

CODE: UK012

## **Teacher Development and Education in Context**

A selection of papers presented at  
IATEFL 2010 by the British Council

## **Foreword**

This collection of articles represents the contribution that ELT staff from the British Council made to the IATEFL annual conference in Harrogate in 2010. It reflects the close and productive relationship that the British Council and IATEFL have maintained for many years.

The British Council's aims in its work in English language teaching are to reach learners and teachers of English with high-quality resources and learning opportunities, to promote the UK ELT sector, and to take a leading role in the debate about effective English language education. Its work in ELT includes working on projects with ministries and other partners in order to assist in education reform in English language teaching. It also undertakes direct teacher training in many countries in the world, with a large staff of teachers teaching English across the range of learners, both children and adults, both general English and English in specific areas. The British Council also develops an increasing range of resources for teachers, incorporating new technologies.

This collection provides an insight into some of the aspects of this wide-ranging work. There are articles investigating the implementation of educational change, lessons learned and factors for success in making change relevant to specific contexts of English language teaching. Some articles focus on the development of teacher trainers to help their teacher colleagues incorporate new teaching methods into their practice. Other articles investigate the application of new technologies to English teaching, or discuss issues facing ELT such as inclusion and diversity, sustainability and politics, as well as aspects of classroom teaching.

I hope that English language teaching practitioners will find much to learn and reflect on in this collection.

**Tim Phillips, Head, Teacher Development, English Language Innovations**

Editor: Susan Sheehan

ISBN 978-086355-655-5

# Table of contents

<b>Monitoring and evaluating INSET in India: Challenges and possible solutions</b>	<b>05</b>
Allison Barrett	
<b>Adapting teacher training to the Chinese context Principles of programme design; culture and consequences</b>	<b>17</b>
Keith O'Hare	
<b>Online Support Mechanisms for Teachers</b>	<b>22</b>
Caroline Meek	
<b>A Black Sea primary experience</b>	<b>27</b>
Suzanne Mordue	
<b>Career Paths in Teacher Training and Trainer Training</b>	<b>29</b>
Esther Hay	
<b>Cascade training: Russian-style</b>	<b>35</b>
Lena Borovikova	
<b>Vision to Village</b>	<b>42</b>
Clare O'Donahue	
<b>Are you a coursebook junkie?</b>	<b>45</b>
David Williams	
<b>CLIL: Teaching science and English to young learners in Japan</b>	<b>53</b>
Gordon Allan	
<b>Challenging themes: radio English for teachers and learners</b>	<b>58</b>
Thelma Umeh and Paul Woods	
<b>Classroom Detectives: An informal look at action research</b>	<b>60</b>
Greg Gobel	
<b>Harnessing Reflection &amp; CPD</b>	<b>66</b>
Seamus Harkin	
<b>Interactive Language Fair presentation</b>	<b>69</b>
Fitch O'Connell	
<b>Welcome to the diverse language school! The Inclusive Classroom</b>	<b>71</b>
Roxana Hughes	
<b>Right Here, Right Now: Handheld Learning in China</b>	<b>75</b>
Andrew Newton	
<b>I don't 'do' politics... do I?</b>	<b>78</b>
Danny Whitehead	
<b>Teaching English for Sustainability</b>	<b>86</b>
Rachel Bowden	
<b>AVALON to Shakespeare: Language learning and teaching in virtual worlds</b>	<b>94</b>
Joe Pereira	
<b>Computer Gaming to Learn</b>	<b>98</b>
Kyle Mawer	
<b>Breaking down the classroom walls: web-based tasks with real outcomes</b>	<b>102</b>
Ann Foreman	



# Monitoring and evaluating INSET in India: Challenges and possible solutions

Allison Barrett

## Introduction

In-service teacher education in India has relied on an institutionalised cascade model for decades. A small number of teacher educators are trained at the state level, they then train teacher educators at the district level who in turn train teacher educators at the block level (Kumar and Kumar 2009). The cascade model creates a multiplier effect which enables large numbers of teachers to be trained, a key driver in a country where there are an estimated 5 million teachers with as many as 100,000 English teachers, or teachers who teach English in any one state. This preoccupation with the multiplier effect (Prabhu, personal communication) has perhaps contributed to criticisms that teacher education is 'poorly managed' and ineffective in changing teachers' practice (National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education 2009:7). However, the lack of clear and transparent monitoring and evaluation systems (of teaching *and* training) means it is very difficult to find studies which establish the reasons for these failings, and as it is unlikely that cascade models will be replaced in the near future, it is necessary to establish ways of generating more data so we can better understand how they can be strengthened.

Firstly, I briefly explore the theory of educational change. Secondly, I share findings from a survey in which I asked Indian stakeholders to list factors they perceived to be critical to the success of cascade models they had experienced. Thirdly, I explain how the British Council's Regional '*Project English*' in India and Sri Lanka is developing a more robust cascade model which integrates monitoring and evaluation systems which assist change managers, trainers and teachers in planning and implementing cascade models which are more successful in achieving their stated outcomes.

## What makes cascade models successful?

Cascade models are unique in that they rely on teachers and trainers at different layers to change not only their practice, but also to change their roles while receiving and delivering training. They are both the subjects and agents of change (Gilpin 1997). Change is not situated in a vacuum, but in a socially constructed

context (Fullan 2007, Hoban 2002, Wedell 2009) comprising a complex system of interrelated layers of social, cultural, economic, educational, political and institutional elements (Kennedy 1988, 1999). As a result it is important to view cascade models through the lens of educational change theory.

I devised a survey questionnaire containing a mix of open and closed questions and sent it to over 500 Indian stakeholders, of whom 121 responded. One question asked respondents to identify 3 factors critical to the success or failure of cascade models they had experienced. Using Hoban's model (2002) of 'change frames' and Fullan's (2007) three stage model of educational change (table 1) as a framework, I identified key contextual and process factors which could contribute to the success of large scale cascade teacher education projects for English language teachers. A total of 479 responses were coded into these categories (summary in table 2).

<b>Phase 1:</b> Initiation	process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change
<b>Phase 2:</b> Implementation	roll-out and initial use of an innovation; the first attempt to put an idea into practice
<b>Phase 3:</b> Institutionalisation	stage where the innovation gets embedded and routinised into a system

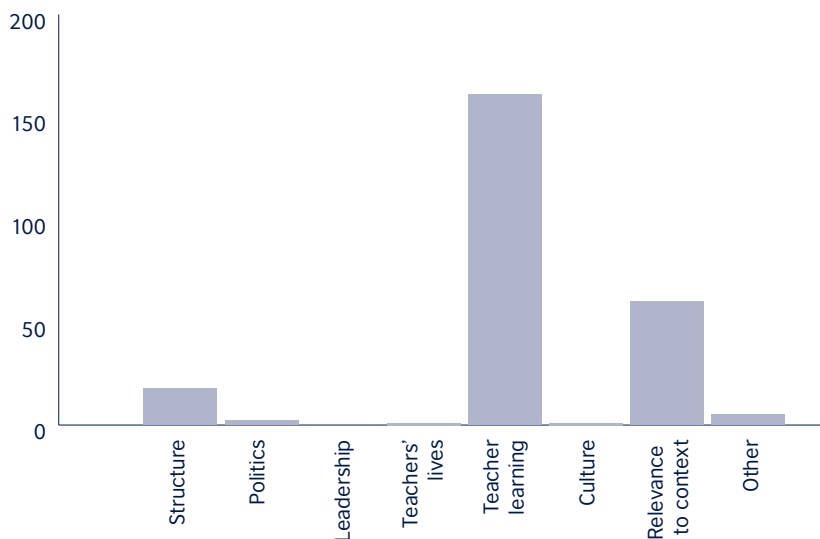
**Table 1:** Phases of educational change (Adapted from Fullan, 2007: 65)

<b>Factors relating to context</b>	<b>Factors relating to process</b>
<p><b>Structure</b> How does the internal structure of cascade models (e.g. number of layers, locations etc) affect outcomes?</p>	<p><b>Participatory planning and decision making</b> How far are all stakeholders consulted and involved in the design and delivery?</p>
<p><b>Politics</b> What is the role of political decisions, policies and practices at the national, district and school level?</p>	<p><b>Communications</b> How can internal and external communications support change?</p>
<p><b>Culture</b> How important are cultural beliefs, values and traditions?</p>	<p><b>Quality and standards</b> What impact did the group size, venues, facilities, materials and quality of the training have on the outcomes?</p>

<p><b>Leadership</b> How important are leaders at national, district and school level in managing and implementing change?</p>	<p><b>Timing</b> When, how often and for what duration is the training?</p>
<p><b>Context</b> How relevant, feasible and appropriate is the training in relation to the macro and micro contexts?</p>	<p><b>Sustainability</b> What kind of follow-up activities are offered?</p>
<p><b>Teachers' Lives</b> How receptive are teachers to change at different stages of their professional and personal lives?</p>	<p><b>Trainer selection</b> Who will be training the teachers and what training did they receive?</p>
<p><b>Teacher Learning</b> How does the content and methodology of a training programme reflect the desired change?</p>	

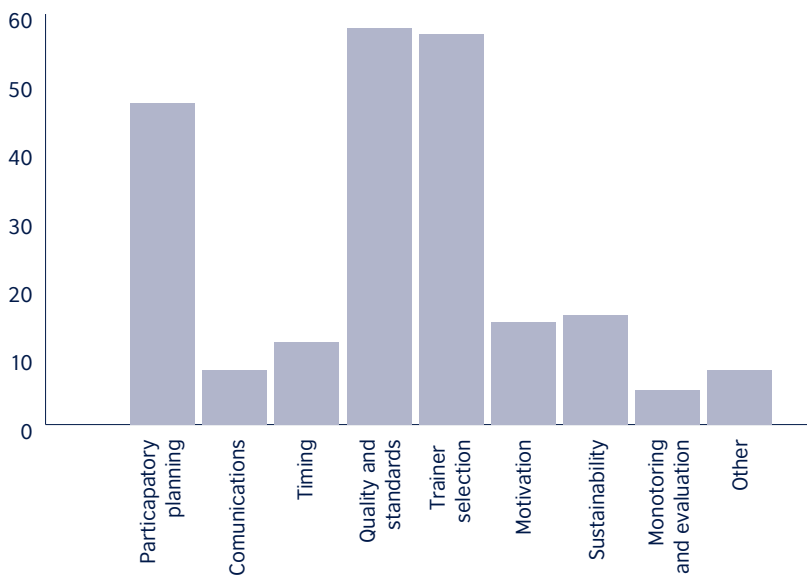
41 per cent of responses related to process factors and 59 per cent of responses related to contextual factors emphasising the importance of context in supporting change initiatives. Findings are presented in Figures 1 and 2. Interestingly, many of the issues which emerged are also relevant for non-cascade teacher education models, indicating that it may not be the model per se which is at fault.

### Contextual Factors



**Figure 1:** Contextual factors critical to success of cascade models

## Process Factors



**Figure 2:** Process factors critical to success of cascade models

## What are the implications and related challenges?

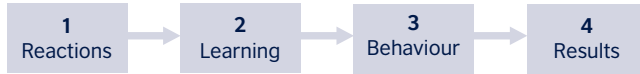
Teacher learning, relevance to context and structure were the most critical contextual factors identified and participatory planning and decision making, quality and standards and trainer selection were the most critical process factors identified. Therefore any monitoring and evaluation exercise should aim to assess the impact of all these factors on the intended and unintended outcomes. Additionally, these challenges need to be considered:

- *Scale and geography:* large numbers of English teachers and other stakeholders are geographically dispersed.
- *Structure:* different layers of a cascade require different monitoring and evaluation tools.
- *Highly heterogeneous groups:* teachers have varying levels of skills, language levels, knowledge and experience.
- *Lack of evaluation experience and expertise:* who can monitor and evaluate?
- *Output driven:* monitoring and evaluation tends to be driven by outputs (e.g. number of teachers present) and accountability.



## What are the possible solutions?

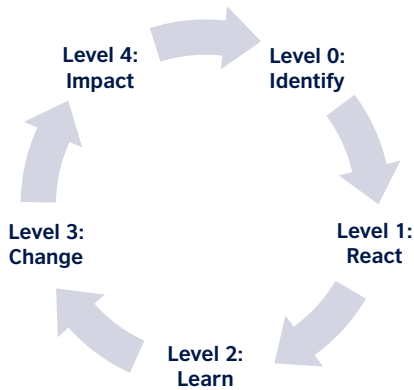
Kirkpatrick's evaluation model, devised originally in the 1970s to evaluate the impact of corporate training on a company's performance, seemed appropriate as it focuses on the various stages of change through four distinct levels (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Donald Kirkpatrick's model for evaluating training

Level 1 refers to reactions after a training programme, level 2 refers to the learning (knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes, behaviour) that the participants should have gained, level 3 refers to whether participants have changed as a result of the training and level 4 assesses the results on performance.

