Ideally, you don't! Let the students choose what to read themselves. If you are lucky and your school buys the books, involve the students by letting them choose from the catalogue or the bookshop. If you already have a class or school library, make sure students choose what they read. If there is no class library, then consider creating one. You can do this by getting each student to buy one (different) book, which they exchange after reading. At the end of the year they can all take 'their' book home, or, hopefully, leave it for the next class to use.

How do students choose their own books? Here are two students' replies to the question.

> Maria: *I read the back of the book and see if it is interesting. I look at the level first because it is for my English, but it is important that the story is interesting because if you don't like it, you can't read.*

> Fahad: *Like she said, first of all I read the back of the book and get an idea of the story, and sometimes I open it and take a look to see what the story is like, and what level the vocabulary is.*

So, learning from Maria and Fahad, we can train our students to choose books by getting them to identify level and genre from the cover. They can practise looking at the title, front cover picture and blurb to work out what kind of book it is. It is also important for students to be able to give up on a book if they don't like it after a few pages, without feeling that they have failed. They just choose something else.

Level

Every publisher has slightly different criteria for defining language levels, and teachers are frequently concerned to choose exactly the right books for their class. Don't worry too much. Every class is mixed ability, and any class library will probably need to have at least three levels. Content and genre are at least as important as level. Someone who likes science fiction, for example, will happily read a science fiction book at a level above or below their ability, rather than struggle through a (hated) romance at the right level. Don't worry about mixing different publishers' series. Although each series has its own word lists and levels, there is a good deal of commonality. It is more important to get a good mix of genres. An extensive survey of learners recently showed that not only did students have very clear genre preferences, but that in each class as many students often loved a genre as others hated it. Food for thought here for teachers wedded to the idea of the same class reader for all students!

Class library

How can I organise a class library? The simple answer is – don't! Let the students do it. Give two students responsibility for looking after the books, lending them and getting them back. A student run class library will probably work more efficiently than a teacher-run one (peer pressure ensures the return of borrowed books) and will certainly give the students more ownership of the reading process. If you have a classroom

of your own, you can display the books on shelves. For many, though, the class library will be a cardboard box or plastic bag of books that you bring to the class. Spread them carefully out on a table, with the covers showing, so that students can see clearly what to choose from.

Peer pressure can also affect the choice of books. A recommendation by another student is often more effective than one from the teacher, so get students to recommend books to each other. A good way of doing this is to have a card inside each book for students to write brief comments. Teachers can also use wallcharts to show who has read which books. Don't be afraid to bribe students, with prizes for the one who has read the most books in a certain period. Sweets, a free book, or simply the competitive spirit, all work – with adults as well as younger learners.

Keeping a record
You and the students can keep track of what they have read and enjoyed, without it seeming that you are 'spying' on them. Students can keep a 'reading diary' showing their reactions as they read. Play *'find someone who…'* liked or didn't like a particular book, has read two books by the same author, has read six thrillers, likes science fiction etc. While book-reviews can be a turn-off, in-book opinion forms are popular: they are just a slip of paper on which students anonymously write a grade for the book (1-5) and a one-sentence comment. And finally, at the end of the term or year, a 'reading fair', where students display posters they have made to persuade other students to read their favourite books, is always a success, and highlights the importance of books and reading.

Don'ts
And now a few don'ts! These are activities which I know (from experience) encourage students *not* to read.

Don't let students read with a dictionary. Dictionaries are fine for intensive reading, and teaching dictionary use is a valuable part of learning to become a better learner. But when students are reading on their own for pleasure, dictionaries get in the way. Most readers are written from a carefully controlled vocabulary, and all new words are contextualised and repeated. By letting students stop to look up the meaning of every 'new' word, we are preventing them from using the valuable skill of guessing. It's better to approximate the meaning of a word and then have that guess verified on the word's next occurrence. We have all seen the student who interrupts an exciting part of a story and starts to search for a word in the dictionary.

Usually, with unerring accuracy, the learner chooses the wrong meaning from those on offer, and returns to the story confused, having forgotten what was happening, and certainly having lost the momentum. Published readers which (amazingly) print 'difficult' words in bold encourage this practice and do no service to the learner.

Don't ask comprehension questions. And don't give tests. They are both equally good ways of stopping students reading. To quote Henry Widdowson:

> *"Comprehension questions commonly require the learner to rummage around in the text for information in a totally indiscriminate way, without regard to what purpose might be served in so doing... Reading is thus represented as an end in itself, an activity that has no relevance to real knowledge and experience and therefore no real meaning."*
> *(Explorations in Applied Linguistics* OUP*)*

Our aim is for readers to be read as real books, and real books don't have questions at the back! Worksheets can be provided for students who want them, but it is a mistake to insist on them. They get in the way of reading. At the end of a chapter, we want learners to turn the page and read the next. Similarly, testing students on books they have read is counter-productive. It is not likely to make them want to read another. How would you feel if you had to complete a test on the book you had just read before you could buy another one?

But, you might object, how can I check if students have really read a book unless I test them? The answer is that you can't, and it doesn't matter. Time spent answering questions is time not spent reading. You will see (as will the students) which learners have been reading most books by their rapid progress in English. Of

course, some students won't read much, just as they won't pay much attention in class. But tests won't make those who read only a little read more, and they will certainly discourage those who do enjoy reading.

Don't require written summaries or book reviews. They too get in the way of reading. It's something I used to do a lot and my students hated it. In fact they read as slowly as possible because they knew that the punishment for finishing a book was to have to write a summary. A simple recommendation is a good idea, but the time spent painstakingly summarising a plot is better spent on reading another book!

Don't ask students to read aloud around the class. Of course, some students may wish to read individually to the teacher. But reading around the class is something students hate. No one listens to the reader; everyone is preparing the next bit they have to read, and the poor reader suffers agonies. On the other hand, for you the teacher to read to the students can only be good news! Moreover, by choosing readers which have accompanying cassettes (make sure the whole of the text has been recorded) students can also get all the benefits of extensive listening. But that's another story!

Reading is principally a matter of enjoyment. The best advice I can offer is to let students get on with the reading, and the key to that is to provide books they want to read. The teachers role is to faciliate access to the books – and then to step aside.

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The writing process and process writing
Anthony Seow

Introduction
The writing process as a private activity may be broadly seen as comprising four main stages: planning, drafting, revising and editing. As depicted in Figure 1, the stages are neither sequential nor orderly. In fact, as research has suggested, 'many good writers employ a recursive, non-linear approach - writing of a draft may be interrupted by more planning, and revision may lead to reformulation, with a great deal of recycling to earlier stages' (Krashen, 1984, p. 17).

Process writing
The term *process writing* has been bandied about for quite a while in ESL classrooms. It is no more than a *writing process* approach to teaching writing. The idea behind it is not really to dissociate writing entirely from the written product and to merely lead students through the various stages of the writing process but 'to construct process-oriented writing instruction that will affect performance' (Freedman, Dyson, Flower, & Chafe, 1987, p. 13). To have an effective performance-oriented teaching programme would mean that we need to systematically teach students problem-solving skills connected with the writing process that will enable them to realise specific goals at each stage of the composing process. Thus, process writing in the classroom may be construed as a programme of instruction which provides students with a series of planned learning experiences to help them understand the nature of writing at every point.

Process writing as a classroom activity incorporates the four basic writing stages planning, drafting (writing), revising (redrafting) and editing - and three other stages externally imposed on students by the teacher, namely, responding (sharing), evaluating and post-writing. Process writing in the classroom is highly structured as it necessitates the orderly teaching of process skills, and thus it may not, at least initially, give way to a free variation of writing stages cited earlier. Teachers often plan appropriate classroom activities that support the learning of specific writing skills at every stage. The planned learning experiences for students may be described as follows.

Planning (pre-writing)
Pre-writing is any activity in the classroom that encourages students to write. It stimulates thoughts for getting started. In fact, it moves students away from having to face a blank page toward generating tentative ideas and gathering information for writing. The following activities provide the learning experiences for students at this stage:

Group brainstorming
Group members spew out ideas about the topic. Spontaneity is important here. There are no right or wrong answers. Students may cover familiar ground first and then move off to more abstract or wild territories.

Clustering
Students form words related to a stimulus supplied by the teacher. The words are circled and then linked by lines to show discernible clusters. Clustering is a simple yet powerful strategy: "Its visual character seems to stimulate the flow of association ... and is particularly good for students who know what they want to say but just can't say if' (Proett & Gill, 1986, p. 6).

Rapid free writing
Within a limited time of 1 or 2 minutes, individual students freely and quickly write down single words and phrases about a topic. The time limit keeps the writers' minds ticking and thinking fast. Rapid free writing is

done when group brainstorming is not possible or because the personal nature of a certain topic requires a different strategy.

Wh-questions

Students generate who, why, what, *where, when* and *how* questions about a topic. More such questions can be asked of answers to the first string of wh-questions, and so on. This can go on indefinitely.

In addition, ideas for writing can be elicited from multimedia sources (e.g., printed material, videos, films), as well as from direct interviews, talks, surveys, and questionnaires. Students will be more motivated to write when given a variety of means for gathering information during pre-writing.

Drafting

Once sufficient ideas are gathered at the planning stage, the first attempt at writing - that is, drafting - may proceed quickly. At the drafting stage, the writers are focused on the fluency of writing and are not preoccupied with grammatical accuracy or the neatness of the draft. One dimension of good writing is the writer's ability to visualise an audience. Although writing in the classroom is almost always for the teacher, the students may also be encouraged to write for different audiences, among whom are peers, other classmates, penfriends and family members. A conscious sense of audience can dictate a certain style to be used. Students should also have in mind a central idea that they want to communicate to the audience in order to give direction to their writing.

Depending on the genre of writing (narrative, expository or argumentative), an introduction to the subject of writing may be a *startling statement* to arrest the reader's attention, a *short summary* of the rest of the writing, an *apt quotation,* a *provocative question,* a *general statement,* an *analogy,* a *statement of purpose,* and so on. Such a strategy may provide the lead at the drafting stage. Once a start is made, the writing task is simplified 'as the writers let go and disappear into the act of writing' (D'Aoust. 1986, p. 7).

Responding

Responding to student writing by the teacher (or by peers) has a central role to play in the successful implementation of process writing. Responding intervenes between drafting and revising. It is the teacher's *quick initial reaction* to students' drafts. Response can be oral or in writing, after the students have produced the first draft and just before they proceed to revise. The failure of many writing programmes in schools today may be ascribed to the fact that responding is done in the final stage when the teacher simultaneously *responds* and *evaluates.* and even *edits* students' finished texts, thus giving students the impression that nothing more needs to be done.

Text-specific responses in the form of helpful suggestions and questions rather than rubber-stamped' comments (such as 'organisation is OK, 'ideas are too vague' etc.) by the teacher will help students rediscover meanings and facilitate the revision of initial drafts. Such responses may be provided in the margin, between sentence fines or at the end of students' texts. Peer responding can be effectively carried out by having students respond to each other's texts in small groups or in pairs, with the aid of the checklist in Table 1 (adapted from Reinking & Hart, 1991).

Revising

When students revise, they review their texts on the basis of the feedback given in the responding stage. They re-examine what was written to see how effectively they have communicated their meanings to the reader. Revising is not merely checking for language errors (i.e., editing). It is done to improve global content and the organisation of ideas so that the writer's intent is made clearer to the reader.

TABLE 1. PEER RESPONDING CHECKLIST

When responding to your peer's draft, ask yourself these questions:

      What is the greatest strength of this composition?
      What is its greatest weakness?
      What is the central idea of this composition?
      Which are the ideas which need more elaboration?
      Where should more details or examples be added? Why?

What are some of the questions that the writer has not answered?
At which point does this composition fail to hold the reader's interest? Why?
Where is the organisation confusing?
Where is the writing unclear or vague?

To ensure that rewriting does not mean recopying, Beck (1986, p. 149) suggests that the teacher collect and keep the students' drafts and ask them for rewrites. 'When the students are forced to act without their original drafts, they become more familiar with their purposes and their unique messages. ... The writers move more ably within their topics, and their writing develops tones of confidence and authority'.

Another activity for revising may have the students working in pairs to read aloud each other's drafts before they revise. As students listen intently to their own writing, they are brought to a more conscious level of rethinking and reseeing what they have written. Meanings which are vague become more apparent when the writers actually hear their own texts read out to them. Revision often becomes more voluntary and motivating. An alternative to this would be to have individual students read their own texts into a tape recorder and take a dictation of their own writing later. Students can replay the tape as often as necessary and activate the pause button at points where they need to make productive revision of their texts.

Editing
At this stage, students are engaged in tidying up their texts as they prepare the final draft for evaluation by the teacher. They edit their own or their peer's work for grammar, spelling, punctuation, diction, sentence structure and accuracy of supportive textual material such as quotations, examples and the like. Formal editing is deferred till this phase in order that its application not disrupt the free flow of ideas during the drafting and revising stages.

A simple checklist might be issued to students to alert them to some some of the common surface errors found in students' writing. For instance:

Have you used your verbs in the correct tense?
Are the verb forms correct?
Have you checked for subject-verb agreement?
Have you used the correct prepositions?
Have you left out the articles where they are required?
Have you used all your pronouns correctly?
Is your choice of adjectives and adverbs appropriate?
Have you written in complete sentences?

The students are, however, not always expected to know where and how to correct every error, but editing to the best of their ability should be done as a matter of course, prior to submitting their work for evaluation each time. Editing within process writing is meaningful because students can see the connection between such an exercise and their own writing in that correction is not done for its own sake but as part of the process of making communication as clear and unambiguous as possible to an audience.

Evaluating
Very often, teachers pleading lack of time have compressed responding, editing and evaluating all into one. This would, in effect, deprive students of that vital link between drafting and revision - that is, responding - which often makes a big difference to the kind of writing that will eventually be produced.

In evaluating student writing, the scoring may be analytical (i.e., based on specific aspects of writing ability) or holistic (i.e., based on a global interpretation of the effectiveness of that piece of writing). In order to be effective, the criteria for evaluation should be made known to students in advance. They should include overall interpretation of the task, sense of audience, relevance, development and organisation of ideas, format or layout, grammar and structure, spelling and punctuation, range and appropriateness of vocabulary, and clarity of communication. Depending on the purpose of evaluation, a numerical score or grade may be assigned.

Students may be encouraged to evaluate their own and each other's texts once they have been properly taught how to do it. In this way, they are made to be more responsible for their own writing.

Postwriting

Post-writing constitutes any classroom activity that the teacher and students can do with the completed pieces of writing. This includes publishing, sharing, reading aloud, transforming texts for stage performances, or merely displaying texts on notice-boards. The post-writing stage is a platform for recognising students' work as important and worthwhile. It may be used as a motivation for writing as well as to hedge against students finding excuses for not writing. Students must be made to feel that they are writing for a very real purpose.

Implementing process writing

Here are some pointers which teachers may like to take note of when implementing process writing:

Teacher modelling

Teachers should model the writing process at every stage and teach specific writing strategies to students through meaningful classroom activities.

Relating process to product

A first draft looks quite unlike another draft that has gone through several revisions. It is vital that as students go through the various stages of writing, they understand what kind of product is expected at each stage. Thus students need to be guided to set and achieve specific writing goals at every stage.

Working within institutional constraints

It is possible to teach some process skills appropriate to a writing stage, be it planning, drafting, responding, revising or editing within a regular two-period composition lesson. The teaching of the same process skill could be repeated in subsequent composition lessons. Process skills can be systematically taught each time until the entire series of such skills is developed over a period of time.

Catering to diverse student needs

The teacher should implement a flexible programme to cater to different student needs. The teacher will need to know what the individual student knows and work from there. The teacher may also decide to have students enter into different writing groups as planners, drafters, responders, revisers or editors during a writing session. A student may be with the planners for one writing task, but move to be with the editors later for the same or another task, according to his or her need or developmental stage in writing.

Exploiting the use of computers in process writing

Many word-processing programmes are user-friendly enough for students to handle. Their direct application to process writing, especially for the purposes of drafting, revising and editing, is rewarding for both the teacher and the students. The teacher can teach responding or editing skills via the computer hooked on to an overhead projector. The students can freely make any number of changes to their texts by deleting words or moving them around without having to retype large chunks of text all over again. Any work done can be saved on the computer for revision later.

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Why teach grammar?
Scott Thornbury

from Thornbury, S. 1999. *How to Teach Grammar*. Longman

In 1622 a certain Joseph Webbe, schoolmaster and textbook writer, wrote: 'No man can run speedily to the mark of language that is shackled ... with grammar precepts.' He maintained that grammar could be picked up through simply communicating: 'By exercise of reading, writing, and speaking ... all things belonging to Grammar, will without labour, and whether we will or no, thrust themselves upon us.'

Webbe was one of the earliest educators to question the value of grammar instruction, but certainly not the last. In fact, no other issue has so preoccupied theorists and practitioners as the grammar debate, and the history of language teaching is essentially the history of the claims and counterclaims for and against the teaching of grammar. Differences in attitude to the role of grammar underpin differences between methods, between teachers, and between learners. It is a subject that everyone involved in language teaching and learning has an opinion on. And these opinions are often strongly and uncompromisingly stated. Here, for example, are a number of recent statements on the subject:

> 'There is no doubt that a knowledge – implicit or explicit – of grammatical rules is essential for the mastery of a language.' (Penny Ur, a teacher trainer, and author of Grammar Practice Activities)

> 'The effects of grammar teaching ... appear to be peripheral and fragile.' (Stephen Krashen, an influential, if controversial, applied linguist)

> 'A sound knowledge of grammar is essential if pupils are going to use English creatively.'
> (Tom Hutchinson, a coursebook writer)

> 'Grammar is not very important: The majority of languages have a very complex grammar. English has little grammar and consequently it is not very important to understand it.'
> (From the publicity of a London language school)

> 'Grammar is not the basis of language acquisition, and the balance of linguistic research clearly invalidates any view to the contrary.' (Michael Lewis, a popular writer on teaching methods)

Since so little is known (still!) about how languages are acquired, this book will try to avoid taking an entrenched position on the issue. Rather, by sifting the arguments for and against, it is hoped that readers will be in a better position to make up their own minds. Let's first look at the case for grammar.

THE CASE FOR GRAMMAR
There are many arguments for putting grammar in the foreground in second language teaching. Here are seven of them:

The sentence-machine argument
Part of the process of language learning must be what is sometimes called **item-learning** that is the memorisation of individual items such as words and phrases. However, there is a limit to the number of items a person can both retain and retrieve. Even travellers' phrase books have limited usefulness – good for a three-week holiday, but there comes a point where we need to learn some patterns or rules to enable us to generate new sentences. That is to say, grammar. Grammar, after all, is a description of the regularities in a language, and knowledge of these regularities provides the learner with the means to generate a potentially enormous number of original sentences. The number of possible new sentences is constrained only by the vocabulary at the learner's command and his or her creativity. Grammar is a kind of **'sentence-making machine'.** It follows that the teaching of grammar offers the learner the means for potentially limitless linguistic creativity.

The fine-tuning argument

(***) the purpose of grammar seems to be to allow for greater subtlety of meaning than a merely lexical system can cater for. While it is possible to get a lot of communicative mileage out of simply stringing words and phrases together, there comes a point where 'Me Tarzan, you Jane'-type language fails to deliver, both in terms of intelligibility and in terms of appropriacy. This is particularly the case for written language, which generally needs to be more explicit than spoken language. For example, the following errors are likely to confuse the reader:

> Last Monday night I was boring in my house.
> After speaking a lot time with him I thought that him attracted me.
> We took a wrong plane and when I saw it was very later because the plane took up.
> Five years ago I would want to go to India but in that time anybody of my friends didn't want to go.

The teaching of grammar, it is argued, serves as a corrective against the kind of ambiguity represented in these examples.

The fossilisation argument

It is possible for highly motivated learners with a particular aptitude for languages to achieve amazing levels of proficiency without any formal study. But more often 'pick it up as you go along' learners reach a language plateau beyond which it is very difficult to progress. To put it technically, their linguistic competence fossilises. Research suggests that learners who receive no instruction seem to be at risk of fossilising sooner than those who do receive instruction. Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean taking formal lessons – the grammar study can be self-directed, as in this case (from Christopher Isherwood's autobiographical novel *Christopher and his Kind):*

> Humphrey said suddenly,' You speak German so well – tell me, why don't you ever use the subjunctive mood?' Christopher had to admit that he didn't know how to. In the days when he had studied German, he had left the subjunctive to be dealt with later, since it wasn't absolutely essential and he was in a hurry By this time he could hop through the language without its aid, like an agile man with only one leg. But now Christopher set himself to master the subjunctive. Very soon, he had done so. Proud of this accomplishment, he began showing off whenever he talked: 'had it not been for him, I should never have asked myself what I would do if they were to ... etc etc.' Humphrey was much amused.

The advance-organiser argument

Grammar instruction might also have a delayed effect. The researcher Richard Schmidt kept a diary of his experience learning Portuguese in Brazil. Initially he had enrolled in formal language classes where there was a heavy emphasis on grammar. When he subsequently left these classes to travel in Brazil his Portuguese made good progress, a fact he attributed to the use he was making of it. However, as he interacted naturally with Brazilians he was aware that certain features of the talk – certain grammatical items – seemed to catch his attention. He **noticed** them. It so happened that these items were also items he had studied in his classes. What's more, being more noticeable, these items seemed to stick. Schmidt concluded that **noticing** is a prerequisite for acquisition. The grammar teaching he had received previously, while insufficient in itself to turn him into a fluent Portuguese speaker, had primed him to notice what might otherwise have gone unnoticed, and hence had indirectly influenced his learning. It had acted as a kind of **advance organiser** for his later acquisition of the language.

The discrete item argument

Language – any language – seen from 'outside', can seem to be a gigantic, shapeless mass, presenting an insuperable challenge for the learner. Because grammar consists of an apparently finite set of rules, it can help to reduce the apparent enormity of the language learning task for both teachers and students. By tidying language up and organising it into neat categories (sometimes called **discrete items),** grammarians make language digestible. A discrete item is any unit of the grammar system that is sufficiently narrowly defined to form the focus of a lesson or an exercise: e.g. *the present continuous, the definite article, possessive pronouns. Verbs,* on the other hand, or *sentences* are not categories that are sufficiently discrete for teaching purposes, since they allow for further sub-categories. Each discrete item can be isolated from the language that normally envelops it. It can then be slotted into a syllabus of other discrete items, and targeted for individual attention and testing. Other ways of packaging language for teaching purposes are less easily

organised into a syllabus. For example, communicative functions, such as *asking favours, making requests, expressing regrets,* and text type categories, such as *narratives, instructions, phone conversations,* are often thought to be too large and unruly for the purposes of lesson design.

The rule-of-law argument
It follows from the discrete-item argument that, since grammar is a system of learnable rules, it lends itself to a view of teaching and learning known as **transmission.** A transmission view sees the role of education as the transfer of a body of knowledge (typically in the form of facts and rules) from those that have the knowledge to those that do not. Such a view is typically associated with the kind of institutionalised learning where rules, order, and discipline are highly valued. The need for rules, order and discipline is particularly acute in large classes of unruly and unmotivated teenagers – a situation that many teachers of English are confronted with daily. In this sort of situation grammar offers the teacher a structured system that can be taught and tested in methodical steps. The alternative – allowing learners simply to experience the language through communication – may simply be out of the question.

The learner expectations argument (1)
Regardless of the theoretical and ideological arguments for or against grammar teaching, many learners come to language classes with fairly fixed expectations as to what they will do there. These expectations may derive from previous classroom experience of language learning. They may also derive from experience of classrooms in general where (traditionally, at least) teaching is of the transmission kind mentioned above. On the other hand, their expectations that teaching will be grammar-focused may stem from frustration experienced at trying to pick up a second language in a non-classroom setting, such as through self-study, or through immersion in the target language culture. Such students may have enrolled in language classes specifically to ensure that the learning experience is made more efficient and systematic. The teacher who ignores this expectation by encouraging learners simply to experience language is likely to frustrate and alienate them.

THE CASE AGAINST GRAMMAR
Just as arguments have been marshalled in favour of grammar teaching, likewise several cases have been made against it. Here are the main ones:

The knowledge-how argument
I know what is involved in riding a bike: keeping your balance, pedalling, steering by means of the handlebars and so on. This does not mean to say that I know how to ride a bike. The same analogy applies to language learning. It can be viewed as a body of knowledge – such as vocabulary and grammar. Or it can be viewed as a skill (or a complex set of skills). If you take the language-is-skill point of view, then it follows that, like bike riding, you learn it by doing it, not by studying it. Learning-by-doing is what is called **experiential** learning. Much of the bad press associated with intellectual approaches to language learning – through the learning of copious grammar rules, for example – stems from the failure on the part of the learner to translate rules into skills. It is a failure that accounts for this observation by Jerome K. Jerome, writing in *Three Men on the Bummel* about a typical English schoolboy's French:

> He may be able to tell the time, or make a few guarded observations concerning the weather. No doubt he could repeat a goodly number of irregular verbs by heart ... [But] when the proud parent takes his son to Dieppe merely to discover that the lad does not know enough to call a cab, he abuses not the system but the innocent victim.

Proponents of the 'knowledge-how' view might argue that what the boy needed was not so much grammar as classroom experience that simulated the kind of conditions in which he would eventually use his French.

The communication argument
There is more to knowing a language than knowing its grammar. It is one thing to know that *Do you drink?* is a present simple question. It is another thing to know that it can function as an offer. This simple observation is at the heart of what is now called the **Communicative Approach, or Communicative Language Teaching** (CLT). From the 1970s on, theorists have been arguing that grammatical knowledge (linguistic competence) is merely one component of what they call **communicative competence.**

Communicative competence involves knowing how to use the grammar and vocabulary of the language to achieve communicative goals, and knowing how to do this in a socially appropriate way.

Two schools of thought emerged as to the best means of achieving the objectives of this communicative approach. Both schools placed a high premium on putting the language to communicative use. But they differed as to when you should do this. The first – or shallow-end approach – might be summed up as the view that you learn a language in order to use it. That is: learn the rules and then apply them in life-like communication. The more radical line, however, is that you use a language in order to learn it. Proponents of this deep-end approach take an experiential view of learning: you learn to communicate by communicating. They argue that, by means of activities that engage the learner in life-like communication, the grammar will be acquired virtually unconsciously. Studying the rules of grammar is simply a waste of valuable time.

The acquisition argument
The fact that we all learned our first language without being taught grammar rules has not escaped theorists. If it works for the first, why shouldn't it work for the second? This is an argument that has been around at least since Joseph Webbe's day. It received a new impetus in the 1970s through the work of the applied linguist Stephen Krashen. Krashen makes the distinction between learning, on the one hand, and acquisition, on the other. Learning, according to Krashen, results from formal instruction, typically in grammar, and is of limited use for real communication. Acquisition, however, is a natural process: it is the process by which the first language is picked up, and by which other languages are picked up solely through contact with speakers of those languages. Acquisition occurs (according to Krashen) when the learner is exposed to the right input in a stress-free environment so that innate learning capacities are triggered. Success in a second language is due to acquisition, not learning, he argues. Moreover, he claims that learnt knowledge can never become acquired knowledge.

Krashen's theory had an important influence on language teaching practices, especially with teachers who were disenchanted with the 'drill-and-repeat' type methodology that prevailed in the 1950s and 1960s. Rejection of the formal study of grammar is central to Krashen's 'Natural Approach'.

The natural order argument
Krashen's acquisition/learning hypothesis drew heavily on studies that suggest there is a natural order of acquisition of grammatical items, irrespective of the order in which they are taught. This view derives partly from the work of the linguist Noam, Chomsky. Chomsky argues that humans are 'hard-wired' to learn languages: that is, there are universal principles of grammar that we are born with. The idea of an innate **universal grammar** helps explain similarities in the developmental order in first language acquisition as well as in second language acquisition. It explains why English children, Thai teenagers and Saudi adults all go through a *I no like fish* stage before progressing to *I don't like fish*. It also suggests that attempts to subvert the natural order by sticking rigidly to a traditional grammar syllabus and insisting on immediate accuracy are foredoomed. In short, the natural order argument insists that a textbook grammar is not, nor can ever become, a mental grammar.

The lexical chunks argument
We have already noted the fact that language learning seems to involve an element of item-learning. Vocabulary learning is largely **item-learning.** So too is the retention of whole phrases, idioms, social formulae etc. in the form of what are sometimes called **chunks** of language. Chunks are larger than words but often less than sentences. Here are some common examples:

excuse me?
so far so good
what on earth?
have a nice day
be that as it may
if you ask me
not on your life
here you are

Acquiring chunks of language not only saves the learner planning time in the cut-and-thrust of real interaction, but seems to play a role in language development too. It has been argued that many of the expressions that young children pick up, like *all-gone,* or *gimme* (as in *gimme the ball,* are learned as chunks and only later unpacked into their component part. Once unpacked, new combinations, such as *give her the ball* start to emerge. It has been argued that this process of analysing previously stored chunk plays an important role in first language acquisition.)

How much of second language acquisition involves item-learning opposed to rule-learning is still an open question. Nevertheless, in recent years there has been a growing recognition of the importance of word- and chunk-learning, such that some writers have proposed a **lexical approach** to teaching, in contrast to the traditional emphasis on sentence grammar. Among other things, a lexical approach promotes the learning of frequent used and fairly formulaic expressions *(Have you ever been ... ? Would you like a ... ?)* rather than the study of rather abstract grammatical categories such as the present perfect or conditionals.

The learner expectations argument (2)
While many learners come to language classes in the expectation that at least some of the time they will be studying the grammar of the language there are many others who may already have had years of grammar study at school and are urgently in need of a chance to put this knowledge at work. Questionnaires of adult students in general English courses almost invariably identify 'conversation' as a high priority, and these statement (from *Looking at Language Classrooms,* Cambridge University Press) by range of EFL students studying in Britain are typical:

> 'In Germany there's more homework, grammar exercises, and things like that. Here, I think you've got more chance to speak and therefore learn the language.'

> 'Sometimes, speaking and things like that help a lot, because if you don't speak English, and just do writing exercises, it's no good.'

> 'I like having conversations because, yes, grammar is important, but it's not much fun...'

The learner expectation argument cuts both ways: some learners demand grammar, others just want to talk. It's the teacher's job to respond sensitively to these expectations, to provide a balance where possible, and even negotiate a compromise.

Before attempting to bring the grammar debate up to date, and to draw some conclusions from recent research evidence, it may pay to briefly sketch in the way attitudes to grammar teaching have influenced the ebb and flow of different teaching methods.

GRAMMAR AND METHODS
In the last century the architects of language teaching methods have been preoccupied with two basic design decisions concerning grammar:

- Should the method adhere to a grammar syllabus?
- Should the rules of grammar be made explicit?

The various ways they answered these questions help distinguish the different methods from each other. What follows is a potted history of methods in the light of their approach to these issues.

Grammar-Translation, as its name suggests, took grammar as the starting point for instruction. Grammar-Translation courses followed a grammar syllabus and lessons typically began with an explicit statement of the rule, followed by exercises involving translation into and out of the mother tongue.

The **Direct Method,** which emerged in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, challenged the way that Grammar-Translation focused exclusively on the written language. By claiming to be a 'natural' method, the Direct Method prioritised oral skills, and, while following a syllabus of grammar structures, rejected explicit grammar teaching. The learners, it was supposed, picked up the grammar in much the same way as children pick up the grammar of their mother tongue, simply by being immersed in language.

Audiolingualism, a largely North American invention, stayed faithful to the Direct Method belief in the primacy of speech, but was even more strict in its rejection of grammar teaching. Audiolingualism derived its theoretical base from behaviourist psychology, which considered language as simply a form of behaviour, to be learned through the formation of correct habits. Habit formation was a process in which the application of rules played no part. The Audiolingual syllabus consisted of a graded list of sentence patterns, which, although not necessarily labelled as such, were grammatical in origin. These patterns formed the basis of pattern-practice **drills,** the distinguishing feature of Audiolingual classroom practice.

Noam Chomsky's claim, in the late 1950s, that language ability is not habituated behaviour but an innate human capacity, prompted a reassessment of drill-and-repeat type teaching practices. The view that we are equipped at birth for language acquisition led to Krashen's belief that formal instruction was unnecessary. His **Natural Approach** does away with both a grammar syllabus and explicit rule-giving. Instead, learners are exposed to large doses of **comprehensible input.** Innate processes convert this input into output, in time. Like the Direct Method, the Natural Approach attempts to replicate the conditions of first language acquisition. Grammar, according to this scenario, is irrelevant.

The development, in the 1970s, of **Communicative Language Teaching** (CLT) was motivated by developments in the new science of sociolinguistics, and the belief that communicative competence consists of more than simply the knowledge of the rules of grammar (see above, page 18). Nevertheless, CLT in its shallow-end version at least, did not reject grammar teaching out of hand. In fact, grammar was still the main component of the syllabus of CLT courses, even if it was dressed up in **functional** labels: *asking the way, talking about yourself, making future plans* etc. Explicit attention to grammar rules was not incompatible with communicative practice, either. Chomsky, after all, had claimed that language was rule-governed, and this seemed to suggest to theorists that explicit rule-giving may have a place after all. This belief was around at about the time that CLT was being developed, and was readily absorbed into it. Grammar rules reappeared in coursebooks, and grammar teaching re-emerged in classrooms, often, it must be said, at the expense of communicative practice.
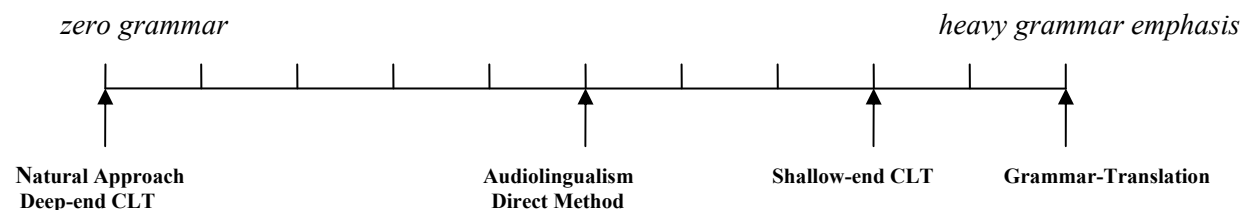
Deep-end CLT on the other hand, rejected both grammar-based syllabuses and grammar instruction. A leading proponent of this view was N.S. Prabhu, a teacher of English in southern India. In his **Bangalore Project,** he attempted to replicate natural acquisition processes by having students work through a syllabus of tasks for which no formal grammar instruction was supposedly needed nor provided. Successful completion of the task – for example, following a map – was the lesson objective, rather than successful application of a rule of grammar. The Bangalore Project was the predecessor of what is now known as **task-based learning.** Task-based learning has more recently relaxed its approach to grammar, largely through recognition of the value of a **focus on form .**

To summarise the story so far: to the first of the questions posed above *(Should the method adhere to a grammatical syllabus?)* most approaches to language teaching up until the 1970s have answered firmly *Yes.* The actual form of the syllabus differed considerably from method to method, but, until such organising categories as **functions or tasks** were proposed, syllabuses were essentially grammar-based.

On the question of the explicitness of rule teaching there is a clear divide between those methods that seek to mirror the processes of first language acquisition – such as the Direct Method and the Natural Approach – and those such as Grammar-Translation – that see second language acquisition as a more intellectual process. The former methods reject grammar instruction, while the latter accept a role for conscious rule-learning.

Finally, even in methods where rules are made explicit, there may be a different emphasis with regard to the way the learner arrives at these rules. In some approaches, such as Grammar-Translation, the rules are simply presented to the learner, who then goes on to apply them through the study and manipulation of examples (a **deductive** approach***). Other approaches, including the shallow-end form of the communicative approach, often require the learners first to study examples and work the rules out for themselves (an **inductive** approach***).

At the risk of over-simplifying matters, the following chart indicates the relative importance these methods attach to the teaching of grammar:

zero grammar   *heavy grammar emphasis*

Natural Approach   **Audiolingualism**   **Shallow-end CLT**   **Grammar-Translation**
Deep-end CLT   **Direct Method**

GRAMMAR NOW

What, then, is the status of grammar now? What is common practice with regard to the teaching of grammar, and what directions for future practice are suggested by recent and current research?

Firstly, it is important to establish the fact that 'grammar teaching' can mean different things to different people. It may mean simply teaching to a grammar syllabus but otherwise not making any reference to grammar in the classroom at all (as was the case with Audiolingualism). On the other hand it may mean teaching to a communicative syllabus (e.g. of functions or of tasks) but dealing with grammar questions that arise in the course of doing communicative activities. This is sometimes called **covert** grammar teaching. More typically, grammar teaching means teaching to a grammar syllabus and explicitly presenting the rules of grammar, using grammar terminology. This is known as **overt** grammar teaching.

Lately, a good deal has been written about a grammar revival. There is a widespread belief that, with the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching, attention to grammar was eclipsed by an emphasis on experiential learning and purely communicative goals. This is only partly true: syllabuses did appear in the 1970s that appeared to marginalise grammar in favour of functions. But, as was pointed out in the previous section, a closer look at these syllabuses shows that they often had a strong grammar basis. And a glance at so-called communicative coursebooks confirms that grammar explanations are much more conspicuous now than they were, say, in the heyday of either the Direct Method or Audiolingualism.

The view that CLT deposed grammar may also stem from a tendency to equate grammar with **accuracy.** It is true that, in comparison with Audiolingualism, CLT has tended to place more weight on being intelligible than on being correct. Such an emphasis need not be at the expense of attention to the rules of grammar, however. Relaxing on accuracy simply acknowledges the fact that the rules of grammar take a long time to establish themselves, and that, in the meantime the learners' wish to communicate should not be needlessly frustrated.

It is also true that the deep-end version of CLT, as promoted by Prabhu, was hostile to explicit grammar teaching. But this was relatively short-lived, and, while of enormous interest from a theoretical perspective, it seems to have had little or no influence on global classroom practice. If grammar ever went away, it was only very briefly and not very far.

The sense that we are experiencing a grammar revival has been underlined by the emergence of two influential theoretical concepts:

- focus on form
- consciousness-raising

Both concepts owe something to the work of Stephen Krashen, even if only as a reaction to his claim that classroom teaching is a waste of time. You will remember that Krashen distinguishes between acquisition and learning. Grammar teaching - that is, attention to the forms of the language - lies in the domain of learning and, says Krashen, has little or no influence on language acquisition. More recently, research suggests that without some attention to **form,** learners run the risk of **fossilisation.** A **focus on form** does not necessarily mean a return to drill-and-repeat type methods of teaching. Nor does it mean the use of an off-

the-shelf grammar syllabus. A focus on form may simply mean correcting a mistake. In this sense, a focus on form is compatible with a task-based approach.

Related to the notion of focus on form is the notion of **consciousness raising.** Krashen argued that acquisition is a largely unconscious process. All that is needed to trigger it are large doses of comprehensible input. Other theorists have argued that the learner's role is perhaps less passive than Krashen implies, and that acquisition involves conscious processes, of which the most fundamental is **attention.** We have seen how Schmidt concluded that **noticing** spoken language items in Brazil helped his Portuguese. It follows that helping learners attend to language items may help them acquire them. Pointing out features of the grammatical system is thus a form of consciousness-raising. It may not lead directly and instantly to the acquisition of the item in question. But it may nevertheless trigger a train of mental processes that in time will result in accurate and appropriate production.

It might seem that we have come full circle, and that grammar consciousness -raising is simply a smart term for what was once called grammar **presentation.** But presentation is usually paired with **practice,** implying immediate – and accurate – output. Consciousness-raising, on the other hand, does not necessarily entail production: it may simply exist at the level of understanding. And remembering. In fact, put simply, that's what raised consciousness is: the state of remembering, having understood something.

To sum up: if the teacher uses techniques that direct the learner's attention to form, and if the teacher provides activities that promote awareness of grammar, learning seems to result. We need, therefore, to add to the pro-grammar position the arguments for a **focus on form** and for **consciousness-raising.** Together they comprise the **paying-attention-to-form argument.** That is to say, learning seems to be enhanced when the learner's attention is directed to getting the forms right, and when the learner's attention is directed to features of the grammatical system.

These would seem to tip the balance in favour of grammar. While the 'anti-grammar' position is strongly and even fiercely argued, it tends to depend on one basic assumption, that is, that the processes of second language acquisition mirror those of first language acquisition. This is an assumption that is hotly debated. While there are certainly cases of adult learners who have reached near-native levels of proficiency in a second language simply through immersion in the second language culture, these tend to be exceptions rather than the rule. On the other hand, there are compelling arguments to support the view that without attention to form, including grammatical form, the learner is unlikely to progress beyond the most basic level of communication.

But this doesn't mean that grammar should be the goal of teaching, nor that a focus on form alone is sufficient. The goal of the communicative movement – communicative competence – embraces more than just grammar, and implies a focus on **meaning** as well. It may be that communicative competence is best achieved through communicating, through making meanings, and that grammar is a way of tidying these meanings up. If so, the teacher's energies should be directed mainly at providing opportunities for authentic language use, employing grammar as a resource rather than as an end in itself. As Leibraz is supposed to have said: 'A language is acquired through practice; it is merely perfected through grammar.'

We have looked at the arguments for and against incorporating grammar into language teaching, and concluded that, on balance, there is a convincing case for a role for grammar. (***) It will be useful at this stage to draw up some basic rules of thumb for grammar teaching – rules of thumb which will serve as the criteria for evaluating the practical approaches that follow.

The E-Factor: Efficiency = economy, ease, and efficacy
Given that dealing with grammar is only a part of a teacher's activities, and given that classroom time is very limited, it would seem imperative that whatever grammar teaching is done is done as **efficiently** as possible. If, as has been suggested, the teacher's energies should be at least partly directed at getting learners to communicate, prolonged attention to grammar is difficult to justify. Likewise, if a grammar activity requires a great deal of time to set up or a lot of materials, is it the most efficient deployment of the teacher's limited time, energy and resources? When considering an activity for the presentation or practice of grammar the first question to ask, is: How *efficient is it?* Efficiency, in turn, can be broken down into three factors: **economy, ease, and efficacy.**

When presenting grammar, a sound rule of thumb is: the shorter the better. It has been shown that **economy** is a key factor in the training of technical skills: when learning how to drive a car or operate a computer, a little prior teaching seems to be more effective than a lot. The more the instructor piles on instructions, the more confused the trainee is likely to become. The same would seem to apply in language teaching: be economical.

Be economical, too, in terms of planning and resources. The **ease** factor recognises the fact that most teachers lead busy lives, have many classes, and simply cannot *afford to* sacrifice valuable free time preparing elaborate classroom materials. Of course, the investment of time and energy in the preparation of materials is often accompanied by a commitment on the part of the teacher to making them work. But, realistically, painstaking preparation is not always going to be possible. Generally speaking, the easier an activity is to set up, the better it is.

Finally, and most importantly: will it work? That is to say, what is its **efficacy?** This factor is the least easy to evaluate. We have to operate more on hunch than on hard data. Learning, like language, resists measurement. Of course, there are tests, and these can provide feedback to the teacher on the efficacy of the teaching/learning process. Nevertheless, testing is notoriously problematic (***). Moreover, there is much greater scepticism nowadays as to the extent that teaching causes learning. This need not undermine our faith in the classroom as a good place for language learning. We now know a lot more about what constitute the best conditions for learning. If teachers can't directly cause learning, they can at least provide the optimal conditions for it.

As we have seen, a prerequisite for learning is **attention.** So the efficacy of a grammar activity can be partly measured by the degree of attention it arouses. This means trying to exclude from the focus of the learner's attention any distracting or irrelevant details. Attention without **understanding,** however, is probably a waste of time, so efficacy will in part depend on the amount and quality of contextual information, explanation and checking. Finally, understanding without **memory** would seem to be equally ineffective, and so the efficacy of a presentation will also depend on how memorable it is.

None of these conditions, however, will be sufficient if there is a **lack of motivation** and, in the absence of some external motivational factor (for example, an examination, or the anticipation of opportunities to use the language), it is the teacher's job to choose tasks and materials that engage the learners. Tasks and materials that are involving, that are relevant to their needs, that have an achievable outcome, and that have an element of challenge while providing the necessary support, are more likely to be motivating than those that do not have these qualities.

Efficiency, then, can be defined as the optimal setting of three related factors: economy, ease, and efficacy. To put it simply: are the time and resources spent on preparing and executing a grammar task justified in terms of its probable learning outcome?

The A-factor: Appropriacy
No class of learners is the same: not only are their needs, interests, level and goals going to vary, but their beliefs, attitudes and values will be different too. Thus, an activity that works for one group of learners – i.e. that fulfils the E-factor criteria is not necessarily going to work for another. It may simply not be **appropriate.** Hence, any classroom activity must be evaluated not only according to criteria of efficiency, but also of appropriacy. Factors to consider when determining appropriacy include:

- the age of the learners
- their level
- the size of the group
- the constitution of the group, e.g. monolingual or multilingual
- what their needs are, e.g. to pass a public examination
- the learners' interests
- the available materials and resources
- the learners' previous learning experience and hence present expectations
- any cultural factors that might affect attitudes, e.g. their perception of the
- role and status of the teacher
- the educational context, e.g. private school or state school, at home or abroad

Activities that fail to take the above factors into account are unlikely to work. The age of the learners is very important. Research suggests that children are more disposed to language learning activities that incline towards acquisition rather than towards learning. That is, they are better at picking up language implicitly, rather than learning it as a system of explicit rules. Adult learners, on the other hand, may do better at activities which involve analysis and memorisation.