In this section, I adapt this model and demonstrate how it can be used as a practical framework to address the critical success factors and challenges identified above. In order to highlight the cyclical and ongoing process of change and learning, I have presented the levels in a circle (figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Adaptation of Kirkpatrick's model

### *Level 0: Identify*

I have also added a level 0 to reflect the importance of identifying the foundations of a cascade model, essential for a successful initiation phase. This can be done through discussion and consultation as part of a needs analysis and baseline study and should address issues such as:

- training needs of key stakeholders (attitudes, beliefs, skills, behaviours, knowledge)
- relevance to classroom context (what's feasible, appropriate etc)
- course content and approach
- venues and facilities
- language proficiency
- cascade model structure
- timing
- communication channels
- risks

Discussing these points systematically will 'raise local leader's awareness of some of the issues they'll probably have to address in their implementation planning.' (Wedell 2009:138), which in turn could prevent mismanagement. Conducting a baseline study can also provide data for a pre and post training intervention comparison.

This stage should also include a clarification of the objectives, outcomes and success indicators. Identifying indicators for evaluating success is not straightforward which is probably why output related indicators (e.g. number of teachers attending, number of handbooks printed) tend to dominate in India (Sapre 2002). But stakeholders need to have a shared understanding of what the agreed success indicators *look like* in practice as it is the performance indicators which ultimately enable an evaluator to state whether the initiative is being implemented and has been institutionalised as intended, or indeed as not intended.

Outcome mapping, a methodology designed by the Canadian International Development Research Center (IDRC) for monitoring and evaluating development projects (Earl et al 2001), can be used once programme objectives have been identified. Stakeholders help us to identify success criteria which relate to outcomes for all stakeholders involved in the project; the teachers, teacher educators, principals, administrators etc. All will need to change their behaviour and skills in some way if the change is to be supported and successfully implemented. This process builds ownership and leads to a shared understanding of the desired change. Indicators should feed into all tools used including those used for giving feedback on micro-teaching or training or when conducting classroom observations.

<b>Level 0</b>	<b>Identify</b>
<b>When</b>	Usually during initiation or pre-initiation stages
<b>What</b>	<p>What is the desired result or outcome?</p> <p>What skills, behaviours, knowledge and attitudes/beliefs will achieve that outcome?</p> <p>What are the existing skills, behaviours, knowledge, attitudes and beliefs?</p> <p>What is the gap between our existing situation and our ideal situation?</p> <p>What needs to change (context and process)?</p> <p>Who needs to change?</p> <p>How can it/ they be changed?</p> <p>(Questions adapted from Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2006: 9)</p>
<b>Data collection</b>	<p>Survey questionnaires with all stakeholders</p> <p>Language assessments</p> <p>Focus groups</p> <p>Lesson observations</p> <p>Documentation analysis (curriculum/ syllabus/ policies etc)</p> <p>Outcome mapping</p>

## Level 1: React

After the initial training, trainees share their immediate reactions to the training in the form of simple reaction questionnaires. Often referred to as 'smile sheets', there is some doubt as to their usefulness, but Kirkpatrick (2006:22) claims that, 'Although a positive reaction does not guarantee learning, a negative reaction almost certainly reduces its possibility.' Reaction sheets can be used to collect quantitative and qualitative information useful for the development of both the process and context and should be adapted and conducted at all levels of the cascade. If reactions at level 1 are not positive, the needs need to be reassessed in light of this and the training programme redeveloped before it is cascaded further.

This stage should be conducted with sample representatives from *all* levels of a pilot cascade before scaling up because although trainers at the initial (top) level may react positively, teachers at the subsequent (lower) levels may not. Additionally, the course material may differ at the lower levels; it may have more focus on trainer training for example, and so the reactions to be measured will vary.

<b>Level 1</b>	<b>React</b>
<b>When</b>	During <b>and</b> Immediately after the course
<b>What</b>	Satisfaction in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ relevance to context</li><li>■ content and methodology</li><li>■ trainer skills, credibility and authority</li><li>■ amount of consultation and participation</li><li>■ understanding of rationale for change and what is required of teachers</li><li>■ quality and standards (group size, venues, facilities, materials etc)</li></ul>
<b>Data collection</b>	Feedback questionnaires and focus groups with all stakeholders Observations of training to master trainers and training to teachers Training journals

## Level 2: Learn

This stage is conducted to assess whether the teachers have understood and developed the skills, behaviours, attitudes and knowledge identified in Level 0. Kirkpatrick warns that many evaluators observe newly trained participants and note that there has been no change and wrongly assume that the training programme was ineffective (Kirkpatrick 2006). However, there are several

possible scenarios; for example, the teachers may have misunderstood; they may have wrongly assimilated the learning into their teaching leading to 'false clarity' (Fullan 2007: 89); they may have been prevented from implementing change by local leaders or contextual constraints; or they may not have had sufficient time. Establishing if learning has taken place indicates which scenario is accurate. Unfortunately, it is difficult to assess learning, particularly in beliefs or attitudes. Some dismiss pre and post tests or self-assessments as having little or no value as often at scale the only method you can use is self report but they can be effective if based on a valid design, for example, controlling for external variables and triangulating with data from other stakeholders.

<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Learn</b>
<b>When</b>	Immediately after and 2–3 months after the course
<b>What</b>	Have the trainers understood and developed the skills, behaviour, knowledge, beliefs necessary to train teachers effectively?  Has the context changed in such a way as to facilitate the change?  Have the teachers understood and developed the skills, behaviour, knowledge, beliefs necessary to bring about a change?
<b>Data collection</b>	Pre and post assessments  Assignments  Teacher journals

### Level 3: Change

Here the focus is on whether there is a visible change in behaviour, skills, knowledge, beliefs and attitudes at the classroom level. Intended or unintended change in classroom practice can only be assessed through classroom observations which are resource intensive and often subjective. If clear success indicators have been identified at level 0, then this assessment will be much easier, although it is essential that monitors and evaluators are trained and standardised and that objectivity is increased by conducting unannounced observations, for example. This stage also provides an excellent opportunity to further develop the teachers' and trainers' skills rather than simply monitor them against targets or indicators, and building peer observations into the process enables teachers to learn from evaluating their colleagues.

It is not easy to establish *when* the change may take place and subsequently when this stage should start and finish, but a period of 3–6 months after a training programme is probably sufficient. A trainer's behaviour and skills should have changed *before* training is cascaded, so this stage could be usefully utilised to

identify which trainers have successfully implemented change and before permitting them to conduct training to other teachers.

<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>What</b>	<p>Is there a visible change in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ classroom practices?</li> <li>■ context?</li> <li>■ processes?</li> </ul> <p>Why? Why not?</p>
<b>Data collection</b>	<p>Classroom observations</p> <p>Teacher journals and assignments</p> <p>Survey questionnaires and focus groups with all stakeholders</p>

#### **Level 4: Impact**

It is extremely difficult to assess impact in a context with so many possible internal and external variables, but if the previous stages have been planned systematically and the criteria which demonstrate what impact looks like in practice are clear, then this should be easier to implement.

<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<b>When</b>	One year after the course
<b>What</b>	<p>What has the impact of the change been on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the students' learning outcomes?</li> <li>■ the teachers' ability to evaluate and critique their own and others' practice?</li> <li>■ the community?</li> <li>■ other teachers?</li> </ul> <p>Focus on intended and unintended outcomes</p> <p>What follow up is happening? Is it effective?</p>
<b>Data collection</b>	<p>Survey questionnaires and focus groups with all stakeholders</p> <p>Exam results/ student portfolios/ samples of work</p> <p>Post assessment again</p>

## Conclusion

A participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation based on Kirkpatrick's model helps to ensure that all stakeholders are consulted, increasing the level of ownership of the change, a critical success factor in cascades (or any educational change programme). Information gathered feeds into all three stages of the educational change process which can help prevent mismanagement. A participatory approach creates inclusivity and provides teachers and trainers with essential professional development opportunities to improve their ability to self-assess, reflect and rethink their classroom practice. It ensures that stakeholder views are respected, which I believe is their right, and could lead to an increase in the potential use of the findings by all stakeholders. In a large-scale project, participatory evaluation enables monitoring and evaluation to be conducted across large geographies and can build trust and understanding between academic and administrative staff.

There are of course disadvantages. Some may view the findings as less credible or even inaccurate as it may be difficult for monitors and evaluators from within the system to be neutral, and many tools rely on self-reporting – often considered to be too subjective. A participatory approach hinges on monitoring and evaluation expertise, which is currently low in India which means that training needs to also focus on monitoring and evaluation, taking valuable time away from other input areas.

Overall, participatory monitoring and evaluation systems directly address these challenges and provide a powerful tool because... as long as change and evaluation are detached from each other, we cannot mobilise the data to make improvement.' (Fullan 1998:261)

## References

**Earl, S., Carden, F** and **Smutylo T.** (2001) *Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*. Ottawa: IDRC

**Fullan, M.** (2007) *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. New York: Teachers College Press/Abingdon: Routledge.

**Fullan, M.** (1998) *Linking Change and Assessment*. In **Rea-Dickens, P.** and **Germaine, K.** (1998) *Managing Evaluation and Innovation in Language Teaching*. Harlow: Longman

**Gilpin, A.** (1997) Cascade training: sustainability or dilution? In: *Learning to Train: Perspectives on the Development of Language Teacher Trainers*. Prentice-Hall, Hemel Hempstead.

- Graddol, D.** (2010), *English Next India*. Chennai: British Council.
- Hayes, D.** (2000) Cascade Training and Teachers' Professional Development. *English Language Teaching Journal* Vol. 54, No. 2 pp. 135–145 Oxford University Press.
- Hoban, G.F.** (2002) *Teacher Learning for Educational Change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Kennedy, C.** (1988) Evaluation of the Management of Change in ELT Projects. *Applied Linguistics* Vol. 9, No. 4 pp. 329-342 Oxford University Press.
- Kennedy, C., Doyle, P. and Goh, C.** (eds) (1999), *Exploring Change in English Language Teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann English Language Teaching.
- Kirkpatrick, DL. and Kirkpatrick, JD.** (2006) *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels* Berrett Koehler: San Francisco
- Kumar, M. and Kumar S.M.** (2008) The need to focus on teacher education. *Seminar* (December 2008). pp 1–10. [www.india-seminar.com](http://www.india-seminar.com) (Last viewed on 28/02/2010)
- Ministry of Human Resource Development,** (2009) *Teacher Development and Management*. [http://www.vidyabhavansocietyseminar.org/DFID\\_Teacher per cent20Development.pdf](http://www.vidyabhavansocietyseminar.org/DFID_Teacher%20Development.pdf) (last viewed 06/03/10)
- NCTE,** (2009) *Draft National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education*. [www.nctein.org](http://www.nctein.org) (last viewed 06/03/10) NCTE.
- Sapre P.** (2002) *Quality, Accountability and Accreditation in Teacher Education*. In **Singh, G. and Rana, G.** (Eds) (2002) *Teacher Education in Turmoil*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd
- Tribble, C.** (2000) *Designing Evaluation in to Educational Change Processes*. *English Language Teaching Journal*. Vol. 54/4 pp319-327 Oxford University Press.
- Wedell, M.** (2005) Cascading Training down to the Classroom: The Need for Parallel Planning. *International Journal of Educational Development* Vol. 25 pp 637–651 Elsevier Ltd.
- Wedell, M.** (2009) *Planning for Educational Change: putting people and their contexts first*. London: Continuum.



# Adapting teacher training to the Chinese context

## Principles of programme design; culture and consequences

Keith O'Hare

### **The cultural challenge for ELT**

When I joined the British Council in 2008, I read many reports of teacher training projects across the world that promoted a more communicative approach to teaching dating back to the 1980's; I wondered if all these communicative training courses were going on then, why is it that traditional, grammar-translation, teacher led classes are still the norm today in a huge number of countries such as China, and India.

Through my own experience in China of observing teachers and educators, talking to them in focus groups and socializing with them, I realised that culture had a big impact on their beliefs and, therefore, on their teaching and how they set up training.

For instance, some cultures may see asking the teacher a question as being rude; what does that mean for telling teachers to elicit and get students to be proactive. Or some cultures may see the teacher making a mistake, as a loss of face; what does that mean for telling a teacher to just try to communicate and not worry about mistakes?

I concluded that there is a need to know the local culture, and understand the consequences; because that is often the barrier to successful programme design and indeed to stopping any training input going further than the training room. Of course this doesn't mean as trainers and training organizations we don't push for change, but we must take these cultural factors into account.

How can we really make changes in the beliefs of teachers and programme designers? I feel we have to challenge the way things are done, adapt our approach to the local context, and finally start from the inside, by getting key local people to help re-enforce the message.

## China

### **The education system**

Moving on to the context in China, it will be useful to give a brief background to the structure of the education system, and to look at the characteristics of teachers, students and training programmes.

At a national level, the central government issues policy on the National Curriculum and standards for teachers. There are six model Normal Universities directly below the Ministry of Education that are responsible for offering pre-service degrees for students who want to become teachers. They also set the example for other normal universities across the country to follow.

China has 38 Provinces and four municipalities, all of which will set up their own training programmes for teachers. Many will have an Institute of Education for training teachers and a Teacher Research Institute for teacher researchers. However, lately many of the duties of the Institutes of Education and the Teacher Research Institutes are merging into the Normal Universities. District level governments have Education Commissions and a centre for further teacher development where they organize more local training for teachers.

### **Teachers, trainers and learners**

As far as teachers are concerned, there are three levels; new, middle and senior. The best senior teachers may also be given extra responsibilities and become known as Key teachers or Backbone teachers. They are expected to support and nurture less senior teachers. In China, teachers are seen as the source of knowledge, disciplined, bossy and loving. They usually feel they are over-worked, and under-prepared to meet the demands of the reform in the National Curriculum that took place in 2001 and then again in 2008. Generally speaking teaching is exam driven, hierarchical and competitive.

Learners in China put a big emphasis on rote learning and generally speaking, they respect the teachers. They are under huge pressure to pass exams, which are extremely competitive (given there are so many people and so few places in higher education) and hence their work load is huge.

Regarding teacher trainers, they generally work in the district, municipal and provincial Institutes of Education. Also there is another kind of trainer known as the teacher researcher, and in fact this is a duty rather than a rank. Their duties include mentoring new teachers, supporting teachers via classroom observation, organizing training, writing exams and carrying out research in classrooms.

Turning to the characteristics of training in China, the main form of training is the open demo class, where ten to twenty teachers are invited to watch a good teacher perform, by teaching a group of students in front of them. In addition, there are group discussions, lectures, and teaching competitions. Generally speaking, there is also a huge demand for training from L1 English speaking trainers, in addition to training from Chinese trainers

## **Culture**

In this next part, I'd like to highlight some cultural characteristics I have experienced in China and possible consequences for external training organizations to take into consideration. Of course, there are consequences for training and teaching in the classroom, and many of you may be familiar with them. Although I will touch on some training aspects, in this essay I would like to focus on the consequences for programme design.

It is important to realize too that, although I try to be objective, my ideas in this essay will undoubtedly be shaped by my own cultural identity and perspective. What's more, many of the following characteristics and consequences may be changing as China also adapts and becomes more internationalized. What I highlight here are very general and are just shown here as a guide, certainly not as rules.

Firstly, let's look at *Hierarchy*. Education and government bodies are very hierarchical, so it is important to be aware of the importance of using a top-down approach to building partnerships and influence. So, when we are running pilot programmes, we let the Ministry of Education know, but we don't necessarily ask for their immediate support. This way, they can avoid embarrassment if the project fails, but they can also get involved and claim some level of ownership later, if the pilot runs well.

The second aspect to look at is that of *Converging ideas*. When working with institutes and groups of people, it is very important to be aware of who holds the power in that group of people. Often, especially in formal settings, everyone will agree with that person. In group meetings, junior players with great ideas may just agree with the senior decision-makers out of respect and because they are expected to have converging ideas.

A related feature of Chinese culture is *Respect*. If leaders make a decision, one should show respect for it. If you disagree, be persistent but don't bulldoze through; changing ways of working takes time and is expected to be done in an indirect and non-confrontational way.

The following feature is quite an international one, and is certainly not limited to China. That is the issue of *Face*, in particular giving people face and losing face. Embarrassing people in public meetings by asking them questions they can't answer may lead to them losing face and so your relationship with them may break down.

The next feature I want to consider is the characteristics of teachers and the culture of teaching. Often teachers may be more traditional and see themselves as the source of knowledge and so facilitating is not natural for them. Several trainers have said to me, 'I like the way you facilitate, but I can't do it, it's not in my culture to do so'.

Teachers are expected, by other teachers, by head teachers and by parents, to control and discipline students; classes should be quiet places where learning takes place. Consequently, you rarely see teachers using pair work and group work activities.

Finally, in China working hard and long hours gets respect. So, ability is less important than trying and working hard. Hence, trainees whose English level or teaching ability is too low for a training course will insist they can catch up by hard work; and training course designers will agree.

### **Training case study**

I would now like to illustrate how the above knowledge of Chinese culture was applied beneficially, although not always with complete success, in the design of a teacher training project that was run by the British Council in Guangzhou in 2009, called Classroom Language.

This project involved an initial training course for trainers who would learn how to deliver a British Council training course, Classroom Language, to other teachers. They would then go and deliver this course to rural and transfer teachers. The cascaded training for rural teachers is focused on improving the confidence and the English level of those teachers as well as their understanding of communicative methodology, so they can start to use English to teach, rather than Chinese.

When it came to the design of this programme, which was done in partnership with a local Institute of Education, an awareness of many aspects of Chinese culture, especially in an education context, certainly helped us design a better programme and work well with this local partner.

The first criterion for our success was that the programme met central government needs as well local needs and British Council needs. Looking first at *Hierarchy*, we initially met with officials at the central government and found out their needs. We

then later let them know we were running this pilot, but we didn't ask for their immediate support. In addition, we identified the leading institute in that province, to do the pilot with. We also identified a leading local expert to help us localize materials. We knew that this would give the project respect from other institutes and experts when we wanted to expand the project in the future.

The second criterion for our success was that the project was based on our own research, which was also corroborated by locally done research too. When carrying out this research an awareness of the phenomenon of *converging* ideas was crucial. We were aware that when doing focus groups with teachers, the participants may tend to agree with senior teachers, even though they may not necessarily agree, and senior teachers may say just what they are expected to say. So when doing focus groups across the country we always separated teachers, trainers and leaders into separate groups. This way they were more comfortable to speak out and tell us the real situation.

The third reason for success was that our training course fitted into an existing system of training. Here, by showing *Respect* for an existing system, rather than attacking it, we were able to start working more closely with the partner and eventually start making changes to improve that system.

Another factor contributing to the success was that the training content was localized to China. This was done by a British and local Chinese expert working together. When we localized the materials, we had to take the role of the teacher into account. So, knowing that many teachers may be reserved and afraid of making mistakes, we designed lots of support materials that they can use for modelling language in class. This included audio files and video files of the classroom language they were expected to use. It was agreed that although most training by Chinese trainers should be done in English to set a good example, methodology discussions would be 'allowed' in Chinese.

When our UK trainer trained the Chinese trainers, we had to take the expectations of the trainers and their preferred training style into account. The concept of 'the way I train you is the way I want you to train teachers' had to be made explicit. We had to explicitly explain that the way you train is the way teachers will teach students. So the importance of training in a communicative way was emphasized again and again.

## **Conclusions**

Culture has a big influence on a teacher's beliefs, and this in turn has implications for how we teach and train teachers and also how we work with local partners to design training programmes. Without a doubt, knowledge of local culture and its consequences is essential for successful programme design and delivery.

# Online Support Mechanisms for Teachers

Caroline Meek

## Background

In 2008, a regional British Council project called Access English was born of a successful smaller scale project called Primary Innovations. The aim of Access English is no less than *'to transform the teaching and learning of English in East Asia'*. As part of the project, the British Council has been working with Ministries of Education (MoE) in Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam to create and develop systems to support the hundreds of thousands of English teachers, many of whom have little or no access to resources such as materials for their lessons and ideas on how to use these, methodology articles and training courses.

Access English works in partnership with MoEs to set up online teachers' portals in all seven countries, but that doesn't solve the problem entirely since thousands of teachers do not have access to classrooms with computers, let alone with internet connectivity. The steps that have been taken to set up and ensure the successful usage of the online teachers' portals, taking into account the different contexts of each country, are interesting. Reaching teachers in more remote areas has been a challenge.

## The 'What', 'Where' and 'How'

*What* exactly do teachers need? Teaching resources, lesson plans, teaching tips, methodology articles, access to the latest thoughts and debates on English language teaching, professional development resources and communities of practice (CoPs) were identified as being key in addressing the issue of teacher support in East Asia.

*Where* can such resources be found? Given the British Council has several websites (LearnEnglish Kids, LearnEnglish and TeachingEnglish) that can provide such support, the logical thing to do initially was to populate the teachers' portals with localised content selected according to the specific needs of teachers and mapped to the curriculum in each country.

*How* can these resources be made easily accessible for teachers? As well as looking at the British Council LearnEnglish and TeachingEnglish sites, two other

teachers' portals were considered useful in providing ideas on the layout, format and content that can be made available online. One was Webenglish, a Hungarian site created for teachers and learners of English by the British Council Hungary, while the other was a portal created by a UK university for the science department of the MoE in Singapore.

www.webenglish.hu  
 www.sciberdiver.edu.sg/teachers.asp

## The steps

Mapping workshops were organised in each country to initiate the project. 'Mappers' who were recruited, i.e. the people who would select the resources to go on the teachers' portals, were local teachers, teacher trainers, coursebook writers and curriculum specialists. The mapping workshops comprised four simple steps:

- Familiarise the mappers with the LearnEnglish and TeachingEnglish websites.
- Provide mappers with training on evaluating and selecting websites and integrating ICT into lessons. This was taken from the *Learning Technologies for the Classroom Course*.
- Decide on a framework for the website and the mapped resources: What would it look like? What would teachers need to see? A template for the mappers to complete with the resources linked to the local curriculum was then created.
- Begin mapping work.

## High tech – Low tech – No tech adaptation

In order to reach *all* teachers in East Asia, it was clear that the online teachers' portal was not enough. The mappers, therefore, when selecting suitable resources for teachers in their country, adapted these for high tech, low tech and no tech teaching situations, essentially creating three lesson plans for each resource depending on the teaching context.

What that means:

- High tech – this is where the teacher has a computer/laptop and data projector in the classroom or access to a computer lab.
- Low tech – in this context, the teacher has access to a photocopier and CD player.
- No tech means just that – the teacher has no access to any kind of technology at all.

## The results

Once the resources have been mapped, they are uploaded onto the website, which either belong to or will be taken over by the MoEs in each country. The Korean, Indonesian and Vietnamese teachers' portals are some examples of what has been achieved so far:

The screenshot displays the EBS English website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'EBS English' logo and menu items like '홈', '초등', '중등', '일반 학부모', '교사', 'Study', and 'Test'. Below the navigation bar, there is a search bar and a dropdown menu. The main content area features a section titled '3학년 초등교과 Activity' (3rd Grade Elementary Activity) with a sub-section 'Learn English Kids' by BRITISH COUNCIL. The page includes a login form on the left, a list of activities, and a detailed view of an activity titled '4. Wash your hands' with a description in Korean and English, and a 'Quiet please' instruction.



**Latest News**

- Workshop 3 Hari: Pemetaan Konten H2TE tahap 2
- Penandatanganan MOU antara Pustekkom dengan British Council
- TEFLIN 2009
- ISCOEL 2009

**Supported By**



**Latest Discussion**

- Strategi Belajar Bahasa Inggris

## Sekapur Sirih



Ir. Liliq Gani H.A. MSc. Ph.D.  
Kepala Pustekkom

Teknologi telah berubah, membawa konsekuensi terhadap perubahan dalam berbagai cara kita hidup. Begitu pula halnya dengan cara belajar dan pembelajaran di abad 21 ini, semuanya telah berubah. Dengan teknologi informasi dan komunikasi telah memungkinkan semua orang memperoleh beragam jenis dan bentuk sumber belajar, bahkan tidak dapat dibendung oleh batas waktu dan wilayah. Semua orang dapat belajar apa saja, kapan saja dan dimana saja.