Cultural factors, too, will determine the success of classroom activities. Recently there have been a number of writers who have queried the appropriacy of indiscriminately and uncritically applying methodologies in contexts for which they were never designed. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been a particular target of these criticisms. CLT values, among other things, **learner-centredness,** that is, giving the learners more responsibility and involvement in the learning process. This is often achieved through **discovery learning activities** (for example, where learners work out rules themselves) and through **group work** as opposed to the **traditional teacher-fronted** lesson. CLT also takes a relatively relaxed attitude towards accuracy, in the belief that meaning takes precedence over form. Finally, CLT has inherited the humanist view that language is an expression of personal meaning, rather than an expression of a common culture. Such notions, it is argued, derive from very Western beliefs about education and language. Its critics argue that CLT is an inappropriate methodology in those cultural contexts where the teacher is regarded as a fount of wisdom, and where accuracy is valued more highly than fluency.

Of course, no learning situation is static, and, with the right combination of consultation, negotiation, and learner training, even the most entrenched attitudes are susceptible to change. (***)

Conclusions

In answer to the question 'Why teach grammar?' the following reasons were advanced:

- the sentence-machine argument
- the fine-tuning argument
- the fossilisation argument
- the advance-organiser argument
- the discrete item argument
- the rule-of-law argument
- the learner expectations argument

There are some compelling reasons why not to teach grammar:

- the 'knowledge-how' argument
- the communication argument
- the acquisition argument
- the natural order argument
- the lexical chunks argument
- the learner expectations argument

To the arguments in favour should be added two more recent insights from second language acquisition research. These are the notions of *focus on form* and of *grammar consciousness-raising*. Together they comprise: **the paying-attention-to-form argument.**

On balance, the evidence suggests that there is a good case for a role for grammar-focused teaching. Grammar presentation and practice activities should be evaluated according to:

- how efficient they are (the E-factor)
- how appropriate they are (the A-actor)

The *efficiency* of an activity is gauged by determining:

- its economy – how time-efficient is it?
- its ease – how easy is it to set up?
- its efficacy – is it consistent with good learning principles?

The *appropriacy* of an activity takes into account:

- learners' needs and interests
- learners' attitudes and expectations.

Accuracy, fluency and complexity
Scott Thornbury

from Issue Sixteen July 2000, English Teaching *professional*

Most teachers will be familiar with the two distinct types of learners described in the extracts below. There are students whose language is virtually error free, but who are painful to interact with because the production of every word is such a struggle. Others, like Sachiko-san, are fast and fluent speakers, but their language is practically unintelligible because of the errors they make. A happy balance would be learners who are able to fine-tune their output so as to make it intelligible, but who, at the same time, are equipped with a core of readily available, fairly automatic, language, so that they can cope with the pressures of real-time communication. The purpose of practice activities is to target these two objectives: precision when applying the system, and automization of the system. We call these objectives, respectively, accuracy and fluency.

Accuracy is judged by the extent to which the learner's output matches some external standard – traditionally the output of an idealised native speaker. This standard has been called into question in the light of both the spread of English as an international language, and the development of different 'Englishes', to the point where it may now be impossible to agree on an acceptable standard. Nevertheless, most teachers have fairly reliable intuition when it comes to assessing a learner's command of the linguistic systems, such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

These extracts describe two English language learners.
Both are taken from travel books and both are set in Japan.

"Talking with the [students] has been a trial of patience as I watch their faces work like computer screens. Inside, their brains are composing sentences, searching for the most appropriate word, then running the draft past their mind's eye for grammatical mistakes. Finally, the sentence is allowed out. I reply. They look uncertain, sometimes ask for a re-run, before their facial screen goes blank while a new sentence is under construction. They seem terrified of making a mistake, which is no way to become fluent. Yet their knowledge of formal grammar is far greater than Australian undergraduates' and they have extensive vocabularies.

[McQueen *Tokyo World* William Heinemann]

"Sachiko-san was as unabashed and unruly in her embrace of English as most of her compatriots were reticent and shy. She was happy to plunge ahead without a second thought for grammar scattering meanings and ambiguities as she went. Plurals were made singular, articles were dropped, verbs were rarely inflected, and word order was exploded— often, in fact, she seemed to be making Japanese sentences with a few English words thrown in. Often, moreover to vex the misunderstandings further she spoke both languages at once. "
[Iyer *The Lady and the Monk* Black Swan]

Fluency is an even more elusive concept. Its non-specialist meaning of 'relatively effortless and fluid speech' was side-lined by communicative theorists in the seventies, when they attempted to re-define fluency in terms of communicative competence. Fluency came to be equated with language use, and fluency activities were those where the focus was on the message, not the form. However, this distinction seems to be a misleading one. It seems perfectly feasible to have message-focused speech events where there is, nevertheless, a strong incentive to be accurate (think of air traffic controllers); and it is also possible to have fairly meaningless speech events where the focus is on fluency (tongue twisters, for example).

Hence, the formula that 'accuracy = form', while 'fluency = meaning' has been called into question, and there is a case for reclaiming the traditional meaning of fluency. According to Skehan, for example: *'Fluency concerns the learner's capacity to produce language in real time without undue pausing or hesitation.'* Research into the exact nature of fluency suggests that it is not so much a matter of the speed of delivery, but more to do with the length of the 'run' - the more words you can put together without pausing, the more

fluent you are. Of course, fluency at the expense of accuracy may result in long but incoherent runs, so the ideal learner is the one who can balance the demands of real-time processing with the need to be reasonably accurate.

Complexity
There is a third type of student, however: the one who is reasonably intelligible and at the same time fluent, but who can express only a relatively limited range of meanings. If such students are going to make any headway in the language, it is not enough simply to be able to speak fast and accurately. They also need to be able to re-organise(or restructure) what they know in order to make it more complex. Here, for example, is how the novelist Christopher Isherwood improved the complexity of his German, thanks to a tip from a friend:

> *"Humphrey said suddenly, 'You speak German so well - tell me, why don't you ever use the subjunctive mood?' Christopher had to admit that he didn't know how to. In the days when he had studied German, he had left the subjunctive to be dealt with later, since it wasn't absolutely essential and he was in a hurry. By this time he could hop through the language without its aid, like an agile man with only one leg. But now Christopher set himself to master the subjunctive. Very soon, he had done so. Proud of this accomplishment, he began showing off whenever he talked.. 'had it not been for him, I should never have asked myself what I would do if they were to ... etc, etc. Humphrey was much amused."*
> **[Isherwood *Christopher and His Kind* Eyre Methuen]**

As well as developing accuracy and fluency, practice activities can also provide the kind of learning opportunities associated with restructuring: through using language, learners come up against situations which force them to re-organise their current knowledge. Thus, a third type of practice is directed at complexity.

The PPP model
Traditionally, these three components of proficiency – accuracy, fluency, and complexity – have each been targeted in the three-stage PPP model. Increasing the complexity of the learner's developing grammar was the goal of the initial **Presentation** stage. Accuracy was developed through controlled **Practice** activities. Fluency was in the **Production** stage. The assumption underlying this linear model was that language learning followed a kind of production line, each item being taught, fine-tuned, and then made automatic, in order that it might be added to the existing store of accumulated items. Fluency –according to this model – is simply automised accuracy, and accuracy is simply complexity realised as output.
Recent developments in the study of language acquisition suggest, however, that there is not one unitary language 'bank' that we draw on in the production of language, but that there are, in fact, two stores, working roughly in tandem. On the one hand, there is a store of memorised words, expressions and even whole sentences – a store that is analogous to a dictionary-cum-phrase book. On the other hand, there is a rule-based system, which is capable of generating original utterances through the application of a set of rules – analogous to a grammar. While the memory-based system is able to deliver at speed, the rule-based system takes longer. It is therefore likely that when we are processing language under real-time constraints, we tend to rely on the memory-based system, retrieving whole chunks of language at a time. Fluency is therefore very much dependent on having a stored bank of memorised chunks, and having the ability (which comes from practice) to retrieve these chunks at speed.

Accuracy, on the other hand, seems to be a function of the analysed system. When we have time and sufficient incentive to apply rules to the production of language, language tends to be more grammaticised, hence more accurate. Typically, this occurs when we are writing. Traditional accuracy practice activities, such as drills, seem to work against the application of a rule-based system, since they are done at speed. In fact drills, because they encourage the development of fluid production, and because they are often focused on the repetition of chunks of language, might better be classified as fluency activities.

Practising accuracy and fluency
What, then, are the characteristics of accuracy activities? For learners to be able to devote attention to 'getting it right', i.e. to engage the rule-based system, they need time. Research suggests that learners become more accurate in proportion to the time they have available. They can use this time to plan, monitor and fine-tune their output. It may therefore be counterproductive to rush students through activities designed for the practice of accuracy, since they also need to devote attention to form. It will help if they are not attempting to

express meanings which are complex or novel. For example, telling a story with which they are familiar will be easier to fine-tune for accuracy than if they create a new story from scratch.

Learners also need to value accuracy, that is, they need to see that without it they risk being unintelligible. This means that they need unambiguous feedback when they make mistakes that threaten intelligibility. By correcting learners' errors, teachers not only provide this feedback, but they convey the message that accuracy is important. Knowing they are being carefully monitored often helps learners monitor themselves.

And what makes for a good fluency activity? Fluency activities are aimed at the process of automisation. Too much attention to form may jeopardise fluency, since it tempts learners to use analysed language rather than memorised language. One way of diverting attention away from form is to design practice tasks where the focus is primarily on meaning, through the use, for example, of communicative activities, such as information-gap tasks. As pointed out earlier, communicative tasks are not fluency tasks by definition; they simply provide good conditions for the development of fluency, since attention to form is 'distracted' by the need to produce and process language in real time. Drills and jazz chants are also a form of fluency practice, since they encourage the rapid delivery of chunks, and their repetitive nature facilitates memorising. A combination of a meaning-focused but drill-type activity would be something like 'Find someone who...', in which students mingle, repeatedly asking a formulaic question (such as *'Have you ever been to…?* in order to complete a class survey.

Of course, the ideal activity would be one in which both accuracy and fluency are involved. Such an activity would need to have an element of real-time processing, while at the same time providing the time and incentive for analysis. Internet chat is a medium which combines some of the real-time effects of speech but which, because it is written, allows a measure of monitoring for accuracy. Having students take part in chats is an excellent way of balancing the demands for fluency (using memorised language) and the demands of accuracy (applying rules). But chat programs are not the only medium: the same effects can be created in the class with pen and paper. Students in pairs simply 'talk' to each other, but write their conversations rather than speak them. Here, for example, is how two teenagers 'performed' a role-play – passing the paper back and forth between them – in which a boy asks his mother if he can get a tattoo:

> B *Mum, I want to ask you something.*
> M *What is the question?*
> B I w*ant to get a tattoo.*
> M *You can do what you want.*
> B *OK*
> M *OK what?*
> B *I'm going to get a tattoo.*
> M *But with one condition. It has to say 'I love mum'.*
> B *Are you crazy…*

Targeting complexity
As previously mentioned, complexity has traditionally been targeted at the presentation stage of the lesson. Learners are expected to learn a new rule, and straightaway incorporate it into their 'mental grammar'. More recently there has been some scepticism as to whether this really happens. There is a growing belief that the restructuring of their mental grammar is more likely to occur during practice activities. Restructuring is sometimes experienced by learners as a kind of flash of understanding, but more often, and less dramatically, it is the dawning realisation that they have moved up another notch in terms of their command of the language.

One school of thought argues that communicative activities (such as information-gap tasks) provide a fertile site for restructuring. When communication breakdowns occur, learners are forced to take stock and re-think, and, hopefully, negotiate their way out of the breakdown. Negotiation of meaning – the collaborative work done to make the message comprehensible – is thought to trigger restructuring. In fact, some early proponents of the communicative approach considered that this was all that was necessary for language acquisition to take place.

How old is old enough?
True or False?
In Britain ...
1.   … you have to vote when you are 18.
2.   … you don't have to marry until you are 16.
3.   … you should pay for a seat on trains once you turn five
4.   …you don't have to do military service.
5.   …you don't have to go into a pub until you are 14.
6.   … you can buy cigarettes once you turn 16.
7.   … you shouldn't smoke until you're 16
8.   … you shouldn't open your own bank account until you are 18.
9.   …you can't buy a pet yourself until you are 12.
10.   …you can drive when you are 17, but you must have a licence.
11.   …children under 12 should see a dentist regularly.
12.   ... you have to start your education by the time you are five.

Answers 1 F (you can vote) 2 F (you can't marry) 3 T(or you must pay) 4 T5 F (you mustn't go) 6 T7 T(but this is a matter of opinion, not law) 8 F (you can't open) 9 T10 T11 T(but this is a matter of opinion, not law) 12 T

Other theorists have argued that a prerequisite for restructuring is *noticing*: you have to notice features of the input you are receiving, and at the same time you have to notice the difference between your output and the target. One way of getting learners to notice features of the language is to 'lead them up the garden path', that is, to put them in a position where they over-generalise their current knowledge and are then shown the effect of their error. Such an approach shortcuts the traditional presentation stage and plunges learners in at the deep end (see boxed example above).

Both communication breakdown and enforced error are ways in which learning is problematised, and it is arguable that, unless learners encounter problems, there will be no push to restructure their present competence. 'Safe' instructional models such as PPP are designed to pre-empt problems, whereas 'deep-end' approaches, such as task-based instruction, force learners up against the limits of their competence.

Grammar interpretation tasks
One activity type that is directed at problematising the present state of the learner's knowledge is the grammar interpretation task. This is a kind of receptive practice activity in which learners are forced to engage with features of the language that they might otherwise have overlooked. There is no immediate pressure to produce the feature – simply to note its existence and its effect. This kind of consciousness-raising, it is argued, may just be sufficient to trigger adjustments in the learner's mental grammar.

The boxed exercise, for example, is a grammar interpretation task (which will almost certainly lead to errors) that targets modality. Try it for yourself to see the sorts of problems you think students will encounter. When I did this task with a group of intermediate learners in Spain, they started off by focusing on the sentences at the level of vocabulary, e.g. vote – 18), ignoring the finer shades of meaning encoded in the modal verbs. Hence, they answered true to the first and second sentences. Only when these were shown to be false, did they start to get wise to the fact that the truth of the sentences was dependent on understanding the differences between *have to, should, must, can* and their respective negative forms. They were learning while practising. As a follow-up, I asked them to correct the false sentences, translate these into Spanish, and then translate them back into English. Finally, they devised a quiz about similar rights and responsibilities in Spain.

While such a task cannot guarantee restructuring the learners' mental grammar, it provides good conditions for noticing – better conditions, perhaps, than had I simply 'presented' the forms and their meanings. By problematising a language feature in the context of a practice task, learners not only notice it, but they notice that it matters.

A reassessment

In attempting to re-define the three goals of language teaching, I am not suggesting that, in order to target accuracy, fluency and complexity, whole new task types need to be devised. Most standard task types fit comfortably into this framework although perhaps more thought needs to be given to ways in which complexity can be targeted in practice activities rather than by means of the traditional presentation stage. What I am suggesting is that we may need to reassess some activities in the light of a dual-mode model of language processing, and abandon once and for all the one-track model of learning enshrined in the PPP methodology.

Reference:

Skehan, P. 1996. 'Second language acquisition research and task-based instruction' in Willis, J and Willis, D (Eds) *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching* Heinemann

Teaching and explaining vocabulary
I.S.P. Nation

from Nation, I.S.P. 2001. *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Cambridge University Press

This section looks at the psychological conditions that need to occur in order for vocabulary learning to take place. It is organised around four questions that teachers should ask about any teaching or learning activity:

1. What is the learning goal of the activity?
2. What psychological conditions does the activity use to help reach the learning goal?
3. What are the observable signs that learning might occur?
4. What are the design features of the activity which set up the conditions for learning?

The section ends with a detailed look at repetition and vocabulary learning. (***)
We will now look at each of the four questions in detail.

What is the learning goal of the activity?
(***)…a learning goal may be a language goal (vocabulary, grammar), ideas or content such as cultural knowledge or safety information, skills (accuracy, fluency), and text (discourse schemata, rhetorical devices, interaction routines). (***) In order to reach a goal, the knowledge or information that makes up that goal needs to be available. Information about words, for example words' meanings, can come from textual input such as a reading or listening text, or the context provided on a worksheet; information can come from a reference source such as a teacher or a dictionary, or it can come from the learners in a group who already know something about the word.

What psychological conditions does the activity use to help reach the learning goal?
There are three important general processes that may lead to a word being remembered. These comprise *noticing* (through formal instruction, negotiation, the need to comprehend or produce, awareness of inefficiencies), *retrieval,* and *creative* (generative) *use.* These processes can be viewed as three steps with the later steps including the earlier steps.

Noticing
The first process encouraging learning is noticing, that is giving attention to an item. This means that learners need to notice the word, and be aware of it as a useful language item (see Ellis 1991; McLaughlin, 1990; Schmidt, 1990 for discussions of noticing). This noticing may be affected by several factors, including the salience of the word in the textual input or in the discussion of the text, previous contact that the learners have had with the word, and learners' realisation that the word fills a gap in their knowledge of the language (Schmidt and Frota, 1986; Ellis, 1990). Noticing also occurs when learners look up a word in a dictionary, deliberately study a word, guess from context, or have a word explained to them.

Motivation and interest are important enabling conditions for noticing. The choice of content can be a major factor stimulating interest. In his study of learning from listening, Elley (1989: 185) found quite different results from the same learners listening to two different stories. This seemed to have been due to the lack of involvement of the learners in one of the stories because of its strangeness, lack of humour, low levels of action and conflict and so on. Without the engagement and aroused attention of the learners, there can be little opportunity for other conditions favouring learning to take effect. Although there is no generally accepted theory of why interest is important and the factors that arouse interest, teachers need to watch their learners carefully and seek their opinions about what stories and topics they find interesting. There is some evidence (Bawcom, 1995) that teachers' views of what will be interesting do not match with what learners find interesting.

Negotiation. There is a growing number of studies that show that vocabulary items that are negotiated are more likely to be learned than words that are not negotiated (Newton, 1995; Ellis, Tanaka and Yamazaki, 1994). This is not a surprising finding, but care needs to be taken in interpreting it. Ellis, Tanaka and Yamazaki found that although negotiation helped learning, the negotiated task took much more time than the non-negotiated elaborated input task. In the Newton study, it was found that although negotiated items were more likely to be learned than non-negotiated items (75% to 57%), negotiation only accounted for about 20% of the vocabulary learning. This is probably because only a few items can be negotiated without interfering too much with the communication task. So, although negotiation really helps vocabulary learning, it is not the means by which most vocabulary is learned. It is thus important for teachers to draw on other complementary ways of decontextualising items to improve the quality of learning. (***)

Definition. Some studies (Elley, 1989; Brett, Rothlein and Hurley, 1996) show that vocabulary learning is increased if vocabulary items are briefly explained while learners are listening to a story. In Elley's study, such defining more than doubled the vocabulary gains. Some studies of reading similarly indicate that looking up words in a dictionary increases learning (Knight, 1994), although this finding is not consistently supported in other studies (Hulstijn, 1993). (***)

Retrieval
The second major process that may lead to a word being remembered is retrieval (Baddeley, 1990: 156). A word may be noticed and its meaning comprehended in the textual input to the task through teacher explanation or dictionary use. If that word is subsequently retrieved during the task then the memory of that word will be strengthened. Retrieval may be receptive or productive. Receptive retrieval involves perceiving the form and having to retrieve its meaning when the word is met in listening or reading. Productive retrieval involves wishing to communicate the meaning of the word and having to retrieve its spoken or written form as in speaking or writing. Retrieval does not occur if the form and its meaning are presented simultaneously to the learner.

Several studies (Elley, 1989; Stahl and Fairbanks, 1986) have shown the importance of repetition as a factor in incidental vocabulary learning. As Baddeley (1990: 156) suggests, it is not simply repetition which is important but the repeated opportunity to retrieve the item which is to be learned. When learners hear or see the form of the word, they need to retrieve what they know of its meaning. This retrieval is likely to be retrieval of ideas stored from previous meetings and retrieval of content and information from the present meeting. Baddeley suggests that each retrieval of a word strengthens the path linking form and meaning and makes subsequent retrieval easier. (***)

The learner's vocabulary size. The more words a learner knows, the less frequently occurring are the next words he or she needs to learn. For example, if we use figures from the Francis and Kučera (1982) frequency count, a learner who knows 1,000 different words would have to read or listen to 10,000 running words in order for a word at the 1,000 word level to be repeated. If the learner knew 2,000 different words, she would have to read or listen to 20,000 running words, on average, for a word at the 2,000 level to be repeated. The larger the vocabulary size, the greater the quantity of language that needs to be processed in order to meet the words to be learned again.

The length of time that the memory of a meeting with a word lasts. A repetition can only be effective if the repetition is seen by the learner to be a repetition. That is, there must be some memory of the previous meeting with the word. A critical factor is the length of time that such a memory lasts. Delayed post-tests of vocabulary learning indicate that memory for words can last several weeks. (***) Research indicates that repetitions need to be increasingly spaced with a short gap between early meetings and much larger gaps between later meetings (Pimsleur, 1967; Baddeley, 1990: 156-158). Thus the number of previous meetings with the word will influence the length of time a memory remains. (***)

Creative or generative use
The third major process that may lead to a word being remembered is generation. There is now an increasing number of studies that show that generative processing is an important factor in first and second language vocabulary learning. Generative processing occurs when previously met words are subsequently met or used in ways that differ from the previous meeting with the word. At its most striking, the new meeting with the word forces learners to reconceptualise their knowledge of that word. For example, if a learner has met the word *cement* used as a verb as in 'We cemented the path' and then meets 'We cemented our relationship with

a drink', the learner will need to rethink the meaning and uses of *cement* and this will help firmly establish the memory of this word. (***)

What are the observable signs that learning might occur?
Most conditions in action have some observable sign. Negotiation, repetition, generative use, involvement and successful completion of a task are among the most observable. Deep processing, focus on the meaning and the need to comprehend are less directly observable. Presence of the signs does not guarantee learning, but looking for them may help a teacher decide if an activity needs adapting. (***)

What are the design features of the activity which set up the conditions for learning?
Design features such as split information, shared information, types of outcomes, and the presence of unfamiliar items in written input, encourage the occurrence of learning conditions. Shared and split information tasks encourage the negotiation of meaning. Removal of written input may encourage retrieval of vocabulary.

Designing activities to encourage noticing
If words occur in important parts of the written input to a task they are likely to be noticed. The chances of a word being noticed can be increased by pre-teaching, highlighting the word in the text by using underlining, italics or bold letters, and glossing the word.

Designing activities to encourage retrieval
An effective way to get repeated retrieval is to read the same story several times. With younger children this is not difficult to do and is welcomed by them. Older learners may not be so receptive. A second option is to serialise a long story, that is, to read a chapter at a time. There is a tendency in continuous stories for vocabulary to be repeated. Teachers could maximise this by briefly retelling what happened previously in the story before continuing with the next instalment. Much research still needs to be done on the effect of a continuous story on repetition. Hwang and Nation (1989) looked at the effect on repetition of reading follow-up newspaper stories on the same topic. They found that follow-up stories provided better repetition of vocabulary than unrelated stories.

The repeated readings or the serial instalments should not be too far apart. Listening to a story two or three times a week is likely to be more beneficial than once a week. If the teacher notes target vocabulary on the board as it occurs in the story, it is best to put it up just after it is heard rather than before. This will encourage retrieval rather than recognition.

Teachers can design retrieval into speaking activities by making it necessary for learners to reuse words that occurred in the textual input. This can be done by making the task involve retelling of the textual input, by making the task involve a procedure whereby the same material has to be discussed or presented several times through a change in group membership as in the 'pyramid' procedure (Jordan, 1990), or by making the solution to the task involve considerable discussion of the information provided in the textual input, as in a problem solving discussion.

In a strip story activity (Gibson, 1975) the learners are each given a sentence to memorise from a paragraph. They then must tell their sentences to each other and decide whose sentence is first, second and so on. No writing is allowed. Because the learners must memorise their sentences, they then have to retrieve them each time they tell them to the rest of the group. Memorisation thus ensures a form of retrieval.

Designing activities to encourage generation
Teachers can try to affect the quality of the mental processing of vocabulary while learners listen to input in the following ways:

- Rather than read the same story several times, as in the Elley (1989) study, it may be better to use a longer story and present it part by part as a serial. As we have seen in the section on repeated retrieval, long texts provide an opportunity for the same vocabulary to recur. If this recurrence is in contexts which differ from those previously met in the story, then this generative use will contribute to learning.
- If the teacher is able to supplement the story telling with pictures by using blackboard drawings, an OHP or a blown-up book, then this will contribute positively to vocabulary learning.

- If it is possible to provide simple contextual definitions of words, that is definitions using example sentences, then this could help learning if the example sentences are different from those that contain the word in the story. The contextual definition would then be a generative use of the word.
- Teachers can encourage productive generative use by requiring retelling of the written input from a different focus, by distributing the information in a way that encourages negotiation, and by requiring learners to reconstruct what was in the text rather than repeat it.

Table 3.3 is an attempt to relate the conditions favouring vocabulary learning to the signs that they are occurring and the features of the activities that encourage them.

Psychological conditions encouraging learning	Signs that the conditions are likely to be occurring	Design features of the activity that promote the conditions
Noticing a word	The learner consults a glossary The learner pauses over the word The learner negotiates the word	Definition, glosses, highlighting Unknown words in salient positions
Retrieving a word	The learner pauses to recall a meaning The learner does not need to consult a dictionary or gloss The learner produces a previously unknown word	Retelling spoken or written input
Using the word generatively	The learner produces a word in a new sentence context The learners produce associations, causal links, etc.	Role play based on written input Retelling without the input text Brainstorming

Table 3.3 *The conditions of learning, signs and features in activities with a vocabulary learning goal*

As our knowledge of vocabulary learning increases, it may be possible to develop a more detailed table where the various aspects of vocabulary knowledge are related to different learning conditions and the design features of activities.

Repetition and learning
Repetition is essential for vocabulary learning because there is so much to know about each word that one meeting with it is not sufficient to gain this information, and because vocabulary items must not only be known, they must be known well so that they can be fluently accessed. Repetition thus adds to the quality of knowledge and also to the quantity or strength of this knowledge.

There has been a great deal of research on how items should be repeated and much of this is relevant to learning vocabulary in another language.

The spacing of repetitions
A very robust finding in memory research in general (Baddeley, 1990) and second language vocabulary learning research in particular (Bloom and Shuell, 1981; Dempster 1987) is that spaced repetition results in more secure learning than massed repetition. Massed repetition involves spending a continuous period of time, say fifteen minutes, giving repeated attention to a word. Spaced repetition involves spreading the repetitions across a long period of time, but not spending more time in total on the study of the words. For example, the words might be studied for three minutes now, another three minutes a few hours later, three minutes a day later, three minutes two days later and finally three minutes a week later. The total study time is fifteen minutes, but it is spread across ten or more days. This spaced repetition results in learning that will be remembered for a long period of time. The repetitions should be spaced at increasingly larger intervals.

Seibert (1927), Anderson and Jordan (1928) and Seibert (1930) investigated retention over periods of up to eight weeks. Their findings are all in agreement with Pimsleur's (1967) memory schedule. Most forgetting occurs immediately after initial learning and then, as time passes, the rate of forgetting becomes slower. Anderson and Jordan measured recall immediately after learning, after one week, after three weeks and after eight weeks. The percentages of material retained were 66%, 48%, 39% and 37% respectively. This indicates that the repetition of new items should occur very soon after they are first studied, before too much forgetting

occurs. After this the repetitions can be spaced further apart. Griffin (1992) also found that most forgetting seems to occur soon after learning.

Bahrick (1984) and Bahrick and Phelps (1987) examined the recall of second language vocabulary items after very long periods of non-use, from 8 to 50 years. They found that the nature of the original learning influenced recall. Items which were initially easy to learn and which were given widely spaced practice (intervals of 30 days) were most likely to be retained over many years. The memory curves showed a decelerating drop for the first 3 to 6 years and then little change up to 25 to 30 years after which there was further decline. Bahrick and Phelps' research supports the well established finding of the superiority of spaced over massed practice. (***)

Communicating meaning
Direct communication of word meaning can occur in a variety of situations - during formal vocabulary teaching, as incidental defining in lectures, story telling or reading aloud to a class, during deliberate teaching of content in lectures and on-the-job instruction, and glossing or 'lexical familiarisation' in academic reading. (***) There are many ways of communicating word meanings:

- by performing actions
- by showing objects
- by showing pictures or diagrams
- by defining in the first language (translation)
- by defining in the second language
- by providing language context clues

The choice of way of communicating meaning of a word should be based on two considerations: the reason for explaining the meaning of the word, and the degree to which the way of explaining represents the wanted meaning for the word. (***)

Translation is often criticised as being indirect, taking time away from the second language, and encouraging the idea that there is an exact equivalence between words in the first and second languages. These criticisms are all true but they all apply to most other ways of communicating meaning. For example, there is no exact equivalence between a second language word and its second language definition. Similarly, a real object may contain many features that are not common to all instances of the word it exemplifies. Pictures and demonstrations take time away from the second language in the same way that using the first language to communicate word meaning takes time away from the second language. Translation has the advantages of being quick, simple, and easily understood. Its major disadvantage is that its use may encourage other use of the first language that seriously reduces the time available for use of the second language. (***)

Helping learners comprehend and learn from definitions
(***)
1. Provide clear, simple, brief explanations of meaning.
The research evidence clearly shows that, particularly in the first meetings with a word, any explanation should not be complicated or elaborate. Learning a word is a cumulative process, so teachers need not be concerned about providing lots of information about a word when it is first met. What is important is to start the process of learning in a clear way without confusion. There are strong   arguments   for   using   the learners' first language if this will provide a clear, simple, and brief explanation (Lado, Baldwin and Lobo, 1967; Mishima, 1967; Laufer and Shmueli 1997). The various aspects of knowing a word can be built up over a series of meetings with it. There is no need and clearly no advantage in trying to present these all at once. Elley's (1989) study of vocabulary learning from listening to stories showed that brief definitions had a strong effect on learning.

2. *Draw attention to the generalisable underlying meaning of a word.*
If knowledge of a word accumulates over repeated meetings, then learners   must   be   able   to   see   how   one meeting relates to the previous meetings. In providing an explanation of a   word, the teacher should try to show what is common in the different uses of the word.

3. *Give repeated attention to words.*
Knowledge of a word can only accumulate if learners meet the word many times. Repeated meetings can have the effects of strengthening and enriching previous knowledge. There is no need for a teacher to draw attention to a word every time it occurs but, particularly in the early stages of learning, drawing attention increases the chance that learners will notice it on later occasions. Teachers need to see the learning of particular words as a cumulative process. This means that they need to expect not to teach a word all in one meeting. They need to keep coming back to it to strengthen and enrich knowledge of the word.

4. Help learners recognise definitions.
Definitions have certain forms (Bramki and Williams, 1984; Flowerdew, 1992) and may be signalled in various ways. Teachers can help learners by clearly signalling the definitions they provide, by testing learners to diagnose how well they can recognise and interpret definitions, and by providing training in recognising and interpreting definitions. A useful starting point for this is recognising definitions in written text. Bramki and Williams suggest that learners can be helped to develop skill in making use of lexical familiarisation by, firstly, seeing marked up text which indicates the word, the signal of lexical familiarisation and the definition; plenty of examples are needed at this stage. And, secondly, getting the student to then mark up some examples with the teacher gradually reducing the guidance given. Flowerdew (1992: 216) suggests that teachers and learners should discuss the various forms of definitions as they occur in context.

5. Prioritise what should be explained about particular words.
There are many things to know about a word, and different aspects of word knowledge enable different word use skills (Nist and Olejnik, 1995). Some of these aspects of knowledge can be usefully taught, some are best left to be learned through experience, and some may already be known through transfer from the first language or through patterns learned from other English words. When deliberately drawing attention to a word, it is worth considering the learning burden of that word and then deciding what aspect of the word most deserves attention. Most often it will be the meaning of the word, but other useful aspects may include its spelling or pronunciation, its collocates, the grammatical patterning or restrictions on its use through considerations of politeness, formality, dialect or medium.

6. Help learners remember what is explained.
Understanding and remembering are related but different processes. The way in which a teacher explains a word can affect understanding or it can affect understanding and remembering. In order to help remembering, information needs to be processed thoughtfully and deeply. The quality of mental processing affects the quantity of learning. Teachers can help remembering by showing how the word parts (affixes and stem) relate to the meaning of the word, by helping learners think of a mnemonic keyword that is like the form of the new word, by putting the word in a striking visualisable context, by encouraging learners to retrieve the word form or meaning from their memory while not looking at the text, and by relating the word to previous knowledge such as previous experience or spelling, grammatical, or collocational patterns met before.

7. *Avoid interference from related words.*
Words which are similar in form (Laufer, 1989a) or meaning (Higa, 1963; Tinkham, 1993 and 1997; Waring, 1997b; Nation, 2000a) are more difficult to learn together than they are to learn separately. When explaining and defining words, it is not helpful to draw attention to other unfamiliar or poorly established words of similar form, or words which are opposites, synonyms, free associates or members of the same lexical set such as parts of the body, fruit or articles of clothing. The similarity between related items makes it difficult for the learner to remember which was which. Confusion rather than useful learning is often the result. In the early stages of learning it is not helpful to use the opportunity to teach a word as the opportunity to teach other related words. (***)

Spending time on words
Teachers should deal with vocabulary in systematic and principled ways to make sure that the learners get the most benefit from the time spent. There are two major decisions to be made for each unknown word when deciding how to communicate its meaning.

- *Should time be spent on it?*

- *How should the word be dealt with?*

It is worth spending time on a word if the goal of the lesson is vocabulary learning and if the word is a high-frequency word, a useful topic word or technical word, or contains useful word parts. It is also worth spending time on a word if it provides an opportunity to develop vocabulary strategies like guessing from context and using word parts. Let us now look briefly at a range of ways for dealing with words, examining the reasons why each particular way might be chosen. We will assume that the words that we are considering giving attention to occur in a reading text.

1. *Preteach.* Preteaching usually needs to involve 'rich instruction' and should only deal with a few words, probably five or six at the most. If too many words are focused on, they are likely to be forgotten or become confused with each other. Because preteaching takes quite a lot of time, it is best suited to high-frequency words, and words that are important for the message of the text.

2. *Replace the unknown word in the text before giving the text to the learners.* Some texts may need to be simplified before they are presented to learners. In general, low-frequency words that are not central to the meaning of the text need to be replaced. Replacing or omitting words means that the teacher does not spend class time dealing with items that at present are of little value to the learners.

3. *Put the unknown word in a glossary.* This is best done with words that the teacher cannot afford to spend time on, particularly high-frequency words, but glossing need not be limited to these. Long (Watanabe, 1997) argues that putting a word in a glossary gets repeated attention to the word if the learners look it up. That is, they see the word in the text, they see it again in the glossary when they look it up, and then they see it again when they return to the text from the glossary. It could also be argued that between each of these three steps the word is being kept in short term memory. Glossing could thus be a useful way of bringing words to learners' attention. Glossing helps learning (Watanabe, 1997).

4. *Put the unknown word in an exercise after the text.* The words that are treated in this way need to be high-frequency words or words that have useful word parts. Exercises that come after a text take time to make and the learners spend time doing them. The words need to be useful for the learners to justify this effort.

5. *Quickly give the meaning.* This can be done by quickly giving a first language translation, a second language synonym or brief definition, or quickly drawing a picture, pointing to an object or making a gesture. This way of dealing with a word has the goal of avoiding spending time and moving on to more important items. It is best suited to low-frequency words that are important for the message of the text but which are unlikely to be needed again. Quick definitions help learning (Elley, 1989).

6. *Do nothing about the word.* This is suited to low-frequency words that are not important for the meaning of the text. It avoids drawing attention to items that because of their low-frequency do not deserve class time.

7. *Help the learners use context to guess, use a dictionary, or break the word into parts.* These ways of dealing with words are suited to high-frequency words because time is spent on them while using the strategies, but they are also suitable for low-frequency words that are easy to guess, have several meanings, or contain useful parts. The time spent is justified by the increase in skill in these very important strategies.

8. *Spend time looking at the range of meanings and collocations of the word.* This is a rich instruction approach and because of the time it takes needs to be directed towards high-frequency words and other useful words.

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Current trends in teaching second language vocabulary
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from Schmitt, N. and M. McCarthy. 1997. *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*. Cambridge University Press.

As we enter the 21st century, acquisition of vocabulary has assumed a more important role, and as some would argue, the central role in learning a second language (Lewis, 1993). With this shift in emphasis, the classroom teacher is faced with the challenge of how best to help students store and retrieve words in the target language. Most L2 practitioners today have been trained in teacher education programs or molded by textbook writers to understand the terminology and teach the systemacity of grammar. However, our understanding of the relationships between words, even the metalanguage to discuss those concepts, is decidedly lacking (Maiguashca, 1993).

Inferring from context
For many of us, our perspective on teaching vocabulary was greatly influenced by the top-down, naturalistic, and communicative approaches of the 1970s and 1980s. The emphasis was implicit, incidental learning of vocabulary. We were taught the importance of directing L2 students to recognize clues in context, use monolingual dictionaries, and avoid defining words or glossing texts with their bilingual equivalents. Textbooks emphasized inferring word meaning from context as the primary vocabulary skill. Although exposure to a word in a variety of contexts is extremely important to understanding the depth of the word's meaning, providing incidental encounters with words is only one method to facilitate vocabulary acquisition.

The arguments for not focusing solely on implicit instruction to facilitate second language vocabulary acquisition come from a number of potential problems associated with inferring words from context. First of all, acquiring vocabulary mainly through guessing words in context is likely to be a very slow process. Considering that many L2 learners have a limited amount of time to learn a body of words, it is not perhaps the most efficient way to approach the task (Sternberg, 1987; Carter and McCarthy, 1988; Scherfer, 1993). Secondly, inferring word meaning is an error-prone process. Recent studies have shown students seldom guess the correct meanings (Pressley, Levin, and McDaniel, 1987*;* Kelly, 1990). Students, especially those with low-level proficiency in the target language, are often frustrated with this approach and it is difficult to undo the possible damage done by incorrect guessing. Third, even when students are trained to use flexible reading strategies to guess words in context, their comprehension may still be low due to insufficient vocabulary knowledge (Haynes and Baker, 1993).

Fourth, putting too much emphasis on inference skills when teaching vocabulary belies the fact that individual learners have different, yet successful, styles of acquiring unfamiliar vocabulary. Hulstijn (1993), in his study of Dutch high school students learning English, found that those good at inferring meaning could acquire vocabulary more easily than those who could not infer well but that the opposite was not true. Students with large vocabularies were not necessarily good at inferring, i.e. they had used other means, such as word lists, to acquire a high level of word knowledge. As a result, Hulstijn suggests that we teach inferring skills as an option, but also allow students to decide whether they need to look up unfamiliar words.

Finally, and most importantly, guessing from context does not necessarily result in long-term retention. Even if a student is exposed to a word in 'pregnant' contexts, those rich with clues, acquisition does not automatically result the first time. Of the increasing number of studies pointing in that direction, three are noted here. Parry's (1993) longitudinal study of a university level ESL student's progress reading in English shows that this student could guess the correct meanings while working through a text but not when tested later. When Mondria and Wit de-Boer (1991) improved the clues in the context of readings for Dutch secondary students learning French, guessing was better, but there was no improvement in retention of vocabulary. In Wesche and Paribakht's (1994) study of intermediate level adult ESL students, those who were just doing extensive reading made smaller increases in word acquisition than those who read and completed accompanying vocabulary exercises. It has become more apparent that what it takes to infer the

meaning of an unfamiliar word is not necessarily what it takes to store it in one's memory, perhaps because the most immediate need – comprehension – has been met.

No one is advocating throwing out contextual guessing. (***)   More and more research points to the ineffectiveness of just using implicit vocabulary instruction and the need to accompany it with a much stronger word level or bottom-up approach than had been previously advocated (Haynes, 1993; Coady, 1993). In fact, explicit vocabulary instruction may also have an effect on students' overall interest and motivation in learning words, which may in turn explain how students receiving explicit instruction have improved comprehension not only of texts which contain the targeted words but also of texts which do not (Stahl and Fairbanks, *op. cit.)*. The pendulum has swung from direct teaching of vocabulary (the grammar-translation method) to incidental (the communicative approach) and now, laudably, back to the middle: implicit and explicit learning.

Explicit teaching
Current research, therefore, would suggest that it is worthwhile to add explicit vocabulary to the usual inferring activities in the L2 classroom (Haynes, *op. cit.;* Coady, *op. cit.;* Stoller and Grabe, 1993; Wesche and Paribakht, *op. cit.)*. Nevertheless, the question remains about how best to implement this kind of vocabulary instruction in the classroom. Throughout the literature, these pedagogical themes emerge: build a large sight vocabulary, integrate new words with the old, provide a number of encounters with words, promote a deep level of processing, facilitate imaging and concreteness, use a variety of techniques, and encourage independent learner strategies. I will now discuss each item in turn.

Build a large sight vocabulary
L2 learners need help developing a large sight vocabulary so that they may automatically access word meaning. However, which words should be focused on: high frequency words or difficult ones? There is support for both approaches. Learning the 2,000 most frequent words in English can be very productive. Analyzing one text for young native speakers and another for native speakers on the secondary level, Nation (1990) found that 87 per cent of the words were on the high frequency list. The teaching of such word lists has proven to be a successful way to learn a large number of words in a short period of time. In fact, learners are capable of acquiring a list of anywhere from 30-100 L2 words with their L1 equivalents in a hour and remember them for weeks afterwards (Nation, 1982; 1990). In the years ahead, technology will undoubtedly aid students in mastering this list. Coady, *et al.* (1993) experimented with computer-assisted learning of the 2,000 most frequent words in English and concluded that using computers to learn the list was an efficient use of time and that emphasizing the list was valuable because it resulted in higher reading proficiency.

Some lists to consider using are the 2,000-word *General Service List of English Words* (West, 1953), the *Cambridge English Lexicon* (Hindmarsh, 1980), and the *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English* (McArthur, 1981). For academic English, Xue and Nation's *University Word List* (1984) has been shown to provide worthwhile returns for the learning effort involved (Nation and Kyongho, 1995). (***)

Finally, because motivation affects intention to learn and, consequently, attention to commit something to memory (Baddeley, 1990), letting students choose the words they want to learn is another option (Haggard, 1982.; Stoller and Grabe, *op. cit.*). Haggard's *Vocabulary Self-Collection Strategy* is effective because words chosen for class work and vocabulary journals come from students' lives and content area classes and they recognize the importance of learning those words. Whether they are self-selected words, difficult words, or high frequency words, the point is to work consciously on the development of a large corpus of automatic word knowledge. This may mean scheduling ten minutes at the end of an instructional period, a class session per week devoted to vocabulary, or on-going homework, such as vocabulary notebooks.

Integrate new words with the old
According to lexico-semantic theory, humans acquire words first and then, as the number of words increases, the mind is forced to set up systems which keep the words well-organized for retrieval (Lado, 1990). The human lexicon is, therefore, believed to be a network of associations, a web-like structure of interconnected links (Aitchison, 1987). If L2 students are to store vocabulary effectively, instructors need to help them establish those links and build up those associations. When students are asked to draw on their background knowledge, their schema, they connect the new word with already known words, the link is created, and learning takes place. (***)

Provide a number of encounters with a word
According to Richards (1976), knowing a word means knowing how often it occurs, the company it keeps, its appropriateness in different situations, its syntactic behaviour, its underlying form and derivations, its word associations, and its semantic features. It is highly unlikely that an L2 student will be able to grasp even one meaning of a word in one encounter, let alone all of the degrees of knowledge inherent in learning a word. But as the student meets the word through a variety of activities and in different contexts, a more accurate understanding of its meaning and use will develop. Various studies create a range of 5-16 encounters with a word in order for a student to truly acquire it (Nation, 1990: 43-5). Therefore, an important aspect of this gradual learning is that the instructor consciously cue reactivation of the vocabulary.

Reencountering the new word has another significant reward. According to theories of human memory (Baddeley):

> ...the act of successfully recalling an item increases the chance that that item will be remembered. This is not simply because it acts as another learning trial, since recalling the item leads to better retention than presenting it again; it appears that the retrieval route to that item is in some way strenghtened by being successfully used. (*op. cit.:* 156)

When a word is recalled, the learner subconsciously evaluates it and decides how it is different from others s/he could have chosen. He continues to change his interpretation until he reaches the range of meanings that a native speaker has (Beheydt, 1987). Every time this assessment process takes place, retention is enhanced.