How To Teach English (h2te) adalah salah satu model baru tentang cara belajar dan membelajarkan di abad 21 yang dikhususkan bagi para guru Bahasa Inggris yang dikembangkan atas kerjasama antara British Council dengan Pustekkom, Depoknas.

[Read more...](#)

**User Access**

Username

Password

Remember me

No account yet? [Register](#)

**Visitors Counter**

**005674**

	Today	76
	Yesterday	161
	This week	476
	Last week	543
	This month	1874

  Ministry of Education and Training

## TeachingEnglishinVietnam

Home Lesson ideas Teaching tips Professional Development Support Forum  Search

**Welcome to Teaching English in Vietnam**

The web site for English Language Teaching that brings you everything you need, from classroom materials for your English coursebooks (Tieng Anh 10, 11 and 12), to methodology articles and teaching tips. Teachers also have opportunities to contribute their own creative ideas and lesson plans. Finally, there are chances for English teachers to join an online global community to share experiences with colleagues and English Language Teaching experts from all over the world.



**Lesson Ideas**

Select a grade:

Use the quick links below to go to different sections of the site

**Teaching tips**

**Professional Development**

- Courses
- Conferences

**Latest content from our editor**

<p><b>Lesson ideas</b></p> <p><b>Grade 10 - Unit 15: Cities</b></p> <p>Definitions Auction: A classroom game to practise defining and non-defining relative clauses.</p>	<p><b>Teaching tips</b></p> <p><b>Repertoire</b></p> <p>All teachers have a variety of techniques and activities that they regularly use - their repertoire. This changes all</p>	<p><b>Last video</b></p> 
--	---	---

## Offline packs

The low and no tech options will then be pulled together into an offline pack and distributed to teachers in parts of countries with little or no internet connectivity. This will consist mainly of teaching resources and methodology articles.

## The key to success

Training and promotion of the online teachers' portals as well as of the offline packs are central to their success. In countries where the portal has already been

launched, teachers are receiving training on how to access and use the site. This has been bundled with other British Council training running in countries.

The ultimate goal of Access English is to provide support for *all* teachers in East Asia, and with each passing month, this is becoming more of a reality.

# A Black Sea primary experience

Suzanne Mordue

## The starting point

When languages were introduced into the primary curriculum in Turkey it highlighted the importance of English and the lack of qualified professionals to teach the subject for this age group. As a result the government was forced to continue accepting short-term teaching certificates as a qualification for English teachers, although they had been phased out in other subject areas in 1998.

In-service training was unable to bridge the gap as the training offered was the drop in the teaching ocean, meaning that each teacher could only be guaranteed a week's training every 30 years. When they were offered training teachers were often disappointed to find a lecture style used; concentrating on teaching theory that they saw as irrelevant to their day-to-day teaching needs.

As we already had a strong working relationship with the Ministry of Education, we decided to develop a project to support this need for appropriate training which could reach the 30,000 primary teachers working across 80 cities. It was clear that such a large amount of people could only be reached online and initially decided to develop a blended-learning course. The growth in Internet usage meant that this was a realistic aim in Turkey and we chose Moodle as our virtual learning environment.

## Piloting

To add an observation element to the online learning experience a teacher was filmed using some of the teaching techniques discussed on the course in a local primary school. I would recommend this for anyone setting up online teacher training as it has become the most popular element of the course. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in many schools peer observation is not practical due to the long-working hours of teachers.

The initial pilot highlighted how ambitious we were setting up the online element with 60 participants! With hindsight we realise that a maximum cohort of 25 participants is more workable for the tutor. An independent evaluation showed us the importance of socialization to the success of online courses. We added Plenary and Social forums where off-course topics could be discussed to create a wider sense of community. We could also clearly see that we needed to expand the reach of our training in the next stage.

With support from the Ministry of Education 14 teachers from 9 cities in Turkey were trained to be F-2-F and online trainers for this course. In 2009 these facilitators trained over 400 teachers across Turkey. Again, there were many lessons learnt from this next step. We set up a section of our Moodle platform as a trainer's resource kit with detailed supporting documents and a coffee shop where the facilitators could share ideas and chat generally about their courses. Creating this interaction between the moderators has been one of the most successful approaches we have taken to support our trainers in online learning as this replaces the 'staffroom chat'. We also produced checklists of the tasks for all modules, so that the tutors could record the information quickly and see at a glance which participants were keeping up with their workload. As many online tutors will have discovered moderating a course can be very time-consuming without support mechanisms in place.

## **Getting to know our neighbours**

Mixing online groups so that teachers were meeting participants who were not on their F2F course led to more productive discussion and when we expanded the English Teacher Training Online (ETTO) project into other countries this approach became even more beneficial. We started to work with project managers in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine. Due to historical reasons the political relationship between some of these countries is strained and, therefore, this project was important from a cultural relations point of view. Many teachers made friends with their 'neighbours' for the first time and the similarities of their teaching situations quickly began to emerge and create bonds. We found that teachers who had struggled to get training in the past, in smaller cities such as Batumi in Georgia with a population of around 122.000, were the most appreciative.

With the only prerequisite Internet connectivity, online education can break down barriers and also bring much-needed resources. As online educators this is where we should be reaching out. One of the participants, Elif Arpacı, says it best in her own words:

*I just thank you for giving me the chance to improve my career. In my hometown I don't have anything to do apart from participating in some seminars. With the help of this online course I could participate and learn lots of things.*

# Career Paths in Teacher Training and Trainer Training

Esther Hay

As teachers and trainers in EFL we work in a variety of different contexts and environments and have different experiences and opportunities in our careers. As part of professional development one path is to move from teaching to training, but how is this achieved?

- *In your own workplace:*
- How does a teacher become a teacher trainer?
- How easy is it to access professional development?
- What training is available to help new trainers and who provides it?
- What training is available for more experienced trainers and who provides it?
- What opportunities are there for trainers to maintain their training skills?
- Is your status as a trainer recognised by your employer?
- In what way is it recognised?
- What training qualifications do you have?
- Would a formal trainer training qualification be useful?

These were some of the questions we asked local teachers in ministry training institutes to assist us with the design and delivery of career paths and cascade training programmes for teacher trainers and trainer trainers.

This paper focuses on the issues and challenges we faced, our response and lessons learnt.

## Background

The Peacekeeping English Project (PEP) is funded by the UK government and delivered by the British Council. It has worked with government ministries in over 36 countries worldwide. Its aim is to support participation in international peace support operations, global and state security, conflict prevention and resolution and disaster relief. It also encourages respect for human rights, protection of civilians, governance and law.

PEP works with the local teachers in ministry training centres to develop sustainable systems for English Language training. Each country project has an agreed timescale, aims, objectives and a UK recruited project manager/teacher trainer.

Working with countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Central America we had to cater for high/low and no tech environments. Teachers had different levels of experience and training, often with no centralised or standardised model for trainer training. There were limited options for teachers to move up the traditional career ladder (senior teacher/head of department) or take a different career path (in an area of specialisation e.g. training or testing). There were also fewer opportunities for existing trainers to train on a regular basis, due to other duties. There was an evident gap between experienced teachers, who had received a lot of training, and those who wanted to develop professionally and become trainers.

In-service teacher training programmes and intensive courses helped build teams and identify team leaders. A one-year modular PEP Trainer Training course was designed to give experienced non-native speaker trainers the opportunity to develop their skills and establish a cadre of trainer trainers across the network. Training is linked to international examinations and professional qualifications where appropriate. CELTA or ICALT courses are run in some countries, but financial and time constraints have prevented a wider application.

## **Clear paths and sustainable systems**

For the work of the project to be sustainable we needed cost effective cascade systems for teacher training and trainer training. A clear system for professional development was required, including training plans and career paths. This had to be recognised by the host partner at ministerial level and embedded in policies and budgets to provide the necessary resources and opportunities. It also became increasingly clear that we needed to find way to bridge the gap between teacher/teacher trainer and trainer trainer.

## **Issues and challenges**

The challenge was to find low cost solutions to cater for both ends of the training spectrum. We had to develop courses that could be replicated (not 'one-off'). They had to be flexible in approach and content, to cater for different contexts and meet the needs of different clients (military, police etc). They also had to be more intensive and practical to better suit our partners' needs. Trainers and trainee trainers had to be given time to train and released from their teaching or other duties. Training needed to be done in different countries/regions at mutually convenient times, with host ministries providing training facilities, accommodation

and logistical support. As funding for PEP was limited, getting local ministry support (financial and in kind) was vital.

## **Integrated training – bridging the gap**

The Integrated Training for Peace Support and Security Managers (ITPSSM) course was developed by the PEP Integrated Training Co-ordinator, Roma Valiukiene and a team of PEP trained trainers. It is an intensive 2-week course run by experienced trainers for less experienced teachers or trainers. All trainers and trainees are non-native speakers and have been trained through PEP. The trainees prepare and deliver a specially designed course for a specific target audience who are the course participants. In this case we targeted key personnel from government ministries (current/future decision makers and influencers) who need English for international communication and negotiation. The trainees work under the guidance of the trainers, with observation and feedback throughout. The courses are hosted at a ministry training centre, with international participants to encourage cross-border co-operation and professional networks.

## **Organisation**

The PEP Integrated Training Co-ordinator was the course designer and organiser, responsible for planning, liaising with partners and the overall management of the events. She led a team of trainers and trainees, identifying and developing future trainers and course organisers. The courses are hosted at local ministry training centres (or ministry hotels) and scheduled around term times or in holiday periods. Local partner contribution includes venue, accommodation, meals, equipment, transport and social events/excursions. Participating countries cover travel costs and course fees for trainers/trainees/participants. The programme ran for 2 years with PEP funding and eleven courses were held in different countries/centres. Subsequent courses are now run independently by local partner ministries.

## **People involved**

All personnel involved are L1 speakers of many languages from different countries. The course organiser and the training team of 8 experienced trainers and 8 trainees are present throughout the two weeks. The 32 course participants attend the second week only. The recommended number of participants is thirty-two, with the host country taking approximately half the number of places. This is the optimum number of trainers, trainees and participants to facilitate group activity and role plays. It is very important to screen the participants in advance to ensure that they are all at CEFR B1 level of English. Pre-course questionnaires are used to assess their needs and select topic areas for course content.

## Course structure and content

The two-week Integrated Training course consists of two phases. In Phase 1 the trainers work with the trainees on course design and in Phase 2 the trainees deliver the course to the participants. The course is aimed at ministry personnel who need English for meetings and negotiations. The course structure remains the same for all courses but the content (subject matter) is needs-based and related to the areas of work the participants are involved in.

### Phase 1

The course organiser and team of experienced trainers set up the course and work with the trainee trainers to prepare the needs-based course for the selected participants. Each day begins with a briefing and ends with a debriefing session. Input sessions deal with team building, critical thinking skills, observing and giving feedback, timetabling, team teaching, materials design and course management. The trainees design the course based on the results of the pre-course questionnaires that were completed by the participants. Input sessions are alternated with self-access (using a mobile mini-resource centre) and speaking corners, to create an English language learning environment overseas and increase exposure to English. The classroom sessions introduce/practice the language of meetings and negotiations and are centred round work related topics (as selected by the participants in the pre-course questionnaires)

### Phase 2

The trainees deliver the course that they prepared in Phase 1 to the selected group of participants. The trainers are paired with the trainees to observe and give feedback. The participants are divided into four groups (Group A, B, C and D) with eight participants per group. Two trainers and two trainees are assigned to each group. The timetable includes alternate sessions of classroom input (language of meetings) with self-access/speaking corner activities. The course leads up to a case study role play on Day 5. Evening social events (including 'international evenings') and excursions are included to foster team working, knowledge of other countries and cultures and to provide opportunities to practise social English.

## Case study role play

**Phase 2 – Day 4** A case study is prepared by Group A for Group B (and vice versa) and by Group C for Group D (and vice versa). The case centres round a work related issue or problem which the other group discusses in a role play meeting on Day 5. The case study brief contains background information on the subject/topic, situation/problem, purpose of the meeting (aim/objective) and individuals or groups represented. The teams are given time to prepare for the meeting.



**Phase 2 – Day 5** Each group role plays the meeting with the corresponding group observing and giving feedback on aspects of their performance/use of language.

## **Observation, feedback and evaluation**

One of the main features of the Integrated Training course is the continual cycle of observation, feedback and evaluation. In Phase 1 the trainees observe the trainers and give feedback and vice versa. In Phase 2 the trainers and trainees are paired up and given observation tasks. The trainees and participants are also paired up and have guided observations tasks. The participants also have peer observation tasks and are encouraged to self/peer correct and give constructive feedback. In the case study role play meetings everyone is involved, through using observation tasks and giving feedback on performance.

At the end of each day there is a debriefing session where trainees elicit feedback on the course from participants. The trainees and trainers then collate this immediately afterwards in their own debrief. At the briefing session at the start of the next day the trainees summarise the feedback given, focusing on strengths, weaknesses and opportunities along with language work on error correction in pairs or groups. A feedback questionnaire is given at the end of the course and a post course evaluation report is prepared.

## **Benefits of integrated training**

The course offers opportunities for professional development for all. The trainers develop their skills in course organisation, planning and delivery. The trainees develop their skills as trainers through course design and delivery. The participants improve their confidence and proficiency in English and professional knowledge, through active participation and role plays. The programme has created an international pool of experienced trainers - trainees have become trainers and some trainers have become course organisers themselves. It also provides a cost effective model that can be applied to different contexts and groups of people. Through involving ministry personnel as participants they have a better understanding of our course and training methods, which has led to more active support for events.

## **Lessons learnt**

Regular and systematic trainer training courses are required to develop new trainers and provide opportunities for experienced trainers to retain and develop their skills. Not everyone has the time and money to engage in long training courses so shorter, more flexible models that can be easily replicated or adapted

to different contexts are ideal for this purpose. Organisational or local partner buy-in is vital for ongoing support and sustainability. We need to reach the influencers and decision makers in a more practical way (through direct experience) for a fuller understanding of the course and methodology. By involving personnel from different departments, sectors or countries it can be a truly integrated course. International participation fosters co-operation between individuals, organisations and nations resulting in a greater impact and reach. It is a valuable tool for establishing contacts and maintaining and professional networks

## Summary

The PEP Integrated Training Course is a cost effective, flexible training model that has potential for a wider application and use in other contexts. It provides a way to bridge the gap between teacher/teacher trainer and trainer trainer. It enables individuals to develop their career and gain experience as trainers and events organisers. Furthermore it brings together internal and external clients and meets the needs of employers (ministries/organisations) trainers, teachers and groups/individuals who need English in their professional and social life.

## A wider application

Returning to our original questions about training and career paths in your workplace, think about how this model could be applied in your own context.

- How could it fit in with your current training programme?
- Where and when could these courses be held?
- Who could you identify as your potential course organisers, trainers and trainees?
- What groups or individuals could you identify as potential course participants?
- What subjects or topics could form the content of their course?
- How could you apply it in your context?

# Cascade training: Russian-style

Lena Borovikova

## Introduction

With restrictions on British Council activity in Russia and the closure of teaching centres in 2007–08, the future of our ELT projects which provided teachers with training and development opportunities was severely jeopardised. Our goal was to develop a new cadre of Russian teacher trainers who would engage with teachers nationwide.

This article will focus particularly on the areas of development and capacity building in the context of ELT in Russia, relating to the use of British Council English global products and their further development in accordance with local needs. Global products are materials which are designed to be used throughout the world.

## Teacher's needs and teaching approaches: current state of arts

English language teaching in Russia is transferring from traditional grammar translation to more communicative and competence-based teaching due to the growing social demand for foreign languages, new global and local teaching materials, and the introduction of the national skill-based examination. Teacher training practices are changing very slowly. Teachers traditionally place heavy emphasis on the importance of learning grammar structures, memorising grammar rules and terms, etc. They often explain the reason by declaring that Russian students want to know about grammar and have a need for knowledge of language systems and structures due to the deep traditions of Russian schools. It is common even for YL classrooms where they are taught grammar forms, types of questions, etc.

One of the trainees participating commented on students' needs analyses: 'I deal with a lot of students whose language *learning experience is mostly totally Soviet*. They normally expect you to explain everything (about the language).' This teacher recognises that the old way of teaching/learning, so common for the Soviet time, still prevails. And she blames students for this not textbooks, nor teachers, while her students were born long after the Soviet system collapsed. The teacher is also justifying her own teaching behaviour and teaching grammar for the sake of grammar.

The top-down, and teacher-centred approaches are still common in English classrooms. It leads to situations where only students with strong linguistic intelligence and motivation for their future career opportunities are successful in mastering the language. The structural and knowledge-based approaches are in force, teachers fear group work and under 'communicativeness' very often understand only 'speaking activities' done through simple re-production of dialogues or texts learnt by heart.

In spite of this, many teachers are getting more and more interested in how to make teaching and learning more efficient. How to raise students' motivation in learning English? How to work in a mixed-ability classroom and organise group work? They demonstrate their rising interest in a communicative approach, new classroom techniques and ways of using modern technologies in ELT lessons.

We've noticed a significant change in target audiences recently. Teachers from various educational institutions with different teaching and educational backgrounds apply for British Council teacher training activities. They come from not only secondary schools, but also from universities, private tutoring and commercial language schools and teaching centres.

According to the official rules, every school teacher in Russia has to take an in-service course every five years in order to maintain or upgrade their teaching qualification. Teachers often complain about the formal system of in-service teacher training. They blame it for top-down training approaches, lack of real teachers' needs analyses, and the strong commercial links with publishers which results in propaganda for particular coursebooks during a course. One of our trainees mentioned: 'TKTE course training sessions were really intensive, interactive, dynamic and very friendly. Something quite opposite to the official ones.' Another teacher mentioned: 'Being a participant is always much more pleasant than being a pure listener. How really boring it was to be present at the lectures of our local in-service teacher training institution several years ago!'

## **Cascade training in Russia: history of British Council projects**

The history of teacher training and other ELT projects in British Council Russia has lasted for many years already. Previous In Service Training (INSET) projects were conducted in 12 regional centres (from St Petersburg in the north-west to Krasnoyarsk in the east and Sochi in the south). Our former regional teams of teacher trainers in many cities work as local teachers' association organisers, or teaching centres or language faculty founders, administrators, teachers, or occupy some other influential positions in ELT education. We have created teacher training capacity through the National Exam project (SPEX), Textbook

Project and Pre Service teacher training project (PRESET) as well. We have been using a cascade model for trainer training in order to develop a new cohort of ELT professional teacher trainers. We are going to influence teaching English practice in Russia and create favourable conditions for more efficient teaching/learning of English. Meanwhile, the old foreign language teaching traditions in Russia are still very strong.

When British Council initiated developing global products, many of us were quite sceptical about whether it is possible to make worthy training/teaching/learning materials which could meet the needs of learners and teachers all around the world, be valued by all national teacher communities in the world and provide radical improvement in teaching English worldwide.

Our scepticism has been melting while the new components of the global products are produced and introduced. They are of good quality and demonstrate a high level of UK expertise. Besides, the local needs of ELT communities are being taken into consideration. Local British Council teams and local teachers and trainers have been invited for consultations, for piloting materials, for feedback and for materials development.

## **TKT Essentials: Why?**

The TKT Essentials course is one element of the global products. It is based on the Teacher Knowledge Test. It attracts attention by its title alone. More and more teachers in Russia are becoming aware of the Cambridge Teacher Knowledge Test. It causes high interest among those teachers who know about Cambridge examinations and their quality and benefits. Although, the name connected with TKT is also a disadvantage. It may mislead a person. It has to be explained to teachers that, this course is not for preparation for Cambridge Exams. It is based on the Teacher Knowledge Test syllabus which is a good initial basis for a teacher's professional knowledge in the area of communicative methodology.

The interactive training model based on a teacher's own reflective practice, clear structure and innumerable and varied teacher training activities make the TKTE course popular and appreciated by teacher trainers from both pre-service and in-service level in the private and state sector in Russia. It does not prescribe how to teach but encourages a professional dialogue between peer teachers, helps to question their own practice and to look for answers.

This course provides opportunities to look at a teacher's career as a developmental process and defines the initial stage of consistent professional development. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a new concept for teacher education in Russia.

## Trainer development

To introduce the TKTE, we started with a trainer training course. Participants were selected on the basis of competition and according to the following criteria:

- enough teacher training experience and varying degrees of it;
- opportunities for sharing and dissemination;
- capability to work in a team;
- ability to be a potential agent of change;
- level of commitment and high level of motivation.

It was an intensive four-day Trainer Development Course, designed by a member of the English global product team, Maggie Milne. The programme incorporated 6 workshops. The trainees explored their beliefs about teaching/learning and examined teacher roles, approaches and styles, identified skills which are transferrable from teaching to training. They defined factors which impact on teacher trainee learning and development, (goals, expectations, needs, learning styles, the implications for motivation). The teacher trainers were equipped with the tools to help deal with difficult issues arising from teacher inexperience or resistance to engaging in communicative or learner-centred teaching. Participants learnt to explore group dynamics, factors for building rapport between trainer and trainees, the impact of constructive and negative feedback on learning, ways of supporting trainees, giving feedback and doing reflective activities.

The participants were twenty teachers and teacher trainers from nine different cities from all parts of Russia: Moscow and Samara (central Russia), Kaliningrad and St Petersburg (North and West of Russia), Omsk in Siberia (East of Russia) and others. They had varying degrees of experience, ranging from teacher trainers in universities and in-service teacher training institutions to school teachers who deliver workshops to their colleagues.

Even while doing micro-training as the final activity of the course, participants used their awareness of the Russian classroom situation where grammar translation, drilling and PPP approaches are still prevalent to adapt materials from TKTE. They provided more background/explanation/examples to clarify the approach and methodology – which are so different from those used in Russia. Furthermore, the trainers while providing cascade training in their cities continued to report on what local adaptation of the course was done by them and was further needed.

The skills and knowledge gained from the Trainer Development course is having an impact on teachers throughout Russia who have received training from the course participants and the numbers of teachers and teacher trainers affected by it are

continually growing. The course participants are using quality materials (TKTE) and these, together with the skills they have gained from the Trainer Development course have equipped them with the tools necessary to improve professional ELT standards throughout Russia. They are running locally a full TKTE course or deliver singular sessions on particular topics derived from it. A number of teacher training institutions (both pre-service and in-service level) have agreed to incorporate the TKTE modules in their curriculum. The course materials are flexible, allowing slight modifications to better fit the local needs.

## **Training online**

The course Teacher Knowledge Test Essentials has got an online analogue. It provided us with important data and helped to develop opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of the face-to-face and online models.

For me as an observer of the online TKTE training course, the most evident point was that training online gives a clear vision of the personal development of an individual teacher and also gives a general picture of teachers' views. It was easily seen how trainees were progressing in understanding the new concepts of teaching.

Trainees' opinions were recorded during the course, which helped to see what the teachers' needs are.

Here are some examples:

*'Learners don't want to know about the aims.  
They just want to get on with the lesson.'*

*'Not all students are prepared for the eliciting method.'*

*'I like working with my students and encouraging them to learn English.  
The only thing I don't like is mixed-ability groups.'*

Training online enables teachers to communicate, network and share teaching tips, ideas and strategies, as well as learn from the course, from each other and from the moderators.

## **Success factors**

According to the final assignments of participants and the micro-teaching delivered on the face-to-face course we may judge that the course has inspired them, and they – in turn – can inspire their students.

These are factors which made TKTE project successful:

- We enrol the most motivated participants trainers and teachers through selection.
- The candidates have to look for new approaches and ways to make teaching more efficient, be flexible and prepared to change own attitudes; and be ready to share.
- The course is developed by UK professionals and throughout the project we receive their constant professional consultancy.
- Cooperation with local educational authorities and getting their approval for the course allowed our participants to get a formal recognition of their qualification upgrade.
- Teachers' awareness of new opportunities for continuous professional development raises their interest and contributes to success.

## What teachers say after

*'The course showed us ways of how to be creative in the lesson, make each lesson extremely interesting and motivating, and offered magic spells of turning boring grammar drills into an unforgettable adventure'*

*'My views have changed. Before the course I viewed a communicative approach not as a basic but as supplementary for the classical approach . . . '*

*'I'll definitely discuss the ways of reflection on a lesson with my peer teachers and will try some other ideas.'*

*'I will practice some new ways of teaching grammar and will pay attention to student's autonomy.'*

## Some lessons learnt

We learnt very concrete lessons from this project.

The age of participants and their teaching experience doesn't mean much.

More practical tasks are needed. Teacher trainees appreciated micro-teaching which was incorporated on the course and expressed their willingness to have more of that during a course.