In addition, if the encounters with a word are arranged in increasingly longer intervals, e.g. at the end of the class session, then 24 hours later, and then a week later, there is a greater likelihood of long-term storage than if the word had been presented at regular intervals. According to this concept of graduated interval recall, the length of the word, its frequency, and whether it is a cognate for the learner will affect the number of recalls necessary; however, instructors can generally rely on the 'ideal' schedule (Pimsleur, 1967). Therefore, the teacher needs to provide initial encoding of new words and then subsequent retrieval experiences. A number of common games can be employed in classrooms to recycle vocabulary, e.g. Scrabble, Bingo, Concentration, Password, Jeopardy. As they provide yet another encounter with the target words, they have the advantage of being fun, competitive, and consequently, memorable.

Promote a deep level of processing
Better learning will take place when a deeper level of semantic processing is required because the words are encoded with elaboration (Craik and Lockhart, 1972). This doesn't mean that simply repeating items, 'maintenance rehearsal', will not lead to retention. It will. However, according to Baddeley *(op. cit.)* providing 'elaborative rehearsal', richer levels of encoding, will result in better learning. When students are asked to manipulate words, relate them to other words and to their own experiences, and then to justify their choices, these word associations are reinforced. Students need to be encouraged to think aloud, give reasons for their word choices, and to extend their learning of the world outside of the classroom, e.g. report when they encounter the target word in the real world (Beck, McKeown, and Omanson, 1987). (***)

Facilitate imaging and concreteness
According to the dual coding theory of human memory (Clark and Paivio), the mind contains a network of verbal and imaginal representations for words:

> Learning foreign vocabulary **...** involves successive verbal and nonverbal representations that are activated during initial study of the word pairs and during later efforts to retrieve the translations. (1991:157)

When learners image to-be-learned material, the possibility for later recall is much greater than if they only make verbal links. To build verbal representations in the memory instructors need to present vocabulary in an organized manner. Since it is harder to memorize random material, arrange vocabulary in units, introduce it in stages and summarize. To build non-verbal representations, elaborate: make illustrations, show pictures, draw diagrams, and list detail. Capitalizing on verbal and non-verbal links appears to be worthwhile; however, a word of caution is necessary regarding which words are initially presented together. If the linked words or representations include both similar and different features, such as in the case of antonyms, cross-association may take place. This may result in the words actually being more difficult to learn (Higa, 1963).

Another aspect of the dual coding theory is that learning is aided when material is made concrete (psychologically 'real') within the conceptual range of the learners. This may mean giving personal examples, relating words to current events, providing experiences with the words, comparing them to real life or better yet, having students create these images and relate the words to their own lives. (***)

Use a variety of techniques
In 1982, Nation argued that those students who were most successful used several vocabulary learning strategies and this mixed approach continues to be advocated (McKeown and Beck, 1988; Stoller and Grabe, *op. cit.*). A mixed approach is particularly appealing to students because it breaks up the class routine while building a variety of associational links. It also has a greater chance of harmonizing with the various verbal and non-verbal learning styles which different students may have.

There are a great number of instructional ideas for teachers to choose from, some more traditional than others. I have divided them into six categories: 'dictionary work', word unit analysis, mnemonic devices, semantic elaboration, collocations and lexical phrases, and oral production.

1 **'Dictionary work'**
Most collecting and maintaining of vocabulary can be termed as 'dictionary work', i.e. routines which focus on the word and its definition. The definition may be in L1 or L2. 'Dictionary work', especially the copying of words (Thomas and Dieter, 1987), provides an opportunity to set up memory links from visual as well as motor traces.

Some examples of 'dictionary work' are:
a) highlighting the word where found and glossing its meaning in the margin
b) copying the word a number of times while saying it or while visualizing its meaning
c) copying the word and then looking up the definition
d) copying the word, looking up the definition, and then paraphrasing it
e) creating a set of index cards of the words or morphemes and their definitions or words with pictures
f) matching words with definitions, in conventional exercises or on computer vocabulary programs

'Dictionary work', including practising good dictionary skills, is useful as an independent vocabulary acquisition strategy. Since students may come to the language classroom without these study skills, it is helpful to expose them to a variety of ways to practise words and their definitions and let them choose the manner which is comfortable for them.

2 **Word unit analysis**
The number of words to be acquired in a new language can be overwhelming. The estimates of the number of words in English range from half a million to over two million (Crystal, 1988), but native speakers have a much smaller number of words in their receptive or productive vocabularies depending on their age and educational background. For example, an undergraduate might only have a vocabulary of 20,000 words (Nagy and Anderson, 1984; Goulden *et al.,* 1990). This is still a huge number of words to acquire, but L2 learners can depend on their background knowledge of word parts to attack new vocabulary (Nation, 1990; Haynes, 1993).

Teachers could choose to systematically teach the important affixes and word roots in the target language although the list would be daunting. (***) A less-structured approach to word parts is to sporadically ask students to analyze words. For example, in one course I have taught for several years, the word *innate* routinely comes up and students rarely know the meaning of the word or its root, *'nat'*. However, once we review what the prefix *'in'* means, and I elicit other words containing the root *'nat' (native, natural, nation, nationality, prenatal),* someone in the class can infer the meaning, *birth,* from their understanding of the brainstormed words. In this way, word unit analysis asks learners to compare the new word with known words in order to get to their core meaning. Because it demands a deeper level of processing and reactivation of old, known words with the new, it has the potential of enhancing long-term storage.

3 **Mnemonic devices**
Mnemonic devices are aids to memory. They may be verbal, visual or a combination of both. Advocates of mnemonic devices believe that they are so efficient in storing words that the mind is then freer to deal with

comprehension (Cohen, 1987). The most common verbal mnemonic device is using the rhyming of poetry or song to enhance memory. According to Baddeley (1990), this combining of rhyme with meaning has a very powerful effect on retention. That many of us can still remember lines from songs taught in our first year in a foreign language class attests to the powerfulness of this memory aid. Regarding visual devices in early stages, students can benefit from word/picture activities which set up mental links. Because of personal investment, student-generated visuals are even more memorable. A classroom version of the party game Pictionary is usually a lively, productive way to associate a picture with a word. Days later, holding up their hurried drawings, students will remember the target words they laboured to visualize for their team.

Of all the mnemonic devices, the most often studied with the most impressive results is a technique which employs both an acoustic and a visual image: Atkinson's (1975) keyword method. The keyword method has two steps: the student chooses a word in L1 which is acoustically similar to the one to be learned and then creates a visual image of that L1 word along with the L2 meaning. For example, to teach the Turkish word for door *'kapi'*, an English speaker could choose the slang word for policeman, *'cop'*, as being acoustically similar and then imagines a policeman pounding on a door. Every time the student encounters the word *'kapi'*, the image of the policeman will be reinvoked, thus leading to the meaning of 'door'. Although effective with all age groups, children find this technique to be an especially enjoyable way to learn vocabulary. Student-generated images have been found to be effective (Levin *et al.,* 1992.), but images can also be provided by the instructor. It can be assumed that while creating these images, stronger links are set up since they require the student to do deeper mental processing as they integrate the new word with a familiar one. (***)

4 **Semantic elaboration**
Although relatively little empirical research has been done on the effectiveness of semantic strategies on vocabulary acquisition, the theoretical base for using them appears to be sound. Both Hague (1987) and Machalias (1991) conclude that meaningful exercises or classroom activities which promote formation of associations and therefore build up students' semantic networks are effective for long-term retention. These kinds of activities have been mentioned earlier because of their importance in integrating new words with old, promoting deep levels of encoding, and establishing concreteness. In addition, there is evidence that combining semantic elaboration with the keyword approach builds memory traces, i.e. mental records of the experience, and retrieval paths which are stronger than those created by the mnemonic device alone (Brown and Perry, 1991). Four techniques for semantic elaboration are discussed below: semantic feature analysis, semantic mapping, ordering, and pictorial schemata.

i. Semantic feature analysis
Channell (1981) argues for including semantic feature analysis, the analyzing of the meaning components of words, in teaching and learning. Such analysis has also been recommended for reviewing activities (Stieglitz, 1983). In semantic feature analysis students are asked to complete a diagram with pluses and minuses (or yes's and no's) as a way to distinguish meaning features. The following is Channell's example of a grid for being surprised, in this case using only pluses to indicate the presence of a feature.

	affect with wonder	*because unexpected*	*because difficult to believe*	*so as to cause confusion*	*so as to leave one helpless to act or think*
surprise	+	+			
astonish	+		+		
amaze	+			+	
astound	+				+
flabbergast	+				+

Figure 2 Channell, 1981

ii. Semantic mapping
Semantic mapping generally refers to brainstorming associations which a word has and then diagramming the results. For example, when asked to give words they thought of when they heard the word *'faithfulness'*, low-intermediate ESL students generated sixteen words or phrases: *cat, friend, family, reliance, trust, dishonest, unfaithfulness, believe in friendships, bonds, obey, dog, friendly, sexually, unfaithful, gossiping,*

marriage, love. After clustering words which they felt went together, they mapped the relationships between these words as follows:
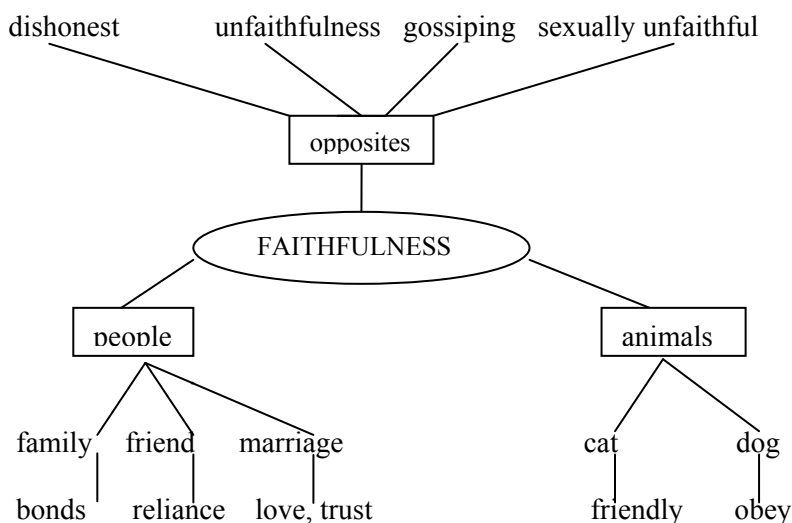
dishonest   unfaithfulness gossiping sexually unfaithful

opposites

FAITHFULNESS

people   animals

family   friend   marriage   cat   dog

bonds   reliance love, trust   friendly   obey

Figure 3 Sökmen,.1992

Both these techniques come with cautions, however. Stoller and Grabe *(op. cit.)* warn that overusing them to introduce new words or less frequent vocabulary with L2 learners may result in overload. Moreover, it is easier to create such exercises with low frequency vocabulary than with high.

iii. Ordering
Ordering or classifying words is another technique which helps students distinguish differences in meaning and organize words to enhance retention. When students are asked to arrange a list of words in a specific order, organizing the words will integrate new information with the old and, therefore, establish memory links. (***)

iv. Pictorial schemata
Creating grids or diagrams is another semantic strategy. Lindstromberg (1985) found using pictorial schemata, i.e. different types of grids, to encourage lexical ordering was more efficient than using synonyms. Whether they are teacher- or student-generated grids, these visual devices help students distinguish the differences between similar words and set up memory traces of the specific occurrence. Scales or clines, Venn diagrams, and tree diagrams are especially interesting for group work when teachers present words for these pictorial schemata in scrambled order. Students are then asked to unscramble the words by putting them in logical order. Since there will be differences of opinion on this kind of exercise, distinguishing features of the vocabulary will become more evident.

1. Arrange in order from *happy* to *sad*: upset, pleased, overjoyed, broken-hearted, indifferent.
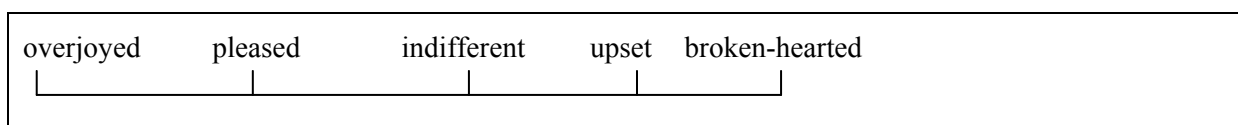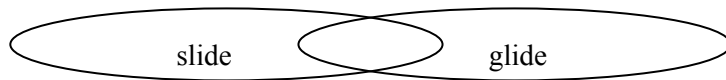Scale or cline:

overjoyed   pleased   indifferent   upset broken-hearted

Figure 4. Lennon, 1990

2. Illustrate how *slide* and *glide* are different.
Venn diagram:

on ice...   *across* ice   *through* air...
maybe accidentally   probably not accidentally
maybe clumsily   gracefully,
                                                  without (much) effort

Figure 5 Lindstromberg, 1985

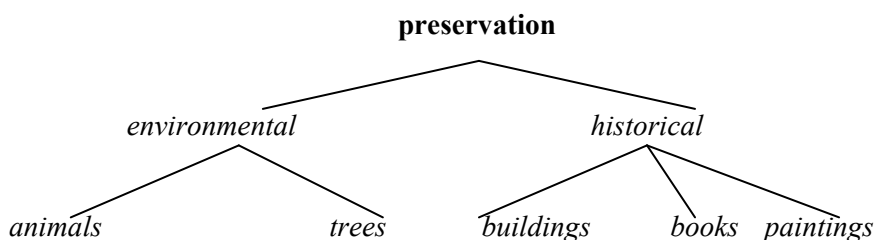3. Classify the parts of *preservation.*
Tree diagram:

Figure 6 Low-intermediate ESL students

These semantic techniques ask students to deeply process words by organizing them and making their meanings visual and more concrete. Nation (1990) cautions, though, that when words are initially presented in semantically-related groups, interference can occur, which can make the words difficult to learn. He advises that semantic techniques are better used as review activities. In addition, as the above figures illustrate, grids and scales work better when distinguishing the differences between words which are above the high-frequency word list.

5 Collocations and lexical phrases
Since collocational relationships, words which commonly go together, appear to have very 'powerful and long-lasting' links in the lexicon (Aitchison, *op. cit.*), providing opportunities to practise collocations is a worthwhile activity. Using grids to measure students' collocational competence, Channell *(op. cit.)* found that students made few incorrect collocations but failed to see all of the possible co-occurrences. This is obviously fertile ground for expanding learners' understanding of vocabulary. Here is an example of a collocation exercise:

Match adjectives with nouns in as many combinations as possible:

    Adjectives:
    inefficient
    sufficient
    enough
    limited

    Nouns:
    time
    responsibility
    decision
    process
    money
    understanding
    office

Teaching collocation activities may mean simply heightening awareness by having students maintain a record of which words they are finding in the company of their target words. As a group activity, index cards can be used for matching halves of collocations. There are even computer programs which provide practice collocating (Fox, 1984). A more productive skill activity is having students write new words in original sentences and then creating a list as a class of the possible collocations generated by the group. (***)

Lewis (1993) takes collocations a step further in his lexical approach, which is based on the principle that language is actually 'grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar'. Consequently, he argues the teaching of 'chunks', groups of words which frequently occur together, warrants more class time than the teaching of grammar. (***)

6 **Oral production.** Oral activities using to-be-learned words have the advantage of breaking up the class routine, getting students out of their seats, and experiencing words in a variety of ways with aural and oral reinforcement. Beginning on the most structured end of the oral communication spectrum is memorizing and acting out dialogues. According to Nation (1990), dialogues have the advantage of putting words directly into productive vocabulary. A similar but less structured technique, role-playing, is an option for more spontaneous oral practice of vocabulary.

Another more traditional activity, translation, has been found effective in building vocabulary in linguistically homogeneous advanced classes. This activity does not have to be a dry, non-interactive exercise. Heltai's (1989) oral translation activities involve such communicative activities as pair work, information gaps, and group discussion while summarizing and paraphrasing the text to be translated. In a similar way, having students read and discuss or retell a selection is another common technique which quite naturally results in students' repeating vocabulary and chunking words (Allen and Allen, 1985).

Variations on the oral interview provide a range of communicative practice with target vocabulary. Students can share one-on-one how a word relates to personal experience, rotate to new partners, or snowball to increasingly larger groups. Information gathering activities also highlight target vocabulary. One example is autograph activities. Students are given a list of questions (e.g. Who has the greatest number of siblings? Who is trilingual?) and must roam around the room, finding a classmate who fits the question. A similar activity is the information gap. In this kind of exercise each student has different pieces of the whole and must move around the class, asking questions using target vocabulary until the information is complete. All of these oral activities may be used to expose students to new vocabulary as well as to reactivate vocabulary in the iterative process words need to go through in order for long-term retention to take place.

Encourage independent learning strategies
It is, of course, not possible for students to learn all the vocabulary they need in the classroom. The final theme in current trends is to help students learn how to continue to acquire vocabulary on their own. All of the trends discussed so far culminate in this last point of emphasis. Students come to the classroom knowing that vocabulary acquisition is crucial to their skill in using a second language. There is no need to motivate them to want more words under their command. When vocabulary gets the attention it deserves, that is, when instructors model explicit methods of vocabulary acquisition which require deep processing and plan re-encountering of words, students not only learn words but experience what Resnick calls a 'cognitive apprenticeship' (1989).

In this apprenticeship, they learn that vocabulary acquisition is a task that involves their active participation, collaborating with classmates and also requiring personal, quiet, self-reflective periods (Rubin *et al.,* 1994). When new words are integrated with past knowledge, learners realize that their past experiences are valuable and that they have the skills to process degrees of meaning, image, and make concrete a huge body of words in another language.

An important step in being independent is to recognize one's own style of learning. Doing a variety of classroom vocabulary exercises will expose students to possible strategies which they may discover feel right for them, accommodating their verbal or non-verbal cognitive styles. Graves (1987) recommends helping students develop a personal plan of vocabulary acquisition since most vocabulary learning will take place outside of the classroom. One way to aid their insight is an evaluation of what techniques are working. For example, a questionnaire might include these questions:

> Do I learn vocabulary more easily doing speaking activities with my classmates?
> Am I comfortable analyzing word parts? Do I like learning word roots?
> Does it work better for me to collect words or index cards or to make word lists?
> Do games help me learn?
> Do I remember words better when I illustrate them?

Ellis and Sinclair's (1989) student book, *Learning to Learn English,* contains useful self-assessment activities for vocabulary learners, which focus on attitudes about learning vocabulary, setting realistic short-term aims, personal strategies, and organizing vocabulary learning.

Another aspect of encouraging independence is to teach ways to learn vocabulary. Language teachers need to design class activities which capitalize on metacognitive training so that students are learning different ways to practise words and expand meaning while they are acquiring them. One approach is vocabulary notebooks (Schmitt and Schmitt, 1995). Students may keep their notebooks on index cards or in a loose-leaf binder. Words they encounter are placed on individual pages and they are translated, L2-L1. As other knowledge is discovered about the word, such as collocations, semantic association, frequency tallies, roots and derivations, they are added to the page. On a regular basis, students are asked to go through their notebooks, adding more information, in order to elaborate understanding of the words and rehearse their meanings.

Another approach is illustrated in interactive, student-generated lessons of *Common Threads; An Interactive Vocabulary Builder* (Sökmen, 1991). An introductory vocabulary activity elicits 'seed words' from the group, which may or may not be known by the whole class. Then the class does a series of expansion exercises which build on the seed words and broaden their understanding of these words in relationship to other words. Finally, students re-examine their collection of words through review activities. Following the directions of 50 different activities, students are able to create the vocabulary exercises, learn new words, and also ways to learn new words.

Conclusion

The renewed importance of vocabulary instruction will continue to interest and be a fertile area for the efforts of second language researchers, materials writers, and instructors in the new century. The first challenge is to systematize the vocabulary of English. Advances in technology will help us collect and analyze current and specialized corpora, such as ESP, spoken English, and academic English, and to develop better descriptions of collocations and lexical phrases. This work will be increasingly more significant as textbook writers and practitioners strive to provide more explicit vocabulary practice. Once we know more about the system and the metalanguage to discuss it, teacher training programs will be better able to prepare L2 instructors to teach vocabulary in a principled and systematic way.

Secondly, more research on the effectiveness of methods of vocabulary instruction is necessary. Three crucial areas are semantic elaboration, ways to productively learn collocations and lexical phrases, and computer-assisted vocabulary activities.

Finally, we need to take advantage of the possibilities inherent in computer-assisted learning, especially hypertext linking, and create software which is based on sound principles of vocabulary acquisition theory. At present, a good deal of vocabulary software is decidedly lacking in variety of exercises and depth of processing. There is a need for programs which specialize on a useful corpus, provide the expanded rehearsal, and engage the learner on deeper levels and in a variety of ways as they practise vocabulary. There is also the fairly unchartered world of the Internet as a source for meaningful vocabulary activities for the classroom and for the independent learner.

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Collocational competence
Jimmie Hill

When I first started teaching English, we were encouraged to think of grammar as the bones of the language and vocabulary as the flesh. The 'skeleton image' has now been consigned to the proverbial cupboard and the current view is that language consists largely of prefabricated 'chunks' of lexis. The key feature to the formation of these chunks is 'collocation', the thought of which scarcely entered my head for the first 15 years of my career, but which for the past ten has come to dominate my thinking about English teaching. (***)

What is collocation?
Every word has a collocational field, i.e. that range of other words with which it collocates. Very often the difference between words of similar meaning is defined partly by their different collocational fields. How many teachers have tried to explain the difference between *wound* and *injury?* The two do share some collocates *(nasty, fatal, serious,* etc), but some are very strongly linked to one or other *(internal + injury,* but *bullet, stab, knife, gunshot, self-inflicted, gaping* and *deep + wound).* It seems that when we have checked the meaning of a word in a conventional dictionary, we have only started on the process of knowing it.

This is not new. Even if the word 'collocation' is new to students (and to some teachers, for whom the basic unit of language is still the individual word), the concept is not. We've all heard the question, *Can you say X?* and had to give the reply, *'Well, no, not really. It's just not English. We don't say it.'* The reason why we don't say it is usually to do with collocation.

Corpus linguistics has taught us the importance of looking at natural language in large enough quantities to see recurring patterns of lexis. Any analysis of naturally-occurring text shows how densely collocations occur. While it can be difficult to define the boundaries of a collocation, every text I have analysed has seven out of ten words occurring in some kind of collocation; even a figure of 50% would have serious consequences for comprehension and choice of text.

There are immediate classroom implications for how we deal with texts. We should be focusing on collocations by asking students to predict them using gap-filling exercises. We should be asking students to notice and underline useful collocations, translating complete collocations rather than individual words, and working out systems for storing them in their notebooks so that they are retrievable.

Stop for a moment. Re-read the article so far and underline all the groups of words which occur in predictable combinations. (Some answers at the end of the article.)

Different kinds of collocation
Collocations consist of two or more words. Simple examples might be:

verb + noun	*make a mistake*
adjective + noun	*heavy traffic*
adverb + verb	*totally misunderstand*
adverb + adjective	*extremely generous*
adjective +preposition	*guilty of (-ing)*
noun + noun	*a ceasefire agreement*

They can be much longer. When analysing text we often find that collocations of six or more words are common, for example *seriously affect the political situation in (Northern Ireland).* Anyone who looks at examples of text with an open mind must immediately be persuaded to stop thinking in terms of individual words.

The English language teaching world has always recognised two types of collocation where the patterns have been clear: idioms and phrasal verbs. Everything falling outside those two categories was conveniently but

confusingly, labelled 'idiomatic'. Some of the lexical categories proposed by Michael Lewis in *Implementing the Lexical Approach* help us to think more coherently about lexis from a student's point of view.

1 Unique collocations
We can think of collocation on a scale from `probably unique', through `fixed, strong' to `flexible, weak'. I say `probably' unique, since as soon as I say that X does not exist, I come across it within 24 hours! I have often used the example *leg room* (meaning the distance between two seats in, for example, a plane) and maintained that *leg space* was not possible. Recently, though, I discovered that the correct technical term in the airline industry is, in fact, *leg space*. (***)

2 Strong collocations
A large number of collocations, although not unique, are very strong, in that the words occur frequently in a particular combination. We often *have ulterior motives* or *harbour grudges* while being *reduced* or *moved to tears*. Further examples might be *trenchant criticism* or *rancid butter,* even though we might well come across other things which are *trenchant* or *rancid.* Such strong collocations are not unique, but it is clear that any knowledge of the words *trenchant, rancid, motive, grudge,* or *tears* would be incomplete without some idea of their strong collocates. The new corpus-based dictionaries often contain information about strong collocations, but they remain patchy in the quantity and quality of information.

3 Weak collocations
Even elementary students create combinations of words which verge on the area we define as `collocation', ie those words which co-occur with `a greater than random frequency.' Colours are a good example.

Early on, students learn the primary colours. They are able to make combinations such as *blue shirt, red car,* etc, which will be similar in their own language. The picture is not as simple as that, but for most teaching purposes we pretend that it is. However, there is something 'more predictable', more fixed, and therefore collocational, about *a white shirt, white wine, red wine, red hair, black hair, a blue film* or *a yellow submarine!*

Many things can be *long* or *short, cheap* or *expensive, good* or *bad.* The adjective *good* occurs in many weak collocations, in that it can be applied to almost anything: a meal, a journey, a government. But even this all-purpose word finds strength in:

> *It'll take you a good hour.*
> *Oh, he's a good age.*
> *He'll do it in his own good time.*

We need to recognise that even simple words have many uses, even if our primary duty to our students is to make sure that they are aware of the more predictable collocations.

4 Medium-strength collocations
The main learning load for all language users is not at the strong or weak ends of the collocational spectrum, but, as with so many aspects of language learning, in the middle. This is where the many thousands of collocations which make up the most part of what we say and write occur. Most intermediate students know the words *hold* and *conversation,* but may not know the expression *hold a conversation.* They know the words *make* and *mistake,* but have not stored *make a mistake* in their mental lexicons as a single item.

Consider the example of the average '*Sun* reader' in the UK, i.e. a native speaker often of less education and with a `smaller vocabulary' than the '*Times* reader', the so-called educated native speaker. Interestingly, *Sun* readers are still collocationally competent with the smaller number of words they have, and it is this which enables them to function perfectly adequately in most normal situations. I speculate that a total vocabulary of 5000 words is adequate for all day-to-day linguistic functions, as long as the user is collocationally competent with those 5000. Size is not the issue. It's what you do with what you've got! This would explain why learners with even 'good vocabularies' still have problems. They may know a lot of words, but typically their collocational competence is very limited.

My view is that the main thrust of vocabulary teaching in the classroom at intermediate level and above should be to increase students' collocational competence with the basic vocabulary they've already got. It is

relatively easy for them to acquire individual words in their own time.

For example, (***) *he's recovering from a major operation* is a complex medium-strength collocation in that it seems to consist of three collocations: *recover from, a major operation,* and the whole expression *recover from a major operation.* Each individual word may be known to students, but they are unlikely to produce the whole collocation. They are more likely to say: *My father ... he's getting better ... he had a big operation.* Full marks for communicating meaning, but more of an effort for both speaker and listener. It is this area of medium-strength collocation which is missing from traditional dictionaries.

Fluency
You may very well look at this last example and ask why students need to learn to say something the way native speakers say it. Why not just make it up? The answer cannot be over-emphasised: *collocation is the key to fluency.*

Native speakers can only speak at a relatively fast speed because they are calling on a vast repertoire of ready-made language in their mental lexicons. Similarly, their reading and listening comprehension is 'quick' because they are constantly recognising 'chunks' of language. The main difference between native speakers and non-native speakers is that native speakers have met more examples of the language. It is this that enables them to process and produce language at a much faster rate than the average student.

Much of the published material which aims to teach fluency concentrates on getting students talking. This is futile if students haven't got enough 'chunks' of language to draw on. All that happens in such lessons is that students are exposed to the low-quality output of other students. Typical intermediate student speech uses simple vocabulary to express both simple and complicated ideas and is a laboured putting together of one word at a time. I propose that we should be placing a much greater emphasis on *good-quality written and spoken input* at all language levels to enable them to develop their awareness of the lexical nature of language, and thereby to recognise and eventually produce longer chunks themselves. Fluency is a natural consequence of a larger and more phrasal mental lexicon.

Collocational competence
We are familiar with the concept of communicative competence, but perhaps we should add the concept of collocational competence to our thinking. Any analysis of students' speech or writing shows that this lack of collocational competence is one of the most obvious weaknesses. Students could easily invent the cumbersome *His disability is forever* because they lack the adjective+noun collocation *He has a permanent disability.* Analysis of students' essay writing often shows a serious lack of collocational competence with the English 'de-lexicalised' verbs *get, put, make, do, bring, take.* Students with good ideas often lose marks because they don't know the four or five most important collocates of a key word that is central to what they are writing about. When students do not know the collocations which express precisely what they want to say, they create longer utterances which increase the likelihood of further errors.

The pronunciation pay-off
Because students create most of what they say from individual words, their pronunciation, stress and intonation can be difficult for the listener. The added bonus of collocations is that students learn the stress pattern of each item as a whole. As they learn more and longer lexical items, their stress and intonation is bound to improve – and they will be better able to concentrate on the content of what they are saying.

There are immediate methodological implications. Teachers should read aloud in class so that students hear texts correctly chunked. *We should avoid asking students to read aloud unless they have had time to prepare.* We should do less silent reading, which students find difficult because they don't recognise the chunks; they read every word as if it were separate from every other word. During silent reading students may be chunking totally wrongly, and they cannot store items in their brain correctly if they have not identified them correctly. If they are not stored correctly, they cannot be retrieved.

The role of memory
Collocation is intrinsic to all natural native speaker language – and is therefore a normal component of students' use of their own language. Every parent knows how children love to hear the same rhymes and stories night after night until they know them by heart – and woe betide the parent who misses out a word!

As adults we all have a huge store of memorised text in our heads. Think about all the addresses, telephone numbers, proverbs, idioms, sayings, clichés, catch phrases, jokes, songs and snatches of poetry that pop into your head, often unwittingly. These are not things we have put any effort into learning, we just know them. How do I know *the quality of mercy is not strained, coughs and sneezes spread diseases, flavour of the month, free gratis and for nothing, each and every one of us, don't forget the fruit gums Mum,* and even *That's the way the cookie crumbles?* I may rarely use them, but the fact of the matter (itself a good example) is that everyone has a vast store of these fixed expressions. We have an even bigger store of simple collocations, ready for use when required.

The issues
Many teachers are trying to incorporate lexical ideas into their teaching, and what we now know about the nature of English lexis and collocation raises important issues for us all.

1 Lexis should be one of the central organising principles of the syllabus. Unfortunately, grammar (sentence grammar) still rules.

2 When we redefine vocabulary as words, collocations, multi-word items, and expressions, the vocabulary learning load is very much greater than we used to think. Educated native speakers have many hundreds of thousands of items stored in their mental lexicons. We need to question the 'present, practice, produce' paradigm and think more about quantity of input. The teacher's role should change from language practiser to language provider.

3 We need different strategies for vocabulary learning at different stages of learning. Beginners need words plus simple collocations and expressions. In class, intermediate students need collocational competence with the words they know; outside class they need to be increasing their store of new words. Advanced students need more and better strategies to build on what they know, while vastly increasing the number of words they meet outside the classroom.

4 We need to give more thought to how best to manage learning in class. Students need to become 'collectors of lexis' with techniques for recording and storing lexis in ways which allow for easy retrieval.

5 The language of many current textbooks and syllabuses is at odds with our current understanding of language and how it is acquired. This needs to change. There is no point in teachers changing their classroom practice if students then fail examinations.

6 How does this affect examinations? Clearly, it is easier to test the Present Perfect Continuous than 'collocation'. Given the size of the mental lexicon, is it even fair to attempt to test it? Who chooses which items are tested? Why those and not others?

7 There are implications for reference books too. Conventional dictionaries cannot give all the necessary information about collocation. A fresh look needs to be taken at bilingual dictionaries, since translation may be one of the keys to dealing with collocation.

8 Translation may regain its importance. Apart from the fact that many learners (especially in business) have to do it, lexis is an area where literal translation is often impossible. A collocation in English may be totally different in Spanish or Japanese. The unique skills of the non-native speaking teacher will come to the fore in this area.

9 There are obvious implications for grammar teaching. Greater emphasis on lexis means less emphasis on grammar. Accuracy must be treated as a late-acquired skill. Considering language in 'larger chunks' also means that grammar and vocabulary merge into one another. The dividing line is much less clear cut than teachers and textbooks often pretend.

10 Finally, and crucially, all this raises the issue of what our model should be. English is taught throughout the world, predominantly by non-native speakers, so that their students can communicate mostly with other non-native speakers. Yet collocation is dictated by the native-speaker community. The English language teaching profession considers that the mistake in *she work in a hospital* is something that teachers should be

concerned about. Is the missing `-s' on *work* really important? Does it matter if a student always uses *a big/small operation* and never uses *a major/minor operation?* Is collocation worth learning? Is it really the key to fluency or is it just one more way for the native speaker establishment to force its methodologies and materials on non-native speakers? At present we have more questions than answers.

Recent developments in corpus linguistics have forced us to change our view of language. It is time for a re/evaluation of many of our accepted ideas about learning and teaching. Corpus linguistics is going to change the content of our teaching. These ideas on collocation are only the first rumblings.

Some collocations from the beginning of the article: *encouraged to think, consigned to the cupboard, a key feature, for the first X years of my career, has come to dominate my thinking, made a significant contribution, at its simplest, such as, etc.*

There is nothing as practical as a good theory
Morgan Lewis

from Lewis, M. (Ed.) 2000. *Teaching Collocation.* Hove: Language Teaching Publications

Introduction
Seeing the title of this chapter, you might have assumed that the chapter was written by an applied linguist who will remove you from the classroom into the far off land of academia. In fact, I am a regular classroom teacher with about ten years' experience of teaching mostly multi-lingual classes in the UK.

Perhaps like you, after a few years in the classroom, I began to question some of the received wisdom of my initial training. The Present-Practise-Produce paradigm I started with seemed such a neat, tidy and sensible way to go about teaching. I increasingly found, however, that learning did not follow the same tidy model. I seemed to have less control over what students were learning than my initial training had led me to expect. I began asking myself questions some more explicitly than others – such as:

- Why is it that what my students learn doesn't more closely resemble what I teach? Should I spend so much time trying to achieve accurate grammar from my students? Should my lesson plan rule the proceedings?
- What is the most efficient way of improving students' performance, given they don't have a lot of time to learn the language?
- What can you really do for those 'intermediate plateau' students who need a breakthrough and a feeling of progression?
- What can you do for advanced students after they have met the third conditional? And what is 'advanced' English anyway?

I began an extended period of extra study free from the constraints of day-to-day lesson planning and thinking about my particular students. This allowed me to stop being preoccupied with my teaching for a while and as a result, I found myself drawn more and more to considering the nature of language itself, and the nature of language learning – what the process in which I was engaged and for which I was trained was really all about. Surprisingly, my initial training had not included study of this at all. It was concerned exclusively with how the teacher should teach; learners and learning were hardly discussed at all. (***)

I very soon came to two broad conclusions. Firstly, there was no guarantee that learners learn what teachers teach. Secondly, the grammar/vocabulary dichotomy was spurious, and the central role of grammar, at least as defined within my training, probably needed to be re-evaluated.

Making slight methodological changes in the light of these conclusions would not have satisfied me. I needed to get below the surface, explore the theory which lies behind classroom procedures, and decide what the real implications for the classroom could be. Let me explain in more detail how I came to these conclusions and show how they relate to the importance of teaching collocation in the classroom.

Learners don't learn what teachers teach
Although it is hard for many teachers to accept, it simply is not true that our students necessarily learn what we teach them. Teaching is, on the whole, organised, linear and systematic, but it is a mistake to think that learning is the same. Learning is complex and non-linear, and although the result may be a system, its acquisition is far from systematic. We cannot control what students learn, in what order they will learn and how fast they will learn. As Diana Larsen-Freeman writes in a disconcerting footnote to an article in the journal *Applied Linguistics:* 'I am constantly reminding students, audiences and myself that teaching does not cause learning.'

This has had an important implication for the way I teach: I no longer expect students to master an item or items of language before exposing them to more. Expecting mastery in the immediate short term is an unrealistic expectation. The fact is, they may or may not acquire what you teach them. If they do, they may acquire it immediately, later or only partially. (***)

What has this to do with teaching collocation? Imagine a student produces *He's a strong smoker*. You could simply supply the student with the standard collocate – *heavy* – and move on. But an ideal opportunity to activate language on the edge of the student's lexicon has been missed. It requires very little extra time or explaining to add: *occasional, chain* and *non* as more collocates of *smoker*. Given that you cannot know whether students will remember and use *heavy smoker*, you might as well give them three more. They might remember none, one, two of them or all of them. Adding collocation to your teaching by consciously introducing one or two new words and re-activating other half-known words in this way increases the chance of acquisition taking place, though you cannot be at all sure what the acquisition encouraged (but not 'caused') by this particular bit of teaching will be.

One of the questions I posed for myself after teaching for a number of years was the extent to which my lesson plan should dominate proceedings. These days, I am less concerned about achieving the language aims in my plan and more concerned about spotting and responding to opportunities like the *heavy/occasional/chain/non-smoker* scenario – whether prompted by a student error or finding a collocation in a text to which I can add a handful of other useful collocates. This mindset is perfectly captured by Peter Wilberg's discussion of responsibility in *One to One,* and quoted by Michael Lewis at the beginning of *The Lexical Approach:* "The teacher's main responsibility is response-ability."

> TASK
> How much control do you think you have over what your students learn? Do you still try to follow your lesson plan fairly rigidly? How willing are you to forget your plan and respond spontaneously with unprepared input?

Knowing a word is complicated

Related to the point that learners don't necessarily learn what we teach is the fact that teaching tends to be linear and step-by-step in nature, whereas learning is holistic, cyclical and evolves over time. This is because new input means individual learners constantly need to make adjustments to what they have already internalised. Learning is not simply additive; it involves the learner re-organising his or her previous interlanguage. For example, learners do not really understand the present perfect until they understand the present simple and the past simple too, and the relationships that the meanings of all these different verb forms have with each other. Tenses are not understood in isolation from each other and it follows that learners' understanding of a particular tense develops as they encounter different uses of that tense and see it used or not used in preference to, and in (implied) contrast with, other tenses.

The same principle of meeting new uses, and becoming more aware of 'negative' choices – choosing one item implies rejecting several similar alternatives – applies to items of vocabulary. Take the word *injury*. This word can be understood by a student from its dictionary definition and all will be fine until the student comes across the word *wound*. S(he) then has to reassess what *injury* means in the light of the new discovery, a discovery the teacher may wish the learner had never made when the learner asks: *What's the difference between 'wound' and 'injury'?* One's instinct – and my initial training – leads you to answer such a question by trying to **define** the difference between pairs of this kind, but this only leads to problems and what are at best half-truths. The difference between the two does not lie in dictionary definitions but rather that we say, for example, *stab wound* not *stab injury,* and *internal injuries* not *internal wounds*. In other words, it is the **collocational fields** of the two words which reveal the difference of meaning, or rather more precisely, the difference between the ways the words are used.

From the classroom point of view, if learners are slowly but continually evolving their understanding of the target language, whether grammar or lexis, it follows that giving students collocations of words newly or previously met will widen their understanding of what those words mean and – more importantly, how they are used. Taking a few minutes to supply these collocations in a lesson shortcuts the process of building up meaning and therefore acquiring. If you do not actively introduce additional collocations, it may be weeks, months or years before students meet those collocations and therefore the process of evolving and deepening understanding is delayed. Actively introducing collocations recycles half-known words and, while this does not directly cause learning, it accelerates it.

Some teachers might say at this point that there is not enough time to explore the collocations of words in this way – there are too many other important things to do, particularly explaining things. A great deal of time is spent in many classrooms explaining what things mean. For the reasons above, I suggest that at least some of that time is better spent showing students what words do – how they are **actually used** and how they collocate rather than explaining what they mean. Explaining and exploring is surely better than either alone.

The intermediate plateau
Referring to my earlier question: *What can you really do for those 'intermediate plateau' students who need a breakthrough?* A big part of the answer lies in the strategy just discussed. The reason so many students are not making any perceived progress is simply because they have not been trained to notice which words go with which. They may know quite a lot of individual words which they struggle to use, along with their grammatical knowledge, but they lack the ability to use those words in a range of collocations which pack more meaning into what they say or write. The answer lies in teachers continually bringing useful collocations to students' attention and helping them to remember them, rather than trying to improve their grammar or giving them a lot more new words, which can so easily mean obscure, rarely used words. Most intermediate students would improve dramatically if they spent less time trying to perfect their grammar and learn new, rare words, and instead simply learned to use the words they already know in the huge number of collocations of which these words are parts.

A shift in approach of this kind will almost certainly need to come initially from the teacher as (s)he trains students to re-direct their priorities in ways which are most likely to produce both perceived and genuine progress.

The grammar-vocabulary dichotomy is invalid
So much of language teaching over the years has been based on the dichotomy of grammar and vocabulary: master the grammar system, learn lots of words and then you will be able to talk about whatever you want. This view of language has meant that students have learned to name a lot of things – an extensive vocabulary, predominantly nouns – and then struggled to use grammar to talk about those things. No wonder students make so many grammar mistakes! They are using grammar to do what it was never meant to do. Grammar enables us to construct language when we are unable to find what we want ready-made in our mental lexicons. But so much of the language of the effective language user is already in prefabricated chunks, stored in their mental lexicons just waiting to be recalled for use.

These chunks of lexis which include collocations, do more than just name things, they also have a pragmatic element. They enable you to talk about things – to 'do' things. This raises the status of collocation to much more than just 'words which go together'. Many collocations have immediate pragmatic force or are situationally evocative. For example, it is hard to think in which situation someone might say: *This is a corner.* But if I say to you: *This is a dangerous corner,* it immediately suggests two people in a car as they approach a corner where lots of accidents have happened. The collocation *dangerous corner* is immediately evocative of a situation or a speech event. Notice, it is not simply that an adjective has been added to the word *corner.* The item *dangerous corner* exists as a prefabricated chunk with its own sanctioned meaning. Taking it apart would do damage to what it does, even what it is. Therefore, what collocation has put together, let no teacher pull apart! (***)

Advanced English

I refer back to another of my earlier questions: *What can you do for advanced students after the third conditional? And what is 'advanced' English anyway?* Advanced students become frustrated when they are unable to talk or write about ideas which they can comfortably talk or write about in their mother tongue. More complicated or this-will-challenge-them grammatical structures do not help them to do this. Unfortunately, this has been the standard diet of many advanced materials, encouraging learners to produce such convoluted gems as: *Were I richer, I would definitely buy one* or *Had I not arrived in time, the kitchen would have caught fire.* The language which helps learners to communicate more complicated ideas is not convoluted grammar structures like these, but different kinds of multi-word phrases, particularly densely packed noun phrases *(firm but relaxed parental discipline, modem cities in the developed world, the continuing decline of educational standards)* and, adverbial phrases *(in marked contrast, referring back to my earlier point, later that year, in the late twentieth century).* As the first two adverbial examples show, among the most important phrases are those which create cohesion across written text. The important thing to note is that all these multi-word phrases are collocations of different kinds.

I no longer worry about how to challenge my advanced classes with obscure grammatical constructions or unusual words. I simply keep my eyes open when using a text for collocations which I can bring to their attention and which we can then explore together.

An important point to make is that very often the words in the collocations are not new or difficult at all. For example, the item, *a major turning point* does not include any individually difficult words for an advanced student but this very fact means that both teacher and student can too easily assume it is not worth their attention. In fact, it is often true to say that neither learners nor the teacher even **recognise** it as a new item, so an extremely useful collocation slips by unnoticed and is therefore unavailable for storage and re-use by the learners.

Asking students: *Are there any words you don't understand?* is, therefore, not a helpful question. They may indeed understand all the words but fail to notice the combinations those words are in. My questioning of students now goes more like this:

T   Is there anything in the first paragraph you think you should write in your   notebooks?   (silence while students
        scan the paragraph) Nothing?
SS   No.
T   Are you sure? 1 don't believe you. (more silence and looking)
        What about the expression with *risk?* In all my time as a teacher
        I've never heard a student say or write *run the risk* of.
        Perhaps my students have never noticed it.
        Do you use this expression? (general shaking of heads)
        Perhaps you have never noticed it either. OK, write it in your notebooks, then.

Being more proactive in pointing out useful language and getting learners to record it is an essential role of the teacher. (***) I have found that higher level students sense very quickly that they are gaining useful ground when collocations are drawn to their attention in this way. Because they are being equipped to say or write more complicated ideas, a new sense of satisfaction, and therefore motivation, develops. (***)

So, having laid a theoretical basis for collocation having a central role to play in the classroom, let us consider some practical ways this can be done.

Some classroom activities

1. Don't correct – collect

Knowing a noun allows you to name a concept, but this is a long way from being able to talk about the concept. So, a learner who makes a collocation mistake when trying to talk about something provides the ideal opportunity to expand and organise the learner's lexicon in a very efficient way, similar to the *strong smoker* example discussed earlier. Don't just correct the mistake, give some extra collocations as well – three or four for the price of one. The transcript below shows how this works.