More attention to work with theory and terminology is needed. Russian teachers want to know how to do things, and why.



Working with one of the elements of the British Council global products made us feel proud that we are privileged to be a tiny part of this huge and very significant work. It was also important that the voice of local teachers and trainers is heard.

The trial of the TKT Essentials in Russia and the use of a cascade approach for its dissemination contributed to building the new capacity of the teacher and the teacher training cadre.

One of the big lessons is that changing concepts in minds takes time and a 72 hour course is not always enough. This thought came to my mind when I came across one of teachers' comments: 'Now I know how to force my students to be interested in learning English'...

Well, we have to be optimistic and just know that 'show must go on'...

# Vision to Village

Clare O'Donahue

## Introduction

In a relatively short time significant changes have taken place in government primary schools in Tamil Nadu, South India. 'Village to Vision' describes how three organisations worked together to build on one man's vision in order to respond to the current demands for English by parents, teachers and children across the state.

From 2002–07 a 'Silent Revolution' took place when MP Vijayakumar, Director of 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' (SSA) the Government of India's flagship programme for Universalization of Elementary Education, implemented Activity Based Learning (ABL) for children aged 5–9 years. ABL within Tamil Nadu is described as:

*selected practices of Montessori pedagogy for multi-grade and multi-level classrooms that has now been extended to 37,500 government and government aided schools in the state. (Schoolscape et al. 2009: 2).*

The resulting change in primary school experience for children has been remarkable but such is the demand for English, many parents are making uninformed choices to remove their children from vernacular medium government provision and send their children to the growing number of private English medium schools.

It was against this background that Unicef, the SSA and the British Council's Project English set about developing English language teaching for children in government schools as they progressed through and beyond the ABL system. A large scale cascade programme which would directly train 900 Master trainers and 120,000 teachers was realised with the partners working together to identify critical success factors.

## Success factors

### Shared expectations

A needs analysis initiated stakeholder involvement and engagement. Everyone from the State Director through to local teachers, children and administrators were consulted with their ideas being taken forward to ensure that needs were met. The three organisations agreed and clearly communicated that the overall aim would be to boost teachers' confidence in speaking English and introduce active learning

techniques thereby increasing the children's opportunities for speaking English. This would be achieved in the local context and within the existing recently implemented English curriculum.

### **Engagement and ownership**

A challenging aspect of educational change programmes is how to ensure teacher 'buy in', without which there is little hope of changing existing practice. A certain amount of adaptation needs to take place when existing beliefs and practice are being challenged. The teachers in Tamil Nadu had recently been through a 'sea change' with the introduction of ABL and as those targeted for the English programme had already seen and heard their colleagues working in different ways with younger learners, they were eager to try out different methodologies themselves. During a monitoring visit to a remote school one teacher enthused about the English training programme, describing in detail how the new ideas were being implemented in the classroom. When asked which cascade training he had attended, he replied *'Unfortunately I did not attend the training; I have learnt all this from my friends and colleagues who did!'* Affirmation from peers within their own local community can only encourage ownership and acceptance.

### **Defined roles and responsibilities**

During the initiation phase, roles were defined which took account of and recognised the knowledge and expertise of each partner. The SSA shared their project planning strategies; similarly Unicef shared their extensive knowledge of the participants and local education systems and advised accordingly. The British Council were able to provide top quality, experienced trainers to start the cascade process and through their reputation were key in motivating and enthusing participants. Crucially, an atmosphere of reciprocal learning was established.

### **Ongoing monitoring and evaluation**

State wide monitoring and evaluation was conducted throughout the programme by all partners at all levels. Key findings were shared and consulted on with subsequent action agreed and wherever possible put into action immediately. Partners were responsive to local needs being appropriately flexible in their approach.

### **Maintaining quality**

Specific logistical arrangements were implemented to maintain quality and minimise risk. Relatively small batches of 40 participants were trained and only one layer to the cascade reduced the risk of transmission loss. The Master Trainer programme was residential with venues undergoing a rigorous quality check. The participant selection process was transparent and fair recognizing

not only experience and knowledge but also positive attitudes to change. Trainers and teachers worked together in pre cascade local workshops adapting the programme for their own context under the supervision of the three partner organizations.

### **Initial impact**

Initial monitoring has indicated that impact from the programme is already being seen and that consultation, communication and careful planning have been the key to success. Observations confirmed that teachers and children across the state, in both rural and urban schools, are beginning to teach and learn in interactive classrooms and communicate in English albeit at different levels and with varying proficiency. On the strength of the success so far of this programme, the three partners have already begun working in another state and will continue the implementation of the project with an additional 25,000 teachers in Tamil Nadu.

### **References**

- Wedell, M.** 2009. *Planning for Educational Change. Putting people and their contexts first.* Continuum International Publishing Group
- SchoolScape.** 2009 *Activity Based Learning. Effectiveness of ABL under SSA. A report of the baseline and year end surveys.*
- Barrett, A.** 2010. *Cascade Models in India: An Effective Tool for Educational Change?* Unpublished Master's Thesis, Institute of Education, London, UK

# Are you a coursebook junkie?

David Williams

## Problems with coursebooks

You're using a particular coursebook and you know that cuts down your preparation. After a while you begin to have reservations - the coursebook has unsuitable activities, you would prefer another coursebook or you find that you need to supplement the coursebook with material from other sources. You want to break your reliance on this coursebook, but you don't want to prepare heaps of your own materials. At the lesson planning level, you will probably find other materials, but this does not solve the problem that your coursebook is inadequate. On what basis then do you select another coursebook and how do you know you have made the best choice?

We need to understand that a coursebook cannot possibly cover all the topics or communicative situations or tasks needed at a particular level of English by all students. Coursebooks vary in for example, content, approach, levels targeted. We are also increasingly seeing versions of coursebooks for particular cultural sensitivities (eg Middle Eastern), or coursebooks focusing more on certain aspects of a general English curriculum (eg the environment, society or international life). Despite this widening range of coursebooks, it is still not a given that a particular coursebook will suit what the students require. Thus it is the responsibility of the teacher who designs the course to decide which coursebook might best suit their students.

This issue became significant for me while teaching in the first year of the Libyan English Teaching in Universities Project (LETUP) in 2007. Students in LETUP classes at language centres attached to Libyan universities needed English so that they would have an improved chance of success when they were sent to English universities on Libyan government educational scholarships. Students were being taught general English using standard coursebooks, prior to taking pre-sessional courses in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at UK universities. The belief was that by adding well-qualified English L1 teachers and communicative activities, the students' standard of English would increase rapidly and they would then succeed in UK universities.

However, these students had particular needs. They needed general English while still in Libya, but their general English needs were oriented towards adjusting to living and preparing to study at pre-sessional courses in the UK. I grouped their English language needs into 5 areas:

- Making plans for studying abroad
- Arriving in an English-speaking country
- English for social purposes
- English for transactions
- Preparing to study in a pre-sessional course

Just using the material in the coursebooks often meant that students were learning English of little relevance to their particular needs. A quick glance at any coursebook will reveal little of usefulness for the first two needs or the fifth need of the students, for example.

## **The link between courses and coursebooks**

Although pedagogically self-evident, it should be emphasized that before a coursebook can be chosen, the course must be determined. We are in error if the coursebook becomes the course, such that teachers teach from the coursebook without there being a specific course. We should not assume that the coursebook writers know what is best for our students. As we have seen above, coursebooks vary considerably – they do not, for example, cover the same skills, communicative situations, cultural or learning needs. In the LETUP situation, courses should have been written first, clearly identifying what students should learn in their general English courses targeted for living and studying in the UK. Only then could appropriate coursebooks be selected.

There are two significant components in the decision of what should be in an English course. The first component is based on the realisation that learning English as an L2 means that the vast majority of students do not have to learn the wide range of English that a L1 speaker knows. Their requirements are more specific; English is a tool for them to get something they want. Students of English have particular reasons for taking the trouble to learn English, and they can identify what needs in English they might have in the foreseeable future. As teachers, we should be targeting those needs, and also identifying the pedagogic implications of what students tell us. Furthermore, we must have sound research data identifying those needs on an ongoing basis. Wiggins and McTighe (2005: 17) refer to this process as ‘backward design’ meaning that we should determine first what students should ‘know, understand and be able to do’ before we start writing the course.

The second component is based on a teacher's responsibility to teach students to a recognised standard, such that students can provide evidence to others (e.g. educational or work institutions, peers or family) of their having reached that standard. This is a professional responsibility, akin to the community using the services of other professionals and expecting a standard of service externally monitored by a reputable body. It is a British Council requirement that Teaching Centre courses are soundly and accurately linked to the Common European Framework (CEF). The CEF provides a range of competencies that a student should be able to demonstrate at a CEF level, such as A1, A2, B1, or B2.

## **Needs analysis**

The first component mentioned above calls for a comprehensive needs analysis which can be used for course design and then lead to coursebook selection. Current British Council procedures such as focus groups, mid-term questionnaires, or even needs analyses in the first lessons of a course, are insufficient methods of determining needs of our students for the purposes of course design or coursebook selection.

To tackle this challenge, I set about creating a suitable needs analysis. I wanted to find out the needs of British Council Kuwait (BCK) students in learning English. From that, I could then determine in what topics, communicative situations or tasks they might want to show competence in English. By then linking this to CEF competencies, I would have frameworks for courses - and yardsticks for selecting appropriate coursebooks. I sought answers to four major questions:

- Why students are learning English?
- Where they use English outside the British Council?
- What English skills they want to improve most?
- How often they use English during the week?

Answers from students were then analysed and collated.

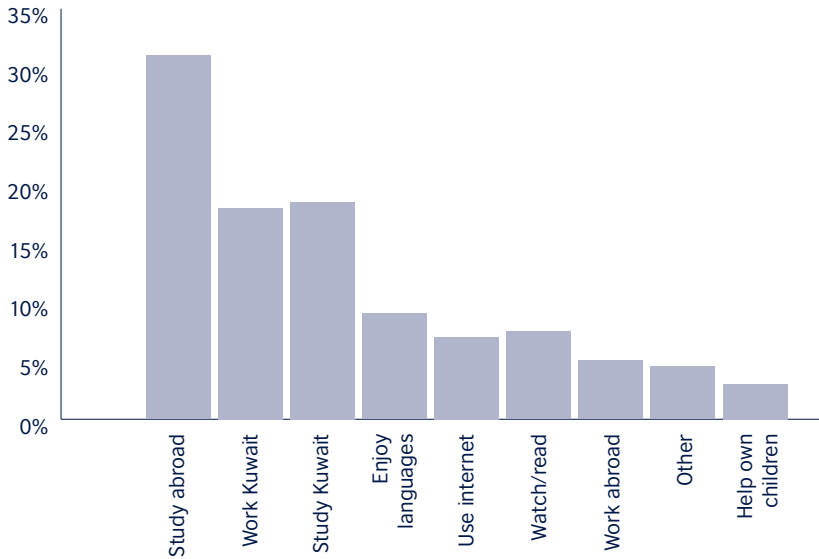
## **Analysis of needs analysis results at British Council Kuwait**

Analysing results (see Figure 1), approximately one third of BCK students want English for study abroad and about another third want English for study or work in Kuwait. About another 13% want English so that they can be more involved in the international English environment of using the internet, watching TV or movies, reading newspapers, magazines or books. From Figure 2, it can be seen that 52 per cent of students use English now for work and study purposes and

38 per cent use English during travelling and shopping. Thus, I look for a coursebook that will offer topics, communicative situations and tasks for mainly work or study or international life. Kuwaiti students have little interest in using English for socialising in Western entertainment communicative situations – a common feature of several coursebooks.

**Figure 1**

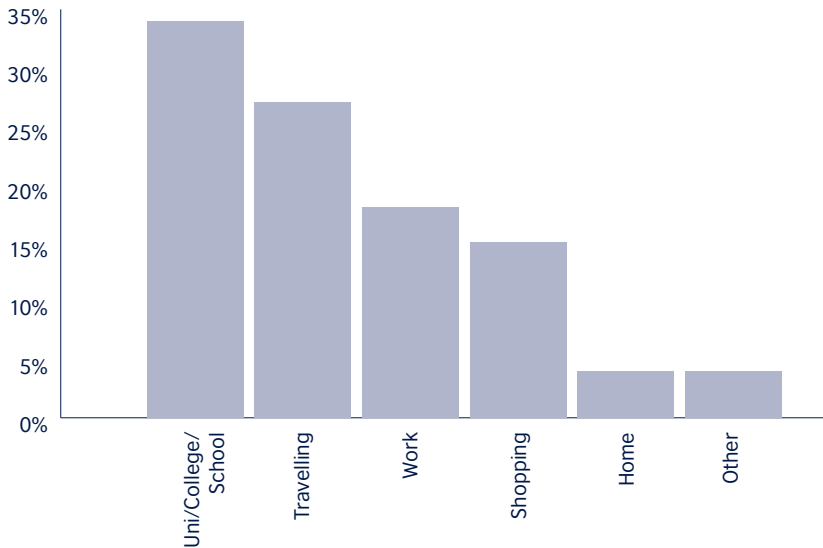
**Reasons for learning English**





**Figure 2**

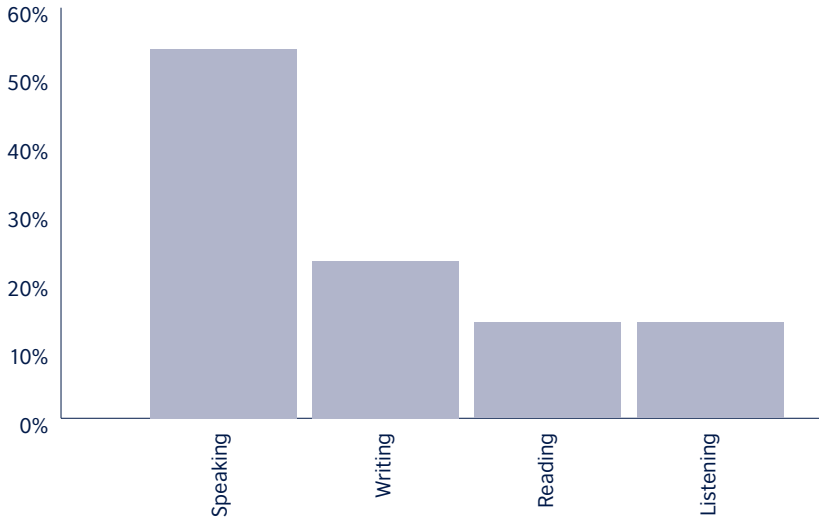
**Location of use of English**



Most BCK students want to improve their speaking and they place much less emphasis on improvement in writing, reading and listening skills (see Figure 3). Bearing in mind that half of BCK students have come to the British Council because they need English for study and that most of them are around CEF A1, A2 or the low end of B1, I then consider they need to not only improve speaking but they also need a solid grounding in grammar and vocabulary. Even though the students rate writing, listening and reading much lower than speaking, they will need these for the reasons why they are learning English (especially work or study). So I look for a coursebook that develops grammar and vocabulary clearly, and offers students practice in using these in speaking, reading, listening, and writing. I also prefer a coursebook that provides usage of the grammar and vocabulary in communicative situations in work/study/international life as these are the major reasons the students are learning and using English.

**Figure 3**

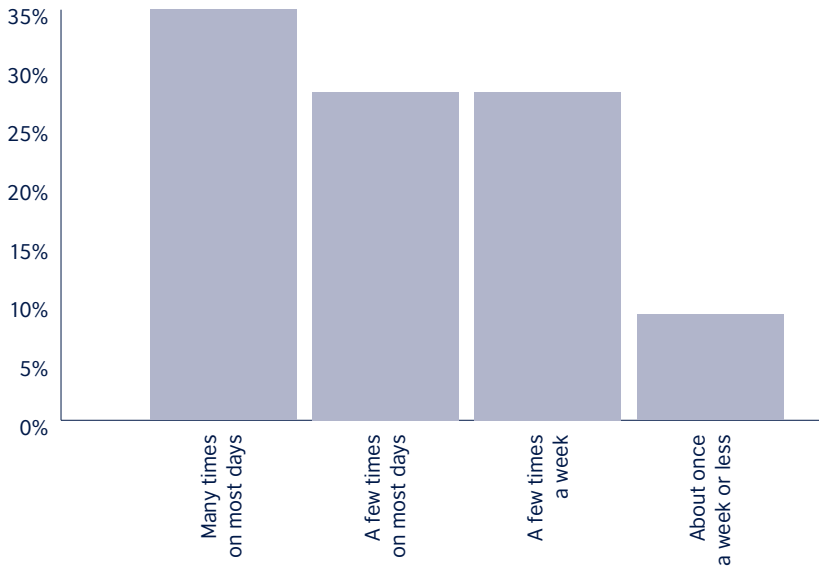
**Most important English skills to improve**



Students stated they have several times most days to practise their English (see Figure 4). The course, lessons and homework – and the CEF competences – should offer those opportunities. Further, the coursebook chosen should offer examples of English which students can be expected to use most days (this is likely to be general English for work, study, international life), thus making lesson planning and coursebook use more fruitful for teacher and student.

**Figure 4**

**Most important English skills to improve**

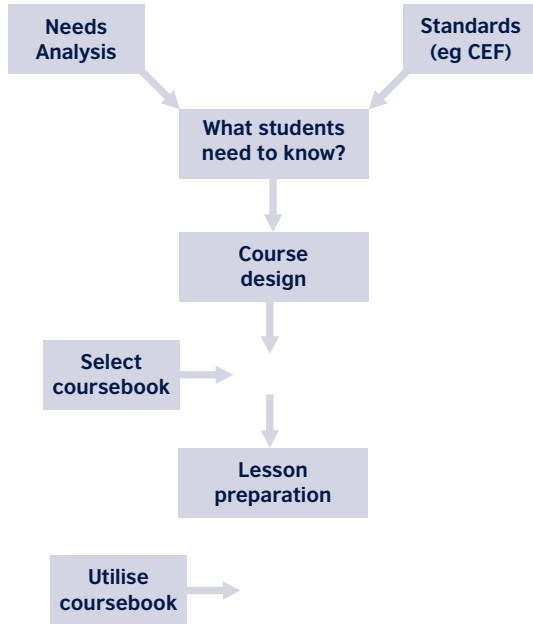


Keeping in mind the British Council requirement for courses to be consonant with the Common European Framework, I look for coursebooks that are designed to take students to e.g. A1, A2, B1, rather than the less precise nomenclature of e.g. Beginner, Elementary, Pre-Intermediate. This makes it easier to demonstrate that the students, by using the coursebook, have been targeting a set of competences at a recognised level.

**Summary**

The process of when to select a coursebook can be represented diagrammatically:

**Figure 5**



My preferred coursebook may not be yours, but the principles remain. Does your existing coursebook meet the needs of your students – and does it supply material to the standards expected by the students and your school? Asking questions in a needs analysis about why they are learning English, what English skills they want to improve, where and how often they use English, can assist you in choosing the most appropriate coursebook. Then in the classroom, you use activities that help to deliver the aims of the course. If you have an appropriately selected coursebook, these will often be from that book.

And one final note – analysing my students' needs has led me to recommend that our coursebook be changed...

## References

**Wiggins, G. & J. McTighe.** (2005). *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

# CLIL: Teaching science and English to young learners in Japan

Gordon Allan

## Introduction: What Is CLIL?

CLIL stands for content and language integrated learning. In practice, the term CLIL is currently used to refer to a wide variety of teaching contexts. This was the source of much discussion in Harrogate. In the panel discussion that took place just a few hours before my session, Do Coyle said that, as far as she was concerned, true CLIL was content driven. This seems to me to be a fair definition. I am employed as a language teacher, however, so my own work tends to be language driven. A number of other teachers who followed the CLIL sessions in Harrogate were in a similar position. Perhaps what we are doing is not 'true' CLIL. That is a question that could be debated at length. To do it justice, I would really need to write a separate, more academic paper. I will return to this briefly later, but for the purpose of this article, the view that I presented in my session was simply that for a lesson to be a CLIL lesson it should have *both* content *and* language aims, and that these aims should be integrated.

## My CLIL context

Since 2005 I have been working with the team dedicated to science projects in Tokyo to help promote the Royal Institution Christmas Lectures in Japan. These lectures take place at the Royal Institution in London every year, having been started by Michael Faraday in 1825. They were originally intended as a Christmas present to the children of London at a time when formal education was a rare and expensive thing, available only to a privileged few. The lectures have been coming to Japan since 1990, delivered in English by the same leading scientists who deliver them in the U.K.

Working with the science team, I developed pre-lecture introductory lessons every year. Our aim was for the lessons to be content based, teaching both relevant basic science and associated English to junior high school students (12–15 years old) from Tokyo. I have also used these lessons in state junior high schools and have used the same techniques to teach non-science CLIL lessons, such as a social studies lesson comparing everyday life in the UK and Japan.

## Why CLIL?

Traditional language teaching in schools often places an emphasis on grammar translation and passing exams, and Japan is no exception. Such an approach may make English seem like nothing more than just another academic subject; a set of terms and rules to be learned by heart. This is not very inspiring. It is far better for learners to appreciate that English, like most other subjects, has a practical value in the real world.

As communicative language teachers, we are all aware that to be taught effectively, language should always be taught in context. We often use contexts that learners are familiar with as a platform for teaching new language. For example, we might use a dialogue that begins with the question, “How was your weekend?” as a basis for a lesson on the past simple forms of common verbs. This is fine up to a point, but it is not always particularly stimulating for young learners. In my experience, young learners and teenagers often find novel content more stimulating than familiar content.

In CLIL lessons the content is new to the learners. In addition, the aims of the lesson include content aims alongside language aims. I think this is crucial to making CLIL work. Having content aims helps the teacher to maintain a focus on successful communication in the lesson. Using language for a real communicative purpose and experiencing the reward of learning something new gives learners a much richer experience than simply memorising a list of new words or a new structure. As a result, they learn more effectively.

## Why science?

Young learners are natural amateur scientists. They are interested in exploring the world around them, and indeed the workings of their own bodies. Science is the study of the natural world. Since science involves a great deal of international collaboration, scientists all over the world often publish their work in English. Teaching science in English, therefore, makes a lot of sense.

Biology lends itself particularly well to CLIL lessons at pre-university level because much of it deals with the world on a scale that we can all readily appreciate. Concepts such as anatomy or the classification of animals and plants are easy for students to grasp. This capitalises on learners’ shared knowledge of the world as a springboard for the acquisition of new language.

## How does CLIL work in practice?

The students I teach at junior high school are aged 12–15 and almost all are at beginner or elementary level. One of the challenges this presents for a language

teacher is keeping the content of the lessons interesting without making the language excessively challenging.

A common objection from teachers who are new to CLIL is that if both the language and the content are new to the students, it will be impossible for them to understand. This is a valid concern. It should be borne in mind when planning lessons, but in practice it is not as big a problem as many teachers imagine it will be. CLIL lessons should be planned to capitalise on learners existing knowledge of language and shared knowledge of the world as platforms for learning.

My favourite analogy is with climbing. Imagine a CLIL lesson as a climb. At any given moment, we need footholds, handholds or both. In case of difficulty, we also need a rope. We can think of footholds as our shared knowledge of the world around us, and handholds as language that we already understand. The rope comes in the form of visual aids. We can use our knowledge of the world (content) as a basis for acquiring new language. Similarly, known language can be used to teach new content. When neither existing knowledge nor known language is available, visual aids can save us from falling by supporting understanding.

In other words, CLIL requires extensive *scaffolding* to support learning, and teachers must keep this in mind when planning lessons and designing materials.

## Choosing content aims

Content aims, like language aims, should be appropriate to the age and level of the learners. In a school environment, collaboration with other subject teachers may be helpful in determining content aims. For example, when planning a CLIL lesson about nutrition, I spoke to the science teacher who directed me to the school nutritionist (the person responsible for planning the school lunch menu). She had some materials aimed at promoting a healthy, balanced diet to the students. This helped me to assess the students existing knowledge and to pitch my lesson at the right level. In addition, although these materials were in Japanese, I was able to present the same information in English using the same format (an inverted pyramid of food groups, rather than the pyramid we are familiar with in the UK). All of this helped to integrate the lesson into both the school curriculum and the students' schema for nutrition.

Another consideration when deciding content aims is that there should be some reason why the content is being presented in English. Since English is the *de facto* language of international communication, any content with an international dimension may be appropriate for a CLIL lesson. For example, teaching Japanese history to the Japanese in English would only make sense if it was Japanese history from an international perspective.