S   I have to make an exam in the summer.
      (T indicates mistake by facial expression)
S   I have to make an exam.
T   *(Writes 'exam' on the board)*
      What verb do we usually use with 'exam'?
S2   Take.
T   Yes, that's right. *(Writes 'take' on board)*
      What other verbs do we use with 'exam'?
 S2   Pass.
T   Yes. And the opposite?
S   Fail.
T   Yes.
      (Writes 'pass' and 'fail' on the board)
      And if you fail an exam sometimes you can do it again.
      What's the verb for that? *(Waits for response)*
      No? OK, re-take. You can re-take an exam.
      (Writes 're-take' on the board)
      If you pass an exam with no problems, what can you say? I passed ...
S2   Easily.
T   Yes, or we often say 'comfortably'. I passed comfortably.
      What about if you get 51 % and the pass mark is 50%?
      What can you say? I ... *(Waits for response)*
      No? I just passed. You can also just fail. *(Writes on the board)*

For advanced learners you may also give them *scrape through.* I use formats similar to this to organise the responses:

take	
re-take	
pass	an exam
fail	
scrape through	

With this language, students can not only **name** the concept *exam,* they have the collocations they need to **talk about** exams with confidence.(***)

2. Make learners be more precise

It is obviously demotivating if every time students communicate effectively, the teacher nitpicks and asks for perfection. However, at the right time and in the right way, improving students' performance is an important part of the teacher's job, and what students need. So, if a student produces: *I was very disappointed,* point out the options: *bitterly/deeply disappointed.* Or if a student writes: *There are good possibilities for improving your job,* you may want to write *excellent promotion prospects* in the margin. In other words, it's not just mistakes that are opportunities for teaching but also the kind of circumlocutions we discussed earlier. If you notice the roundabout expressions which are the symptom of the lack of the necessary lexis you will frequently recognise opportunities for helping students be more precise or more concise.

3. Don't explain–- explore

When students ask *What's the difference between*, for two words of similar meaning such as *wound/injury* discussed earlier, rather than spending too much time explaining the difference, give three or four contextualised examples of each word - that is, provide the appropriate collocational language. For example, with *make* and *do* you might give: *make a mistake, make an enquiry, make the most of the opportunity; do your best, do some overtime, Can you do me a favour?* and so on. The same procedure is particularly useful with those nouns which have very little meaning unless used in collocations, such as: *effect, position, action,*

point, way, ground. (If you look in a collocation dictionary, you will see that these nouns have very large collocational fields. The most important part of 'knowing' a word like this is knowing a large number of its collocations.) Consider this classroom scenario:

T   …yes, that's a good point, Marco
S   Excuse me but you said 'point' again. You say it in every lesson but it's   sometimes different.
         What does 'point' mean?
T   Point ... well, we use it in different ways, and it's very common. Here are some typical ways we use it. *(Writes on the board):*
         Why do you want me to do that? I can't see the point;
         I know you want to come but, the point is, you're not old enough.
         That's a good point. I hadn't thought of that.
         I always make a point of saying thank you to the bus driver.
         It's difficult to say exactly what *point* means but you could learn these expressions and there are lots more so let's see if we can collect more. If you hear me use one, stop me and we'll write it with the others. If you meet one outside the class, write it down and tell us at the next class. When you look at them later, try to think what expressions you would use in Italian to express the same ideas. Check with Paola or another Italian speaker to see if you agree.

Although possibly more time-consuming than an explanation of *point,* surely meeting four typical uses is time better spent than trying to get to grips with what would have to be a vague, complicated and ultimately unhelpful definition.

4. If in doubt, point them out
One of the reasons students have not learned collocations is simply because teachers have not pointed them out in the texts they are using. This happens sometimes because the teacher's approach to dealing with the vocabulary in the text is to ask the class: *Are there any words you don't know?*

Collocations are missed with this approach because the words of the collocations may not be new, but the fact they occur together, and are worth noticing and recording together, must be pointed out by the teacher if students are not to 'look straight through' language which will expand their mental lexicons. Peter Skehan *(A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning)* makes a similar point when he writes:

> In this view, the role of instruction is not necessarily therefore in the clarity or in the explanation it provides, but rather in the way it channels attention and brings into awareness what otherwise would have been missed.

Simple questions such as *What's the verb before 'opportunity' in the first paragraph?* draw students' attention to collocations. Once that has been done let's say the verb was *miss* – quickly add some others: *take, grab, make the most of*, using the collection and recording technique discussed above.

Instead of asking questions, you can prepare a simple worksheet or use the board or overhead projector to list parts of the useful collocations in the text. I often do this while students are engaged in a more global reading task. They then have to go back and search the text for the missing parts of the collocations. For any collocations which are worth adding to, I elicit or give more very quickly. Do not assume students are noticing collocations and recording them for themselves. They won't unless you train them to. I have found that after a short period of time, students begin to ask me about collocations in texts – whether they are worth recording – and they also ask for extras because that is what they have learned to expect from me. (***)

5. Essay preparation – use collocation
Students sometimes complain that they lack ideas when sitting down to write a composition on a prescribed topic. Teachers complain that they do not want to spend half the class time telling students what to write. There is a simple answer. Many teachers brainstorm words connected with the topic in class before setting the composition for homework. When the words are on the board, the next step is to add, where possible, useful collocates to each word. It is particularly important to introduce the nouns which will be central to the content of the essay. As we saw with the *exam* example above, this provides students with language items with more communicative power than individual words can offer. (***)

6. Make the most of what students already know

Some students already know a lot of 'simple' words but are not aware of what those words can do for them because they haven't noticed their common collocations. I regularly take such words, usually nouns, and brainstorm adjectives and verbs which students think go with those nouns. Very often, these collocations are already half-known by students – they sense they have met them before – but they have not yet internalised them. Time spent on half-known language is more likely to encourage input to become intake than time spent on completely new input. Again, Skehan suggests that "… very often the pedagogic challenge is not to focus on the brand new, but instead to make accessible the relatively new". (***)

7. Record and recycle

It is becoming clear that the lexicon is much bigger than anyone previously thought. This implies a greater memory load, an increased learning load – or certainly an increased input load – and this being the case, careful and systematic recording of collocations which ensures accurate noticing of useful language is essential. During class time, I encourage students to write down collocations in their main note-taking books and ask them to transfer them later into the collocation section of their lexical notebooks using formats such as the one shown earlier. As much as possible, I encourage students to record collocations in topic groups.

I use a simple and time-efficient approach to recycle collocations. Before the lesson, I make a list of all the collocations I want to recycle but delete part of each collocation before photocopying the list for each student. Students then search their notebooks to fill in the missing part of the collocation. If the collocations came from the same text, I sometimes ask students to reconstruct the main content of the text, or parts of the text, using the collocations as prompts. This activity has the added usefulness of encouraging and including those students who may have trouble answering comprehension questions about the text for linguistic reasons but who are able to participate by remembering parts of it, however falteringly.

One important point: when deciding which part of the collocation to delete, leave the word or words which most strongly suggest what the missing part is. For example, for the collocation *a window of opportunity,* it would be better to delete *opportunity,* as *a window of…*is more helpful than *opportunity.* Your choice of deletion, therefore, is a principled one with the aim of **helping** learners to remember, not trying to make the task artificially difficult.

A slight variation is to dictate part of the collocation and students have to remember or find the missing part in their notebooks before I dictate the whole item.

Other ways of recycling include: domino-type games – match the cards end to end by matching the collocations; 'find your partner' activities where two-word collocations are split between members of the class who then have to find their 'partner'; or a simple memory game with cards placed face down on the table and, in groups, students take it in turns to turn over two cards at a time hoping to find the collocations. A helpful principle to work with for recycling is little and often, with some variation. (***)

Conclusion

For many teachers, collocation is just another way of presenting vocabulary, and perhaps once every other unit of the coursebook, an exercise on two-word collocations appears and it is seen as a welcome change to the regular vocabulary building that goes on. Indeed, that is how I saw it up until about three years ago – useful, but peripheral. Teachers who do not stop to consider, or fail to grasp, the theoretical basis behind the teaching of collocation will only play at introducing it into the classroom. There will be no deep commitment to giving it a prominent role – the old arguments will crowd it out: *There isn't enough time to explain everything. There won't be enough time to practise. They won't remember all that. They still can't do the present perfect!* However, if we take a deeper look at the non-linear, unpredictable and holistic nature of learning, the nature of natural language – the way it is organised, the way it is stored in, and recalled from, the mental lexicon collocation will become so central to everyday teaching that we will wonder whatever took up so much of our time before.

Vocabulary notebooks: theoretical underpinnings and practical suggestions
Norbert Schmitt and *Diana Schmitt*

In spite of the recent surge of interest in many aspects of vocabulary learning, little has been written about what constitutes a good vocabulary notebook. This article attempts to address this perceived gap by first deriving eleven principles from language memory and language research which can serve as a guide in the creation of a pedagogically-sound notebook. Drawing from these principles, a design for vocabulary notebooks is presented which emphasizes the incremental learning of vocabulary, and different aspects of word knowledge. Suggestions are then made for integrating this kind of notebook into classroom activities. A sample schedule is provided to illustrate how notebooks can be introduced into a class.

Introduction
In recent years, proponents of learner-based teaching have promoted the idea of giving their students the tools and strategies to learn independently (O'Malley and Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990). In terms of vocabulary learning, one way of achieving this is to have them keep vocabulary notebooks. These do not replace other forms of vocabulary learning, such as extensive reading, learning implicitly through task work, or explicit classroom vocabulary exercises, so much as supplement them by focusing on a limited subset of words. The use of vocabulary notebooks is widely advocated (Allen 1983: 50, Gairns and Redman 1986: 95-100, McCarthy 1990: 127-9), but many teachers are unsure how best to advise students on setting up well-organized and pedagogically-sound notebooks of their own. This article aims to give teachers practical advice on this matter, by highlighting findings from memory and language research, suggesting how these can be applied to the design of a sound vocabulary notebook, and showing how this component can be added to a course.

Memory and vocabulary acquisition
The following eleven principles need to be considered when designing any vocabulary programme. Most come from general memory research (reviewed by Baddeley 1990), while others have been developed by language researchers.

1. The best way to remember new words is to incorporate them into language that is already known
According to Baddeley, (ibid.: 145) the principle of incorporating new knowledge into old is so widely accepted as a basic requirement of learning, that learning itself can in some respects be considered a 'problem-solving exercise in which one attempts to find the best way of mapping new learning onto old' (ibid.: 198). Old-established words are part of a rich network of interwoven associations. If new words can be integrated into this network, those associations can facilitate their recall. Conversely, a word which has not yet been integrated will have only its individual features to aid the student in its retrieval. (For more on this, see Stoller and Grabe 1993: 33-6.)

2. Organized material is easier to learn
It is much easier to learn information that is organized in some way than to remember unrelated elements (Baddeley 1990: Chapter 8). For example, which of the following lists, consisting of the same numbers. would be easier to learn in order?
>   a.   7, 3, 9, 6, 1, 8. 2, 4, 0, 5
>   b.   0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

There is a wide variety of ways in which words can be organized to facilitate learning – in hierarchies, for instance, or as synonyms and antonyms, or parts of speech. (For more details, see Gairns and Redman 1986: 69-71, McCarthy 1990: 15-22, or Carter and McCarthy 1988: Chapter 2)

3. Words which are very similar should not be taught at the same time
Although organization can facilitate learning, teaching words together which are too similar can be counter-productive. With a pair like *left* and *right,* learners often confuse which word applies to which direction. In addition to learning the meanings of the two words, the learner has the additional burden of keeping them separate. This 'principle of interference' applies to formal similarities as well. If *affect* and *effect* are taught together, they are likely to become cross-associated in the learner's mind. Higa (1963) found that words which were strongly associated with each other, such as antonyms, were more difficult to learn together than words which had weak connections, or no relationship at all. One way to avoid interference between two similar words is to teach the more frequent word first, and only introduce the second item after the first has been firmly acquired.

4. Word pairs can be used to learn a great number of words in a short time
Nation (1982:16-18, 22-4) reviewed research on using word pairs (native word/L2 target word) and concluded that average learners were able to master large numbers of words (thirty-four word pairs per hour in one study) using this technique. He also concluded that this learning does not wear off quickly. In a study by Thorndike (1908), more than 60 per cent of the words were still remembered after forty-two days. These results led Nation (1982) to suggest that word pairs are a good way of giving initial exposure to new words. For adult EFL learners who have already developed the concepts underlying most new L2 words, word pairs may be especially useful for quick exposure to the new L2 labels for those concepts. However, despite these advantages, there are also some problems. Most word pairs are only partly synonymous, with potential cultural, stylistic, or grammatical differences (Gairns and Redman 1986: 23). Also, while in regular use context reduces the risk of misunderstandings, in word pairs, words are presented in isolation. Since the long-term goal is to tie the L2 word directly to meaning, rather than to an L1 word, it is important to enrich these initial translated meanings and so give the learner a fuller understanding of the target word.

Nation (1982:20) also explains that consideration must be given to the order of the word pairs: studying an L2 word and trying to recall its L1 meaning is appropriate for words that only need to be recognized in reading, while an Ll-L2 order is best for words which need to be used productively.

5. Knowing a word entails more than just knowing its meaning
Word pairs may be good for the initial learning of a word's meaning, but several additional kinds of word knowledge are necessary for native-like control. These include knowledge about a word's form (spelling and pronunciation), its grammatical characteristics, its root form and derivatives, its frequency, its relationships to other semantic concepts *(diamond: hard, weddings, expensive),* the words it commonly appears with *(blonde* occurs with *hair* but not with *paint),* and its stylistic qualities *(ask* is a neutral term, *request* is more formal) (Richards 1976, Nation 1990: 30-3).

6. The deeper the mental processing used when learning a word, the more likely that a student will remember it
The 'Depth of processing hypothesis' states that mental activities which require more elaborate thought, manipulation, or processing of a new word will help in the learning of that word (Craik and Lockhart 1972; Craik and Tulving 1975): Deeper, richer semantic processing, such as creating a mental image of a word's meaning, judging the formality of a word, or grouping the word with other conceptually associated words, will be more likely to enhance learning than shallower processes such as rote repetition.

7. The act of recalling a word makes it more likely that a learner will be able to recall it again later
The 'retrieval practice effect' (Baddeley 1990: 156) requires students to use vocabulary techniques that call for the production of new words as soon as possible. To begin with, students are usually forced to rely mostly on receptive activities, such as word pairs in an L2-Ll order, to discover and practise the meaning of new words. After that, if the goal is productive capability, switching to activities which require production of the target word, such as using it in written sentences, will improve the chances of future recall.

8. Learners must pay close attention in order to learn most effectively
Although implicit learning can occur when learners are not paying specific attention to language, Cohen (1990:143--8) argues that the most efficient learning happens when learners are concentrating their mental resources on the task at hand. Ellis (forthcoming) distinguishes between the types of word knowledge learnt

implicitly and explicitly: word recognition and speech production systems are largely learnt through exposure, but knowledge about semantic meaning needs attention and elaborative practice to be remembered.

9. Words need to be recycled to be learnt
The seemingly obvious principle that learners cannot be expected to learn a word fully on the first exposure has been confirmed by empirical studies. In several studies summarized by Nation (1990: 43-5), learners need from five to sixteen or more repetitions to learn a word. Nagy *et al.* (1985) placed the chances of eighth-grade students learning an L1 word from context in one exposure at only 10-15 per cent. If recycling is neglected, many partially-known words will be forgotten, wasting all the effort already put into learning them (Nation 1990: 45).

10. An efficient recycling method: the 'expanding rehearsal'
When studying language, most forgetting occurs soon after the end of the learning session. After that major loss, the rate of forgetting decreases. Taking this into account, the 'principle of expanding rehearsal' suggests that learners should review new material soon after the initial meeting, and then at gradually increasing intervals (Pimsleur 1967, Baddeley 1990: 156-8). One explicit memory schedule proposes reviews 5-10 minutes after the end of the study period, 24 hours later, one week later, one month later, and finally six months later (Russell 1979: 149). Students can use the principle of expanding rehearsal to individualize their learning. They should test themselves on new words they have studied. If they can remember them, they should increase the interval before the next review, but if they can't they should shorten the interval. Landauer and Bjork (1978) combined the principle of expanding practice with research results (demonstrating that the greater the interval between presentations of a target item, the greater the chances it would subsequently be recalled) to suggest that the ideal practice interval is the longest period that a learner can go without forgetting a word. Research by Schouten van Parreren (1991: 10-11)) shows that some easier words may be 'overlearnt' (in the sense that more time is devoted to them than necessary), while more difficult abstract words are often 'underlearnt'. A practice schedule based on the expanding rehearsal principle may help in avoiding this problem.

11 Learners are individuals and have different learning styles
There has been a recent emphasis on learner enablement, in which teachers consider their students' desires and individual differences in an attempt to allow them some voice in the curriculum, as well as to teach them how to learn independently. When dealing with vocabulary, Allen (1983: 9-10) suggests that teachers should create a need for new words if they want them to be learnt. One way of doing this is to let students pick the words they want to study (Gairns and Redman 1986: 55-7; McCarthy 1990: 90). This fits in with the general recommendation that teachers should not be too prescriptive when teaching learning strategies. Since students may have diverse learning styles, or simply different ways in which they like to study, the best teaching plan may be to introduce students to a variety of learning strategies and techniques and then let them decide for themselves which ones they prefer.

Setting up a vocabulary notebook
This section will illustrate what a vocabulary notebook based on as many of the above principles as possible might look like.

Formats
The notebook should be arranged in a loose-leaf binder, an index card binder, or on cards which are kept in a box. The advantage of these formats over traditional bound notebooks is that the pages can be taken out and moved around to facilitate expanding rehearsal; pages with better-known words can be put further back in the binder, and lesser known words put towards the front. In addition, this arrangement allows words to be organized into groups, which can make learning easier. Cohen (1990: 35-6) proposes several word-grouping possibilities, including topics, parts of speech, themes, speech acts, and even separate sections for productive and receptive words. (see Gairns and Redman 1986: 69-71 for additional groupings.) However, it is best to avoid placing words which are very similar to each other in these groupings until they are known well enough not to be cross-associated. Cards have an additional advantage in that their handy size makes them convenient to carry around, and easy to study in odd minutes of free time. (For more on word cards, see

Brown 1980.) The pages or cards should be large enough to include the elaborate information it is suggested students add to their word listings.

Writing word pairs
Given the usefulness of word pairs as a way of gaining initial exposure to a word, a good first step is writing word pairs in the vocabulary notebook. Once the students have discovered the Ll translation for an L2 target word from a teacher, textbook, or dictionary, they can initially practise it by looking at the L2 word and trying to remember its L1 translation. As soon as possible, they should switch to an Ll-L2 word-pair order to practise recalling the new word, because recall involves deeper processing than recognition. Alternatively, if students know an L2 synonym, they could use that instead of the L1 translation.

Enriching knowledge
Once the word has been learnt from the L1 translation or L2 synonym, it needs to be enriched with some of the other kinds of word knowledge, for example, the more common words with which it collocates. To facilitate this, the word card or page should be divided into sections, with each having enough space to write down a different aspect of word knowledge. A wide variety of activities could be used in the different sections, of which the following are only some of the possibilities.

- Semantic maps are useful in helping students visualize the associative network of relationships which exist between the new words and those they already know. Hierarchical trees may achieve the same purpose more clearly for words which are part of a superordinate or subordinate structure.

- Students can increase their awareness of the frequency of a word by keeping a tally of every time they hear or see it within a certain period of time, say a day or a week. Students might also keep track of words that seem to collocate with the new word at a noticeably frequent rate.

- Roots and derivatives in the word's 'family' can be learnt by studying what affixes are used to change its part of speech.

- Students might quickly sketch an illustration to prompt recall of the word. They could make notes on stylistic aspects of the word, or write a sentence illustrating its use.(***)

Recycling
The new words need to be recycled regularly to be learnt. A method of doing this that combines several purposes is to have students go back and fill in the above kinds of information on a scheduled basis. For example, students may sketch as many keyword illustrations as they can for a few days. After that, they might go back and list possible affixes for the words for the next few days. Later, they may try to draw semantic maps for a period of time. Still later, they may review the words by writing down other words which collocate with them. The key point is that students regularly go through their notebooks and do something with the words.

Learner independence
Learners can find information for some forms of enrichment, such as derivative affix information, in resource materials – a dictionary, for instance, or their textbook. They might also find it beneficial to work together in groups to find and develop other kinds of information. For some activities, such as semantic maps, they need only knowledge they already have. For others, teachers may have to provide some kind of information, such as stylistic nuances, in which case they may want to write the information on the blackboard and have students copy it, or perhaps photocopy small squares of information for the students to paste directly onto their cards. However, care should be taken not to spoonfeed too much information to students, as their individual efforts to discover and develop meaning enhance both their learning of vocabulary and their independence from the teacher.

Expanding rehearsal
Obviously, it would be too time-consuming to do all these enrichment activities with every word in the notebook. The principle of expanding rehearsal suggests that the words which are towards the front of the

notebook should be given the most attention. The words placed at the very front will probably still be only partially memorized at the L2-L1 translation level, but the memorized words placed behind them should be enriched as much as possible. One practice strategy would be to start at the beginning of the notebook and review all the words which are still at the receptive translation level, then begin the enrichment activity with the words which are at the productive level. This is not to say that the learner should not occasionally go towards the back of the notebook and spend time with the words which are better known, since even better-known words need to be enriched to achieve a native-like level of knowledge; it is just a matter of how much time and effort the learner is willing to expend. When a word eventually becomes known to the learner's satisfaction, it can be taken out of the expanding rehearsal rotation and be moved to a 'learned section' at the back of the notebook, or to a separate notebook or box to be stored in alphabetical order in case it is needed again in the future.

A personal word store
After an initial training period, in which students are shown different possibilities, they should be left free to choose their notebook activities. Some may even prefer to use an audio supplement to their notebooks, by putting some of the vocabulary information on cassette tapes, and listening to them in order to study. But learner autonomy goes further than students picking their own practice activities. The vocabulary notebook should become each student's personal word store. Although it may be desirable initially to give students lists of words to learn and put into their notebooks, teachers should also encourage them to find their own words from readings or class lessons. Eventually, the notebooks should become deposits for the words the students want to learn. Use of vocabulary notebooks is one learning strategy that can outlive the classroom and be a continuing resource, provided teachers encourage students to keep them independently.

Reviewing notebooks
Since students will put a great deal of information into this kind of notebook, much of it on their own, teachers should occasionally take the time to check what they have written for accuracy (Kramsch 1979: 155-6). It does no good to have students efficiently learning errors! Additionally, McCarthy (1990: 128) notes that teachers can learn much about their students' progress and problems by reviewing their notebooks.

Selecting words
A final consideration which should not be forgotten is the words themselves: which ones should be included and how many should be studied in a week? Some teachers may want their students to study lists such as the first 2,000 words on Thorndike and Lorge's list (1944) or on Nation's University Word List (available at: http://www.fiu.edu/~dwyere/academicvocab.html), while others will choose words from class texts or activities. In either case, the teacher should be careful to choose words that are frequent and that students are likely to encounter again in their studies. The number of words chosen will depend on the goals of the class. If the primary goal is to teach students how to enrich their word knowledge, twenty words per week should be sufficient. However, if the goal is to increase vocabulary, the number will have to be quite a bit larger.

Using vocabulary notebook activities
Teachers can keep vocabulary notebooks relevant by integrating them into as many activities as possible. One way of doing this is by planning classroom exercises which use the words in the notebooks, for instance, having students write short stories which include a certain number of words from their notebooks, having them listen to a story and list how many words from their notebooks they hear, or giving them one or two letters from the alphabet and asking them how many words they have in their notebooks which include the letters. Fountain (1980) suggests several word card games which could be used in the classroom, including versions of *solitaire, snap, concentration*, and *bingo*. Nation (1990: 138) lists six ways of reviewing words which could be applied to words in a vocabulary notebook, including asking students to break words into their roots and affixes, and having them suggest words which collocate with those written on the blackboard. Teachers could blow up a student's card or page on an OHP, or pin it up on a classroom wall, and have the class question the owner on its contents. Students could be put in pairs or groups to either teach or test each other on their notebook words. Outside the classroom, students can make notebook words relevant by taping cards to the physical objects they represent or are associated with, or by trying to use several notebook words in their regular conversations throughout the day. By promoting activities which encourage students to use

the words they are learning, teachers can make them feel their notebooks are more than just an academic exercise.

A sample schedule

The sample schedule given below shows how the use of vocabulary notebooks might be implemented in a class over a period of weeks.

Week 1

The first week has an activity every day so that students will get into the habit of looking at their notebooks regularly and begin to practise the principle of expanding rehearsal.

Day 1: Introduce the vocabulary notebook as an important course objective, and tell students what materials they need to buy.

Day 2: Introduce the ten new words for the week, and tell the students to use a dictionary to write L1 translations or L2 synonyms on the front of the card or page, and the new word on the back. Ask the students to choose ten additional words from this week's lessons, and write them in their notebooks.

Day 3: Using good learner's dictionaries, if possible, show the students where to find each word's phonemic transcription and part of speech. Ask them to write this information in their notebooks for all twenty words.

Day 4: Again using a learner's dictionary, have the students write the L2 definition of each word in their notebook. (This may be done using the dictionary definition or their own words). Show them how to find the meaning which best fits how that word has been used in class; this will be a lesson in using context.

Day 5: Collect the students' notebooks and skim through them to check that the information they have written is correct. Depending on the motivation of your students, you may want to give them some kind of mark for completing their homework. In order for the introduction of vocabulary notebooks to be a success, it is important that they be mandatory for an extended period of time, since it will take time for students to see the benefits of this type of study. If they are not encouraged, they may give up too soon. Give the notebooks back, so that students can study from them over the weekend. Tell the students to arrange the words according to how well they feel they know them.

Week 2

The following activities expand upon what was learnt in the first week, with the inclusion of information about derivatives.

Day 1: Introduce this week's ten new words. Give the students a worksheet which shows them how to form derivatives for the new words. Show them where to find information about derivatives in their learner's dictionaries. Tell them to write the new words, their L1 translations, and their derivatives in their notebooks.

Day 2: Ask the students to find ten additional words from this week's lessons and to write them, their L1 translations, and their derivatives in their notebooks.

Day 3: Tell the students that they should add the derivative information to all of last week's words, and all of last week's information to this week's words.

Day 4: Remind the students to continue working with their notebooks.

Day 5: Collect the students' notebooks and skim through them to make sure that the information is correct.

Week 3

In each subsequent week, teachers can introduce ten new words and a new strategy that will enrich their students' word knowledge. Initially, they will need to give explicit instruction in how to use each strategy. After that, class time should no longer be necessary except to remind the students to look for ten additional new words and to add any new information to the words already in their notebooks. Teachers should continue to make periodic checks of the notebooks both for accuracy and for compliance. This is a good chance to determine which strategies have been mastered and which need additional attention. Teachers should also check to see that words are moving to different sections in the notebook – a sign that students are gaining mastery over some words, and putting extra study time into others. Some teachers may wish to give their students periodic quizzes on words and strategies from the notebooks. Quizzes can be individualized by including both assigned words and self-selected words from each student's notebook.

As the number of words in the notebook grows larger, students will no longer be able to complete all information for each word. However, the minimum information for each word should include: L1 translation or L2 synonym, part of speech, phonemic transcription, L2 definition, and the word's derivations. After using their notebooks for a period of weeks, students should gain some sense of which other information they find beneficial.

Conclusion

The memory and language learning principles discussed in the first section serve as a guide to preparing an efficient vocabulary notebook. We should teach students to learn words from as many different perspectives as possible, encourage them to choose the learning activities which are best for them, and foster independent vocabulary study. The type of notebook advocated here is likely to be much more interesting than traditional notebook designs, and keep students actively engaged in the learning process long enough to gain some tangible results.

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Teaching vocabulary by oral translation
Pál Heltai

This article examines the conditions under which oral translation from a first language to a second language can be used as an exercise to build vocabulary. The potential of the exercise is dependent on the teaching situation. It is argued that oral translation can be made both interesting and useful under the conditions described and that the activity is not incompatible with the communicative approach.

Introduction

In recent years communicative language teaching has made considerable headway in Hungary, bringing a welcome improvement in the communicative competence of many language learners. Examiners at the Foreign Language Further Education Centre in Budapest, where national language examinations are taken, have been impressed by the increased communicative fluency of most examinees. Whatever the reason, once students have learnt or acquired the basic grammar and vocabulary necessary to get by, and once they have mastered a number of communicative and reduction strategies (see Faerch and Kasper 1980), they think they know the language. What they fail to realize is that they have learnt to get the best of a simplified code. Many students, even those aspiring to higher levels, are under the false impression that vocabulary is of secondary importance, provided they are skilled in getting round lexical problems. Clearly, this is not a situation that is helpful to students, especially, one might think, to advanced students.

Translation abused

Recently a lot of attention has been given to vocabulary. I would like to contribute to the debate by discussing the usefulness of translation in its development. Of course, translation has been given a bad name in modern language teaching. It has always been the whipping boy for complaints about language learning and teaching. It has been made responsible for interference errors, lack of communicative competence, boredom in the classroom, and for learning about the language instead of learning to speak it.

Most of these criticisms are justified. Translation was over-used in the past, and there is no reason why it should continue to be used as a major type of exercise at the elementary and intermediate levels. Not only was translation over-used, it was used inefficiently, too. Uninteresting, dull texts were set, and the exercise was not prepared; it was mostly a written exercise; there was heavy reliance on the bilingual dictionary, and translation was not integrated with other types of activities, if there were any.

I am convinced, however, that translation from a first to a second language, especially oral translation, can be streamlined, so that under given conditions it can be fitted in with the latest approaches to foreign language teaching. Discussion of the possible objections to the use of translation and to the *teaching* of vocabulary as distinct from *acquiring* vocabulary is outside the scope of the present article, which proceeds from the assumptions that teaching vocabulary is a feasible objective, and that translation can be a worthwhile exercise under the following conditions:

1 Translation should not be used where it does not belong. It should not be used excessively or to   the exclusion of other types of work.
2 A translation exercise should always be thoroughly prepared.
3 Proper attention should be paid to integrate it with other activities.
4 Measures should he taken to ensure that the exercise is interesting and motivating, both in the oral and the written mode.

Where does translation belong?
Translation belongs in the curriculum when translation is an end in itself; furthermore, when English is a foreign and not a second language; when students have reached the advanced level; when adult students are concerned; with adults whose previous learning habits predispose them towards conscious learning; when formal correctness is considered important; when students take an active interest in the formal aspects of the foreign language; and when the teacher speaks the same native language as his or her students.

There is no need to justify the use of translation when translation is an end in itself, but the other points may well require some explanation.

In countries where English is a foreign language, opportunities for naturalistic acquisition are few, thus formal teaching remains important. Imitation of naturalistic acquisition under conditions of formal teaching may be successful up to a point. However, since in such situations classroom work is not backed up by more intensive practice outside the classroom and is not motivated by outside needs, it is easy for the learner to reach a point where motivation to learn new vocabulary ceases. In those cases a more concentrated form of exercise is needed to counterbalance the tendency of learners to rely too heavily on communicative strategies.

Another consideration is interference: under conditions of teaching English as a *second* language it may be all right to say that most interference errors are not interference errors at all, but developmental errors that will disappear as learners learn more of the language (see Krashen and Terrell 1983). But one may wonder if that will happen under conditions of teaching English as a *foreign* language, when learners do not hear the language spoken outside the classroom, and what they hear spoken in the classroom most of the time is the interference-rich speech production of their peers. Thus a more conscious attitude towards interference errors might be helpful. It should also be noted that in countries where English is a foreign and not a second language, translation may be an end in itself even in general language courses, since advanced learners are often called upon to translate, either orally or in writing, for others who do not know the language.

Also, it can be argued that 'cognitively' oriented learners value translation because it helps their linguistic knowledge (at least they think so), and they feel that they must have a sound linguistic competence before they can see to the job of acquiring strategic competence. It has been my experience that such learners – and most adults belong to this type – benefit from a mixed approach that contains elements of the communicative approach and more traditional methods, and not from an approach that is communicative only. After all, formal correctness is an important consideration in the training of teachers and translators. I have found that certain aspects of the foreign language, both grammatical and lexical (for my learners, for example, the use of the definite article), tend to escape the attention of learners if translation is never used.

Naturally, translation has to be dispensed with in situations where the teacher does not speak the language of his or her students. But since many teachers do speak their student's language, this should he regarded as an asset. The problems for non-native teachers with respect to communicative teaching have been highlighted in an article in *ELT journal* by Medgyes (1986). On the credit side, however, those same teachers know the mother tongue of their students, and I see no reason why this potential should be left unexploited, provided that some or most of the conditions described in this section obtain in the given teaching situation.

Preparation of the translation exercise
Preparation begins by selecting an appropriate text, which can be a story from a newspaper or any other source. The text should be short, so that the students are able to remember it after reading or listening to it once. The prime objective is not to learn or teach new words, but to consolidate vocabulary and to clarify sense relations between words in meaningful contexts, and also to draw attention to cross-linguistic problems. Therefore, ideally the text should not contain unfamiliar vocabulary. However, it would be silly not to use an excellent text because it contains an unfamiliar item. If such an item is of key importance within the text, it can be presented and practised in advance of the exercise. The teacher should translate the text beforehand, noting the points where difficulties might be expected, and studying all the possible variations in grammar, lexis, and style that his or her students are likely to offer.

Preparation should be particularly careful on the lexical side: the teacher should check the meanings of synonyms, record the collocational properties of individual items, and study the relevant semantic fields. Such meticulous preparations may appear to be too exacting, but I am convinced that most teachers prefer devoting extra time to preparation, rather than facing a situation where they have to deal with vocabulary problems on an ad hoc basis, which frequently happens during the course of a role-play exercise, or when a group discussion develops and takes unexpected turns.

Integration with other activities
I have found that the translation exercise is best introduced by a short discussion focusing on the same topic as the text. Thus, if the text is about a controversial subject, the arguments for and against it can be discussed. In this way, much of the vocabulary that will be needed in translating the text will have been reactivated. This is an important consideration, since if they have not recently been practised, some of the lexical items found in the text might have slipped from the students' 'active' repertoire of words.

Integration with other activities can take various forms. A translation exercise may be preceded by grammatical and lexical exercises to provide additional practice on certain points, and also to prepare the translation exercise. Alternatively, the translation exercise can be used as a starting point for further oral practice. Translation can also be integrated with teaching *functions* in the foreign language. Thus, for instance, *the function of warning* can be practised in various communicative oral exercises, and then complemented with the more formal types of warning based on oral translation of written texts.

Interest and motivation
Translation should not be a dull exercise. First of all, the text to be translated must be interesting and/or relevant to the needs of the student. Interest may be aroused by purely linguistic means, too: the translation of a racy native-language expression into English will intrigue most students. Interest can also be created by applying the standard procedures of communicative teaching. An information gap can be created if only one student has the text, and invites comments after he or she has translated it for the class. Alternatively, if the text is a bit long, a selected student sums it up to the class and then the text is handed out to all of the students and a full translation is worked out jointly, making use of questions and comments from the whole class. Translation could be done as pair work, followed by discussion in class. To sum up, as Edge points out, there is no reason why 'a translation class should not benefit from a communicative and interactive approach.' (Edge 1986: 121; see also Becher Costa 1988: 11-12.)

All this sounds very much like a description of communicative exercises based on English-language newspaper items. The difference is, however, that in this case there is an additional exercise, i.e. translation, which of course provides additional practice. This additional practice might not be much of an advantage in itself, but, under the conditions listed above, there may be other advantages, which will be described presently.

Variations
I have tried some variations at the Foreign Language Further Education Centre in Budapest and at the College of Agriculture in Gödöllő with advanced classes:

1 I read out the text in Hungarian (the students did not have it) and a student was asked to provide a summary of the story in English. Other students were asked to add detail or offer alternative translations. Finally, a student was called upon to reproduce the complete story. The discussion of alternative translations always generated lively interest. The discussion itself was, of course, conducted in English.

2 With longer texts containing more sophisticated vocabulary, a useful technique was to read out the text in Hungarian and then to ask questions in English. Then students were asked to sum up or translate the story, either in pairs or as a whole class.

3 The text was handed out to the students, who were asked to mark the words that they thought could be omitted, simplified, or paraphrased in translation. A simplified translation was subsequently worked out by the class and the next exercise was to try and refine it, that is, to find more precise equivalents for the items

that had been circumvented. The conclusion of the exercise was sometimes to translate the same text (using a bilingual dictionary) as a home assignment. This type of exercise proved to be helpful in demonstrating the dangers inherent in dictionary use and the pitfalls of too close a translation. In many cases the original simplified translations turned out to be the best translations!

4 The students were asked to provide an oral translation after either listening to or reading the text. Then English texts relating to the same topic were handed out, and the students were asked to improve their translations, using vocabulary from the English text. This type of exercise was a sort of eye-opener for many students. It helped them appreciate the effects of interference and also the gaps in their vocabulary.

5 The translation exercise was conducted in the form of pair work. Student A had the text and translated it to Student B, who noted it down, compared it with the original, and commented on it.

Interference
Translation is a dangerous exercise, since it enhances interference from the mother tongue. One way of avoiding excessive interference is to use delayed translation (see Lado 108). Therefore, reading out the text was preferred to handing it out to students, and a few preliminary questions or comments were also used to delay the exercise. An alternative way of dealing with interference is to take it head-on and equip the students to fight it, enlisting help from contrastive analysis. Hints can be given of possible trouble spots, and positive transfer can be encouraged in those cases where it is possible.

Conclusion
The best use of translation as an exercise is, of course, for teaching translation as a skill. It can also be used as a supplementary exercise to practise and build vocabulary at the advanced level under the conditions indicated above. In my opinion, its advantages *under those conditions* are as follows:

1. The lexical requirements of a translation exercise are more foreseeable than those of an open exercise. For non-native teachers this is clearly an advantage.

2. Oral translation can be a very flexible exercise. It can be used to practise communicative strategies consciously, but it can also be used for the opposite purpose, to exclude the possibility of taking short-cuts by using reduction strategies, to make students devote attention to vocabulary, and to encourage them to extend their vocabulary into new areas, for example synonymic sets, collocations, and idioms.

3. Oral translation can be a convenient starting-point for either oral or written work.

4. Many adult students are reluctant to engage in role-play and other communicative exercises, while some students fail in such exercises simply because they do not have the sort of imagination or personality that such exercises, properly conducted, require. An oral translation exercise may in fact be a relief for them and their partners.

5. A well-conducted translation exercise can give students a sense of achievement.

6. Most oral work is primarily aimed at preparing the student to function in dialogues in informal situations. However, as speakers of a foreign language they will mostly need to function in neutral or formal situations, in both dialogues *and* monologues. Oral translation exercises might provide more practice in transactional interaction and redress the balance that is somewhat tilted towards dialogue and personal interaction in informal situations.

The effectiveness of oral translation in teaching vocabulary was difficult to assess, since the time devoted to the exercise represented only a small proportion of total class time, and it was closely related to other grammatical and lexical exercises and oral discussion. However, if student attitude is an indication of success, it was successful, since students certainly seemed to enjoy the exercise. Further work is required to assess objectively the advantages and disadvantages. I am confident that the advantages will outweigh the

disadvantages. If so, translation might indirectly, through contributing to the learning of vocabulary, help improve the learners' communicative fluency.

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Translation
Daniel Linder

Translation and English language teaching have not mixed very well over the last few decades. This is firstly because the traditional language teaching method known as grammar translation has been strongly rejected by the ELT profession since the introduction of newer methods, and secondly because translation into English as a real-world professional practice is commonly done by native speakers of the language. For these reasons, professional translation has traditionally been totally disconnected from ELT.

However, I believe that now is a good time to re-examine the use of translation for didactic purposes. Many teachers are returning to translation activities in the English classroom, and shedding their fear of admitting it, because they have always believed that translation is an effective tool for language learning. Also, since non-native models of English are increasingly gaining recognition as valid ends in themselves, ELT professionals are now employing into English translation activities and measuring their students' performance against these non-native models of language production.

Something old, something new
Basic language teaching methods throughout history have centred on translation, grammar-translation being only the most commonly known of them. However, many teachers associate the use of translation activities in the classroom with the use of grammar-translation as a method. This may be one of the reasons why they often reject translation, even though it is clear that using translation activities in the classroom does not imply that teachers are using grammar translation as a teaching method. When teachers associate translation activities with grammar-translation and other traditional methods of language teaching, they tend to consider such activities non-communicative and non-natural. This could be another reason for rejecting translation, even though the existence of communicative or natural approaches does not imply that all other methods and activities are non-communicative or non-natural.

As a reality check, consider that at present translation continues to be one of the main and most practical methods available for teaching classical and dead languages; and also bear in mind that communicative and other natural methods for teaching and learning modern foreign languages are not entirely new either. There are documented instances of these methods being used by teachers as far back as the 16th century.

Professional translation
The fact that translation, in addition to a language learning activity, is also a professional activity further clouds the issue. Professional translators take a text written in the source language, which is usually their second language, and usually their native language. The goal of professional translators is to produce a text in the target language that is as equivalent as possible in fit, function and form to the text in the source language. Language teachers get caught in a bind because they realise that:

-professional translation is a specialised skill that requires specialised training;
-translation into a foreign language, in this case into English, is a professionally unrealistic task for their students;
-word-for-word or literal translation into the students' native language, such as the translations they may use to guarantee comprehension of language content, is also a professionally unrealistic task;
-neither translation into English nor translation into a foreign language should be the focus of an English class.

Classroom translation
We may need to define the territory in which we can use translation in the classroom. We know that translation activities contain valid learning opportunities for our students but that translation should not be

used as a method, but rather as a classroom activity. We also know that the goal of translation should not be to produce professionally valid translations, but to produce English-language texts that provide learning opportunities in the process of creating them and in the examination of them as final products. Therefore, I believe that translation *activities* should be used in the English classroom, and they should be supported by communicative, natural language learning *methods*. The focus of these activities should be translation into English for promoting contextualised language use, discourse and textual-level language competence, and cultural transfer skills. Many teachers, especially those who work in an EFL context and those who are proficient in foreign languages, are now using translation activities in this way. They do this either by emphasising translation as *process,* in other words, by using activities that use the process of translation as a way of learning discreet language items, such as grammar, vocabulary and syntax, or by emphasising translation as product. This involves using activities that force learners to focus on producing a finished translation product in order to facilitate the learning of discourse/textual language items, such as linking words and expressions, coherence and cohesive devices, and context-specific language.

Translation procedures
As a general guideline, translation activities should be done regularly (once a week, twice a month) and they should involve production of a brief amount of English target text (no more than 100 words), although the length of the foreign language source texts will be longer for some of the activities. Texts should be selected that integrate easily with the curriculum and the activity type, and which are in tune with course objectives.

All translation activities in the English classroom should include at the very least one part and which students work in pairs or small groups, and another in which they discuss the activities as a whole class. This will ensure that there will always be both productive collaboration and reflective discussion of the English language texts, both while they are being produced and after they have been produced.

Teachers in EFL contexts who are not proficient in the language of their students, and teachers in ESL contexts who may have students who speak a variety of languages, can still apply many of these methods, particularly translation proper, gist translation and sight translation, because of the focus of the activities is on English text production , not accurate professional translation. If either one of these applies in your situation, have your students select the texts and limit your role to being the judge of the resulting English-language text without examining the original. e activities may not be as rich that way, but they will still work.

Here are several practical translation activities, all of which are also realistic activities from a professional translator's point of view. They are suitable for students aged 15 and over at an upper-intermediate or advanced level.

Translation proper (written only)
- In a professional context:
Whether professional translators receive their source texts in hard copy or in electronic format, they usually produce their final copy on computer by either creating a new document or by overwriting an existing one. English teachers could incorporate the use of computers with this activity and also with gist translation and cultural translation.

- For the English classroom**:**
Give the same short source text to all pairs or small groups. Have them produce a translation and compare orally the resulting translations as a whole group.

Jigsaw translation
Give each pair or small group a short part of a longer text, and ask them to produce a translation of it. Then have them photocopy their part so that there are enough copies to give the other pairs or groups in the class. Students then have to assemble the various parts and make the necessary changes to the entire text in order to make it coherent as a whole. They then discuss as a class the changes that each pair or group has made.

Gist translation (written or spoken)
- In a professional context:
Professional translators are often asked to read a document and produce an abstract or summary of it in a prespecified number of words.

- For the English classroom:
 Give the same source text (about 500 words) to all pairs or small groups. Have them produce a translation containing the gist of what the source text says in 100 words. Then compare orally the resulting translations as a whole class.

Point of view:
Give each pair or small group a different source text dealing with the same subject, and ask them to produce a gist translation of it. Compare the various gist translations orally as a whole class, examining how different the point of view, the arguments and the focus of each text may be.

Cultural translation (written or spoken)
- In a professional context:
Professional translators often must make concessions in their texts for cultural reasons, since it is the translator's responsibility to ensure that a text is understood completely and accurately.

- For the English classroom**:**
Give pairs or small groups the same short source text containing one cultural situation or item of content from the local culture that does not exist in the culture of English-speaking countries. Have students try to translate that situation or item into an equivalent one in English, and then discuss each solution as a class.

Add-ons: Give each pair or small group a different, very short text (one or two sentences long) containing locally significant cultural items. Students practise adding information to a text, particularly using extra information clauses containing *which, who* or *whose* between commas or information in parenthesis, in order to supply the reader of the English text with the cultural information necessary to understand the local culture content. Then discuss each solution as a class.

Sight translation (spoken only)
In a professional context:
- There are professional translators who produce oral translations of written source texts using typists or voice recognition software. Sight translation also occurs when interpreting orally in the context of business meetings involving documents to be discussed and signed.

- For the English classroom: Give pairs or small groups the same short source text. Ask each student to produce a sight translation, and have their partner or the other members of the group produce written comments on it. They then share their comments with the translator and discuss them. Finally, discuss the activity orally as a class.

Point and translate
Select a fairly long text and have your students read it through silently. Begin the activity by pointing to a student, who has to translate a sentence or two, then point at another, then another until the entire text has been translated. Divide the students into pairs or small groups to comment orally on the resulting translation, and then discuss it as a class.

'Acquisition disappears in adultery': interaction in the translation class
Julian Edge

The interactive methods and communicative procedures that have been developed in foreign-language teaching should also be applied to the teaching of translation. One such application is described in detail, followed by evaluative comments from students and from the author.

Introduction

The teaching of translation has perhaps not benefited as much as it might have done from the developments in classroom procedure that have taken place in foreign-language teaching over the last decade. The thirty years' war (still going strong in many countries) against Grammar/Translation as the basic method of language teaching seems to have made us see foreign language teaching (FLT) and translation as unconnected. (***)

In this article, I want to describe a classroom procedure for translation classes that I have used with pre-service teacher trainees, and which other colleagues have used with various types of student. The procedure sets out to:

a apply to the running of translation classes lessons learnt from a communicative approach to language teaching, with particular regard to the dynamics of pair and group work and an emphasis on learner responsibility;

b involve and motivate the students as they produce learning materials for each other;

c make translating and translation the topic of peer discussion;

d bring about immediate contrastive discussion of the native language (L1)
and the target language (L2) in terms of accuracy and appropriacy;

e reinforce understanding of relevant, known topics. In my case, the idea was the thematic integration of the translation and methodology components of the trainees' syllabus.

The procedure

1 Choose two short texts for translation. Each text should be as self-contained as possible and should deal with a topic that is familiar and relevant to the students. Below is a pair of texts that has been used with fourth-year undergraduate teacher trainees at Istanbul University. Both texts are taken from Stevick (1982: Chapter 3).

Text A: 'Learning and acquiring'
There are a few questions which have occupied language teachers for centuries and probably always will. Of these perhaps the most basic is 'How does a person come to control a language anyway?' We all achieved this feat with our first language, and many of us have gained some ability in other languages by studying them in school. The term 'acquisition' is sometimes used for the former, and 'learning' for what goes on in the classroom. There has been considerable discussion about whether these two processes are essentially the same, or essentially different. Until very recently, however, people have generally assumed that one followed the other with perhaps a few years' overlap. The ability to 'acquire' supposedly died out at about the age of puberty, while 'learning' became possible only in the early school years as the necessary 'readinesses' developed,

Text B: 'Remembering and producing'
In recent years there has been a great deal of fascinating research on human memory. One of the most basic facts which that research has brought to light is that what we think of as separate items are not stored separately. In talking with audiences about memory, I have many times asked people to call to mind some word which they have learned recently either in a foreign language or in their native language. Once they

have identified such a word 1 ask them a series of questions: At what time of day did you learn it? Where were you? Which way were you facing? If you learned the word out of a book, where was it on the page? Was the type large, or small? If you learned the word from a person, where was that person? What general tone of voice did he or she use? What was the weather like? In general, people can come up with immediate and confident answers to questions such as these. *Sensory data that come together are stored together.*

2 Divide the class into two halves, A and B. Divide each half into pairs. Give out one text to the pairs in one half of the class (pairs A1, A2, A3, etc.) and the other text to pairs B1, B2, B3, etc. Set a time limit (approximately twenty minutes) for each pair to produce a legible L1 translation. The teacher circulates and helps with any problems of comprehension, but leaves translation to the students.

3 Collect the original texts. Pairs of students (A1-B1, A2-B2, A3-B3, etc.) now exchange the L1 texts that they have produced. Set a time limit (twenty-five minutes) for each pair to produce a legible L2 translation. The teacher circulates and helps with any problems of L2 structure or vocabulary, but not of translation.

4 Put the students into groups of four, so that the pairs who have been working on each other's translations now come together (Al/B1, A2/B2, etc.). Give out the original texts again. Tell the groups to read one original L2 text together and then the retranslated L2 text. They should ask themselves the following questions:

a   Have any important meanings been lost? Have these meanings simply
    become unclear, or have completely different meanings been produced?
b   Which words have changed? Are these changes important?
c   How have sentence structures changed? Are these changes important?
d   How are the sentences tied together to make up the text? Are the changes
    in cohesion and coherence important?

The questions need not be dealt with in this order; it is often useful to have different groups starting with different questions, as this ensures that all these aspects are referred to in the feedback session.

Wherever differences are discovered between the original and the retranslated text, the group should go to the L1 text and try to agree at what stage (L2 into L1, or L1 into L2) and why the changes took place. The group should work together first on one text until they are satisfied, before going on to the second text. The teacher fixes a time for this stage (twenty-five minutes) and circulates among the groups, consulting where required and making notes on problems arising.

5 Call the class back together. Ask each group to raise the most interesting translation point that they came across in the two texts. Invite comparative translations and comments from the other groups. Make sure that each group has the chance to raise at least one point. If there is time, go round the groups again, raising more points.

Comment
1 The above procedure has been received enthusiastically by both colleagues and students. Some sample student comments are:

  'We usually use a safe range of language; this encourages us to widen our range and that will make us better translators.'
  'It's interesting to be able to make an immediate comparison; it also makes us see our mistakes more clearly.'
  'It's very interesting to see how somebody else interprets your translation.'
  'Before, I used to think my mistakes aren't important, but now I can see how everything goes wrong.'

2 The timings are, of course, approximate. The above timings are descriptive of the use of this material in a situation where we had a ninety-minute session. An approximate 50/50 split between translating and talking about translating seems about right.

3 The above procedure comes from a native speaker of the target language who could not begin to attempt a translation of such texts into the students' L1. This fact has not caused a problem; students have responded

well to the need for them to assume responsibility for the accuracy of the L1 (Turkish) text. Bilingual teachers, who can obviously offer more insight and support here, have also reported back very favourably on the procedure.

4 The procedure creates a communicative context for more format follow-up work, including the development of a metalanguage sufficient for the students to be able to talk about their texts. The bilingual teacher can carry out contrastive work on problem areas that arise. Formal L2 work can be done by having students look up in their grammar reference books those sections that deal with the problems that have been met. The same applies to dictionary work. Alternatively, or additionally, problem areas can be passed on to teachers who are working with the same students on their L2 language skills, or in the field of applied linguistics.

5 At step 3 of the procedure (L1 into L2), students consulting the teacher get a lot of practice in eliciting words from the teacher. This is a very useful communication strategy in itself, and particularly useful for teacher trainees.

The title of this article, for those readers who have not guessed, is taken from a retranslated version of Text A: 'Learning and acquiring'. In this version, the statement,

The ability to acquire supposedly died out at about the age of puberty ...
was retranslated as,
The ability of acquisition disappears in adultery . . .

Discussion was animated.

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Pronunciation issues
Jeremy Harmer

Almost all English language teachers get students to study grammar and vocabulary, practise functional dialogues, take part in productive skill activities and become competent in listening and reading. Yet some of these same teachers make little attempt to teach pronunciation in any overt way and only give attention to it in passing. It is possible that they are nervous of dealing with sounds and intonation; perhaps they feel they have too much to do already and pronunciation teaching will only make things worse. They may claim that even without a formal pronunciation syllabus, and without specific pronunciation teaching, many students seem to acquire serviceable pronunciation in the course of their studies.

However, the fact that some students are able to acquire reasonable pronunciation without overt pronunciation teaching should not blind us to the benefits of a focus on pronunciation in our lessons. Pronunciation teaching not only makes students aware of different sounds and sound features (and what these mean), but can also improve their speaking immeasurably. Concentrating on sounds, showing where they are made in the mouth, making students aware of where words should be stressed – all these things give them extra information about spoken English and help them achieve the goal of improved comprehension and intelligibility.

In some particular cases pronunciation help allows students to get over serious intelligibility problems. Joan Kerr, a speech pathologist, described (in a paper at the 1998 ELICOS conference in Melbourne, Australia) how she was able to help a Cantonese speaker of English achieve considerably greater intelligibility by working on his point of articulation – changing his focus of resonance. Whereas many Cantonese vowels happen towards the back of the mouth, English ones are frequently articulated nearer the front or in the centre of the mouth. The moment you can get Cantonese speakers, she suggested, to bring their vowels further forward, increased intelligibility occurs. With other language groups it may be a problem of nasality (e.g. Vietnamese) or the degree to which speakers do or do not open their mouths. Other language groups may have trouble with intonation or stress patterns in phrases and sentences, and there are many individual sounds which cause difficulty for different first language speakers.

For all these people, being made aware of pronunciation issues will be of immense benefit not only to their own production, but also to their own understanding of spoken English.

Perfection versus intelligibility
A question we need to answer is how good our students' pronunciation ought to be. Should they sound like native speakers, so perfect that just by listening to them we would assume that they were British or American or Australian? Or is this asking too much? Perhaps we should be happy if they can at least make themselves understood.

The degree to which students acquire 'perfect' pronunciation seems to depend very much on their attitude to how they speak and how well they hear. In the case of attitude there are a number of psychological issues which may well affect how 'foreign' a person sounds when they speak. For example, many students do not especially want to sound like native speakers; frequently they wish to be speakers of English as an international language and this does not necessarily imply trying to sound exactly like someone from Britain or Canada, for example. Frequently foreign language speakers want to retain their own accent when they speak the foreign language because that is part of their identity. Thus speaking English with, say, a Mexican accent is fine for the speaker who wishes to retain his or her 'Mexican-ness' in the foreign language.

Under the pressure of such cultural considerations it has become customary for language teachers to consider intelligibility as the prime goal of pronunciation teaching. This implies that the students should be able to use pronunciation which is good enough for them to be always understood. If their pronunciation is not up to this standard, it is thought, then there is a serious danger that they will fail to communicate effectively.

If intelligibility is the goal then it suggests that some pronunciation features are more important than others. Some sounds, for example, have to be right if the speaker is to get their message across, though others (***) may not cause a lack of intelligibility if they are confused. Stressing words and phrases correctly is vital if emphasis is to be given to the important parts of messages and if words are to be understood correctly. Intonation – the ability to vary the pitch and tune of speech – is an important meaning carrier too.

The fact that we may want our students to work towards an intelligible pronunciation rather than achieve a native-speaker quality may not appeal to all, however. Despite what we have said about identity; some may wish to sound exactly like a native speaker. In such circumstances it would be churlish to deny them such an objective.

Problems
Two particular problems occur in much pronunciation teaching and learning:

What students can hear: some students have great difficulty hearing pronunciation features which we want them to reproduce. Frequently speakers of different first languages have problems with different sounds, especially where, as with /b/ and /v/ for Spanish speakers, there are not the same two sounds in their language. If they cannot distinguish between them, they will find it almost impossible to produce the two different English phonemes.

There are two ways of dealing with this: in the first place we can show students how sounds are made through demonstration, diagrams, and explanation. But we can also draw the sounds to their attention every time they appear on a tape or in our own conversation. In this way we gradually train the students' ears. When they can hear correctly they are on the way to being able to speak correctly.

The intonation problem: for many teachers the most problematic area of pronunciation is intonation. Some of us (and many of our students) find it extremely difficult to hear 'tunes' or to identify the different patterns of rising and falling tones. In such situations it would be foolish to try and teach them.

However, the fact that we may have difficulty recognising specific intonation tunes does not mean that we should abandon intonation teaching altogether. Most of us can hear when someone is being enthusiastic or bored, when they are surprised, or when they are really asking a question rather than just confirming something they already know. One of our tasks, then, is to give students opportunities to recognise such moods and intentions either on tape or through the way we ourselves model them. We can then get students to imitate the way these moods are articulated, even though we may not (be able to) discuss the technicalities of the different intonation patterns themselves.

The key to successful pronunciation teaching, however, is not so much getting students to produce correct sounds or intonation tunes, but rather to have them listen and notice how English is spoken – either on audio or videotape or from the teachers themselves. The more aware they are the greater the chance that their own intelligibility levels will rise.

The phonemic alphabet: to use or not to use?
It is perfectly possible to work on the sounds of English without ever using any phonemic symbols. We can get students to hear the difference, say, between *sheep* and *cheap* or between *ship* and *sheep* just by saying the words enough times. There is no reason why this should not be effective. We can also describe how the sounds are made (by demonstrating, drawing pictures of the mouth and lips, or explaining where the sounds are made).

However, since English is bedevilled, for many students (and even first language speakers), by problems of sound and spelling correspondence, it may make sense for them to be aware of the different phonemes, and the clearest way of promoting this awareness is to introduce the various symbols.

There are other reasons for using phonemic symbols too. Dictionaries usually give the pronunciation of their words in phonemic symbols. If students can read these symbols they can know how the word is said even without having to hear it. When both teacher and students know the symbols it is easier to explain what

mistake has occurred and why it has happened; we can also use the symbols for pronunciation tasks and games.

Some teachers complain that learning the symbols places an unnecessary burden on students. For certain groups this may be true, and the level of strain is greatly increased if they are asked to write in phonemic script (Newton 1999). But if they are only asked to recognise rather than produce the different symbols, then the strain is not so great, especially if they are introduced to the various symbols gradually rather than all at once. In this chapter we assume that the knowledge of phonemic script is of benefit to students.

When to teach pronunciation
Just as with any aspect of language – grammar, vocabulary, etc. – teachers have to decide when to include pronunciation teaching into lesson sequences. There are a number of alternatives to choose from:

Whole lessons: some teachers devote whole lesson sequences to pronunciation, and some schools timetable pronunciation lessons at various stages during the week.

Though it would be difficult to spend a whole class period working on one or two sounds, it can make sense to work on connected speech concentrating on stress and intonation over some forty-five minutes, provided that we follow normal planning principles. Thus we could have students do recognition work on intonation patterns, work on the stress in certain key phrases, and then move on to the rehearsing and performing of a short play extract which exemplified some of the issues we worked on.

Making pronunciation the main focus of a lesson does not mean that every minute of that lesson has to be spent on pronunciation work. Sometimes students may also listen to a longer tape, working on listening skills before moving to the pronunciation part of the sequence. Sometimes students may work on aspects of vocabulary before going on to work on word stress, sounds, and spelling.

Discrete slots: some teachers insert short, separate bits of pronunciation work into lesson sequences. Over a period of weeks they work on all the individual phonemes either separately or in contrasting pairs. At other times they spend a few minutes on a particular aspect of intonation, say, or on the contrast between two or more sounds.

Such separate pronunciation slots can be extremely useful, and provide a welcome change of pace and activity during a lesson. Many students enjoy them, and they succeed precisely because we do not spend too long on any one issue. However, pronunciation is not a separate skill; it is part of the way we speak. Even if we want to keep our separate pronunciation phases for the reasons we have suggested, we will also need times when we integrate pronunciation work into longer lesson sequences.

*Integrated phases***:** many teachers get students to focus on pronunciation issues as an integral part of a lesson. When students listen to a tape, for example, one of the things which we can do is draw their attention to pronunciation features on the tape, if necessary having students work on sounds that are especially prominent, or getting them to imitate intonation patterns for questions, for example.

Pronunciation teaching forms a part of many sequences where students study language form. When we model words and phrases we draw our students' attention to the way they are said; one of the things we want to concentrate on during an accurate reproduction stage is the students' correct pronunciation.

*Opportunistic teaching***:** just as teachers may stray from their original plan when lesson realities make this inevitable, and teach vocabulary or grammar opportunistically because it has 'come up', so there are good reasons why we may want to stop what we are doing and spend a minute or two on some pronunciation issue that has arisen in the course of an activity. A lot will depend on what kind of activity the students are involved in since we will be reluctant to interrupt fluency work inappropriately, but tackling a problem at the moment when it occurs can be a successful way of dealing with pronunciation.

Although whole pronunciation lessons may be an unaffordable luxury for classes under syllabus and timetable pressure, many teachers tackle pronunciation in a mixture of the ways suggested above.

Right from the start
Brita Haycraft

Many students today speak much better English than in previous years, probably because their teachers speak better English and because they themselves experience more 'live' English, thanks to travel, films and pop music. However, for many, pronunciation still advances slowly. How has it been overlooked?

It was probably a mistake to introduce pronunciation as a science, describing each sound in detail with new and daunting terminology. All this does is cause many teachers to shy away from it and avoid correcting pronunciation because they fear they are unqualified to do so. (The current examinations are not helping this situation either.) Other teachers may be up-to-date with pronunciation studies, but so overwhelmed by it all that they pass it along wholesale to students as a subject of study, regardless of their communicative spoken needs. What are we doing wrong?

To start with, there are some practices which still seem to feature in many classrooms, even though they may actually hinder pronunciation progress. Perfecting sounds is time-consuming and often leaves little room for more productive pronunciation work. Time is wasted on non-problems such as when the ending 'ed' or 's' is voiced or voiceless, when in fact no student says /aːskd/ or /bukz/. Stresstiming is needlessly mentioned, when it is the use of the weak shwa vowel in unstressed syllables that is so special to English. The shwa is introduced as a free-standing sound when in fact it is part of the domain of stress. Similarly, weak and contracted forms are often introduced on their own under the odd heading 'connected speech' (What is speech if it isn't connected?), rather than together with stress, the very reason for their transformation.

The vital role of sentence stress is not much taught, oddly enough. Instead, rhythm patterns are drilled without the students being trained to work out which words to stress, so that they can apply the rhythm without help. Sentence stress is often regarded as part of intonation, when clearly these two play quite different roles. Teachers feel the need to correct elusive intonation along with sentence stress, when the latter is so easy to correct on its own. Intonation, on the other hand, is frequently overtaught, leaving the impression that it doesn't exist in other languages.

Apart from being difficult and discouraging, the traditional 'bottom-up' approach makes no phonological sense, since vowels have different pronunciations when stressed and unstressed and many sounds disappear altogether in the flow of speaking. Speaking does not begin with phonemes in the same way as writing begins with the alphabet. It is stress and speed which determine how many sounds get pronounced, and if students are complimented on their pronunciation, it will always be for their command of stress, not for their perfect sounds.

Stress
The easy and sensible approach to pronunciation is to start with sentence stress. Help students say sentences with a logical stress for the context. Any beginner can identify the most important word in the question, *'What time is it?'.* With the stress firmly in place, students can say the sentence more quickly and link up the words in a natural way:

> What TIME is it?

One of the best ways of making students confident of their grasp of stress is to give them a text. In pairs, or for homework, let them predict the words they think will be stressed most. Then in class as a whole group, one sentence at a time, they take turns saying each sentence as predicted and comparing their text with the taped version. It is amazing how accurate they can be and it is a great boost to morale. Within a relatively short time, I have had students cheerfully read passages, stories or newspaper extracts to their peers with great involvement and skill. Many students would show a dramatic improvement in their pronunciation if they simply recorded themselves and compared their recording with a native speaker version.

Students should be trained from early on to change the stress in exchanges essential to human contact and interaction, such as, *'WHAT do you DO?' 'I'm a student. What do YOU do?'* And they will enjoy discussing which word is likely to be stressed in a sentence such as, *'Is that your car?'* When they have made their first choice, ask them to consider whether the stress would change in the following situations:

a a traffic warden complaining about your parking
b a police officer to whom you have reported your car stolen
c a snobbish person who doesn't think much of your old vehicle*

Intonation
Intonation is best introduced by engaging students' emotions. 'Loves and hates' bring out livelier intonation than 'likes and dislikes'. When practising in pairs, students must state their requests (or whatever) with interest and enthusiasm, or their partner can refuse them. Although intonation is applied similarly in their own languages, it frequently gets forgotten in the target language in the 'false' classroom situation unless the teacher reminds them and inspires them to speak with more involvement.

Weak forms
Not surprisingly, students are hesitant when it comes to reducing little unstressed words such as *for* and *have* to 'f' and 'v'. While firm stress on the important words and speaking more quickly certainly make the reduction easier, it is also useful to give students a list of the more common words, showing which ones weaken to a shwa, such as *for*, and which contract, such as *have* and *is*, eg to *I've* and *he's*.

It is totally in the students' interest to cultivate the reduced forms right from the start, as unwarranted strong forms can sound insistent and bossy and add to the impression some inexperienced native speakers have of 'rude foreigners'. *Do not touch* is much blunter than *Don't touch.* The strong forms are also hard to get rid of later on, and the contracted forms are not only easier to say, they are no more difficult to learn. After all, other languages use contractions too, eg French *Qu'est-ce que* is compressed to /kesk/. An example from the students' own language can often win over reluctant learners.

Word-linking
Students often separate words unnaturally as they concentrate on remembering vocabulary and grammar, or perhaps in a misguided attempt to pronounce words more clearly. Simply encouraging them and giving them time to say practice sentences again (and again) more quickly helps them speed up and link the words naturally into a flowing sentence. It might also be worth pointing out to students how irritating and pedantic it can sound to separate every word. Even Hamlet is likely to merge the *t's* in **To be or not to be.**

What students don't need to know, however, is whether the first *'t'* is unexploded or glottalised. Saying the two as one produces the required merger automatically.

Word-linking naturally solves (or avoids) various problems with sounds too. It helps avoid the unwanted 'h' sound before vowels: **get up at eight** becomes **ge tu pa teioht** not **get hup hat height**

There is no need to put the elaborate /w/ or /j/ between the vowel sounds in **go on** and **be out**, since students cannot avoid saying them when the words are said fairly quickly together. The initial 'e' sound syndrome (eg +estation) can be partially cured when it comes after a final 's': **this stop, next station**

Neither teachers nor students need to know how assimilation works, as this also happens automatically when words are spoken quickly: **It can walk** becomes **ickamwalk**

Shaping words
Of course, students still have to shape individual words, and it's important that they know where the stress goes in words of two syllables or more. As many longer English words are recognisable to students, especially those who know European languages, it can be useful to compare the stress in similar words, eg *ARCHitecture – architectURE, laBORatory – laboraTORio*. It is certainly worth giving rules where they reliably exist, for example using endings as a clue to the stress position:
-    words ending in *-ology* and *-ity* are stressed on the third syllable from the end, eg *graphOlogy, uniVERsity*.

- words ending in *-tion* and most ending in *-ic* are stressed on the second syllable from the end, eg *revolUtion, autoMAtic*
- words with foreign-sounding endings such as *-oon, -ette* and *-eer* stress those syllables, eg *ballOON, laundeRETTE, enginEER.*

When they know these rules, students can even lift long words from their own language and turn them into 'English'. Whether or not they actually exist, it can be a lot of fun and will certainly help students internalise the rules.

The dreaded sounds
And so finally to the sounds – and they only need be dealt with when students have some grasp of all the preceding points. As already mentioned, word-linking can resolve some of the problems, not least with consonant clusters.

Most mispronounced sounds, however, are simply caused by confusing spellings. The classic *-ough* combination is destined always to strike dread into the hearts of non-native speakers, and the pronunciation of place names is a minefield. If it's any consolation, place names are a minefield for native speakers too.

There are, however, some worthwhile rules to be passed on, such as not pronouncing *'r'* after a vowel, as in *supermarket car park*, and tricky spelling can be bypassed with phonemic symbols .Alternatively 'simplified spelling' (particularly where the phonemic symbols look a bit daunting) can often be helpful: eg *Birming-m* and *Lond-n,* for *Birmingham* and *London.*

Difficulties are best played down. Instead, the teacher can reassure students that most English sounds have very similar equivalents in many other languages. There are obviously a few new sounds, but we should find ways to make them accessible. The English 'th', after all, is only an official lisp, as it is in Spanish, and most other English sounds exist elsewhere too.

There is only one unusual diphthong to cope with: 'o' as in *'go',* and the long and short /i/ sound needs pursuing. The shwa sound is very easy to say, the only problem being remembering to say it.

Practising saying international names can unlock the door to English pronunciation and reveal many of its characteristics at the same time. A Spaniard able to say *Barcelona* or *Malaga* the English way, an Italian saying *Martini*, *Madonna* or *Palermo*, anyone saying *Tokyo* the way the English do, is halfway there. It is a matter of letting students relish the sounds and fall in love with them.

A positive start
Many of the students' problems are due to their timidity and lack of helpful information rather than any intrinsic difficulty, or even native language interference. Most pronunciation problems can easily be overcome if we take a positive approach from the start. We shouldn't be teaching *about* pronunciation. We should help with the urgent pronunciation issues in every lesson, whatever else we are teaching, in a way that ensures it is learnt easily and without tears.

10 holistic ways to good pronunciation
Jim Wingate

Some learners are visual, some audial, some kinesthetic (i.e. they learn through actions and feelings). Audial learners have a good ear and are naturally good at pronunciation. But most teachers teach pronunciation audially only, thus only helping their audial learners who are the ones who don't need help. How can we solve this problem?

Here are ten ways to good pronunciation which also help the visual learners to see sounds and the kinesthetic learners to feel sounds and do actions for them.

One: Mother Tongue with Target Accent
Ask your learners to speak their own language(s) with English/American etc. accents. It's fun. Then they discuss what English sounds like and decide what sounds will help them speak English in a more English way.

Two: Becoming English/American etc.
Each learner chooses an English first name, family name, age, hobbies, where they live in UK/USA etc. In pairs they speak, interviewing each other as their English-speaking personalities. For this they can exaggerate the characteristics identified in One.

Three: Self-image in the Mirror
Bring mirrors into class or set this for homework. Each learner speaks English to their reflection, e.g. reciting a song or poem they know. They see that they don't look stupid speaking English. They can put on a very English/American etc. accent and remain themselves. In this way they accept a self-image with better pronunciation.

Four: Instant Language Laboratory
Ways One, Two and Three loosen up your learners, and get them making their own perceptions and judgements. Now they are ready for language-laboratory-style listening. Each learner places the fingers of their flat right hand face up at the base of the palm of their flat left hand, then the finger tips of their left hand on the top of their left ear. Each learner counts aloud 1-10, listening to his or her own voice. Then you give an example of good pronunciation, and they say it to themselves three times using their instant language lab. The example may be a sound, word or phrase which you say or which you play on audio or video cassette.

Five: Alliterative Sentences
With specific sounds your learners find difficult, encourage them to experiment, tongue up, tongue down, mouth open, mouth closed. Then encourage each learner to make his or her own sentence with as many instances of that sound as possible. Most learners write funny tongue-twister sentences.

Six: Chest Voice
Ask your learners to yawn (I've never had any problems!). Then to yawn and count to ten with a yawning voice, then once again, feeling on their ribs how deep the vibrations go. The yawning voice is very English: open-throated, relaxed, chest-resonant.

Seven: Nose Voice
Then, by contrast, ask your learners to feel the vibrations as they slightly pinch their noses and count up to ten nasally with a 'nose voice'.

Eight: Head Voice

Ask your learners to touch their skulls as they speak in their own language to feel the vibrations of 'head voice'. All non-English speaking accents have more nose and head tone than English does. English-speaking accents have more chest tone. When they speak English they should feel less head voice.

Nine: The Front of the Mouth

Each learner tears off a 1 cm square scrap of paper, holds it in a flat palm with the heel of the hand against the chin. They count up to ten, aloud, in their own language. The paper hardly moves. They count up to ten in English, the paper should dance and fly on every word except ***nine, and*** twice on six and seven. Getting the paper to dance is getting your learners to bring the voice forward in the mouth. Only English is spoken so breathily.

Ten: **Er ... Um...**

When English-speaking people say 'er...', um ...' (not knowing what to say next) they use chest tone and the front of the mouth. In fact, the relaxed position of the mouth when saying 'er...' and 'um ...' is the shape of the English-speaking mouth. Use Four so your learners experiment with the mouth shape of 'er ... um ...'
They then form that mouth shape before each word, and the word will then sound much more English, e.g. 'Er the um shop er is um by um the er church'.

How to deal with grammar errors
Scott Thornbury

from Thornbury, S. 1999. How to Teach Grammar. Longman

What are errors?

Language learners make mistakes. This seems to happen regardless of the teacher's skill and perseverance. It seems to be an inevitable part of learning a language. Most teachers believe that to ignore these mistakes might put at risk the learner's linguistic development. Current research tends to support this view. Not to ignore mistakes, however, often means having to make a number of on-the-spot decisions. These can be summed up in the form of the 'in-flight' questions a teacher might ask when faced with a student's possible error:

- Is there an error here?
- What kind of error is it?
- What caused it?
- Does it matter?
- What should I do about it?

Here, for example, is a written text produced by a Spanish-speaking student:

> The Sunday night past, the doorbell rangs, I opened the door and I had a big surprise, my brother was stopping in the door. He was changing a lot of. He was having a long hair but him looking was very interesting. Now, he's twenty five years, and he's lower. We speaked all night and we remembered a lot of thinks. At last when I went to the bed was the four o'clock.

While it is clear that the text is non-standard (by native-speaker standards) it is not always an easy task to identify the individual errors themselves. Take for example, *I had a big surprise*. At first sight there seems to be nothing wrong with this. It is a grammatically well-formed sentence - that is, the words are in the right order, the tense is correct, and the subject and verb agree. Moreover, the meaning is clear and unambiguous. But would a native speaker ever say it? According to corpus evidence (that is, databases of spoken and written texts) something can *be a big surprise*, a person can *be in for a big surprise*, you can *have a big surprise for someone*, but instances of *I had a big surprise* simply do not exist. Should we conclude, therefore, that it is wrong? The answer is yes, if we imagine a scale of 'wrongness' ranging from 'completely wrong' to 'this is OK, but a native speaker would never say it'. However, no corpus is big enough to include all possible sentences and, at the same time, new ways of saying things are being constantly invented. This is a case, therefore, when the teacher has to use considerable discretion.

Once an error has been identified, the next step is to classify it. Learners may make mistakes at the level of individual words, in the way they put sentences together, or at the level of whole texts. At the word level, learners make mistakes either because they have chosen the wrong word for the meaning they want to express (My brother was *stopping* in the door instead of *standing*), or they have chosen the wrong form of the word *(lower* instead of *lawyer*, *thinks* instead of *things)*. These are lexical errors. Lexical errors also include mistakes in the way words are combined: *the Sunday night past* instead of *last Sunday night*. Grammar errors, on the other hand, cover such things as mistakes in verb form and tense (the doorbell rangs, we speaked), and in sentence structure: was the four o'clock, where the subject of the clause (*it*) has been left out. There is also a category of errors called discourse errors which relate to the way sentences are organised and linked in order to make whole texts. For example, in the student extract above *at last* suggests that what follows is the solution to a problem: *eventually* would have been better in this context.

To sum up, then, the following categories of errors have been identified:
- lexical errors
- grammar errors
- discourse errors

and, in the case of spoken language:
- pronunciation errors

It is not always the case that errors fall neatly into the above categories, and there is often considerable overlap between these categories.

Identifying the cause of an error can be equally problematic. Speakers of Spanish may recognise, in the above text, the influence of the writer's first language (his L1) on his second language (his L2). For example, the lack of the indefinite article in *he's lower* (for *he's a lawyer*) suggests that the learner has borrowed the Spanish construction *es abogado*) in which the indefinite article (*un*) is not used. Such instances of L1 influence on L2 production are examples of transfer. They do not necessarily result in errors - there is such a thing as positive transfer. *He's lower* is an example of negative transfer or what was once called L1 interference.

The case of *rangs*, however, cannot be accounted for by reference to the learner's L1. Nor can *speaked*. Both errors derive from over-applying (or over-generalising) an L2 rule. In the case of rangs, the learner has overgeneralised the *third person -s* rule in the present (*he rings*) and applied it to the past. In the case of *speaked* he has overgeneralised the *past tense -ed ending*. Such errors seem to be influenced not by factors external to the second language such as the learner's first language but by the nature of the second language itself. They suggest that the learner is working according to L2 rules and this is evidence that a process of hypothesis formation and testing is underway. In fact, these developmental errors are not dissimilar to the kinds of errors children make when they are learning their mother tongue:

> He go to sleep.
> Are dogs can wiggle their tails?
> Daddy broked it.

These two kinds of errors – **transfer and developmental** – account for the bulk of the errors learners make. Such errors can range from the fairly hit-and-miss (*him looking was very interesting*) to errors that seem to show evidence of a rule being fairly systematically (but not yet accurately) applied. Thus: *my brother was stopping, he was changing, he was having a long hair*. These are all examples of a verb form (past continuous) being overused, but in a systematic way. It is as if the learner had formed a rule to the effect that, 'when talking about past states – as opposed to events – use *was + -ing'*.

It is probably these systematic errors, rather than the random ones, that respond best to correction. Correction can provide the feedback the learner needs to help confirm or reject a hypothesis, or to tighten the application of a rule that is being applied fairly loosely. Of course, it is not always clear whether an error is the product of random processes, or the product of a developing but inexact system. Nor is it always clear how inexact this system is. For example, it may be the case that the learner knows the right rule but, in the heat of the moment, has failed to apply it. One way of testing this is to see whether the learner can self-correct: could the writer of the text above change *speaked* to *spoke,* for example, if told that *speaked* was wrong? If so, this suggests that the rule is both systematic and correctly formulated in the learner's mind, but that it hasn't yet become automatic.

The next issue to address is the question of priorities. Which errors really matter, and which don't? This is obviously rather subjective: some errors are likely to distract or even irritate the reader or listener while others go largely unnoticed. For example, speakers of languages in which nouns are distinguished by gender (e.g. un banane une pomme) frequently say they are irritated by gender mistakes such as *une banane*. A fairer, but still fairly subjective, criterion might be the one of intelligibility: to what extent does the error interfere with, or distort, the speaker's (or writer's) message? In the text above it is difficult, even impossible, to recover the meaning of *lower* (for lawyer) from the context. On the other hand the *doorbell rangs* is fairly unproblematic. It may cause a momentary hiccup in communication, but it is not severe enough to threaten it.

It should be apparent by now that there are many complex decisions that teachers have to make when monitoring learner production. It is not surprising that the way they respond to error tends to be more often intuitive than consciously considered. But before addressing the question as to how to respond, it may pay to look briefly at teachers' and students' attitudes to error and correction.

Attitudes to error and correction

Few people like being wrong, and yet there seems to be no way of learning a language without being wrong a lot of the time. Not many people like being corrected either, yet to leave mistakes uncorrected flies in the face of the intuitions and expectations of teachers and students alike. This accounts for some of the problems associated with error and correction.

Attitudes to error run deep and lie at the heart of teachers' intuitions about language learning. Many people still believe that errors are contagious, and that learners are at risk of catching the errors other learners make. It is often this fear of error infection that underlies many students' dislike of pair and group work. On the other hand, many teachers believe that to correct errors is a form of interference, especially in fluency activities. Some teachers go further, and argue that correction of any sort creates a judgemental – and therefore stressful – classroom atmosphere, and should be avoided altogether.

These different attitudes find an echo in the shifts of thinking that have taken place amongst researchers and materials writers. Recent thinking sees errors as being evidence of developmental processes rather than the result of bad habit formation. This sea-change in attitudes is well captured in the introductions to ELT coursebooks. Here is a selection:

> 'The student should be trained to learn by making as few mistakes as possible ... He must be trained to adopt correct learning habits right from the start.'
> (from First Things First by L. Alexander)

> 'Getting things wrong is only good practice in getting things wrong.' (from Success with English, Teacher's Handbook 1 by Barnett et al)

> 'Provided students communicate effectively, they should not be given a sense of failure because they make mistakes.'
> (from The Cambridge English Course, 1, Teacher's Book by Swan and Walter)

> 'Don't expect learners to go straight from ignorance to knowledge. Learning takes time and is not achieved in one go. Be prepared to accept partial learning as an important stage on the way to full learning.'
> (from Project English 2, Teacher's Book by Hutchinson)

> 'Making mistakes is an important and positive part of learning a language. Only by experimenting with the language and receiving feedback can students begin to work out how the language works.' (from Blueprint Intermediate, Teacher's Book by Abbs and Freebairn)

Certainly, current methodology is much more tolerant of error. But the tide may be turning yet again. Studies of learners whose language development has fossilised - that is, it has stopped at a point well short of the target – suggest that lack of negative feedback may have been a factor. Negative feedback is simply indicating *No, you can't say that* when a learner makes an error. Positive feedback, on the other hand, is when learners are told when they are right. If the only messages learners get are positive, it may be the case that there is no incentive to restructure their mental grammar. The restructuring mechanisms close down. Hence it is now generally accepted that a **focus on form** (not just on meaning) is necessary in order to guard against fossilisation. A focus on form includes giving learners clear messages about their errors.

Responding to errors

What options has the teacher got when faced with a student's error? Let's imagine that, in the course of a classroom activity, a student has been describing a person's appearance and said: *He has a long hair.*

Here are some possible responses that the teacher might consider:

1. *No.*
This is clearly negative feedback, but it offers the student no clue as to what was wrong. The teacher may be assuming that the student has simply made a slip under pressure, and that this does not therefore represent a lack of knowledge of the rule. The learner should therefore be able to self-correct. There are, of course, other ways of signalling that a mistake has been made without having to say No. A facial expression, shake of the head etc, might work just as well. Some teachers try to soften the negative force of *no* by, for example, making a *mmmm* noise to indicate: Well, that's not entirely correct but thanks anyway. Unfortunately, this may leave the student wondering Have I made a mistake or haven't I?

2. *He has long hair.*
This a correction in the strictest sense of the word. The teacher simply repairs the student's utterance - perhaps in the interest of maintaining the flow of the talk, but at the same time, reminding the learner not to focus only on meaning at the expense of form.

3. *No article.*
The teacher's move is directed at pinpointing the kind of error the student has made. This is where metalanguage (the use of grammatical terminology) comes in handy: words like *article, preposition, verb, tense* etc. provide an economical means of giving feedback - assuming, of course, that students are already familiar with these terms.

4. *No. Anyone?*
 An unambiguous feedback signal plus an invitation for peer-correction. By excluding the option of self-correction, however, the teacher risks humiliating the original student: perhaps the teacher knows the student well enough to rule out self-correction for this error.

5. *He has ... ?*
In other words, the teacher is replaying the student's utterance up to the point where the error occurred, with a view to isolating the error as a clue for self-correction. This technique can be reinforced by **finger-coding**, where the teacher marks out each word on her fingers, indicating with her fingers the part of the phrase or sentence that needs repair.

6. *He has **a** long hair?*
Another common teacher strategy is to echo the mistake but with a quizzical intonation. This is perhaps less threatening than saying *No*, but often learners fail to interpret this is an invitation to self-correct, and think that the teacher is simply questioning the truth of what they have just said. They might then respond *Yes, be has a very long hair. Down to here.*

7. *I'm sorry, I didn't understand.*
Variations on this response include *Sorry? He what? Excuse me*? etc.
These are known as **clarification requests** and, of course, occur frequently in real conversation. As a correction device they signal to the student that the meaning of their message is unclear, suggesting that it may have been distorted due to some problem of form. It is therefore a more friendly way of signalling a mistake. Research suggests that when learners re-cast their message after receiving a clarification request, it usually tends to improve, despite their not having been told explicitly that a mistake has been made, much less what kind of mistake it was. This suggests that the policy of 'acting a bit thick' (on the part of the teacher) might have positive dividends in terms of self-correction.

8. *Just one? Like this?* [draws bald man with one long hair] *Ha ha ...*
The teacher has pretended to interpret the student's utterance literally, in order to show the student the unintended effect of the error, on the principle that, once the student appreciates the difference between be *has long hair* and *he has a long hair* he will be less likely to make the same mistake again. This is possible only with those mistakes which do make a difference in meaning - such as *He's lower* in the text we started with. There is, of course, the danger of humiliating the student, but, if handled sensitively, this kind of feedback can be extremely effective.

9. *A long hair is just one single hair, like you find in your soup. For the hair on your head you wouldn't use an article: He has long hair.*
The teacher uses the error to make an impromptu teaching point. This is an example of **reactive teaching**, where instruction is in response to students' errors rather than trying to pre-empt them. Of course, if the teacher were to do this at every mistake, the classes would not only become very teacher-centred, but the students might become reluctant to open their mouths.

10. *Oh, he has long hair, has he?*
This technique (sometimes called **reformulation**) is an example of covert feedback, disguised as a conversational aside. The hope is, that the student will take the veiled correction on board but will not be inhibited from continuing the flow of talk. Typically, this is the way parents seem to correct their children – by offering an expanded version of the child's utterance:

> CHILD: Teddy hat.
> MOTHER: Yes, Teddy's got a hat on, hasn't he?

Some theorists argue that these expansions and reformulations help provide a temporary scaffold for the child's developing language competence. The problem is that learners may simply not recognise the intention nor notice the difference between their utterance and the teacher's reformulation.

11. *Good.*
Strange as this seems, it is in fact a very common way that teachers provide feedback on student production, especially in activities where the focus is more on meaning than on form. For example, it is not difficult to imagine a sequence like this:

> TEACHER: What does Mick Jagger look like?
> STUDENT: He has a long hair.
> TEACHER: Good. Anything else?
> STUDENT: He has a big lips.
> TEACHER: Good. etc.

The intention behind *good* (or any of its alternatives, such as *OK)* is to acknowledge the students' contribution, irrespective of either its accuracy or even of its meaning. But, if construed as positive feedback, it may lull learners into a false sense of security, and, worse, initiate the process of fossilisation.

12. *Teacher says nothing but writes down error for future reference.*
The intention here is to postpone the feedback so as not to disrupt the flow of talk, but to deal with errors later. Perhaps the students are working in groups and the teacher has chanced on the error while monitoring. A correction in this context might be inappropriate. Nevertheless, there are some grounds to believe that the most effective feedback is that which occurs in what are called real operating conditions, that is, when the learner is using language communicatively. For example, a trainee driver is more likely to notice the correction when it is most relevant while driving - than after the event, in a list of points being ticked off by the driving instructor. The trick, it seems, is to intervene without interfering.

To sum up, then: learners' errors offer the teacher a rich source of data with which to monitor learning. At the same time, learners need feedback on their production. This suggests that teachers should deal with at least some of the errors that arise. To do this, they have a wide range of feedback options available. The choice of feedback strategy will depend on such factors as:

The type of error: Does it have a major effect on communication? Is it one that the learner could probably self-repair?
The type of activity: Is the focus of the activity more on form or on meaning? If the latter, it is probably best to correct without interfering too much with the flow of communication.
The type of learner: Will the learner be discouraged or humiliated by correction? Alternatively, will the learner feel short-changed if there is no correction?

Continuous assessment
J. B Heaton

from Heaton, J.B. 1990. *Classroom Testing*. Longman

Continuous assessment is a procedure which enables you to assess over a period of weeks or months those aspects of a student's performance which cannot normally be assessed as satisfactorily by means of tests. For example, you can use continuous assessment to measure students' work in groups and their overall progress as shown in class. Continuous assessment includes marks or grades for homework as well as scores on classroom tests.

Most students like continuous assessment, but it may still be stressful if you do not handle it carefully. There will usually be less stress, for example, if you tell students that their worst three assignments will not be taken into account in awarding a final score or grade.

Continuous assessment enables us to take into account certain qualities which cannot be assessed in any other way: namely, effort, persistence and attitude. You can draw up short tables to enable you to grade very broadly what you wish to measure (provided that you are aware of the limitations of measuring such qualities).

The following table provides an example of a teacher's attempts to grade students according to their persistence and determination in learning English.

5→Most persistent and thorough in all class and homework assignments. Interested in learning and keen to do well.

4→Persistent and thorough on the whole. Usually works well in class and mostly does homework conscientiously. Fairly keen.

3→Not too persistent but mostly tries. Average work in class and does homework (but never more than necessary). Interested on the whole but not too keen.

2→Soon loses interest. Sometimes tries but finds it hard to concentrate for long in class. Sometimes forgets to do homework or does only part of homework.

1→Lacks interest. Dislikes learning English. Cannot concentrate for long and often fails to do homework.

When you start to write your own table, try to imagine the student who always tries the hardest and let him or her be the model for your description of the top grade. Then imagine the laziest and least motivated student (if you have such a student!) and write an appropriate description of the bottom grade. Then imagine the average student, and so on.

Remember that a positive attitude to learning is very important indeed and should constantly be encouraged – either through some kind of formal grading or, preferably, by means of indirect and informal encouragement.

Oral activities: projects and role play
In addition to the qualities referred to in the previous section of this chapter, there are certain language skills which cannot be suitably assessed by formal methods of testing. Continuous assessment enables us to see how students can perform in situations and assignments which are closer to real life than formal examinations. Since language (particularly oral language) is essentially a communicative activity, it follows that the oral skills can best be measured by observing how students use language amongst themselves to achieve certain goals.

Spontaneous conversation – genuine communication – is extremely difficult to examine. In many oral tests examiners ask students questions to which they already know the answer. Often an examiner will still be in a position of asking questions simply for the sake of asking questions. In short, the whole situation is artificial; there is too much control and there is nothing spontaneous.

Since it is always essential to give students a reason for speaking, we should devise suitable activities with this in mind. For example, if we want students to exchange information in as natural a way as possible, we can give each student (or each group of students) only part of the information they need. Immediately they will be in the position of asking questions to which they do not know the answer. They themselves will then be asked in turn about the information which they have and the others lack. Such situations are not too difficult to devise. Simply divide students into pairs or let them work in small groups of three or four and give each student an incomplete text or diagram. The students then exchange information orally, listening carefully in order to complete the text or diagram and telling the other students about the contents of their own text or diagram.

Simple role playing is also an activity useful for continuous assessment purposes. Students can act various parts and are given details about a certain situation. For example, a student may be told to buy certain things in a shop but he or she may not be given enough money to get all the things. Another student will be told to act the part of the shopkeeper. While the shopkeeper is serving the customer, another person comes in the shop. The other person is in a great hurry and only wants something small.

This is just one example of a possible situation which students can act out. It is important at the outset to give students in a role play a clear idea of who they are, what they are like and what they should do. Avoid letting them spend a long time preparing for the role play. Students should have the opportunity to speak spontaneously and to react to something unexpected.

While this oral activity is taking place, walk round the class from group to group. Jot down one or two notes discreetly about certain students. Use a card or small note pad. Never make it obvious that you are assessing the students in any way. And don't try to observe every student. Restrict your observations to a handful of students in each lesson – say, six or seven.

When supervising and assessing such activities, it is not necessary for you to remain aloof and provide no help at all. Your active involvement in an activity from time to time can be very useful provided that you take care not to dominate the entire activity.

Whatever the kind of activity, you should try to be systematic in keeping records of your students' progress. Small cards are always very useful as they enable you to walk around the class from group to group, jotting down brief comments and, where appropriate, indications of grades. Remember, however, that short notes are usually far more informative for your purposes than grades or scores. In formal tests we are concerned frequently (but not always) with quantitative assessments (e.g. 24 out of 30, 63 per cent, B- etc). In continuous assessment, however, we should be far more concerned with qualitative judgements. One or two sentences – or short notes – will usually tell us far more about a student than a numerical score.

Writing: editing and group activities
In ordinary writing tests we rarely allow for students' editing skills - the skills of correcting what they have written, reorganising it, omitting certain parts, adding other parts and generally expressing themselves more effectively. When we administer tests of writing, we usually expect students to be able to write a perfect piece of prose at their very first attempt. Such a task is one which few professional writers ever achieve or even attempt to achieve.

This situation is usually a result of the fact that the assessment of the editing skills is not particularly suited to normal testing situations. These skills are far better measured in class by careful observation whenever students are engaged in a writing task; hence the importance of continuous assessment in this field.

Unfortunately, most tests also require students to write a composition, letter, report, etc. within strict time limits. Once again, such tests do not reflect the situations so often encountered in real life, when we have

considerable time to write and re-write. Consequently, in many cases you will find that continuous assessment is a much better tool for the measurement of writing than either a formal or an informal test.

Group writing activities also especially lend themselves to continuous assessment. In a group task, each individual student writes a paragraph or part of a composition. Then, working together as a group, the students organise the different paragraphs into a complete composition. As they do this, they check each part for errors. Finally, after discussion and re-writing at this stage, all the students in the group write out the complete composition - an activity which can be judged satisfactorily only by means of continuous assessment.

Using questions for continuous assessment
Questions have several purposes in teaching and testing. We are chiefly concerned here with 1) finding out students' strengths and weaknesses,
2) evaluating students' preparation, and 3) checking comprehension.

When you use questions as an aid to assessment, don't jot down marks and comments in front of the class. Before you ask questions, choose only three or four students for observation. After your questions (or preferably at the end of the lesson), quickly write down one or two notes about the students concerned. Students should never be aware that you are asking questions to assess them in any way. Questioning should be a pleasant experience with as great an emphasis on helping students to learn as on assessing their progress and diagnosing their weaknesses.

Consequently, always ask questions in a friendly and sympathetic manner. Moreover, vary the difficulty level of your questions to suit both more able and less able students. Many of the questions you ask in teaching English may be divided into the following types:

1 recognition questions
Did the girl in the story you've just read go on a picnic or stay at home?

2 recall questions
What did the girl do in the story you've just read?

3 comprehension questions
Can you tell me what the author's reasons for his view were?

4 evaluation questions
What's your opinion about the way Tina acted when she heard the news?

5 application questions
The word 'edible' refers to any kind of food which isn't poisonous. What would you do if you found some berries which you knew were inedible?

It isn't necessary to vary your questions systematically according to the types exemplified here. It is enough to be aware of the different kinds of questions and to try to vary them from time to time. Concentrate on forming a reliable impression of a student and on noting down general information about the student's performance.

Combining methods
Remember that the most reliable form of continuous assessment combines grades and comments from course work, projects and group work, homework assignments, oral questioning, and progress tests.

Moreover, in many schools and colleges the information obtained from continuous assessment is further combined with terminal assessment i.e. marks in an end-of-term or end-of-year exam. Once you feel confident about the reliability of the grades you award in your continuous assessment of students, you may wish to dispense with terminal assessment or at least reduce the number of formal exams.

Continuous assessment should be regarded as an integral part of your teaching and your students' learning. Above all, it should be designed and administered so that it forms a pleasant component of your teaching programme. Often students will be quite unaware of any kind of assessment taking place since the whole situation will be informal and relaxed. If continuous assessment is treated as a formal means of student measurement in any way at all, its value will be largely lost.

If carried out sensibly, continuous assessment will be as natural a process as learning itself and indistinguishable from it. One of its main purposes will, in fact, be to improve your teaching by providing opportunities for recall and revision. Another equally important purpose will be to provide you with a means of diagnosing not only your students' weaknesses but any weaknesses in your teaching, in your particular programme of work, in the books you use and in the syllabus you are following. In short, it will tell you more about your own teaching.

Above all, however, continuous assessment should encourage learning and motivate students. This, after all, should be the reason for everything we do when we teach and test in the classroom.

The backwash effect: from testing to teaching
Luke Prodromou

"*Teach*: If you teach someone something you give them instructions so they know about it or how to do it; you make them think, feel or act in a new or different way; you explain or show students how to do something.?" (Cousins' COBUILD Dictionary)

"*Test:* To find out how much someone knows by asking them questions."
        (Longman's Active Study Dictionary).

'Teach' and 'test' are quite close together in a dictionary, but in testing we do different things from the things we do when we teach. This article assesses the concept of 'backwash' in language teaching, looks at the consequences of testing on teaching in a broad educational context, and suggests that 'negative backwash' makes good language teaching more difficult. The two processes of testing and teaching are considered to be necessary but distinct. A system is described for distinguishing between them which is then applied to developing classroom activities for examination preparation classes, to help teachers move from testing to teaching procedures.

What is the backwash effect?
The backwash effect can be defined as the direct or indirect effect of examinations on teaching methods. According to the effect of examinations on what we do in the classroom we may refer to 'positive' and 'negative' backwash (Heaton 1990: 170, Hughes 1989: 1).

Whether the backwash effect is positive or negative, how it operates in particular contexts – indeed, whether it exists at all – must be explored empirically. Many of the assumptions about backwash are untested and simplistic. Alderson and Wall (1993) point out that very little observation of the effect has been carried out, and that what evidence there is points to the highly complex nature of the process.

Bearing these words of caution in mind, it might be useful to provide a brief background to the description of backwash put forward in this article. I have been involved in examinations at several levels: as a teacher, trainer, examiner, and writer of tests and examination-related materials. The backwash effect described here is based on my observation of examination classes in the private and public sectors, over a period of twenty years, in a society (Greece) where examinations play a very significant role.

The consequences of backwash
Professional neglect of the backwash effect (what it is, how it operates, and its consequences) is one of the main reasons why new methods often fail to take root in language classes. Many teachers, trapped in an examination preparation cycle, feel that communicative and humanistic methodologies are luxuries they cannot afford. When the market calls on teachers and institutions to produce quantifiable results, it usually means good examination results. Sound teaching practices are often sacrificed in an anxious attempt to 'cover' the examination syllabus, and to keep ahead of the competition. In summary, 'negative backwash', as experienced by the learner, means language learning in a stressful, textbook-bound environment.

The value of testing
It goes without saying that tests and examinations – at the right time, in the right proportions – have a valuable contribution to make in assessing learners' proficiency, progress, and achievement. As a device for diagnosing learners' errors, and for defining the interlanguage of individuals and groups of learners, they are indispensable. Tests are also the simplest and most effective form of extrinsic motivation, of imposing discipline on the most unruly class, and of ensuring attention as well as regular attendance. Because they are

closely bound up with classroom authority, tests invariably lead to teacher-centred lessons, especially where the teacher is inexperienced or insecure.

Uses and abuses of testing

Abuse of testing occurs when tests invade essential teaching space, when they are not the final stage of a process of learning but become the beginning, middle and end of the whole process. Testing may be a short-cut to extrinsic motivation, but constant resort to it is an admission of the teacher's failure to make intrinsic motivation work. In the long run, it will demotivate the learner.

Overt backwash

The backwash effect can be overt or covert. In its overt forms, it usually means doing a lot of past papers in class as preparation for an examination; it may involve replicating, from past papers or the textbook, the exercise types favoured in the particular examination students will be taking: multiple-choice, transformation or gap-filling. The methodological routine that results from the negative backwash effect in its overt forms is an all too familiar one: presentation of the text followed by questions similar to those in the examination. This 'text + questions' formula is a crude mirror-image of what happens in most conventional examinations.

Other hallmarks of the backwash effect include the use of fragments of (often inauthentic) language, a concentration on word- and sentence-level linguistic features, and a focus on skills which in terms of administration and marking are easier to test. This is why reading and writing tend to be given much more emphasis in classrooms than speaking and listening.

This kind of overt backwash is usually negative, but there is no reason why we should not have tests which adopt techniques more in line with communicative and, to some extent, humanistic teaching. Fortunately, it seems that most examination boards are aware of the problem, and are taking steps to tip the balance in favour of positive backwash. It is possible for testing procedures to have a positive effect on classroom practice. For example, when one of the examination boards introduced a listening test based on audio-cassette material (to replace the texts read aloud by an examination supervisor), this had the effect of heightening awareness of what authentic listening involves, and schools quickly began to prepare students to cope with the new challenges.

Covert backwash

The explicit consequences of the backwash effect are easily identifiable. The implicit consequences are more elusive, and more disturbing. Even if examination boards reduced the number of boring multiple-choice exercises, the examination class would still be in conflict with the teacher's desire to teach communicatively and humanistically. This is because covert testing will always be with us. It is a deep-seated, often unconscious process, which reflects unexamined assumptions about a wide range of pedagogic principles: how people learn, the relationship between learner and teacher, the nature of teacher authority, the importance of correction, the balance between form and content, the role of classroom management, and so on.

Basically, covert testing amounts to teaching a textbook as if it were a testbook. Usually the teacher is not fully aware of this process: in his or her mind there is a clear dividing line between a lesson which involves teaching and one which involves testing. I am using the latter term in a specific sense which includes both overt and covert backwash effects. Some examples of covert testing will show what I mean. I have observed many lessons where the teacher asks a question, receives a correct answer from a particular student, and then moves on to ask the next student the next question. The objective of this routine is to find out what the students know. This, and the lack of involvement of the rest of the class in the sequence, makes the activity more of an informal assessment than a teaching procedure. The absence of any lead-in or follow-up to the work done on a text is entirely typical of testing procedures.

Lead-ins and follow-ups have become standard teaching devices (see Peck 1988:201, where he refers to them as 'heads and tails'). The pedagogic rationale of a lead-in is to arouse interest and draw on the students' knowledge, thereby making learning 'easier'. By drawing a personal response from students, a follow-up will help fix or anchor the new input in the learners' memories. A good teacher maximises the learners' chance of success by pre-teaching vocabulary, and doing pre-listening and pre-reading tasks to motivate learners, activate their past experience, and draw on their potential for more effective learning strategies. This

approach could not be more in contrast to the standard ritual in classroom tests and public examinations, where the teacher simply gives out the papers, and instructs students to 'get on with it' in silence.

Penalizing error
Testing values correct answers, and penalizes error. But in teaching we should be as interested in the process by which students arrive at the wrong answer as we are in the correct answer itself. Holt (1964: 142-3) described how the process of 'only the right answer' ignores the stage individual students have reached in their learning, and imposes on them models of performance based on the 'good' learners in the class. In testing, the good learner is a yardstick by which all students are measured; in teaching, the student is his or her own yardstick. This is important: covert testing occurs whenever we do not give individuals their own space and time to answer questions; it is in subtle, invisible ways like this that we set up students to fail. Failure may be an inevitable feature of the discrimination required in testing procedures, and the classroom hierarchies this leads to; in teaching, however, discrimination in the negative sense has no place – for the good language teacher, success in tests should be as routine as failure.

Asking questions
In overt tests, the teacher or the examiners ask a lot of questions, but students taking public examinations, for instance, are expressly discouraged from doing so, unless there are exceptional circumstances. In covert testing, too, the teacher asks a lot of questions, while the students are not given much opportunity to ask questions (of the teacher or each other). A teaching procedure, on the other hand, allows students to exercise the power of asking questions; question-asking is accepted as an assertion of personality that can give a boost to self-confidence. It is symptomatic of the psychology of conventional testing that questions are discouraged, and worrying to note how often teaching mimics the mono-interrogative mode of public examination, with parallel systems of teacher authority and student submissiveness.

Denying learners' thinking time
In covert testing less able learners are penalized by the collective assumption that the objective of teacher questions is to elicit the right answer in the shortest possible time. Thus, good students shout out the answers, put their hands up first, fill in the pauses created by 'slower' learners searching for the right answer. Testing abhors pauses, which it sees as a vacuum rather than a necessary space in which students find their own level.

Some learners need more thinking time than others, but conventional testing conditions impose a strict time limit on the production of knowledge. It is not uncommon to hear of highly intelligent people who have failed public examinations because of time constraints, or an inability to adapt their learning style to examination conditions.

In denying learners essential thinking time teachers often unconsciously recreate these conditions; it is a great temptation to accept a correct answer from the quicker students and move on to the next question. Not giving students the time they need to prepare and process language, either in whole-class work or in pairs, creates anxiety, even panic, and therefore error – teacher-induced error. The strict time limits of formal tests can produce error in the same way.

The proxemics of covert testing
Covert testing routines are often accompanied and reinforced by the teacher's approach to classroom management. The use of space is one important dimension of the management of groups. Teachers can teach badly, not because of the methods or techniques they have adopted, but through mismanagement of space.

Many teachers tend to move closer to the student they have asked to answer a question, and to fix their gaze on this student as they wait for the answer they have in mind. This proximity of teacher and nominated student tends to exclude the rest of the class; the teacher's body language almost invites the non-participants to 'switch off' and talk amongst themselves, which they often do, till the teacher turns to them in search of the next correct answer.

Denying learners communication
A powerful visual message is also conveyed by the way desks are arranged in the classroom. In testing, the desks are invariably arranged in straight lines with a space between them large enough to deter students from

communicating with each other. Communication between students in a test is thus both implicitly and explicitly forbidden.

In teaching, by contrast, we encourage sharing and communication by arranging desks in a semi-circular or group formation. These are familiar dichotomies. Yet how many teachers go into a classroom for an ordinary lesson where the desks have already been laid out in linear fashion and leave them exactly as they are, even though a horse-shoe or group arrangement is possible? The learners are thus given an unspoken but powerful message about the teacher's methodological assumptions; what in teaching we would call 'caring and sharing', in testing becomes 'cheating'.

The way we use space in class is as important as the texts we choose and the methodology we adopt in presenting them. An arrangement of desks, appropriate in the context of objective assessment, when transferred to everyday teaching, may obstruct the process of learning.

Inflation of teacher authority
Testing, overt and covert is, as Fabian (1982: 24) has argued, a paternalistic, teacher-centred business: 'Examinations – like democratic institutions – do not thrive in isolation. When the consumer and the community at large surrender to academic technicians their right and duty to be involved, they also surrender their right to check on the teaching strategies that are the direct result.'

The premium placed on the 'right answer' in both overt and covert testing inevitably adds to the inflation of the teacher's authority, based on his or her role as arbiter of correctness. One of my main arguments is that we need to move away from this relationship towards a learner-centred approach to testing, and I will give examples of how this can begin to happen. (***)

Management techniques
My suggestions may seem to imply that the problem of negative backwash is one of course design and methodology. It is, however, especially in its covert forms, chiefly a problem of attitude and rapport. Teachers express attitudes towards learning not only in their choice of materials and methods, but also in their approach to classroom management. This discipline – which involves the use of time, space, voice, and gesture – weaves subtle messages which can motivate or demotivate a class. For this reason I would like to end with a brief checklist of management tactics which will tend to mitigate some of the features of testing, and encourage an ideology of co-operative learning.

1 When you ask the class a question, allow the 'weaker' students some thinking time – do not make question and answer routine a race to the right answer.
2 Do not stand too close to the student who is answering the question, thereby excluding the rest of the class: use space and distance to create an inclusive, group feeling.
3 When you get a 'right' answer do not just move on to the next item: ask other students 'Do you agree?', 'What have you got?' Do not reveal the right answer too soon. The process is as important as the product.
4 Give students time to look at questions before they listen or read – this will make the task more directed, and help develop skills rather than merely test them.
5 Encourage students to share – establish the idea of tests as a group activity alongside individual testing tactics.
6 Ensure smooth linking of the stages of the lesson-avoid the disconnected, random fragments, the rag-bag so characteristic of test material and examination preparation classes.
7 Avoid saying things like 'work quickly', or 'you've got one minute to do this – hurry up'.
8 Arrange desks in such a way that students can see each other and make eye contact.
9 When you ask a question or discuss a problem use eye contact to include the whole class, not just the 'best' students.
10 Use your voice to suggest that error is a useful contribution to the class, not an unfortunate lapse on the part of the student. Try a fall-rise intonation ('Yes, but…') rather than a fall ('No').

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Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: excerpt

At the conference of the Council of Europe "Language Learning for European Citizenship" in Strasbourg in April 1997, a book was presented which will be of major importance for language learning and teaching in the years to come: *Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching Assessment* (Cambridge University Press and Council of Europe).

Developed through a process of scientific research and wide consultation, this document provides a practical tool for setting clear standards to be attained at successive stages of learning and for evaluating outcomes in an internationally comparable manner. The Framework provides a basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications, thus facilitating educational and occupational mobility. It is increasingly used in the reform of national curricula and by international consortia for the comparison of language certificates. A recent European Union Council Resolution (November 2001) recommended the use of this Council of Europe instrument in setting up systems of validation of language competences.

The Framework is a document which describes in a comprehensive manner
- the competences necessary for communication
- the related knowledge and skills
- the situations and domains of communication

The Framework facilitates a clear definition of teaching and learning objectives and methods. It provides the necessary tools for assessment of proficiency. It is of particular interest to course designers, textbook writers, testers, teachers and teacher trainers ─ in fact to all who are directly involved in language teaching and testing.

The function of the framework is "to allow all different partners in the language teaching and learning process to inform each other as transparently as possible of their objectives, primarily in terms of what they wish learners to achieve, the methods they use and the results actually achieved". In addition to a list of parameters and categories for description, six levels of language proficiency have been defined. The levels are named A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2, and roughly correspond to:

- Breakthrough
- Waystage
- Threshold
- Vantage
- Effective operational proficiency
- Mastery

As a rule of thumb, an average learner needs twice the effort to achieve the next level. This means, for instance, that if 100 hours are needed to achieve level A1, 200 are needed for A2, 400 for B1, and so on.

For each level, listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing are distinguished. For each of these skills, a general level descriptor has been formulated.

Levels of the Common European Framework of Reference		
C2	*Mastery Level*	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
C1	*Effective Operational Proficiency Level*	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
B2	*Vantage Level*	Can understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
B1	*Threshold Level*	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
A2	*Waystage Level*	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
A1	*Breakthrough Level*	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Source: http://www.arabic4all.org/eurofram.html

When one looks at these six levels, one sees that they are respectively higher and lower interpretations of the classic division into basic, intermediate and advanced. Also, some of the names given to Council of Europe specifications for levels have proved resistant to translation (e.g. *Waystage, Vantage)*. The scheme therefore proposed adopts a 'hypertext' branching principle, starting from an initial division into three broad levels - A, B and C.

The framework can fulfil an important role in making qualifications more transparent, especially in an international context. National language qualifications of a given school system can be related to the levels of the framework, and schools such as those offering content-based or integrated language education can make it clear what levels are achieved.

The Common European Framework is available in English and French, the two official languages of the Council of Europe, and has been translated into Hungarian. (ed.)
Source: http://www.euroclic.net/english/bulletin/bulletin4/4.htm
The complete document is also available at: http://assets.cambridge.org/0521803136/sample/0521803136WS.pdf

Classroom decision-making and negotiation: conceptualising a process syllabus
M. P. Breen and A. Littlejohn

The question that we address in this article refers to the potential focus of negotiation: *Which classroom decisions are open to negotiation?*

Negotiation can potentially occur in relation to any and all decisions that need to be made in the ongoing creation of the language curriculum of a particular class or group of learners. Procedural negotiation can be the means for teacher and students to reach agreement in four key decision-making areas:

• the purposes of their work together;
• the content or subject matter of their work;
• their various ways of working together;
• their preferred means of evaluation of the efficiency and quality of the work and its outcomes so that new directions in the work can be identified.

These four areas of decision-making can be expressed in terms of questions the answers to which may be negotiated by teacher and students together. These questions are illustrated in Table I.I. Two important characteristics of decision-making become clearer when we consider them as questions. First, as Table I.I. indicates, each major question is generic in the sense that it can be further specified in terms of contributory questions that may need to be addressed through negotiation. Second, any single decision reached can affect and influence other decisions that have to be made.

Negotiation between a teacher and students and between the students themselves can be devoted to *any one* of these or similar questions. Not only may negotiation be selective among the range of decisions, it may occur only at certain points depending on the circumstances of each classroom group. Indeed, it would be highly unusual and inefficient for a classroom group to seek negotiated agreement on all of the major questions in every lesson, even if this was feasible. A language lesson is rarely a discrete event although it may follow its own micro-sequence focusing upon a single topic or aspect of language, punctuated by class, group or individual work, involving a particular way of working, and concluding, perhaps, with some form of evaluation and feedback. However, classroom work is most often based on a macro-sequence of related lessons. Content in terms of a topic or specific uses of language may take up a series of lessons and may be recycled. Participation may shift appropriately from whole group, to small group and individual work and back again on a particular set of tasks or larger activity over time. Additionally, assessment of achievements or evaluation of the whole process may come only at the end of a number of lessons when the sequence is completed. Lessons form a kind of narrative, and negotiation seen as part of a cycle is the means for teacher and students to initiate such a narrative together and for revealing their interpretations of it as it unfolds as the basis for future decisions.

Purposes: Why are we learning the language?
What immediate and long term learning need(s) should be focused upon? What should we aim to know and be able to do? What very specific aims might we have? etc.

Content: What should be the focus of our work?
What aspects of the language? What topics, themes, or specific uses of the language? What skills, strategies or competencies when using or learning the language? What puzzle(s), problem(s) or focus for investigation should be addressed? etc.

Ways of working: How should the learning work be carried out?
With what resources? What types of texts or materials would be most appropriate? How long should it take? How will the time available be organised? What working procedure or set of instructions should be followed? Who will work with whom? (the teacher with the class, a group or an individual?; the students in groups, in pairs or alone?). What can best be done in class and what best outside class? What support or guidance may be needed, what form should it take, and who should provide it?

Evaluation: How well has the learning proceeded?
What should be the outcomes from the work? Have the purposes been achieved? Of the intended outcomes, what has not been learned and what has been learned in addition to these? How should outcomes be assessed and against which criteria? What will happen with the assessment? etc.

Table I.I. *The range of decisions open to negotiation*

The negotiation cycle
Figure I.2 illustrates the negotiation cycle within a process syllabus indicating three important steps in the cycle. At Step 1, teacher and students identify and address those decisions from the full range which may appear to be most appropriate and feasible for them to negotiate in the context in which they work, or the most urgent, or even ones that both teacher and have different reasons for the particular decisions which they choose to negotiate.

Step 1:   *Negotiated decisions*
Purposes: WHY?   Contents: WHAT?   Ways of working: HOW?   Evaluation: HOW WELL?

Step 2:   *Action(s)*
Undertaken on the basis of the negotiated decisions at Step 1;for example: tasks chosen and completed, plans made, evaluation procedures worked out

Step 3:   *Evaluation*
of learning outcomes:achievements and difficulties
of the process itself in relation to outcomes: appropriateness of purposes, contents, ways of working, evaluation and action taken at Step 2
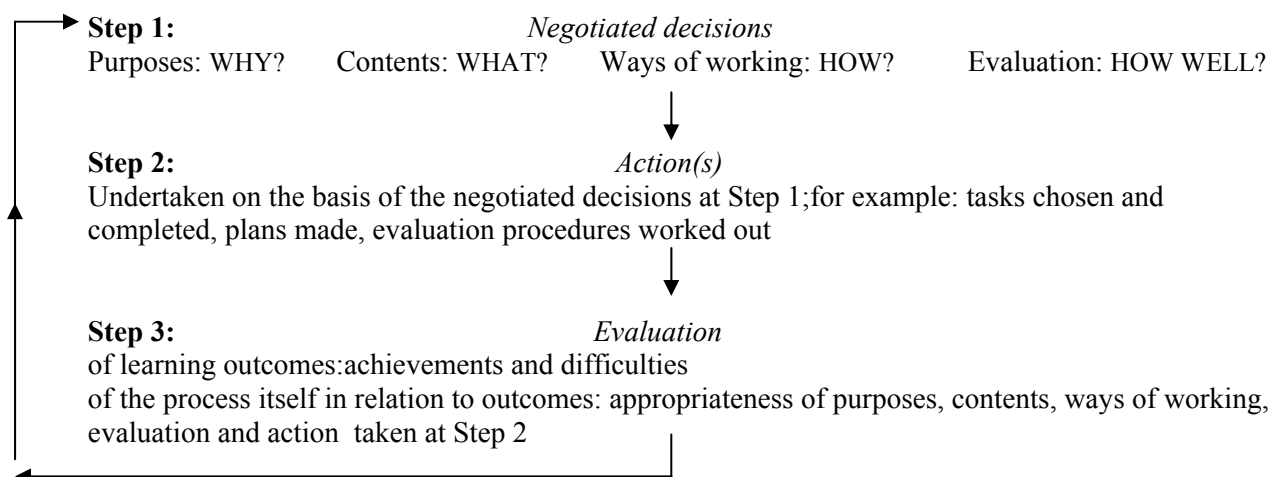
Figure 1.2 *The negotiation cycle*

Step 2 in the cycle is the resulting action or actions in terms of what is done on the basis of decisions made. We can briefly illustrate such 'actions' by giving examples of what might occur as a result of a negotiated decision within each of the four areas of decision-making.

Implementing decisions made in relation to their *Purposes*, students might collect and display the short-term and long-term language learning aims of all class members, or analyse a test or exam that has to be taken at the end of the course in order to plan and map out future work upon unfamiliar aspects, etc. In relation to the *Contents* of the work, the group may choose to work on a common topic or different topics, undertake tasks that focus on form or use of the language, or they may work on specific problems they have identified, or find out about specific learning strategies that members of the group have found helpful. Implementing decisions made concerning their *Ways of Working*, students may investigate specific resources beyond the classroom, or agree a particular schedule for an activity and who would be responsible for which parts of it, or specify that a particular task will be a whole class undertaking with the teacher, or something completed in sub-groups, or even partly undertaken by individual students but with a view to sharing outcomes. Concerning *Evaluatio*n, students may identify particular criteria for success, choose or design an appropriate test or diagnostic task, or create portfolios of their work and write an evaluative report identifying their strengths and weaknesses, etc., etc.

These few examples of actions resulting from negotiated decisions at Step i are merely illustrative and it may be that a classroom group will either implement a decision within only one of the decision-making areas or act upon a set of decisions initially negotiated across all four areas.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of a process syllabus is that it pivots upon the evaluation of an agreed action or set of actions. Identifying learner reflection as a key contributory factor in learning, Step 3 of the cycle involves the classroom group in evaluation of:

1. outcomes in terms of both what is learned and what has proved problematic; and
2. the appropriateness or otherwise of the actual process which they have followed in terms of initial decisions made and subsequent actions undertaken.

A key criterion of appropriateness here is the extent to which initially planned or agreed learning purposes have been achieved. This reflective phase is, of course, unlikely to occur in every lesson or session but more likely at the completion of a large activity made up of a sequence of tasks or after a related sequence of lessons. However, the phase is critical in the whole process because it generates essential information for teacher and students for the next cycle of decision-making.

Clearly, the teacher stands in the centre of the negotiation process. The teacher has the opportunity to act as a role model for active learning. The teacher can welcome learners'alternative interpretations and proposals as equal but also identify them as open to the group's judgements, selection and agreement.

Lesson art and design
Scott Thornbury

Novice teachers find lesson planning difficult because of the lack of experientially-derived lesson schemata. As a substitute – and as a way of encouraging experienced teachers to re-think lesson design unconstrained by narrow methodological prescriptions – I suggest that teachers look to the expressive arts for principles and structures for lesson design. Such a perspective may harmonize with their learners' expectations, as borne out by a student survey of lesson metaphors. Good lessons, I conclude, share features with, among other art forms, good films. They have plot, theme, rhythm, flow, and the sense of an ending.

Lesson schemata, scripts, and images
Novice teachers frequently admit to having difficulties planning lessons. These quotes from the diaries of pre-service trainees are typical:

> 'For reasons I'm still not sure I understand, I had a real difficult time preparing this lesson ...'
> 'Still don't feel absolutely comfortable planning strategy for my own lessons.'
> 'Went home and spent five hours planning Tuesday's lesson ...'
> (Thornbury 1991a)

What is it that teachers in training don't know, or can't do, which makes lesson planning such a chore? A likely source of difficulty is their lack of a lesson blueprint – that is, an internalized representation of a lesson overall shape that acts as an exemplar for the generation of individually-tailored lessons. It has been shown that, when planning, experienced teachers draw on lesson schemata, or mental scripts (Shavelson and Stern 1981), and that these provide a kind of template on which to map lower-order planning decisions. These mental scripts are often conceived in visual terms as lesson images. Westerman (1991: 298), quotes one experienced teacher as saying, when asked to describe his planning decisions: 'I have a vision. I sort of know exactly how it's going to go. I've imagined what will happen.'

Such 'visions' are derived from the cumulative experience of having planned and taught a lot of lessons. In the absence of such experientially-gathered lesson blueprints, trainee and novice teachers need to import them. But when it comes to providing ready-made blueprints, the literature on lesson planning is curiously tight-lipped While there exists an ever-expanding bank of texts and activity types for teachers to draw on, there is little explicit advice as to how these texts and activities might usefully be fashioned into a coherent lesson.

It may be that the reluctance to recommend lesson structures owes a lot to the view that the endorsement of such structures, or models, implies allegiance to a specific methodological paradigm. Thus, the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model is considered suspect by virtue of being associated with a transmission-style view of teaching. Such models, it has been argued, are unnecessarily constraining, and if predicated on discredited learning theory, may perpetuate bad practice. But models, like cooking recipes or route maps, embody the good practice of experienced practitioners, and offer novices shortcuts to professional decision-making. The issue is not whether models per se are good or bad, but which models to choose from. That is, how do you provide the kind of recipes that might be generative without committing trainee teachers to a specific method? What design principles, for example, are generalizable across methods? And, if it is true that images generate lessons, what images for lessons might be accessible to trainees with little or no experience in lesson design?

Lessons as performance events
I have had the opportunity to observe many different teachers in many different contexts over a period of time that has embraced at least one paradigm shift, i.e. from a largely audiolingual methodology to one that is at least nominally communicative. The experience has persuaded me that good lessons share characteristics that are independent of the teacher, the context, and the teacher's allegiance to any particular method. My stronger claim is that, from the point of view of the learners, at least, these `good characteristics'

are largely aesthetic and, as such, are not peculiar to the culture of the classroom, but are shared by other expressive art forms. Further, these design features may provide teachers in training with non-specialist criteria for making sound planning decisions.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 236) suggest that `aesthetic experience is ... not limited to the official art world. It can occur in any aspect of our everyday lives'. This is certainly true of teaching, which Widdowson has suggested should be considered less a science than an art, because teachers `are not scientists seeking to eliminate variety in the interest of establishing generalities ... [Rather,] as artists, they react to variety and give shape and meaning to it.' (Nunan 1996:13) It follows, then, that the basic unit of teaching – the lesson – may justifiably be described, prescribed, and evaluated according to aesthetic criteria.

A teaching event, after all, has many of the contextual characteristics of other public performance activity types. Like a sports match, a piano recital, a play, a rodeo, or a sermon, a classroom lesson is a scheduled, bounded, deliberately-constituted, and purposeful event, happening in real-time and in a specially appointed space. Moreover, it involves two distinct sets of participants, each with mutually accepted codes of behaviour that determine the nature and extent of their participation, and interaction. It should not be surprising, therefore, if teaching events set up expectations similar to those of other performance genres. After all, from the learner's point of view, the success or not of a lesson probably depends less on exclusively classroom-specific factors, such as whether it was a PPP lesson or a task-based lesson, than on much more broadly applied, cross-generic criteria to do with whether it was interesting or boring. And even if such connections are not expressed explicitly, it is nevertheless likely that they may be formulated metaphorically, and it is metaphors, according to Lakoff and Johnson (op. cit.), that both embody and shape our view of the world, and hence our view of both teaching and learning.

Metaphors for lessons
To investigate this hypothesis, a representative sample of EFL students at International House, Barcelona, was asked to complete a questionnaire, ostensibly about metaphors (see Appendix). By asking students to draw comparisons between classroom lessons and other performance genres, it was hoped that at least some respondents would make reference to shared formal features of the genres, as opposed to, for example, similarities in the roles of the participants or in the ways they interact. Of the 39 responses, 13 made reference to formal features, with the most popular metaphor being 'A lesson is a film'. Since the study was by nature small-scale and exploratory, no attempt has been made to analyse the data statistically, nor to correlate the findings with other factors, such as level, age, gender, or ability. The study was intended solely to capture some of 'the metaphors we teach by' (Thornbury 1991b).

Lessons as aesthetic experience
Characteristics of the aesthetic experience mentioned or implied by respondents, and on which I wish to focus, are plot, theme, rhythm, flow, and the sense of an ending.

Plot
A good lesson is like a film 'because it has a plot like in the movies and you have to be caught up in it so you don't lose the thread'. 'It is like the different parts of a jigsaw or a film which add up to a whole which has its own sense.'

That learning is fundamentally narrative by nature is a view that has been argued by Bruner (1985: 97-115), among others, and, at the level of the lesson, story-type structures, such as beginning-middle-end, are easily identifiable.

However, more than being simply stories, good lessons have plots. Forster, in his Aspects of the Novel (1990: 87), distinguishes plots from stories thus:

> 'The king died and then the queen died', is a story. 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief, is a plot. The time sequence is preserved but the sense of causality overshadows it ... Consider the death of the queen. If it is in a story we say: 'And then?' If it is in a plot we ask 'Why?'

In pedagogical terms, this suggests an analogous distinction between story-type lessons and plot-type ones. Some lessons are simply the cumulative layering of only notionally-related activities, whereas the activities

in others have a certain inevitability, in which each stage serves to develop an argument: the difference between sequential staging, on the one hand, and consequential staging, on the other.

In Forster's terms, plots are not only cohesive, but coherent as well: they have an internal consistency. Aristotle (1965: 43), on the epic poem, describes plot unity in these terms: 'Its various incidents must be so arranged that if any one of them is differently placed or taken away, the effect of wholeness will be seriously disrupted. For if the absence or presence of something makes no apparent difference, it is no real part of the whole.' These characteristics would seem to apply equally to well-designed lessons.

Another essential plot feature is the complication. Complications and their resolutions have been identified as obligatory generic features of spoken narratives (Labov 1972). By analogy, good lessons have complications, which typically take the form of problem-setting tasks, be they the induction of a rule, the comprehension of a challenging text, or the production of language beyond the learner's current level of competence. Through collaborative classroom work, the complication is satisfactorily resolved. Lessons in which learning is not problematized, i.e. in which there are no complications, may be perceived by learners as being deficient in plot.

Theme
A lesson is like a symphony 'because a symphony has an introduction and a conclusion, and different ongoing parts.... which at the same time vary, giving a range of ideas and developments on a limited number of musical ideas'.
The theme is, essentially what the lesson is about. In discourse terms, it is the topic, and van Lier's (1988: 148) definition serves well: 'In a classroom ethnography, topic is ... a sustained focusing of attention, through the talk and across a stretch of talk, on some single issue or set of closely related issues.'

No other single factor contributes as much to the sense of the wholeness of a lesson as thematic, or topic, consistency. Nevertheless, less experienced teachers, often overly fixated on grammatical objectives, tend to make the grammar the theme, and to marshall a repertoire of thematically unrelated activities to present and practise it. Learners may be hard-pressed to offer any simple answer to the question 'What was the lesson about?', apart from 'We did the present perfect.'. Van Lier would describe this kind of lesson as activity-oriented rather than topic-oriented (op.cit.). In terms of retention, I suspect that this may have negative effects since, over time, lessons are remembered less for their grammatical content than for the salience, relevance, and inherent interest of their themes, with the best themes of all being volunteered by the learners themselves.

Rhythm
A lesson is like a film 'because in a good class there have to be changes of rhythm, it has to be agreeable, amusing, and it has to take place without you realizing it'. A lesson is like a poem, 'because a poem should have ... a good rhythm, and meaningful content'.

'Whenever we transcribe and analyse lessons we get the strong feeling that they all have a sense of rhythm to them, or some form of cyclical progression' (van Lier 1988: 162). Doyle (1986: 403) elaborates: 'Time does not simply pass in classrooms. Rather, there is rhythmic movement toward the accomplishment of academic and socio-interactional ends.' This rhythmic movement is achieved through basic 'to-and-fro' sequences, such as question-and-answer routines and prompt-response drills, but also by alternating between teacher-fronted activities and pair or group work, between form-focused activities and meaning-focused ones, between a receptive skill focus and productive skill focus, and between activities demanding a high degree of concentration and activities that don't.

Flow
A lesson is like a play, 'because one moment you can be enjoying yourself and then at another you have to pay attention to how the play is developing'. Flow is less a planning strategy than the procedure by which planned elements such as plot, theme, and rhythm are operationalized. Shavelson and Stern (1981: 484) have noted that 'the teachers' main concern during interactive teaching is to maintain the flow of the activity'.

Flow is essential if a sense of the whole is not to be lost through a concentration on the parts. Lévi-Strauss (1978: 49), writing on the parallels between myth and music, says:

> 'A symphony has a beginning, has a middle, it has an end, but nevertheless I would not understand anything of the symphony, and I would not get any musical pleasure out of it, if I were not able, at each moment, to muster what I have listened to before, and what I am listening to now, and to remain conscious of the totality of the music. . .. Thus, there is a kind of continuous reconstruction taking place in the mind of the listener to music or the listener to a mythical story . . .'

Of course, the reconstruction may be taking place in the mind of the learner in the lesson. Lessons that flow facilitate this process of continuous mental reconstruction.

Flow is achieved principally through the deployment of largely automated routines. Experienced teachers have a fairly limited number of these routines, but they are usually fluidly automated. They free teachers' attentional resources, allowing them to attend to the 'cut-and-thrust' of learner interactions, where, arguably, opportunities for learning are optimally situated. New teachers, like novice drivers, have to think themselves through every stage of a classroom procedure, which is why their lessons often lack flow.

More problematically, without automated routines, novices have little attention in reserve to deal with the unexpected: unsolicited questions, for example, or learner errors. From a training perspective, rather than encouraging novice teachers to experiment with a wide gamut of techniques, it may be more helpful to provide as many opportunities as possible, in the practicum, for example, to become proficient at executing, and automating, a limited repertoire of multi-purpose classroom procedures.

The sense of an ending

A lesson is like a story, because, 'like an English class, it has a beginning, a development, and an end, and it always has a happy ending'.

A lesson is like a meal, 'because in a good class there's the first course which is the presentation of the new topic, after which comes the practice of what has been learnt, during which you're allowed a break, and afterwards there's the dessert, which should be a little bit more amusing and original. At times, however, the dessert is the most boring bit of all.'

A lesson is like a film, 'because in a good film you are feeling more and more interested along all the time it lasts and at the end you feel convinced about the story and happy about the hours you have spent'.

Kermode (1967: 46) coined the term 'a sense of an ending' to describe the impetus that drives narrative fiction forward, the expectation on the part of the reader that complications will be resolved, that 'tock' will follow 'tick', and the 'sense that however remote tock may be, all that happens, happens as if tock were certainly following'. Do lessons have endings? And if so, what constitutes a 'happy' one?

The conventional wisdom on lesson design is that, consistent with a techno-rational approach to instruction, the 'end' of a lesson is the demonstrated achievement of a pre-selected learning objective, usually the 'learning' of a discrete item of grammar. This is a fundamental tenet of the PPP model of instruction; teachers in training are constantly exhorted to articulate linguistic aims when planning lessons, and are criticized when they fail to achieve them.

Paradoxically, the 'aims-driven model of lesson planning does not, it seems, reflect the processes by which experienced teachers plan their lessons. Freeman (1996: 97) summarizes the research findings: 'Teachers [tend] to plan lessons as ways of doing things for given groups of students, rather than to meet particular objectives.' In other words, rather than adopt a means-ends model of planning, it seems that teachers start with a general notion of 'fit', i.e. an understanding of what kind of lesson will fit a particular class. Harmer's (1991: 266) advice more accurately reflects the process: 'Teachers should make decisions about activities independently of what language or language skills they have to teach. Their first planning thought should centre round what kind of class would be appropriate for the particular group of students on a particular day.'

How, then, can teachers provide a sense of an ending in a lesson whose primary focus is not a discrete item of grammar? Kermode's 'tick-tock' principle would seem to apply just as well to lessons as it does to novels:

the tension and momentum of the lesson is sustained by a sense of expectancy – the expectation, for example, that all complications will be resolved. This expectation of closure, as opposed to drift, serves to structure the learning experience, and make it purposeful, but without imposing on it the techno-rational 'achievement of aims' scenario so beloved by examining bodies.

The expectation of resolution assumes, of course, the presence of complications to start with. The PPP model is designed to pre-empt complications. A more reactive and problematizing approach is the test-teach-test cycle: learners are first set a communicative-task, on the basis of which their task-specific language needs are diagnosed. Some form of instruction is then provided, after which the initial task (or one similar) is repeated. The 'happy ending' is one in which there is a perceptible improvement in the performance of the repeated task. Moreover, if this task is to be performed to the class, anticipation of the public phase to come may provide a washback effect, concentrating the minds of the learners, and reinforcing the sense of an outcome – the sense of an ending.

While this attempt to draw connections between classroom lessons and expressive art forms may seem far-fetched, experience suggests that, when pedagogical practices are construed in metaphorical terms, these practices are often rendered less opaque to trainee teachers. On pre-service courses, tasks, involving matching the unfamiliar (teaching) with the familiar (the expressive arts), offer accessible criteria for designing and evaluating lessons. After all, every trainee teacher will have an opinion as to what makes a good film or story, but they may feel less confident about voicing criteria for good lesson design. (***)

Note
(1) In a similar but more extensive survey of teenage EFL learners in Greece, Prodromou found that of 100 respondents, 31% chose a game as their metaphor for a good lesson, followed by a play (22%), a film (13%), music (10%), a story (9%), and a meal (6%). (Prodromou, personal communication)

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Appendix
Questionnaire: Metaphors
1 In your opinion, what should a good English class be like? Choose of the following:
a story/ a symphony/ a film/ a meal/ a song/ a poem/ a football/tennis/basketball match/ a dance/ a play/ a sonata/ or…?

2 Why? What does your choice have in common with a good class?
For example: (if you chose a football match) 'Because in a good there's a break . . .'

How to use textbooks
Jeremy Harmer

from Harmer, J. 1998. *How to Teach English.* Longman

What are the different options for textbook use?
When teachers open a page in their textbook, they have to decide whether they should use the lesson on that page with their class. Is the language at the right level? Is the topic/content suitable for the students? Are there the right kind of activities in the book? Is the sequencing of the lesson logical?

If the language, content and sequencing of the textbook are appropriate, the teacher will want to go ahead and use it. If, however, there is something wrong with the textbook, the teacher has to decide what to do next. (***)

In his book *Making the Most of Your Textbook,* the author Neville Grant suggests four alternatives when the teacher decides the textbook is not appropriate. Firstly, he or she might simply decide to *omit* the lesson. That solves the problem of inappropriacy and allows him or her to get on with something else.

There's nothing wrong with omitting lessons from textbooks. Teachers do it all the time, developing a kind of 'pick and choose' approach to what's in front of them. However, if they omit too many pages, the students may begin to wonder why they are using the book in the first place, especially if they have bought it themselves.

Grant's second option is to *replace* the textbook lesson with one of the teacher's own. This has obvious advantages: the teacher's own material probably interests him or her more than the textbook and it may well be more appropriate for the students. If the teacher is dealing with the same language or topic, the students can still use the book to revise that particular language/vocabulary. But the same comments apply here as for omission. If too much of the textbook is replaced, both students and teacher may wonder if it is worth bothering with it at all.

The third option is to *add* to what is in the book. If the lesson is rather boring, too controlled, or if it gives no chance for students to use what they are learning in a personal kind of way, the teacher may want to add activities and exercises which extend the students' engagement with the language or topic.Addition is a good alternative since it uses the textbook's strengths but marries them with the teacher's own skills and perceptions of the class in front of him or her.

The final option is for the teacher to adapt what is in the book. If a reading text in the textbook is dealt with in a boring or uncreative way, if an invitation sequence is too predictable or if the teacher simply wants to deal with the material his or her way, he or she can adapt the lesson, using the same basic material, but doing it in his or her own style.

Using textbooks creatively is one of the premier teaching skills. However good the material is, most experienced teachers do not go through it word for word. Instead, they use the best bits, add to some exercises and adapt others. Sometimes, they replace textbook material with their own ideas ─ or ideas from other teachers and books ─ and occasionally they may omit the textbook lesson completely. (***)

So why use textbooks at all?
There are some teachers who have a very poor opinion of textbooks. They say they are boring, stifling (for both teacher and students) and often inappropriate for the class in front of them. Such people want to rely on their own ideas, snippets from reference books, pages from magazines, ideas from the students themselves and a variety of other sources.

Most teachers and students would recognise the truth behind these criticisms of textbooks - whether they teach language, mathematics, or geography. They are sometimes uninteresting and lacking in variety, for

example, and all teachers can remember times when they saw the way a textbook treated a piece of language or a reading text and thought they could do it much better themselves. Added to this must be the ever-present danger that both teacher and students will get locked into the book, using its content as the only material which is taken into the classroom, always approaching a piece of teaching and learning in the way the book says it should be done. In such circumstances, the book becomes like a millstone around the necks of all concerned, removing, as it does, the very possibility of engagement which its writer(s) hoped to provoke in the first place. As a result, some teachers take the decision to do without textbooks altogether, a decision which may well be of benefit to their students if, and only if, the teacher has the experience and time to provide a consistent programme of work on his or her own and if he or she has a bank of materials to back up the decisions that are taken. Such a decision will need the agreement of the students too.

For the vast majority of teachers who do use them, textbooks are just collections of material. However well they are planned, they can be inappropriate for teachers and students who should approach them with a degree of healthy scepticism which allows them not only to assess their contents carefully but also to use the textbooks judiciously for their own ends, rather than have the textbook use and control them.

Despite these worries about the dangers of textbook use, it should be pointed out that students often feel more positive about textbooks than some teachers. For them, the textbook is reassuring. It allows them to look forward and back, giving them a chance to prepare for what's coming and review what they have done. Now that books tend to be much more colourful than in the old days, students enjoy looking at the visual material in front of them.

For teachers too, textbooks have many advantages. In the first place, they have a consistent syllabus and vocabulary will have been chosen with care. Good textbooks have a range of reading and listening material and workbooks, for example, to back them up. They have dependable teaching sequences and, at the very least, they offer teachers something to fall back on when they run out of ideas of their own.

It is precisely because not everything in the textbook is wonderful - and because teachers want to bring their own personality to the teaching task - that addition, adaptation, and replacement are so important. That is when the teacher's own creativity really comes into play. That's when the dialogue between the teacher and the textbook really works for the benefit of the students.

How should teachers choose textbooks?
At many stages during their careers, teachers have to decide what books to use.
How should they do this, and on what basis will they be able to say that one book is better or more appropriate than another?

There are nine main areas which teachers will want to consider in the books which they are looking at, as the table on page 119 shows (the issues are not in any significant order).But when completing the questions from the table, teachers should try to follow this 4-stage procedure.

Analysis: the teacher can look through the various books on offer, analysing each for answers to the questions on the next page. It helps to have a chart to write down the answers for this so that the information is clearly displayed.

Piloting: by far the best way to find a book's strengths and weaknesses is to try it out with a class, seeing which lessons work and which don't. If teachers are teaching more than one group at the same level, they may want to teach two different books to compare them.

Consultation: before choosing a book, teachers should try and find out if any of their colleagues have used the book before and how well they got on with it. Through discussion, they can get an idea about whether or not the book is likely to be right for them.

Gathering opinions: anyone who might have an opinion on the book is worth speaking to, from the publisher and bookshop owners, to colleagues and friends. It is also a good idea to let students look through the book and see how they react to a first sight of it. If they express a preference which you agree with, they are likely to be more committed to the textbook.

Although choosing a textbook is an important step, it is what a teacher does with such a book once it has been selected that really matters.

area	questions to consider
1 price	How expensive is the textbook? Can the students afford it? Will they have to buy an accompanying workbook? Can they afford both? What about the teacher; can he or she pay for the teacher's book and tapes?
2 availability	Is the course available? Are all its components (students' book, teacher's book, workbook etc.) in the shops now? What about the next level (for the next term/semester?) Has it been published? Is it available? What about tapes, videos etc.?
3 layout and design	Is the book attractive? Does the teacher feel comfortable with it? Do the students like it? How user-friendly is the design? Does it get in the way of what the book is trying to do or does it enhance it?
4 methodology	What kind of teaching and learning does the book promote? Can teachers and students build appropriate ESA sequences from it? Is there a good balance between Study and Activation?
5 skills	Does the book cover the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) adequately? Is there a decent balance between the skills? Are there opportunities for both Study and Activation in the skills work? Is the language of the reading and listening texts appropriate? Are the speaking and writing tasks likely to engage the students' interest?
6 syllabus	Is the syllabus of the book appropriate for your students? Does it cover the language points you would expect? Are they in the right order? Do the reading and listening texts increase in difficulty as the book progresses?
7 topic	Does the book contain a variety of topics? Are they likely to engage the students' interest? Does the teacher respond to them well? Are they culturally appropriate for the students? Are they too adult or too childish?
8 stereotyping	Does the book represent people and situations in a fair and equal way? Are various categories of people treated equally? Is there stereotyping of certain nationalities? Does the book display conscious or unconscious racism or sexism?
9 teacher's guide	Is there a good teacher's guide? Is it easy to use? Does it have all the answers the teacher might need? Does it offer alternatives to lesson procedures? Does it contain a statement of intention which the teacher and students feel happy with?

Psychology and Teaching English to Children
Marion Williams and Bob Burden

from *jet*, a magazine for teachers of English as a foreign language to young children. Vol. 4. No.3. Issue 2. May1994. Mary Glasgow Magazines

Social interactionists believe the secret of effective learning lies in the relationship between teacher and pupil. Marion Williams and Bob Burden examine the implications this particular psychological theory has for language teaching.

As well as reflecting on practice in order to enhance our approaches to teaching a foreign language to young learners, we should also back up our teaching with a strong theory. One field that we can draw on for a rich body of knowledge to inform our approach to teaching is psychology: a knowledge of how children learn, and how they can be helped to learn. There has, however, been surprisingly little cross-fertilisation between psychology and language teaching up to now. In this article, we aim to discuss one important contribution that psychology can make in informing our practices in teaching a language at primary level: we will first provide a brief introduction to a social-interactionist view of learning, before considering the work of one particular psychologist, Reuven Feuerstein.

Social interaction
For social interactionists, the secret of effective learning lies in the nature of the social interaction between 2 or more people with different levels of skill and knowledge. The role of the one with most knowledge, usually a parent or teacher, is to find ways of helping the other(s) to move into and through the next layer of knowledge, skill or understanding.

One social interactionist who has developed a theory of learning which is currently receiving a great deal of interest and attention worldwide is the Israeli psychologist and educator, Reuven Feuerstein. We have chosen to focus on his ideas as they have exciting implications for the language teacher, and offer possible solutions to some of the questions currently being raised in the ELT field.

Feuerstein's theory of learning
Feuerstein worked with Jewish immigrant children entering Israel from many different parts of the world who appeared to be mentally retarded and incapable of learning at school. Feuerstein firmly believed that this was not true and with a group of co-workers he devised ways of successfully providing these children with the necessary skills and strategies to become fully effective learners.

Central to Feuerstein's theory is the firm belief that anyone can become an effective learner. Two important aspects of his work are: a programme for teaching people to learn how to learn, known as Instrumental Enrichment (I.E.); and a way of assessing the true potential of children that differed significantly from conventional tests, known as 'dynamic' assessment. A central component of his theory is the notion of 'structural cognitive modifiability', which is the belief that no-one ever achieves the full extent of their learning potential, but people continue to develop their cognitive capacity throughout their lives. This view goes against more traditional notions of critical periods and fixed intelligence as central factors in learning. It also leads to the concept of 'mediated learning experiences' (MLE) which we will develop in the rest of this article. We will also consider the implications of mediation to language teachers.

Mediated learning experience
Feuerstein suggests that right from birth a child's learning is shaped by the intervention of an adult (a 'mediator'). This adult, at first the parent, but later the teacher, selects, organises and shapes the stimuli offered to the child. Mediators, therefore, have a considerable amount of influence on children's learning and cognitive development, and have responsibility for the cognitive, social and emotional development of the child.

The teacher or other adult can mediate in a number of different ways to promote or hinder learning (e.g. by effecting confidence, self-image, motivation and the will to learn). Feuerstein identifies 12 ways in which a teacher can mediate (the first 3 are considered essential for all learning tasks; the other 9 are important and helpful, but they do not necessarily apply to all tasks, and they may depend to some extent on the culture in which the learning is taking place):

1 Intention
The teacher's intention in presenting any task must be made absolutely clear to the learners. It is the teacher's job to ensure that the learners understand precisely what is required of them, and that they are able and willing to attempt the task. The learners will then approach an activity in a focussed and self-directed way. This is of particular significance to the language teacher who should make the intentions and procedures of activities clear to learners.

2 Significance
For any learning task to be successful, the teacher needs to make learners aware of the significance of the task so that it has real value or meaning to them personally. The learners then see why they should do the task, and how it will help them in their own learning. If the learners do not find personal value in a task, then it lacks the necessary vitality or relevance to be successful.

For teachers of a foreign language particularly at the primary level, this is a challenge. Teachers would need to develop a repertoire of strategies that they can use in the target language that will help their learners to see the personal relevance and value of what they are doing.

3 Purpose beyond the here and now
Any learning experience should produce learning which is more than the learning or behaviour required by the task itself. That is, the child should learn something of more general value as well. The teacher's role is to make it clear to learners how and why the activity will produce learning that will be helpful in other times and places. For example, the learner might learn some vocabulary and at the same time learn some strategies to help them learn other vocabulary items in the future.

4 A sense of competence
For a learning task to be successful, it is important that teachers encourage learners to feel confident that they can complete the activity. It is vitally important to encourage a positive self-image, self-esteem, self-confidence, a feeling in learners of 'can', or, 'I am capable of this'. This is a factor that is familiar to most language teachers, who often find themselves faced with learners who lack confidence in themselves as language learners, who have a negative self-image, and who lack feelings of being able to express themselves or achieve something in a foreign language. Feuerstein argues that it is the teacher who often carries the blame for poor motivation, for feelings of inadequacy. Once children perceive themselves as incompetent, it is extremely difficult to change this self-image, which will lead to under achievement, lack of ability and erratic behaviour in tackling tasks.

The language teacher thus needs to establish in their classroom a climate that is free from embarrassment, where mistakes can be made without fear, where pupils' ideas and contributions are valued, where the learning activities lead to success, not failure.

5 Control of behaviour
Teachers need to teach children to take a logical and systematic approach to solving problems. Children need to gradually learn to take control of, and responsibility for, their own learning behaviour, so that they can become independent learners.

This aspect of mediation can be developed with young learners through language learning activities in various ways: they can be taught to analyse language, and to develop different strategies, cognitive and communicative, that they will need for language learning, so that they can use these strategies to learn independently. The current interest in learner training and in language awareness link strongly with this aspect of mediation. At primary level, there is still considerable scope for developing materials that teach children problem solving and language learning skills, and to control and regulate their use of these skills for language learning.

6 Goal setting

As part of learning to control their behaviour, children need to learn to set realistic goals, and to plan ways of achieving them. The absence of goals in life can lead to dependency on immediate gratification and an inability to restrain impulsive behaviour.

The teacher, therefore, needs to teach learners how to set goals. In a language class, for example, children can learn to set their own language learning goals and plan ways of achieving them. Alternatively, they can be involved in activities which involve setting targets and making appropriate plans in the foreign language.

7 Challenge

Teachers need to encourage in learners an internal need to respond to challenges, and to search for new challenges in life. This involves providing tasks that stretch children just enough, setting tasks that are sufficiently difficult to provide a challenge, but not too difficult so that they are demotivating. What is particularly important for the language teacher is to avoid always presenting learning tasks in easily manageable stages, which learners progress through in an error-free way without ever having to grapple with the complexity of language.

8 Awareness of change

As part of learning to control their own behaviour, it is important that teachers should develop in their learners an ability to recognise, monitor and assess the changes in themselves as they learn. Many language teaching programmes, however, are based on the learner performing certain behaviours which the teacher evaluates. We would see it as equally important to foster the ability to self-evaluate if we are to produce autonomous language learners.

9 The belief in optimistic alternatives

The teacher must make learners believe that even when they are faced with what appears to be an intractable problem, there is always the possibility of finding a solution.

10 Encouraging sharing

Sharing and working co-operatively is a vital part of social existence, the absence of which can result in cognitive difficulties. The teacher needs to encourage sharing behaviour by setting up tasks in the target language where cooperation is essential, e.g. information-gap activities, group problem-solving tasks, shared writing, and peer editing.

11 Individuality

At the same time as learning to co-operate, children need to become individuals, to feel they can legitimately think and feel differently from others, and to develop their own personalities. The teacher can develop this by making it clear that what each child brings to the class is important. In the foreign language classroom this can be achieved by encouraging the learners to express their own opinions in oral or written activities, and making it clear that these opinions are valued.

12 Belonging

As well as being an individual, a person needs to feel that they belong to a community or a culture. There are many activities a teacher can use to foster a sense of belonging to a group.

Conclusion

In this article we have considered the implications of one aspect of Feuerstein's theory to teaching a language to children. What is clear is that this immediately provides a far stronger foundation to underpin our teaching approach and methodology. It is our view that we need to examine more closely other aspects of psychology, and consider carefully their implications for the language teacher in order to further inform what we are doing when we teach a language to young learners.

Ten Principles for Teaching English to Young Learners
Melanie Williams

Teaching English to young learners involves more than merely teaching the language. Both the social and cognitive development of learners, as well as the linguistic, need to be taken into account when planning for and working with the five to sixteen age group.

From my study of child development and the development of a first and second language in children, I have identified certain patterns and elements which seem to be central to all aspects of development. It is these I feet we need to keep at the forefront of our minds when we teach English to young learners. In many ways these principles might appear to be common-sense and are what some teachers are already doing in their classrooms. In such cases the confirmation should be reassuring.

This global approach also ensures that we foster the development of the complete person, the whole child. For "... language learning is now presented as being closely bound up with all the other learning that is going on". (Donaldson 1978:38)

My Ten Principles are these:

1. Start where the child is
Children bring so much with them to the classroom that is often ignored or underestimated. They have experience of life, knowledge of their world, are good at making sense of what is around them and have already learnt at least one language. Quite an impressive record. In addition, they are usually enthusiastic and well-motivated. The stage of cognitive development will depend upon the age as well as the stimuli they have received to support and trigger that development. One area of difficulty which often arises for teachers occurs when the potential and abilities of the children are ignored and they are thought of as 'empty vessels'. The other is when the tasks or activities set are not designed to be seen from a child's perspective, to make sense to the child, but from an adult's perspective. This renders the task inaccessible to the child, but does not show that the child is unable to do the task. The challenge for teachers is to stay in touch with their learners and set tasks at an appropriate level.

People excel in different ways. It has been shown that, rather than there being one type of 'intelligence', in fact there are many. Gardner (1983), identifies seven different, possibly overlapping intelligences: linguistic, o-mathematical visual/spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, inter-personal and intra-personal. It is, therefore, important that work in the classroom is devised and constructed so that every child, whatever their intelligence strengths, can fully participate and make progress. In addition to the intelligence aspect(s), materials need to be an appropriate balance of the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic channel(s) through which learners process input.

Depending on the level of metacognitive awareness, young learners may not be aware of language as a system: neither, for that matter, are all adults. Therefore, topics are used in the English language classroom to 'carry' and contextualise the target language. These topics should be meaningful, involving and interesting for learners, within their experience of life and conceptually accessible.

2. Encourage social interaction
Learning is an interactive process. Piaget, with reference to general development, holds that the quality and quantity of social interaction a child receives can markedly affect the rate of development. Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) emphasises the quality of interaction "... under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978:86). Scaffolding, Bruner's interpretation of ZPD, is a metaphor to describe the intervention by one 'learned' person in the learning of another. Halliday also supports the interactionist view: "As well as being a cognitive process, this learning of the mother tongue (and subsequent

languages) is also an interactive process. It takes the form of the continued exchange of meanings between self and others,' (1975:139).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), within which I would include Krashen's *Monitor Model* and task-based approaches, has at its heart the importance of understanding and transmitting messages even more than the accuracy of the language which carries it.

3. Support negotiation of meaning and collaborative talk
Meaning is neither constant nor is it fixed. It is renegotiated constantly by all of us in our dealings with each other. Vygotsky (1978) talks about a 'tool kit of culture' where the concepts and meanings the child acquires in the mother tongue arise from the culture by which the child is surrounded. Wells (1987) believes collaborative talk is vital in helping children to shape and arrive at shared meanings and understandings. Fisher (1990) also emphasizes the importance of talk in the development of thinking, appearing to echo Vygotsky's view that the process of transferring ideas into language plays an important part in stimulating overall development.

"Knowledge has to be constructed afresh by each individual knower through an interaction between the evidence (which is obtained through observation, listening, reading, and the use of reference materials of all kinds) and what the learner can bring to bear on it." (Wells 1987:116)

Within CLT, the use of authentic, real-life (type) tasks in which learners exchange ideas and work together to solve problems and arrive at agreed outcomes gives scope for collaborative talk and negotiation of meaning. Clearly, all learners need to be working with ideas and opinions, not merely facts, for the talk to be meaningful and motivating.

4 Allow children to be active participants in the learning process
"The child's task is to construct a system of meanings that represent his own model of social reality. This process takes place within his own head; it is a cognitive process. But it takes place in contexts of social interaction, and there is no way it can take place except in these contexts." (Halliday 1975:139)

Learning is an active, cognitive process. No longer are learners seen as vessels waiting to be filled, but as explorers actively working on language and ideas. As mentioned above, children bring so much with them to the classroom which can be used as building blocks for the new. Barnes describes the central contention of constructivism thus: "each of us can only learn by making sense of what happens to us, through actively constructing a world for ourselves" (Norman 1992:123). For further discussion of constructivism, see Williams and Burden (1997). Fisher (1990) argues for a focus on problem solving to enable the child to be actively working on discovering meanings and answers.

For children to be cognitively active participants in this learning process, they need to encounter challenges and take risks. Learners who are not sufficiently challenged and are given and/or take no risks will never become independent and in some cases will fail to progress, and become demotivated. However, clearly these challenges need to be adequately scaffolded and within the ZPD.

This active involvement in learning is also evident in relation to a second language: "A task-based approach sees the learning process as one of learning through doing ─ it is by primarily engaging in meaning that the learner's system is encouraged to develop." (Skehan, in Willis & Willis 1996:20)

5. Pitch input within the zone of proximal development
Krashen (1982) has comprehensible input (1 + 1 = input plus one) as key in the learning process because this 'gap' stimulates and challenges learners to develop their language further whilst the message remains understandable and accessible. There are echoes here of Vygotsky's ZPD and Bruner's scaffolding, where adult or peer support and input at a level just beyond that of the learner is held to be central to the child's development. All too often in young learner as well as adult classrooms, learners are fed a diet of oversimplified language pitched at their level without account being taken of the need for exposure to language in a wider context. This links to the point above in relation to tile importance of challenges and risks. If language input is always at the learners' present linguistic level, there will be no opportunities for challenge and risk, both essential components for successful learning.

6. Introduce language at discourse level

There is much discussion as to how a foreign language is learned. The tendency has been to break language down into discrete items — traditionally structures or functions — and to teach these to learners bit by bit. Learners are then expected to put the puzzle together again. However, children do not appear to do this when learning their mother tongue. They are exposed to a wide range of language and from this assimilate and use chunks of language, working out the structure at a deeper, sub-conscious level. Lewis (1993) suggests that foreign language teaching might also be looked at from the perspective of "multiword chunks", developing learners' ability to "chunk successfully". Tough (Brumfit 1991) discusses the role of formulaic speech in the classroom, where the teacher is ready to reformulate and fill out the child's talk with alternative utterances, much as parents do in the home.

All too often, in young learner as well as adult classrooms, learners are restricted to a diet of 'pre-digested' language operating only at sentence level. Rather than simplifying the process for learners, I believe this complicates it by specifying a structured learning path for all to follow, regardless of learning styles, preferences, abilities and where learners are in their general and linguistic development. In young learner classrooms, stories, songs and plays are examples of how learners can be exposed to comprehensible, meaningful language at discourse, level.

7. Plan meaningful and purposeful activities within a clear, familiar context

Children learning their first language do not choose the contexts: these are part of their daily lives. They bring what knowledge they have to the situation and build from the known to the new, adjusting schemata constantly through 'accommodation' and 'assimilation'. In the English classroom too, children need to be working within clear, familiar contexts and for the interaction to be meaningful and purposeful to them. They need to know why they are doing something and for the answer to the why to make sense to them. Again it is a question of the teacher's ability to access and assess the children's level (of interest and understanding) and to select topics and tasks accordingly.

8. Help learners to become more independent and autonomous

It is natural for young learners to be dependent on their teachers. However, if learners are to become active participants in the learning process, creating their own understandings and meanings, it is important that activities are designed and sequenced to support and foster growing independence. In young learner classrooms, for example, this would include the staged introduction of pair and group work and the use of dictionaries and reference materials.

9. Develop a supportive, non-threatening, enjoyable learning environment

For learning to be successful, learners need to feel secure, for parameters to be clear and for the learning to be enjoyable. Some of the factors which I believe engender a positive atmosphere in the classroom are these. All learners are valued as individuals; challenges and risks are supported, topics are relevant and interesting. activities are meaningful and purposeful; praise is given where and when it is due, and discipline is firm, consistent and fair. As well as having a positive effect on the learning environment in the classroom, this approach will also encourage learners to be more tolerant of each other and others they encounter outside the classroom.

10. Test and assess in the way that we teach

If we take the above nine points to be key to successful learning, then it is essential that the ways in which learners are tested and assessed in the classroom mirrors and complements these. Sadly, this is not always the case, testing and assessment processes and procedures often being excluded when teaching programmes are developed and reviewed.

Conclusion

It is clear that the ten principles I have identified are not discrete. There is much overlap between them. However, what emerges is the importance of taking account of the development of the whole person when planning for and teaching English to young learners because only by doing this can we ensure that the optimum environment and circumstances for successful learning are created.

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Issues and problems in primary education
Reinhold Freudenstein

In 1974, early foreign language learning suffered a severe setback when the results of a British experiment on teaching French at primary level were made available (Burstall et al., 1974). The study simply stressed the fact that a later start in foreign language learning produced certain results in a shorter period of time, which is also true for many other subjects taught at school. The study neither indicated nor implied that there are negative consequences arising from early foreign language learning, and yet it was repeatedly used as proof that teaching foreign languages to young children was more or less a waste of time. In 1974, both the profession and society were obviously not prepared for changes to language programmes in the educational system.

In view of the language needs of a multilingual European society, we should look at the issues again, identify the problems and seek solutions if we are to introduce language learning activities as a normal option during the first four years of formal education.

Advantages of early foreign language learning
The following advantages have been claimed from research carried out in connection with foreign language teaching at primary level. They are also drawn from personal observation.

Intellectual improvement
Children who learn a foreign language at an early age tend to be superior to their monolingual peers in verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Intellectually, a child's experience with two language systems seems to give him or her greater mental flexibility, superiority in concept formation and a more diversified set of mental abilities.

Mother-tongue improvement
Children who start learning a foreign language early in life can understand their native language system better; they become conscious of the existence of language as a phenomenon. It is therefore false to argue negatively that learning a foreign language at primary level interferes with the development of the mother-tongue or even interrupts its acquisition. The basic development of one's mother-tongue comes to an end by the age of four or five. So there should not be any obstructing influence from other languages at primary level. There is a lot of evidence in favour of this argument from many bi- and multilingual children all over the world who do not suffer as a result of knowing and using several languages effectively in their everyday communication.

Cultural gains
Children who speak foreign languages tend to have a wider cultural outlook than monolingual children who often believe that their own culture and customs are the only ones that matter. Children may be safely exposed to other languages and cultures while still quite young, even before they have identified with their first language and culture. The introduction of a foreign idiom into the child's world helps him or her to develop tolerance towards people who are different and, in the long run, contributes to mutual understanding between individuals and nations. It must be noted, however, that positive cultural values can only result from favourable teaching situations leading to successful learning, e.g. small learning groups, suitable teaching aids, appropriate methodological approaches and properly trained teachers. If these conditions cannot be met, early foreign language teaching might easily be connected with negative experiences in a child's mind, and produce unfavourable attitudes towards another culture. Every effort should be made to arrange for teaching and learning situations in which the foreign language can be discovered in such a way that only positive attitudes can result from, and be connected with it.

The advantages of early language learning with regard to cultural gains show that conventional objections to early foreign language teaching can no longer be accepted as valid. Teaching foreign languages to children at

primary level can support the growth of individual qualities of character and it plays an important part in the development of the intellect. There is evidence to support the view that the process of learning other languages alongside the mother-tongue must start at an early age if multilingualism is to be achieved.

Problems connected with an early start

Rather than continue to reproduce old-fashioned, obsolete prejudices about early foreign language learning, it would be more constructive to concentrate on those problems connected with foreign language learning which have not yet been satisfactorily solved and therefore need further clarification. The following questions and issues now need to be tackled at local, national and international levels, in order to achieve reliable results within a reasonably short period of time.

The problem of continuity

Although it is true that learning a foreign language at primary level is in itself a worthwhile individual educational experience, many early language teaching projects have been discontinued in the past because of inadequate links between language learning in primary schools and in institutions of secondary education. After two or three years of learning a foreign language at primary level children had to start all over again with the same language when they moved to a secondary school. Their motivation and interest in language learning in general often declined in consequence. This lack of continuity also discouraged administrators from pursuing projects in early foreign language teaching. In addition, teachers at secondary level are, as a rule, not familiar with teaching techniques at primary level; they often have a sense that the approach to foreign language instruction which they use with older children is the only effective way to success, and they have received no guidance, either from empirical research or from their own training, with regard to ways of handling the language knowledge which children have previously acquired. It is essential, therefore, to find a way of solving the problem of continuity. It should also be established how early language learning can remain a positive and gainful experience, even if there is no immediate continuation of language learning or of learning the same language as children change schools. Finally, new approaches to initial teacher training are necessary in order to enable foreign language teachers to be more flexible in different teaching situations; future foreign language teachers must be in a position to instruct young children, as well as older pupils and adults.

The question of the number of languages

The experience of Luxembourg shows that it is not unrealistic to introduce more than one foreign language to children at primary level. In Luxembourg, German is offered from Year 1, French from Year 3. The Waldorf school system is an example of two foreign languages (English and French) being offered at the same time to all children from Year 1 onwards. There are countries outside Europe where it is the norm that children have command of two or three languages (as well as their mother-tongue) by the age of ten. On the basis of these models, we need to know what the educational advantages and disadvantages are with regard to the number of languages to be learned by children in the European context. A future Europe requires multilingual citizens; language learning must therefore start as early as possible if it is not to be restricted to only one foreign language.

Finally, the introduction of foreign language learning at primary school can also be regarded as a major contribution to a diversified language programme offered during the years of compulsory education. Given due regard for local conditions, an early start need not be restricted to the major languages, and it provides time and opportunity to learn other languages later.

Language awareness before language learning

We should try to establish new models of language learning which could help to overcome the current inadequacies of early language instruction. There are programmes in the United Kingdom which aim to introduce children to several cultures and languages (regional and national dialects, community or foreign languages) at the same time; they try to promote a positive attitude towards languages in general. It might well be that various forms of this kind of 'language awareness' could be the best way of preparing pupils for a multilingual society. If children first learn to understand new values connected with languages spoken in their country (local dialects, the language of immigrants, migrant workers) they will probably be well equipped to choose and learn a foreign language, and so be in a better position later on, when they want to, or have to, speak other languages for professional or private purposes.

Language studies in the primary curriculum

One of the strong objections to early foreign language teaching concerns the risk of overloading the curriculum of primary schools. In projects in the past foreign languages have simply been added to the regular timetable and have thus intensified the feeling that foreign language learning is an additional, time-consuming extra at the expense of free time. We need to know if there are other and better ways of integrating foreign languages in the primary school curriculum. There is a wide spectrum of possibilities: from ten-to-fifteen-minute modules daily to instruction in school subjects, such as Music or Physical Education, through the medium of the foreign language (partial immersion).

Language learning at pre-school level

Research projects of a practical kind need to be conducted to discover if pre-school foreign language learning can prepare and support language instruction at primary level. An early contact with several languages might be the best means of paving the way for multilingual instruction at a later stage. Research in this field should concentrate primarily on two questions:

1 What educational benefits are there for the individual learner?

2 Can monolingualism be overcome in a natural way in situations which are meaningful to children?

In spite of a number of unsolved questions, foreign language learning activities at primary level provide an educational setting in which children can best be prepared for the multicultural challenges of the future.

Early foreign language learning: YES or NO?

from JET Magazine, May 1992. Anonymous.

While many primary schools in Europe are currently implementing programmes for teaching languages, it is often not without some misgivings. The article below may help allay some of these feelings by providing an overview of the advantages of an early start, while emphasising the need for continuing research and debate.

Early foreign language teaching suffered a severe setback after the results of a British experiment were made available in 1974 (***). This experiment was restricted to testable knowledge and to external factors like accumulated lexical items only. It neither indicated nor implied that there are some negative consequences arising from early foreign language learning. It simply stressed the fact that a later start in foreign language learning produced certain results in a shorter period of time. This, of course, is also true for any other subject taught at school and should therefore not be linked to foreign language teaching and learning only.

The following advantages have been drawn from research carried out in connection with foreign language teaching at primary level as well as from personal observation. They are not merely based on subjective impressions but can also be supported by empirical findings.

Advantages
Intellectual improvement
Children who learn a foreign language at an early age tend to be superior to their monolingual peers in verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Intellectually, children's experience with 2 language systems seems to give them greater mental flexibility, superiority in concept formation and a more diversified set of mental abilities.

Mother tongue improvement
Children who start learning a foreign language early in life can understand their native language system better: they become conscious of the existence of. language as a phenomenon. It is therefore false to argue negatively, that learning a foreign language at primary level interferes with the development of the mother tongue or even interrupts its acquisition. The basic development of one's mother tongue comes to an end by the age of 4 or 5. So there should not be any obstructing influence from other languages at primary level. There is a lot of evidence in favour of this argument from many bi-and multilingual children all over the world who obviously do not suffer in any way by knowing and using several languages effectively in their everyday communication.

Cultural gains
Children who speak foreign languages tend to have a wider cultural outlook than monolingual children who often believe that their own culture and customs are the only ones that matter in the world. Children may be safely exposed to other languages and cultures while still quite young, even before they have identified with their first language and culture. The introduction of a foreign idiom into the child's world helps him/her to develop tolerance towards people who are different, and, in the tong run contributes to mutual understanding between individuals and nations. It must be noted, however, that positive cultural values can only result from favourable teaching situations leading to successful learning, e.g. small learning groups, suitable teaching aids, appropriate methodological approaches and properly trained teachers. If these conditions cannot be ensured, early foreign language teaching might easily be connected with negative experiences in a child's mind, and produce unfavourable attitudes towards another culture. Therefore, every effort should be made, and financial means provided, to arrange for teaching and learning situations in which the foreign language can be discovered in such a way that only positive attitudes can result from, and be connected with it.

The advantages of early language learning in regard to cultural gains show that conventional objections to early foreign language teaching can no longer be accepted as valid. Teaching foreign languages to children at primary level can support the growth of individual qualities of character and it plays an important part in the development of the intellect. Early foreign language instruction contributes significantly to the multilingual society of the European Community whose citizens will need to know at least 2 foreign languages. There is

much evidence to support the view that the process of learning other languages alongside the mother tongue must start at an early age if multilingualism is to be achieved.

Rather than continue to reproduce old-fashioned, obsolete prejudices about early foreign language learning, it would be more constructive to concentrate on those problems connected with early foreign language learning, which have not yet been satisfactorily solved and therefore need further clarification. The following questions and issues now need to be tackled at local, national and international levels, in order to achieve reliable results within a reasonably short period of time.

Problems
The problem of continuity
Although it is true that learning a foreign language at primary level is in itself a worthwhile individual educational experience, many early language teaching
 projects have been discontinued in the past because of inadequate links between language learning in primary schools and in institutions of secondary education. After 2 or 3 years of learning a foreign language at primary level, children had to start ail over again with the same language when they moved to a secondary school. Their motivation and interest in language learning in general often declined in consequence. This lack of continuity also discouraged administrators from pursuing projects in early foreign language teaching. In addition, teachers at secondary level are as a rule not familiar with teaching techniques at primary level: they often have a sense that the approach to foreign language instruction which they use with older children is the only effective way to success, and they have received no guidance, either from empirical research or from their own training, with regard to ways of handling the language knowledge which children have previously acquired.

It is essential therefore to find a way of solving the problem of continuity. It should also be established how early language learning can remain a positive and gainful experience, even if there is no immediate continuation of language learning or of learning the same language as children change schools. Finally, new approaches to initial teacher training are necessary in order to enable foreign language teachers to be more flexible in different teaching situations: future foreign language teachers must be in a position to instruct young children, as well as older pupils and adults.

The question of the number of languages
Luxembourg shows that it is not unrealistic to introduce more than one foreign language to children at primary level. The Waldorf school system is an example of 2 foreign languages (English and French) being offered at the same time to all children from year 1 onwards. There are countries outside Europe where it is the norm that children have full command of 2 or 3 languages (as well as their mother tongue) by the age of 10. On the basis of these models, we need to know what the educational advantages and disadvantages are in regard to the number of languages to be learned by children in the European context. Europe after 1992 needs to have multilingual citizens: language acquisition must therefore start as early as possible if it is not to be restricted to only one foreign language.

Finally, the introduction of foreign language learning at primary school can also be regarded as a major contribution to a diversified language programme offered during the years of compulsory education. Given due regard for local conditions, an early start need not be restricted to the major languages only, and it also provides time and opportunity to acquire other and more languages later on.

Language awareness before language learning
We should also try to establish new models of language learning which could help to overcome the current inadequacies of early language instruction. There are programmes in the United Kingdom which aim to introduce children to several cultures and languages (regional and national dialects, immigrant or foreign languages) at the same time: they try to promote a positive attitude towards languages in general. It might well be that various forms of this kind of 'language awareness' could be the best way of preparing pupils for a multilingual society. If children first learn to understand new values connected with languages spoken in their country (local dialects, the language of immigrants, migrant workers, etc.) they will probably be well equipped for choosing and learning a foreign language, and so in a better position later on, when they want to, or have to, speak other languages for professional or private purposes.

Language studies in the primary curriculum

One of the strong objections to early foreign language teaching concerns the risk of overloading the curriculum of primary schools. In many projects of the past foreign languages have been simply added on to the regular time-table of the pupils and have thus intensified the feeling that foreign language learning is an additional, time-consuming extra at the expense of free time. We need to know it there are other and better ways of integrating foreign languages in the primary school curriculum. There is a wide spectrum of possibilities: from 10 to 15 minute modules daily, to instruction in school subjects. such as Music or Physical Education, through the medium of the foreign language (partial immersion).

Language learning at pre-school level

Finally, research projects of a practical kind need to be conducted to discover if pre-school foreign language instruction can prepare and support language instruction at primary level. A very early contact with several languages might possibly be the best means of paving the way for multilingual instruction at a later stage. Research in this field should concentrate primarily on 2 questions:

1. What educational benefits are involved for the individual learner?
2. Can monolingualism be overcome in a natural way in situations which are meaningful to children?

Recommendations

On the basis of current professional knowledge and in view of the needs in a multilingual European society of tomorrow, the West European FIPLV Modern Language Associations recommend support for all efforts which aim at introducing foreign language instruction at primary level. The best way to proceed is, perhaps, to start foreign languages in the third year of primary education during a transitory period in order to avoid sharp discrepancies between existing educational practices and necessary changes in the future. By the end of this century, however, children in the countries of the European Community should have the opportunity to become involved in language learning activities earlier as a normal option in the educational system. This should be aimed at in a joint educational action programme of all countries in the Community because isolated projects cannot lead to satisfactory results if a general improvement of foreign language instruction in Europe is aimed at. The provision of financial means in support of early foreign language learning should not be used as an easy excuse for the neglect of foreign language instruction in later school years. It should, on the contrary, be regarded by the governments in the countries of the European Community as a chance for developing and establishing a cultural policy in which a diversified foreign language instruction is part of a continuing process throughout the years of formal education.

Teaching English to children – an activity-based approach
David Vale and Anne Feunteun

from Vale, D. & Feunteun, A. 1995. *Teaching Children English*. Cambridge University Press.

Introduction
In recent years, much of EFL methodology and curricula have been developed for the purpose of teaching highly motivated adults or exam-driven teenagers. General EFL teacher-training courses, therefore, may not always be relevant to the teaching of children. It is therefore essential to give additional support and guidance to teachers who are teaching English to children for the first time. The teaching approach is necessarily different. Many of the techniques and attitudes that are essential for the teacher of children seem to conflict with general EFL methodology.

We feel that teachers of children should consider integrating /using an activity-based approach within their language classroom, since such an approach seems to have much to offer in terms of the overall needs of the child. For example:
- children study activities which have practical educational value;
- children are motivated and interested in what they are studying;
- children are introduced to a wide range of natural English. This language is meaningful and understandable, because the activities are meaningful and understandable;
- children are taught in English;
- children are not introduced to English language in an artificially pre-determined sequence of grammatical structures or functions;
- the input from the teacher, and their learning about their world, is in English;
- children can be taught in mixed ability groups: children with more English will speak more about the activity they are doing, and help lower-level classmates at the same time;
- the learning focuses on the individual child: each child is encouraged to acquire language at his or her own pace and own manner.

Priorities for teacher of children
A key priority for teachers is to establish a good working relationship with children, and to encourage them to do the same with their classmates. The teacher's role is that of parent, teacher, friend, motivator, co-ordinator, organiser. The skills for these roles have more to do with understanding children's development, children's needs, children's interests, the children themselves – than with EFL methodology alone.

Young learners have specific learning needs. It is not sufficient to provide children, whether native or non-native speakers, with a programme of study which merely focuses on language, or indeed on any other isolated skill. Instead, it is necessary to offer a whole' learning situation in which language development is an integral part of the learning taking place, and not the only end product. Moreover, it is extremely difficult to know what children in any given (language) lesson can or will learn. What is known is that children learn best when they are involved, and when their work is valued. They learn best when they are the owners of their work – when they have the opportunity to experience and experiment for themselves.

Good teaching practice
Good teaching practice is not limited to teachers of one nationality. It is not limited to one particular approach and series of techniques. It is important for teachers to have an opportunity to reflect on what happens in the classroom within a variety of teaching contexts and approaches, including those that are activity based. Teachers can then decide for themselves how such approaches relate to their way of teaching children.

An activity-based approach
Language activities for the sake of teaching language alone have little place in the children's classroom. For example, it makes little sense to ask children *Can you see a boy and a girl in the picture? Can you fly*? where the purpose of these questions is merely to teach *can/can't*. Children do not normally learn language one structure or six new words at a time. They are able to learn language whole, as part of a whole learning

experience. It is the responsibility of teachers to provide this whole learning/whole language experience. Therefore, rather than impose a language-based course of study on young learners, where children are exposed only to small and predetermined chunks of language, it would seem to be of far more value to encourage children to acquire language through an activity-based curriculum. Such a curriculum can provide a language-rich *environment/input* for the child, while at the same time reflecting the actual interests and needs of the young learner. For example, let us assume that the language point you wish to teach is *can/can't*. Within an activity-based approach, a possible teaching sequence might be:

1. Introduce children to a range of small creatures, encouraging them to add their own examples.
2. Ask children to sort the creatures according to specific *can/can't* criteria
   (e.g. fly, swim, sting, buzz, walk, wriggle, dig).
3. Create an individual/class chart to record this information.
4. Encourage/support/teach the children to describe the results, focusing on can/can't.

While this task is taking place, the teacher is also exposing the children to a very wide range of language in the form of instruction, comment and description related to small creatures. This will be absorbed by each child at his/her own pace, without the pressure or need to produce it for display.

At the same time, this practical task will be supporting the development of the children in more general terms, such as:
   - supporting cognitive development in terms of subject matter (e.g.
     science, art, geography);
   - developing observational and recording skills;
   - promoting awareness of the environment;
   - focusing on co-operative work and socialisation;
   - supporting emotional needs, for example, in terms of providing a situation in which children will
     proudly display their work.

An activity-based approach does not, however, prevent the teacher from establishing clear language objectives. The relationship between the topics being studied and the language to be focused upon (or to be covered according to the school curriculum) can be clearly demonstrated. For example, where the topic is measuring (*personal height, weight, ability to jump, hop, etc.*) the following chart illustrates the relationship between the main activity (measuring) and the language:

Main activities & topics	Skills practised include	Physical Response language	Language input from teacher	Potential language output from the children
Measuring & personal measurements	Measuring distance, height, etc. recording results of measuring	*stand up* *reach up stretch* *higher* *wider* *relax* *sit down*	Registration language; instructions, questions, comments and descriptions related to measuring activities and to classroom management	*numbers 0-9 eye, hair, foor, hand, centimetres, me, her, him, yes/no, verb* to be*: I'm (142 centimetres) tall*

From *early bird 1*, *Teacher's Book* (David Vale, Cambridge University Press)

Similarly, the chart below demonstrates this relationship for an art and craft topic that includes making a beetle mobile:

Main activities & topics	Skills practised include	Physical Response language	Language input from teacher	Potential language output from the children
Beetles & beetle games	Making a beetle; playing beetle games numbers; parts of the body	Draw Cut Glue Pick up say	Registration lang; instructions, questions, comments and descriptions related to beetles and to classroom management	Parts of the body; numbers: *21-30* *long (longer)* *big (bigger)* *small (smaller)* *round, dice* *my turn/your turn/ her turn/his turn*

In other words, not only are the **language** needs of a traditional EFL curriculum being covered, but at the same time the children are being exposed to, in terms of relevant input, a wide range of language as part of a whole learning experience in English.

An example framework for teaching in English
An activity-based approach requires a clearly defined teaching framework. In the example shown below, the children are guided along a learning pathway which starts with input and active understanding, continues with first-hand experience of a practical task, and ends in speaking (and writing). This particular framework consists of three learning (teaching) phases:

1 A preparation (or familiarisation) phase which includes a series of physical response activities with the key language needed for thee main activity. In this phase the children are exposed to key language and respond to it, but do not necessarily have to produce it. This phase creates a feeling of confidence and success with a limited amount of relevant language. it motivates and supports the young learner in the following main activity stage.

2 *A main activity phase* in which the children complete a practical topic. In the first example (see the chart above), the children complete a variety of measuring tasks and record their results. This task is relevant to the stage of cognitive development of, for example, eight- or nine-year-old children. It is a maths/science activity which links to similar work children of this age might be doing within their mainstream education. In addition, the co-operation required to carry out this task and record results in chart form supports the social development of the child. In other words, the task is of value in whole learning terms, where whole takes into consideration the whole child. This activity is not merely an excuse for practising a predetermined language structure. Instead, the children will have understood and followed a series of instructions, comments, etc. from the teacher **in English** (children will already be familiar with key words related to these instructions through the above preparation phase activities), as well as having carried out the task and recorded results. These results provide a context and purpose, created by the child, for language production and practice in the ensuing follow-up phase.

3 A follow-up and consolidation phase in which the teacher uses the confidence and experience gained by the children in the two previous phases to encourage them to speak (and, if appropriate, record in writing/drawing). The children will, for example, give information about their personal involvement in a task, and the results achieved. During this stage the teacher may focus on specific language points. So, referring to the example of measuring, by using the numbers and units they will have learnt, the children, at beginner level, will most likely be able to say:
  - how tall they are: (*I'm) one, four, two centimetres tall* (i.e. 142);
  - how far they can reach: one, six, nine centimetres (i.e. 169);
  - how far they can jump, hop, etc.

In other words, the children will process a wide range of English throughout the activity, and will be able to respond to a variety of classroom questions and instructions that arise within the context of measuring:

T: Who's the tallest in the class?
S: Tomiko.
T: Who's the shortest?
S: Maria. etc.

This speaking may be supported by additional *practice* activities (e.g. word games, child-friendly language games, pre-reading tasks, etc.) in a workbook or similar. (***)

Putting the children's needs first
In the EFL classroom there is a lot of pressure on the teacher to produce immediate, tangible results. Teachers worry about their own performance; parents want to hear their children speak English; administrators need concrete evidence of progress. Teachers therefore feel responsible if specific new structures and new words are not learned and produced every lesson. This is potentially a very harmful state of affairs since silence does not mean that the children are ignorant or not learning. Indeed, there is evidence that, in a total immersion situation, for example, many children go through a silent period during which they are processing their language environment.

Moreover, if teachers insist on accurate production as evidence of achievement from children, they will encourage a considerable percentage of children to fail. Children who have tried their best and failed to produce the result the teacher wants will often lose confidence and interest. They will feel, quite wrongly, that English is too difficult for them – and stop trying. Children should therefore be allowed to learn at their own pace, and language learning targets should not be forced upon them because of an external and non-flexible language syllabus.

Those who favour an activity-based approach feel that children gain in confidence and motivation by studying English in an activity-based environment, where the main objective is the successful completion of a practical task in English. Since the focus is initially on the practical task, children can be encouraged to work out for themselves what they want to say about their own work, at their own level. They can be allowed to make language mistakes without the fear of failure. In this way, a teacher is laying the foundations for a successful language learner. Most children will speak in the classroom – and speak well – when they are ready to speak, and have something they wish to speak about.

Errors and correction
The long-term aim of teaching English is for the pupils to speak English confidently, correctly and fluently. However, it is neither reasonable nor desirable to have this expectation at the beginning of a language programme. Young learners may have ten or more years of language study ahead of them. In the early stages of a language course for children, it is important to establish priorities for the child as a learner. These include:

- building confidence;
- providing the motivation to learn English;
- encouraging ownership of language;
- encouraging children to communicate with whatever language they have at their   disposal (mime, gesture, key word, drawings, etc.);
- encouraging children to treat English as a communication tool, not as an end product;
- showing children that English is fun;
- establishing a trusting relationship with the children, and encouraging them to do the same with their classmates;
- giving children an experience of a wide range of English language in a non-threatening environment.

Moreover, the correction of errors in the early stages of a language course may foster the following negative aspects:

- children lose confidence from fear of making mistakes;
- children become reluctant to take risks: they only say what they know they can say;
- children become dependent on the teacher for correction;
- the need for accuracy interferes with the need to communicate.

There are certainly times when children do want to know how to say something correctly, and there are times when correction may be necessary. Teachers need to judge the importance of errors and correction with respect to the other factors that affect the success of learning for children. Experience has shown that errors made in the early learning days do not become so ingrained that the children themselves cannot be guided to recognise and correct them ─ when they have enough experience of the language to make such correction meaningful and productive.

Group support
Speaking a foreign language requires the learner to take risks. To make mistakes in front of many others can be a daunting experience for young learners. Until children feel comfortable and secure in the class they may learn very little. This sense of security takes time to develop and needs to be built up throughout the year. Lessons should always therefore incorporate activities which encourage group support, fun and friendship. Furthermore, to make the most effective use of class time these activities can be adapted to fit in with the theme or language of the particular unit that is being studied.

Using their bodies

It is very important for children to have the opportunity to use their hands and their bodies to express and experience language. In an everyday context in an English-speaking country, children are normally exposed to a variety of physical and intellectual experiences of language. In the foreign learning situation where children may have as little as one hour per week of English, it is vital to include physical activities where the main focus is on the physical response or physical activity, and not the spoken word.

The importance of providing physical and practical learning opportunities cannot be overstressed. For children, this type of input is a crucial stage in the learning pathway. With respect to activity-based study, where children are working in a language-rich environment, many of the preparation activities should necessarily incorporate physical response. This provides a foundation of active understanding of the English that will be needed for any given topic or project.

Similarly, course material should encourage children to do a range of practical activities or tasks that require dextrous as well as intellectual skills. These tasks will give the language a practical context that has obvious meaning to children. The results of the tasks -whether a chart, a badge, a beetle, or a collection of bottles ─ form a natural language text, created and owned by the children themselves. The teacher can then go on to exploit and practise selected aspects of this language text.

The age of the learner

An activity-based approach can be used successfully with children of all ages and nationalities. The activity content can be chosen from activities which are common throughout the primary school years. The content can, if necessary, be adapted to the country and culture of the children. Taking measuring as an example, six year olds may need a lot of guidance in order to be able to use a ruler and standard units of measurement. On the other hand, most ten year olds are able to estimate measurements in advance, and measure extremely accurately with a variety of measuring tools. However, the task of measuring is relevant to both age ranges. The language that is generated from the activity is also relevant to both age ranges. The role of the teacher is to make sure the activity content is exploited to suit the developmental age of the children in the class. The teacher also needs, where necessary, to ensure that this content is adapted to the children's cultural experience.

The pace of learning

Children do not all learn at the same pace or in the same manner. Pace within a lesson is a matter of experience, and sensitivity to individual needs. The temptation is often to work too fast through materials, rather than to exploit the ability and interest of the children. It is not necessary, for example, for all the children to complete all the activities that a book suggests. Moreover, when children have successfully mastered an activity, it may well be more useful to build on this success than to move on to the next unit.

It is also important to incorporate many changes of activity within one lesson. This means that the children should be introduced to language and content through a variety of steps and activities. Some may involve movement, others may be more passive. Since the attention span of young learners can be extremely short, change of pace (and approach) within a teaching sequence is vital.

In terms of overall pace through a course, this very much depends on the teacher and the class. One of the strong features of activity-based materials is that learning is not tied to a linear sequence of structures and functions. Teachers are able merely to leave out that which they feel is too easy, too difficult, or not relevant to their particular class.

Summary

In terms of the language teacher, an activity-based approach may require a change in attitude and teaching strategy. Traditionally, EFL has focused on the value of the language. Activity-based learning focuses on the value of the activity. The latter approach would seem to favour the needs of the child – and these needs are a very important factor to consider when teaching children.

The term **whole** *is used in this context to refer to the provision of activities which are of value to the overall educational and social development of the child, and not merely to develop English language skills.*

Nurturing emotional intelligence through literature
Irma K. Ghosn

from English Teaching Forum, January 2001.

Children develop emotional intelligence during the early years of life, and emotional intelligence has been associated with academic achievement. However, today's children seem to be low on emotional well being. This deficiency may harm not only their academic development, but also their personal relationships.

Literature has the potential of fostering emotional intelligence by providing vicarious emotional experiences that shape the brain circuits for empathy and help the child gain insight into human behavior. Literature also promotes language learning by enriching learners' vocabulary and modeling new language structures. Moreover, literature can provide a motivating and low-anxiety context for language learning.

What is emotional intelligence?
Children develop emotional intelligence during the first 15 years of life as they mature. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is a more reliable predictor of academic achievement than is the IQ. Emotionally intelligent children apparently perform better in academic tasks than other children. One can relate this to the ELT class and argue that emotional intelligence is also a factor in second language learning.

Goleman (1995:9) defines emotional intelligence as "knowing what one's feelings are and using that knowledge to make good decisions." It includes the ability to maintain hope and an optimistic outlook in the face of disappointments and difficulties. He also defines emotional intelligence as empathy, which is awareness of the feelings of others. According to him, empathy develops as a result of experience and interaction with others. Referring to recent brain research, Goleman further suggests that "repeated emotional lessons of a child's life literally shape the brain circuits for that response" (O'Neil 1996). Empathy can thus become a lifelong skill through appropriate learning experiences.

Today's children, however, seem to lack the ability to empathize, negotiate and cooperate, and they often cannot feel optimistic and hopeful about the future. This void has potentially negative consequences, first on their academic achievement and second on their interpersonal relationships. These two factors together will influence children's psycho-social development and can lead to behavior problems, alienation, and perhaps even aggression and violence.

Emotional intelligence and literature
There are a number of good reasons for using literature in a language class, in particular the potential of literature to nurture emotional intelligence and caring communication.

I have argued elsewhere that literature can nurture emotional intelligence by providing vicarious emotional experiences that may help shape the brain circuits for empathy (Ghosn 1998, 1999). A child who lacks personal experiences with empathy may, through repeated vicarious experiences provided by literature, develop some readiness for empathy. (***) Pinsent (1996) has argued that lack of exposure to stories may actually limit the development of empathy in children.

Quality literature can also help the child gain insight into human behavior, and it can demonstrate that there is always hope and that one can overcome even seemingly insurmountable obstacles (Vandergrift 1990; Sutherland and Arbuthnot 1991; Bettelheim 1976). Literature will also promote language learning by enriching a learner's vocabulary and modeling new structures (Crystal 1987; Hill 1986). Most importantly, quality literature provides models for rich, natural language and a variety of different registers. To quote Bassnett and Grundy (1993:7), "Literature is a high point of language usage; arguably it marks the greatest skill a language user can demonstrate. Anyone who wants to acquire a profound knowledge of language that goes beyond the utilitarian will read literary texts in that language."

I don't think anyone in the ELT profession would argue that L2 learners should be left at the utilitarian level of language, especially if the L2 is the community language or the vehicle of academic instruction. (Exceptions to this, of course, might be specialty ESP courses, whose very aim is utility.) Moreover, literature can provide a motivating and low-anxiety context for language learning. Children are naturally drawn to stories and many language learners come from backgrounds rich in story telling. Although this article focuses on teaching English to children, well-chosen children's literature can be used with adult learners as well.

The following are some suggestions for literature response activities that can both develop language skills and nurture emotional intelligence**.**

Scripting
This activity is best used with stories in which one of the characters is experiencing setbacks or disappointments without much support from the other characters. Students are invited to add script that shows what the others could have said or done to make the character feel better, and what the character could have said to the others to let them know how he or she was feeling. This activity can also be done with picture storybooks to which children can add speech bubbles to the illustrations. (***)

Reading body language
It is difficult to know what to do or say to people if we don't know how they feel. We can use literature and illustrations to help pupils "read" feelings. Sometimes we can tell how a person feels just by looking at them. To teach pupils how to read body language, select a story with illustrations. Invite pupils to think about the story and then examine the body language of the characters in the illustration. How does each character's body language show his feelings? Ask pupils how they show their disappointment. Then ask about the other characters, whose feelings are not explicitly mentioned in the story but are shown in the illustration.

Detecting feelings in text
This is a good activity that requires students to return to the text to find evidence for their interpretations while they try to figure out how the the author reveals the character's emotions. Students know that in stories, authors use specific words to show directly how the characters feel, but sometimes the readers needs to read texts closely to identify the characters' feelings and how they are expressed in words, behaviors, or silence. This is not always easy, but with practice pupils will gain insight that will be helpful in real life.

Feeling hunt
The following activity will reinforce vocabulary that pupils need in order to express their feelings in real situations. Identify as many feelings as possible and make a list of appropriate words from the stories that pupils have read. Ask them to match the words in the list with the feelings of the characters in the stories. You can make the activity easier by also providing a list of characters. (***) Remind pupils that one character may experience many different emotions during one story. Encourage pupils to tell how they determined their match.

Positive language
Have pupils find in the stories examples of positive expressions that demonstrate caring, empathy, tolerance and cooperation.(***) Pupils will benefit practising expressions that reflect caring, empathy, willingness to share, and cooperation. Select excerpts in which characters experience conflict, disagreement, or sadness. Invite pupils to change the dialogue so that it reflects more positive, pro-social communication. (***)

What if I…?
This is an activity that requires students to speculate what their own emotions would be if they were in situations experienced by story characters. This works best in small groups that allow students an opportunity to exchange ideas about their reactions. Students are asked: *What if I were in the situation of the character? What if this happened to me? How would I feel? Why would I feel that way?* This activity fosters self-awareness by inviting students to provide reasons for their emotions. The groups can report to the whole class and a class discussions will help develop awareness of different ways of reacting. A guide sheet with questions and response stems will be helpful. This activity is very useful when introducing or reinforcing conditionals with *if* because it requires students to put themselves in hypothetical situations for which the context has already been established.

Diary entries
Diary entries are a familiar and popular activity with many students and teachers. They are especially useful in introducing a discussion about feelings. Before asking pupils to write a diary entry from a character's point of view, discuss the story and the feelings involved. The discussion will allow for review of past tense verbs in a meaningful context and enable the teacher to introduce any vocabulary that pupils may need. (***)

Letters to characters
Writing letters to characters is a familiar activity in literature-based reading classes and is perfect for getting pupils to practice positive, caring expressions. It requires the writer to infer the character's feelings, empathize, and then think about what might make the character feel better. After reading about a character who faces obstacles, students discuss the feelings involved. After the class discussion, students write letters to the character, saying something that indicates they understand how the character is feeling and why, and something that might be encouraging or supportive. Pupils share their letters and evaluate them. Building language skills, letter writing can reinforce not only use of vocabulary about feelings, but also the conventions of a friendly letter.

Conclusion
Successful literature-based strategies help foster personal and emotional intelligence while developing students' language skills. All the activities in this article can be adapted to different grade and proficiency levels depending upon the type of literature chosen.

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Real language through poetry: a formula for meaning making
Natalie Hess

The entry into a poem, under the guidance of appropriate teaching, brings about the kind of participation that almost no other text con produce. When we read, understand, and interpret a poem we learn language through the expansion of our experience with a larger human reality. Reading poetry gives us a concentrated version of a parallel life. A poem con be used as a vehicle for thought, and as an instrument for shaping language. The article provides a manageable nine-step process that unlocks the richness of poetry for real and relevant language learning.

Literature in the classroom

> In class today I started thinking about what makes people happy and what makes them unhappy. I always thought that traveling would make me the happiest person in the world, but now I have traveled so far and I miss my home so much ... and I try to be happy ... every day ... just a little ... but I can understand Mr. Richard, he was so sad and so lonely ... so very alone. I wish he had a dog or maybe a girlfriend.

Entry from a student journal at the conclusion of a two-hour lesson with 'Richard Corey' by Edwin Arlington Robinson (slightly edited for grammatical correctness).

> When I took my first course in German, the teacher assigned us a story about two lovers in Germany of the 193os. The man was an Aryan German, whose career was suddenly made brighter through his inclusion in the Nazi party. His sweetheart was Jewish, and they were very much in love, and had to decide what to do next. The linguistic load of the story was way above my level of German, but I became so engrossed in the content that I stayed up all night looking up words, just to find out what would happen.

Quote from an ESL teacher telling about his language-learning experience at a conference.

Literature, as Hotter (1997) tells us, is quintessential language content. For language teaching, we might keep in mind that it is possibly the only text written for the primary purpose of reading enjoyment. Collie and Slater (19991) in their practical approach to literature in language teaching, promote literature as authentic material that deals with ever-present human concerns, and allows students to enter and inhabit the landscape of a text that touches emotions and invites personal involvement. The teaching of language through the use of poetry has been seen as a road to meaning making by ESL practitioners from both philosophical and practical perspectives (Bakhtin 1986; Carter and Long 1990; Isenberg 1990; Widdowson 1975). Literature, and particularly poetry, seems to bring out emotions such as those described in the two quotes at the opening of this article. Entering a literary text, under the guidance of appropriate teaching, brings about the kind of participation almost no other text can produce. When we read, understand, and interpret a poem we learn language through the expansion of our experience with a larger human reality. Through a poem, we can grapple with the problems of a parallel life. Kramsch (1993) sees language not just as a vehicle for thought, but also as an instrument for shaping thought. She points out that literature is the kind of language that not only transports, but also actually shapes meaning.

Literature seems to be making its way back into the curricula and methodologies of language teaching (Kramsch 1993). The *ELT Journal* dedicated its entire July 1990 edition to the teaching of EFL through literature.

The purpose of this article is to illustrate how a very structured approach to the study of poetry can use the compactly condensed text of a poem to create meaning-filled language lessons that integrate the four skills, allow for the cohesion of text with the life experiences of students, and heighten both interest and involvement in the language lesson.

An example

The poem I have chosen for this demonstration is a well-known one: 'Richard Cory', by Edwin Arlington Robinson. This particular poem works best in advanced ESL/E EFL classes, but the formula I have used works well for all kinds of poems in classes across all levels.

Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935) was born and raised in Maine, USA. He is a 'people poet', writing almost exclusively about individuals or individual relationships that focus on the human character, and the forces that move people to success or to failure. 'Richard Cory' is a poem that, through its drama, intensity, and tightly-controlled emotional context, is suitable for a close reading, with much language unfolding and, as a result, much good language practice. However, the techniques that I present in the demonstration have worked for me in all the poems I have taught, as well as for many short stories. Step nine (spin-offs), in particular, has proven useful to short stories, poetry, novel, and drama, as well as content instruction in history and social studies.

Richard Cory
Whenever Richard Cory went downtown
We people on the pavement looked at him
He was a gentleman from sole to crown
Clean favored and imperially slim.
And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
'Good-morning', and he glittered when he walked.
And he was rich – yes richer than a king –

And admirably schooled in every grace.
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.
So on we worked and waited for the light,
And went without the meat and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night
Went home and put a bullet through his head.
(Edwin Arlington Robinson)

The formula I have adopted is a nine-step process. These are the steps:

Trigger
Vocabulary preview
Bridge
Listen, react (X3), and share
Language
Picture
More language
Meaning
Spin-off

STEP ONE – TRIGGER
The function of trigger activities is the building of schemata. Rumelhart (198o) has called schemata 'the building blocks of cognition – the 'pockets' or 'units of knowledge' that help us to understand the world.' (p.34). It is schemata which help us to understand how a restaurant, a hospital, or a hotel operates when we enter it. When we read the back cover of a book before we decide to buy it, we are also tapping into our mental scripts that help us to foreshadow the enjoyment we might gain from the book. The teacher's job, prior to the reading of any poem, is to create the kind of mental landscape that will ease the students into the poem, and give them enough anticipatory pleasure to afford a natural glide into context. The trigger should be something outside of the poem that can readily touch the lives of students, and then be linked into the poem. The trigger can consist of pictures, a film strip, a quotation, an anecdote, or any other device that seems suitable. For 'Richard Cory' I have used two different triggers.

Trigger one

A – I present students with a set of pictures of faces. Each student chooses a face to turn into a story. They have to give the person they have chosen a name, an age, and an occupation, and to think of an interesting (sad or happy) event that recently occurred in that person's life.

B – In groups of three, students introduce the persons they have chosen to one another.

C – In the whole group, we talk about how we decide certain things about people, and how we form our opinions about them. The answers usually deal with clothes, mannerisms, gestures, appearance, dress, and manner of speech.

Trigger two

A – In pairs, students talk about a time when they formed a quick first impression of a person and were absolutely right in their initial estimate, and how at another time they did the same thing and were completely wrong.

B – We have the same conversation as in C of the first trigger.

STEP TWO – VOCABULARY PREVIEW

I choose to present those words which present difficulty, but are essential for the uncovering of the essential meaning of the poem. At this time, no more than *7-10* words should be introduced. For 'Richard Cory', I might choose:

Pavement	Fluttered pulses
Gentleman	Glittered
Sole	Admirably
Slim	Cursed
Arrayed	Bullet.

It is important to stress that the teacher should not explain a word until he/she first elicits it from students. Students tend to feel insulted if the teacher goes into a long explanation of something that they know and could facilitate. I tend to look on vocabulary acquisition as a four-step process. Students should understand the word, be able to pronounce it, to spell it, and to use it in a sentence.

STEP THREE – BRIDGE

The bridge is a sentence or two that connects the trigger activity to the text to be read. For example, the bridge sentence I use for an association of the activities above and the poem 'Richard Cory' is 'We have talked a lot about how we get to know people. We are going to read a poem in which a whole town has made up its mind about a man. They all think that they know everything about him, yet they are all completely wrong.'

STEP FOUR ─ LISTEN, REACT (x3), AND SHARE

The teacher does a dramatic reading of the entire poem (I advise teachers to practice this reading for maximum effect) while students listen and follow along in the text. At the conclusion of the reading, students write down any ideas that occurred to them as they were listening. The procedure is repeated three times. At the conclusion of the third reading, students stand and mingle. They meet with one or two classmates and talk about their initial impressions.

Teachers have often asked me if the activity can work without a pre-teaching of vocabulary. In very advanced classes, I have found this possible, and I have noticed that after the third reading, students have discovered the meaning of many of the words they only half understood in the first reading. Prior to that first reading, however, I would explain or elicit an explanation of the few words that I thought were absolutely essential to the meaning of the poem. In this case such a word might be 'bullet'.

STEP FIVE – LANGUAGE

We now return to the poem and analyze its language as it pertains and adds to the meaning of the poem. Claire Kramsch (1993), in her seminal essay on the teaching of poetry, convincingly makes the point that language teachers almost seem to subvert the literary context by using it only as a springboard for

communicative activities, and omitting the essence of the language that contributes to the meaning of the work. As we enter the linguistic level of a poem, it is therefore essential to study not only the lexical but also the performatory contribution made by the vocabulary. The poem under consideration here is rich in such linguistic allusions, of which we will mention only a few here. The name 'Richard' includes two words: 'rich' and 'hard.' Both contribute to the meaning of the poem. The word 'pavement', which means any paved road in American English, places the townspeople on the ground, while Richard Cory seems to float above the ground. The word 'sole' in line three is, of course, the bottom part of a shoe, but one of its homophones – 'soul' – means something else that adds depth to this poem, and yet another homophone 'sole' connotes the sense of 'alone'. When we reach the line of how he 'glittered when he walked', we talk about all the things that glitter, and note that a 'quietly arrayed' person does not glitter. We then talk about how and why Richard Cory does glitter for the people who look at him.

STEP SIX – PICTURE
Poets may well think in abstractions, but they write in images. Collie and Slater (1991) note that the printed page can be a cold and distancing medium, and that only the teacher, through his or her powers of visualization and imagination, can lift the image from the page, and, together with the help of his/her students, paint it in its lustrous colors. In Richard Cory, I ask my students to imagine the man. How does he really look? Is he tall or short? What color is his hair? What kinds of clothes is he wearing? Does he carry an umbrella? Does he wear a hat? Does he have a watch? We continue by envisioning the world around Cory. What does the town look like? Where does Cory live? What do the town's people do? Whose pulses flutter? Who does Cory speak to? What do people say to him? About him? Together the teacher and students can create a whole cinematic world.

STEP SEVEN – MORE LANGUAGE
When the poem has become very much our own, students enjoy working closer with the language. They take turns re-reading the poem to each other in pairs. I give them the openings of lines, and they complete them from memory and later check their results with the poem. They write definitions of single words, and later match their own and classmates' definitions to the words. They locate the verbs and say which one contributes most meaning to the poem. They listen to the song written by Simon and Garfunkel about Richard Cory and compare the meaning of the two versions. In an exercise that I call 'How Does the Poet Say It?' I give them a line in everyday language and ask them to find the equivalent in the poem. For example, 'He was a very special person.' could become 'He glittered when he walked.'

By the time we have finished these activities, many of the students know the poem by heart.

STEP EIGHT – MEANING
After much experimenting, I have discovered that just asking students to provide a central meaning to a poem brings about rather flat results. What works better is a suggested list of meanings from which students choose their favorite and add on their own contributions. Below is the list of meanings I give them:

A It is obviously a poem written by someone rich wanting to keep poor
    people in their place.
B The grass is always greener on the other side.
C All that glitters is not gold.
D Envy is the curse of human existence.
E We all need someone to look up to.
F There is no such thing as a perfect human being.
G No one knows the darkness of the human heart.
H Every moment in life is full of light. You should not waste your time
    'waiting for the light'.
I Everything is not calm when you think that you have a 'calm
    summer's night'.
J Life without friends is not worth living.
K Other —

Students stand up and mingle as they share their chosen meaning with classmates, and explain why they have made the choice. This is followed by a whole class discussion. We point out that Richard Cony had a fine

education, lots of money, respect and admiration from his fellow beings, and good looks. In spite of all this, he was obviously not happy. Such a conclusion frequently leads us to a discussion of what is needed for happiness.

STEP NINE – SPIN-OFF

The spin-off activities are almost the opposite of the trigger. Whereas in the trigger, we took something from the outside world to incorporate into the poem, in the spin-off activities, we take something from the poem and evolve a real world activity from it. My most successful spin-off activities, for this particular poem, have been an interview and a newspaper article.

For the interview, students pair up, one of them becoming Richard Cory's housekeeper of many years, while the other is a newspaper reporter who has come to investigate the alleged suicide. Together as a class we first brainstorm for the kinds of questions a newspaper reporter might ask, and then, in pairs, we proceed with the role-play interview. At the conclusion of the interview, several of the reporters tell the class what they have learned, and then in small groups, produce the article that would appear in the next day's paper. The articles are read out to the whole class, and we insist on catchy headlines. (This is a good place to demonstrate how headline language differs from other language.) The articles are eventually posted on our classroom walls and commented on.

For homework, I have assigned other spin-off activities, such as:

- Richard Cory's last will and testament.
- Richard Cory's mistress tells all.
- A page from the diary of Richard Cory.

Let me again stress, what I previously noted – the spin-off activity lends itself to almost any interesting context. For example:

Students have interviewed and done press conferences with Napoleon.
They have sent presents to Thomas Jefferson's mistress.
They have rebuilt the burnt-down house of Miss Maudie of *To Kill a Mocking Bird,* by Harper Lee.

They have made new business posters for Jimmy Valentine in the story 'The Retrieved Reformation' by O'Henry.

On average, the work with 'Richard Cory' has taken me two hours, but some classes become very involved, and we actually continue for two sessions, making it a total of four hours. I have applied the above formula to any number of poems, and always found it enjoyable, linguistically rich, and communicatively rewarding.

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Board organising
Kevin Byrne

The white or black board is such an integral part of our classrooms that most of us would probably feel lost without it. It is an essential aid to learning and retention and can be used for brainstorming, showing meaning, context, collocation, spelling, stress and a host of other things. Making the most of this seemingly indispensable tool should surely be one of our main classroom aims. But if the board is such an important classroom tool for teachers and students, how is it that there doesn't seem to be any literature on how to use it, not even in the classic teaching manuals recommended to us all on our initial training courses?

Teachers seem either to love or hate the board. Students appear to rely on it and demand all sorts of outrageous things from us ─ such as 3D visuals and spelling of very long words! But do we let our scruffy handwriting, poor drawings and lack of organisation affect our use of the board? If so, what is the remedy? Surely planning would be the answer, but how do you plan board work? Having 'Jackson Pollocked' along with the best of them for much too long, I have finally found a possible solution.

Some teachers will be familiar with the idea of organising the board by dividing it into columns or in the form of an U. I have adapted this effective method by dividing the board as shown in Figure 1 below, and allotting the different sections to the different parts of my lessons. The numbers show the usual sequence of events in the lesson, though this sequence is by no means compulsory.

1	5		3b
2	4a		6a
	4b		
	3a	6b	

Figure 1

1 date
I elicit this from different students each lesson, providing good practice with days and months, intonation and schwa, comparing ordinals with cardinals, etc. This is useful at all levels - once the students know how to ask each other what the date is, why not let them do it?

2 last lesson
I use this section for feedback or a warmer, revising points from the previous class by asking 'What did we do last lesson?' This is especially good for getting lower levels used to the past simple. You can teach *studied, looked at, finished,* etc, or simply get them to tell you the things covered (using simple constructions, ideally, but not necessarily, in English). At the same time I put some symbols or prompts on the board. I like to use three boxes with positive, negative and question mark symbols inside. You can point to the symbols at any time during the lesson to elicit phrases and forms from the students, revise meaning and correct mistakes.

3a vocabulary
This section is for revising vocabulary, showing stress, collocations, etc. A fun activity is to rub out a word or phrase on the board, replace it by 'stress balls', phonetic transcription or a little picture and ask students to

say what was there before. This can turn into an enjoyable duel between you and the students as they quickly try to memorise a word or phrase before you finish rubbing it out. It is also a very good way of getting them to remember (or write down) a word or phrase so as not to be caught out when you erase it (you can even keep score). If no tricky vocabulary comes up, you can always use this space for something else.

3b phrase of the day
Sometimes students produce some beautiful language and it's always nice to let the others share it. In this section you can revise an utterance that was particularly funny or creative and then rub it out when the next one comes along. This is a useful way of learning idioms and everyday expressions.

4a introduction
This could be used for the setting up of an activity, a prompt to get students thinking, for brainstorming or for some type of warmer.

4b write and rub
This is the area where I put long phrases, sentences highlighting form or concord, sketches or diagrams ─ which, once they have been copied and dealt with, are removed (or reduced to small icons) ready for the next. Depending on your aims, sentences can be rubbed out and replaced by a line showing rhythm or by stress balls, taking the focus away from the written word and giving more emphasis to the spoken.

Try to keep writing clear and natural ─ why put everything in capitals when that's not how we usually write? Try to imagine this area as a piece of lined paper and always start on the left: that way you won't run out of space!

1   title
Once I have started the day's lesson, say after the first or second activity and before any focus on grammar, if any, I'd elicit a title. You could ask the students what they think today's lesson is about. If they don't know, tell them. I like to make up the title during the lesson as this usually leads to some funny and spontaneous phrases, but if you can't think of anything, you can simply write the topic, theme or structure. I find that the title also ensures that we all know where we're heading.

6a this lesson
New grammar, forms and phonetics all go in this section. Once again I elicit and put prompts onto the board, to be pointed at when needed for correction, highlighting, etc.

6b vocabulary/pictures
New words, phrases and phonetics that come up during the lesson can be reduced and put here in the form of prompts, icons, etc. (***)

Using the completed board
Five minutes before the end of each lesson you can focus on the board, going over any part by getting students to explain a certain prompt, point or word, and generally summing up the lesson. This symmetry – 'the opening' (date), and 'the closing' (summary) – gives a solid cohesive structure to the lesson, which adds a pleasant rhythm to the class as well as keeping us all active and alert, even at the end.

It isn't necessary to stick rigidly to the '1 to 6b' structure. In each new lesson, the previous right-hand column becomes the left hand column, as if you were sliding the board along and revealing a new surface with the last part of the old one overlapping the new one.

Copying down the finished board onto a 'post-it' note doesn't take long and is a great way of keeping track of things covered. It is then easily slipped into the relevant coursebook or diary with some simple notes. This is excellent for monitoring and assessing your own teaching, and it enables you to re-enter into the feeling of a lesson, helping you to plan the next one.

I see organised board designing as a kind of computer window, where you can click on the appropriate icon and find the information required, using the students as the memory with you as backup. Gairns and Redman assert that *'... our memory for visual aids is extremely reliable and there is little doubt that objects and*

images facilitate memory', and they recommend that the teacher should incorporate organised recycling into lessons by way of a warmer using *'an appropriate retrieval* cue'. They sum up by mentioning how noting vocabulary chronologically might benefit some learners. This is what I believe is happening here with the use of the prompts, images, etc, especially if students copy down all of the finished board work - which I find happens quite often.

I personally use this board organisation system at all levels, with groups and especially individual students. The response from both students and colleagues has been very positive. I have found that students up to pre-intermediate level seem to respond particularly well to it, whereas higher level students sometimes appear less interested, perhaps because they are more set in their ways and more autonomous in their learning. However, all the students I teach, regardless of level, tell me the date and what we did last lesson, and write a title in their books.

I must be honest, not all of my board work looks like that in Figure 1, but rare are the days when I quickly scribble down some notes, promise not to let it happen again and clean the board before anyone else can see it! I am sure that fabulous lessons exist without even using a board, but sooner or later we all have to write something down. So what could be better than using that opportunity to give your students a real active learning experience, which can be re-used throughout the lesson and into the next?

Homework
Lesley Painter

A while ago, as I was setting homework, I noticed the glazed expressions: most of the class had switched off and closed their books. I thought I was making an important point. They obviously thought I was going through my habitual end-of-lesson ritual.

It is not that my students think homework is unnecessary. Most agree that the limited time they have with the teacher means that homework or autonomous learning is vital. When the offerings were duly, if belatedly, handed in, I was encouraged to find that almost everyone had done the homework. A lot of the students had dutifully filled in the 'gap-fill' and some had managed to read the passage and answer questions. My second shock came when I found myself glazing over while marking them! I decided that something had gone drastically wrong and that something had to change.

I looked at the problem and considered probable causes:
Lack of student motivation? Very likely, but why?
Lack of time? Probably. Most of my students are adults who have jobs during the day.
Could the students see the relevance of the tasks I was setting? Could I?
Was I addressing my students' needs, or was what I was giving them seen as irrelevant and therefore uninteresting and demotivating?
Were we all just going through the motions?

I resolved to address these problems, starting with the question of motivation. What were my students' interests, outside the classroom as well as in? I decided to find out what they do in their free time and to see whether learning English could be incorporated into their regular activities.

The 'research' was done via a questionnaire – a relevant language task in itself, since it was designed in collaboration with the students and conducted by them (***). I told them what I considered the problem to be (to make homework more relevant to their personal and language-learning needs) and asked them to work with one another to design homework tasks which everyone would be happy to do.

The results were amazing, not least for me. The students began to attach greater importance to homework and to view what was happening inside the classroom as more directly relevant to their lives outside the classroom. Almost more importantly, I had a much greater understanding of the reality of my students' lifestyles and living conditions. Some students were working and had very limited time and some were taking other classes too, so homework tasks needed to be flexible. Once I knew that some of them spent hours glued to the Internet, it made sense to set some Internet-related tasks.

The following activities are the result of the initial questionnaires. Some of the activities were suggested by the students (with suitable teacherly refinements). Some I came up with all by myself. Not all students had to do the same homework tasks, but we chose one or two to work on at a time, and everyone promised to do one of the tasks and hand in work for marking, or report back to the class, as appropriate.

I'm not claiming that this approach to homework has solved all the problems of teaching and learning English. We're only human after all. However, it has certainly made a significant difference to all of us.

The activities
Follow the news
Students watch the news on television and pick one item or story which they report back to the group the following day. If this is done regularly, then updates can be given on some of the bigger stories which unfold over time.

It is worth devoting quite a lot of lesson time to this activity in the early days, particularly to teach the vocabulary which tends to recur (impeach, under oath, congress, political agenda, etc, or alternatively adultery, untrustworthy cheating, unfaithful, affair ...). Students can then listen for this vocabulary during the broadcast, which not only reviews the words in context, but also builds the students' confidence and encourages them to watch the news more often.

In an English-speaking country, students have easy access to TV news and any channel will do, but in most countries it is possible to have access to English-speaking news broadcasts, on radio if not on TV.

Students who regularly surf the Internet can do this news activity via the Internet. At higher language levels, students can compare different sites and compare the slants on a story. The European position, particularly on world news, is frequently very different from the view taken by Americans.

Headlines
Everyone brings in an interesting news story which also has an interesting headline. These can be taken from newspapers or the Internet. Each student writes a headline on the board and, in pairs or small groups, the students guess what the story was about. The person who brought in the headline confirms or corrects the various suggestions.

Topic research
Tell students in advance of a lesson what the topic will be: food, health, sports, pollution, etc (this will frequently be dictated by the coursebook). Students surf the Internet (or look through newspapers, magazines, books, encyclopedias, etc) for interesting facts on the topic. Individuals can give a verbal summary of information they discover, or items can be pinned to the noticeboard. Encourage students to exchange good sources of information, eg website addresses.

Collecting materials
Students collect 'realia' for lessons. You can set a topic, or people can use their own discretion. In an English-speaking country, this is relatively easy. Some of the things that the students collected in New York were menus (ordering food), train timetables (times, Present Simple), and poems from the subway.

Even in a non-English-speaking country, there are many sources of realia available – advertising brochures, song lyrics, magazines, newspapers, food cans, clothes labels, etc (and students who are travelling abroad for their holidays often return with a treasure trove of materials). Students can also be set the task of looking and listening for English words used in their country, and for anything they can find written in English. The aim is simply to increase students' exposure to English outside the class, and once they start looking, it is amazing how much they find.

Film reviews
The students agree to watch a film. This can be in English, in their own language or subtitled, it doesn't matter. Then they give it a rating and decide whether it is worth recommending.
Either the students can write up the review and stick it to the wall for the rest of the group to read, or if they want to recommend it strongly, they can present it to the group in a 'good ideas for the weekend' session. (This is a point in lessons on Fridays in which the students tell one another what they are planning to do, and recommend activities for the weekend, such as watching certain TV programmes or reading a particular magazine.)

Collecting language
Students collect examples of a particular kind of language (idioms, for example) over a certain period of time. My students can do this in the course of their daily lives, but it could equally be from an American movie or soap opera, or books. Each example of the chosen language should be written on an individual piece of paper and placed in a bag on the wall in the class. The finder keeps a record of the context (and, if possible, what it means).

At the end of the given period, the students get into groups of three or four. The bag is emptied into the middle of the floor. Individuals from each group go up and grab an item they know and take it back to the team, where the group collaborates to write a definition, and/or use the language in context. Then another

student goes up to choose an item. When the papers run out, or after a set time, count how many items each team has defined or used correctly. The team with the most wins.

Language examples
Students look back over language which has been presented in the previous two or three units in the coursebook and then find real-life examples outside the classroom. In my experience students have brought in songs to play to the group, and newspaper articles containing the language point (other students had to read the article to try to identify the example – in the course of which several other relevant examples were found).

Personal listening cassettes
Over a period of time, students record certain activities and build up their own listening material. Tasks can be set by the teacher to relate to language in the coursebook and/or students can use their own initiative. Tasks might include things like interviewing other students about daily activities or about what they did at the weekend. In an English-speaking country, they can interview their host family and friends, but in any country they can be encouraged to set up impromptu interviews with native speakers they come across.

Song tasks
Students choose a song they particularly like. They then put themselves in the role of the teacher, view it as a learning aid and invent a language activity that could be done by the rest of the class. This might involve them transcribing the words. The students should then write down the activity in detail and give it to the teacher to do at a suitable time. Students should provide the recording of the music. You might also consider calling upon the students to lead the activity.

Three things I do to learn English
Ask the students to think what really helps them to learn English outside the classroom. This could be listening to the radio, memorising vocabulary, etc. The students write up the list and put it on the wall. Other students read the lists and try to find three things that would work for them.

Design your own homework
Put the students into groups and ask them to decide on a task that they would set the class for homework. (They will be doing it too, so they shouldn't be too vindictive!) They should take into account the likes and dislikes of their group and what they themselves like to do and feel is effective for their own learning. If you want a balanced set of activities, then groups can be told (or can volunteer) to produce 'a reading activity', 'a writing activity', 'practice of the Past Simple tense', etc.

Tasks should be written down and handed to the teacher. The tasks (possibly with a little editing) can then be set at an appropriate time – with due credit to the authors.

The activities described here are ones which have worked with my students and there is some overlap, since different tasks have originated with different classes. Although they may seem somewhat haphazard as presented here, tasks and language have been chosen to fit the syllabus imposed by the coursebook. In fact they have enhanced the coursebook (as well as bringing it up-to-date), and I have had the experience of students looking ahead to future units so that they can start finding relevant examples.

It is not simply that the individual activities have given such a boost to the status of homework. The whole ethos of involving students and relating English to their lives and needs has greatly increased their enthusiasm for the language, and for lessons. For me, too, it's been enlightening.

Webquests
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As more students gain access to the Internet, there is growing pressure on teachers to help their students use this valuable resource as an effective study tool. Webquests are just one way in which teachers can help.

Defining a webquest
Bernie Dodge of San Diego State University was one of the first people to attempt to define and structure this kind of learning activity. According to him, a webquest is *"an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet..."* This definition has been refined over the years, and adapted for various different disciplines. Philip Benz (See further reading) describes a webquest as follows: *" A "WebQuest" is a Constructivist approach to learning (...). Students not only collate and organize information they've found on the web, they orient their activities towards a specific goal they've been given, often associated with one or more roles modeled on adult professions."*

Essentially, webquests are mini-projects in which a large percentage of the input and material is supplied by the Internet. Webquests can be teacher-made or learner-made, depending on the learning activity the teacher decides on.

Reasons for using webquests
There are many compelling reasons for using webquests in the classroom, including:

- They are an easy way for teachers to begin to incorporate the Internet into the language classroom, on both a short-term and long-term basis - no specialist technical knowledge is needed either to produce or use them.
- More often than not, they are group activities and as a result tend to lend themselves to communication and the sharing of knowledge - two principal goals of language teaching itself.
- They can be used simply as a linguistic tool, but can also be interdisciplinary, allowing for crossover into other departments and subject areas.
- They encourage critical thinking skills, including: comparing, classifying, inducing, deducing, analysing errors, constructing support, abstraction, analysing perspectives, etc.. Learners are not able to simply regurgitate information they find, but are guided towards a transformation of that information in order to achieve a given task.
- They can be both motivating and authentic tasks and encourage learners to view the activities they are doing as something 'real' or 'useful'. This inevitably leads to more effort, greater concentration and a real interest in task achievement.

Structure of a webquest
Webquests have now been around long enough for them to have a clearly defined structure. However, this structure - whilst being unofficially recognised as the definitive schema for these activities - should only really be taken as a basic guideline and you should design your webquests to suit the needs and learning styles of your students. There are usually four main sections to a webquest:

- **The Introduction stage** is normally used to introduce the overall theme of the webquest. It involves giving background information on the topic and, in the language learning context, often introduces key vocabulary and concepts which learners will need to understand in order to complete the tasks involved.

- **The Task section** of the webquest explains clearly and precisely what the learners will have to do as they work their way through the webquest. The task should obviously be highly motivating and intrinsically interesting for the learners, and should be firmly anchored in a real-life situation. This often involves the learners in a certain amount of role-play within a given scenario (e.g. you are the school social organiser and have to organise a trip for your class to an English-speaking country...)

- **The Process stage** of a webquest guides the learners through a set of activities and research tasks, using a set of predefined resources. These resources - in the case of a webquest - are predominately web-based, and are usually presented in clickable form within the task document (it's important to bear in mind that it's much easier to click on a link than to type it in with any degree of accuracy). In the case of a language based webquest, the Process stage of the webquest may introduce (or recycle) lexical areas or grammatical points which are essential to the Task. The Process stage of the webquest will usually have one (or sometimes several) 'products' which the learners are expected to present at the end. These 'products' will often form the basis of the Evaluation stage.

- **The Evaluation stage** can involve learners in self-evaluation, comparing and contrasting what they have produced with other learners and giving feedback on what they feel they have learnt, achieved, etc. It will also involve teacher evaluation of the same, and good webquests will give guidance to the teacher for this particular part of the process.

Producing a webquest

Producing a webquest does not entail any detailed technical knowledge. Whilst all of the examples in the further reading are essentially web-based, it is extremely easy to produce a professional-looking and workable design using any modern word processor. The skillset for producing a webquest might be defined as follows:

- **Research skills**
  It is essential to be able to search the Internet and quickly and accurately find resources. It is beyond the scope of this article to delve into the finer points of using search engines and subject guides, but a good reading of their respective help pages will dramatically improve the accuracy of any search.
- **Analytical skills**
  It is also very important to be able to cast a critical eye over the resources you do find when searching. Make sure to visit any website you are considering using thoroughly before basing any activity around it.
- **Word processing skills**
  You will also need to be able to use a word processor to combine text, images and weblinks into a finished document. This particular set of skills can be acquired in approximately ten minutes.

Before sitting down to plan a webquest, it is always worth searching around on the Internet to see if someone has produced something which might fit your needs. There are plenty of webquest 'repositories' on the Internet, so there is little point in reinventing the wheel. Use a search engine to have a good look round before you do the hard work yourself. In the event that you have to design and produce your own webquest, Tom March (see further reading for more details) has produced a flow chart for the design process. Essentially, the following guidelines will get you started:

  o Define the topic area and the 'end product' (Introduction and Task phases)
  o Find web resources which are suitable content-wise and linguistically (Resources)
  o Group the resources according to stages of the Task
  o Structure the Process - tasks, resources, lexical areas, grammatical areas
  o Design the Evaluation stages and concepts

Once these tasks have been performed, the webquest can be put together as a simple word-processed document (add images and links to all the resources learners will need) or as a webpage.

Implementing a webquest

Shorter webquests can be used to complement coursebook materials - over one or a small number of classes - whilst long-term webquests are perhaps more suited to longer courses. In breaking down a webquest for use over several class sessions, ensure that your learners are aware of what they are doing - of why they are doing it, and of the benefits to them. It's all too easy for them not to spot the benefits and to consider regular visits to the computer lab as a waste of time. The self-evaluation proposed in the model above can go some way towards mitigating this situation. Suggested questions for learners to consider include:

- o How effective was my contribution to the group work?
- o What did I learn about the topics we researched?
- o How did my English improve doing this project?
- o What did I learn about using the Internet?

Conclusion

However you decide to work with webquests, you should find that well-chosen and motivating topics, coupled with up-to-date websites and access to the wealth of material on the Internet will provide lively, interesting and learning-rich classes for you and your learners.