## **An example: Teaching internal anatomy in English**

In my session I demonstrated the activities in this lesson. For obvious reasons it is not possible to repeat that in a printed publication. The following is a summary of the stages in the lesson, and is probably best read alongside the materials used in the lesson. All the materials are available to download from the Harrogate online website.

### **Aims**

The 2008 Christmas Lectures by Dr. Hugh Montgomery were about survival in extreme conditions. They dealt with the body's reaction to extreme environments. I felt that internal anatomy would be an interesting and appropriate introduction to the topic that avoided covering the same ground as the lectures. The junior high school science teachers that I spoke to confirmed that it would fit well what the students were studying in their science classes, so I made this my content aim.

Having chosen a content aim, I then thought about the language necessary to teach it. An obvious lexical aim was lexis for internal organs. In addition, prepositions are often an area of difficulty for many learners and here was an ideal context in which to teach prepositions of space to describe the relative positions of the various organs in the body. I, therefore, chose these as my language aims.

Note that the aims are integrated. Understanding the content aids understanding of the language and *vice versa*.

### **Introduction**

The lesson began with a short quiz about the Christmas Lectures. Students worked in pairs to try to answer the questions so this served as an ice-breaker.

To introduce the topic of anatomy, I began with a review of body parts such as eyes, ears, arms and legs. These are usually taught early on so the learners already knew them. In small groups students played Pelmanism, matching the written forms to pictures.

### **Stage 1: Vocabulary**

Using flashcards, I attempted to elicit the names of the following internal organs: Lungs, heart, brain, stomach, intestines, liver, kidneys, and muscles. Most of this was new to the students so I drilled the new words and then added cards for all of them to the Pelmanism cards the students already had. They played again. The rule was that they had to say each word when they turned a card over, so I was able to monitor and correct their pronunciation as they played.



## **Stage 2: Anatomy**

To elicit and teach the anatomy, I used a kinesthetic activity. The students had to stick actual-size cut out pictures of the internal organs on to a volunteer in the correct positions. Students worked in the same small groups they had played Pelmanism in. I did not pre-teach this, instead allowing students to teach each other and work it out for themselves. I allowed them time to discuss it and try out ideas, monitoring and making suggestions where necessary using the prepositions that would be taught later in the lesson. I did not explain what the prepositions meant at this stage, nor did I point so students had to work out what my suggestions meant.

This was the most important stage of the lesson, and the most fun! Because they had not been pre-taught the answers, students felt more in control and worried less about making mistakes.

## **Stage 3: Consolidation**

I used two worksheets for consolidation. On the first, students labelled a diagram with the names of the internal organs, and on the second they wrote sentences using prepositions of space to describe the relative positions of the various organs, for example: 'The heart is between the lungs.'

## **Post conference reflection**

As I mentioned in the introduction, what I have described above is not necessarily true CLIL because it is not content driven but language driven. For those of us who are employed to teach language, this is inevitable, but I see no reason why this should prevent us from trying to harness some of the benefits of CLIL to improve our language teaching by using content as a vehicle for language. In doing so, we are developing the skills and techniques that will be important to making CLIL work in future. I see this as a developmental step in the right direction for teachers who are interested in CLIL.

# Challenging themes: radio English for teachers and learners

Thelma Umeh and Paul Woods

## Context

There are approximately 11.4 million English language teachers and 1.1 billion English language learners in the world today. 750,000 of these teachers and 100 million learners are in Sub-Saharan Africa, where internet connectivity is still patchy and generally unaffordable for teachers and learners. As the British Council wanted to reach many more learners and teachers using its limited resources, this meant we had to explore different channels to reach our target audiences at a distance – including radio, newspapers and mobile phones.

## Why radio?

You may say – ‘radio is old hat. It’s all been done before by BBC English’. True, radio has been around for a long time, but there are still very good reasons for using it, especially in Africa. Widely available in developing countries, radio is accessible and provides a cost-effective way of reaching audiences in countries with low levels of school attendance and gives high impact for relatively low levels of investment.

## A Nigerian case study

In Nigeria we adapted the British Council’s *Language Improvement for Teachers course* (originally designed for face to face delivery) for radio. The course was very clearly defined, but had a skeletal nature which needed to be filled out. To do this, two consultants were employed to adapt the existing content. There was a script conference with ELT experts and radio producers and presenters to develop a production script prior to the actual production of the programmes. Challenges included a lack of experienced personnel to work with, getting a national radio station to partner with us, keeping the partner on board, generating additional content and getting sponsorship for the programmes. In Nigeria we secured a three-year partnership with the national radio network, and the programmes were broadcast on Federal Radio at 7.00pm once a week to an estimated audience of 5 million, rising to 8 million by the end of the series – many of whom were not teachers of English!

## Teaching English Radio

Teaching English Radio is a series of twelve 15-minute radio programmes we have developed at the global level, aimed at teachers of English working in schools in developing countries where large classes, a lack of resources and few training opportunities are a reality. The programmes provide advice and training on teaching English at a very basic level and include clips from over twenty different countries from Afghanistan to Angola.

The objective of the series is to motivate teachers and provide a 'catalyst' to improve morale, encourage learner-centred strategies and make learning more effective. We have produced supporting notes for teachers and the programmes are designed to be very flexible: they can be re-packaged and delivered via podcasts, or adapted to include a live studio audience and questions from listeners.

The topics covered include *finding and using resources*, *using group and pair work in large classes*, *using English in the classroom*, *the teaching of new language*, *teaching listening* and *teaching reading*. We have also produced a promotional pack for radio stations which includes two data CDs and a booklet outlining the programme content, as well as 10,000 sets of 3 audio CDs which can be used on pre- and in-service training courses after the radio programmes have been broadcast. We anticipate the first series will create an insatiable demand for more, and have already commissioned a follow-on series, covering topics including *how to get the most out of your coursebook*, *managing different levels in the same class*, *marking*, *correcting*, *setting homework*, *doing revision* and *enjoying English lessons*.

## Challenges

We hope to find delivery partners in each country who will broadcast the programmes free of charge. One problem encountered during development was that it took far longer to produce the first series than we had originally anticipated. This was mainly due to difficulties in obtaining recordings from countries like Afghanistan.

## LearnEnglish Radio

Potentially the audiences for a series of programmes aimed at learners of English are huge and by 2013 we expect to reach up to 20 million listeners in Sub-Saharan Africa with our programmes. The series will focus on English for work situations.

# Classroom Detectives: an informal look at action research

Greg Gobel

## Introduction

In the 2008–09 academic year, many British Council teaching centres throughout Spain participated in the Spain Teaching Quality Project (STQP), led by Michael O'Brien. This project set out to give teachers the opportunity to take on informal action research projects of personal interest as part of their professional development and training. The project included well over 100 teachers taking part in 8 centres (Somosaguas, Barcelona YLs, Segovia, Palma, Valencia, Bilbao and Barcelona Adults).

My IATEFL talk focused on this project and its action research (AR) component, with the following objectives:

- for participants to learn about and react to informal action research projects carried out in the 2008–09 academic year in the British Council around Spain,
- see and experiment with an informal action research planning template, and
- brainstorm areas of interest for possible future action research.

## STQP outline

The STQP included a research menu created by teachers and training managers. This menu gave many options for teachers to consider when thinking about which area of teaching they could investigate. Teachers were then given a planning template to sketch out their ideas for how to conduct their informal action research. Teachers were given the option to carry out their AR in small groups/teams or individually. There was also a Spain-wide wiki site on the internet for teachers to voluntarily upload their project plans and their results in an effort to share the learning that was happening throughout the various British Council centres involved.

## Why AR?

There are many reasons to do AR as part of one's teacher development and the session asked participants to brainstorm their ideas, and then to compare them with ours, including these:

- to help you notice what you and your students really do, rather than what you think they do,
- to get feedback as to the success or failure of what you are doing,
- to help you tailor teaching and learning to your learners' learning and their context,
- to help you to be able to justify the teaching and learning choices you make,
- to increase your knowledge of learning and teaching and become an authority on teaching,
- to ensure you maintain your interest in teaching,
- to enable you to become less dependant on decisions made by people who are far away from your classroom such as textbook writers and managers.

## Example descriptions from Somosaguas

Participants were then given several short descriptions of some of the projects done by teachers at the Somosaguas Teaching Centre. The participants read two summaries each, compared them with other projects read by other participants, and asked me for clarification when needed. They considered the projects in their own teaching/managing contexts and discussed what benefits there may have been for the learners, the teachers and the centre. Here are some of the descriptions that the participants read and discussed:

1	<p>5 teachers experimented with ways to integrate Drama to develop and extend coursebook content to make it more engaging and to enhance communication skills. The starting point for this project was materials from coursebooks that could be considered a bit dry and unengaging. The group set out to enhance these texts/ dialogues by helping students to act them out. They found that, not only at primary and lower junior levels but also with adults and senior groups, students were motivated by 'acting out' what was in the coursebook and adapting some of the basics from the book into their own mini-plays. One of the teachers will be developing the group's ideas into a 1-hour training session in the Somosaguas In Service Training (INSET) programme this year.</p>
2	<p>4 teachers investigated recycling vocabulary to address these problems: students having difficulty in retaining lexis when it's presented in the context of product based classes, in retaining incidental vocabulary when it comes up in class, the inability to use a certain word which has been taught because the learner has not yet assimilated the word into his/her active word store. Their focus was on if recycling vocabulary would affect both the retention of vocabulary and the production of vocabulary. They used student questionnaires, pre- and post-recycling tests, and through monitoring students in oral tasks. Their students reported that this was extremely useful for them. The teachers' conclusion is that consistent recycling 'makes all the difference.'</p>
3	<p>4 teachers looked into the use of authentic native speaker recordings to improve their students' listening skills. This group set out to address the lack of authenticity in typical coursebook recordings. They used these in a task-based teaching/learning framework involving task repetition with particular focus on the language gap between what the students produced on their own before hearing a recording and what the students would produce after hearing a recording with attention to particular language use by the native speakers on the recordings. Their project has started what could become a large, useful bank of authentic recordings that could be used to supplement coursebook listenings for many levels and ages.</p>
4	<p>A teacher experimented with using input only to promote improved use of discourse markers in writing. To address the problem of his 11 year old pre-intermediate students producing relatively incohesive texts, which read as lists of sentences rather than units of longer discourse, he focused his learners on pronoun referencing. The focus was on input rather than output, i.e. for four months the students noticed pronouns in reading texts and identified what they referred to. During this time pronoun usage (their output) was not corrected or praised in their writing tasks. The result was this input processing improved their ability to use pronoun referencing in their texts much more effectively leading to more cohesive writing compared to four months earlier. Although this experiment was successful, the teacher wonders how effective this sort of input processing would be for any other structure or language type.</p>

5	A teacher looked into ways of helping students to use more English in transactional classroom interaction. His particular focus was on identifying the Spanish that learners would slip into unnecessarily in class and then teach them how to change their habits from language learners to language users. He used questionnaires that both students and teaching colleagues completed in order to identify typical Spanish usage in class and why they perceive this is done. He found that these teaching techniques helped: using phrase bubbles around classroom walls; phrase bingo cards; the teacher noticing what's been used in Spanish, logging it, then teaching the appropriate English; including more focus on teaching process language and students using it; and encouraging students to be more self-aware through self- and peer-monitoring.
6	One teacher used wikis to encourage redrafting in the writing process with his Cambridge Proficiency Examination (CPE) students while another teacher used wiki to help his junior students develop their creative writing skills. Both set out to train their students in using wiki with computer lab visits so that the students could use wiki at home to do collaborative writing. They wondered if integrating writing with new technology would help to motivate their students to both write better and write paying more attention to the writing process. Teacher B felt that with lower levels the initial set up of using the wiki was somewhat problematic, but once the students knew what to do and were aware of expectations, they were able to write on the wiki, and his students felt this was more motivating than writing on paper in class or at home. Teacher A's Proficiency Examination students were quite active in peer-correcting and collaborating through the wiki to help each other approach CPE-style writing tasks. 'Publishing' to a public space seemed to have a positive impact on both the writing process and product.

## The Planning Template

The basic AR process used was a simple plan, do, review, share learning cycle. The planning template that was used to help give teachers structure and guidance to their AR looked much like this:

Topic	What broad area are you going to investigate?
<b>Problem</b>	Identify the problem – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 'Spanish speakers have difficulty with'...</li> <li>■ 'My FCE class never'...</li> <li>■ 'Kids under ten can't'...</li> </ul>
<b>What's known</b>	What do you know about the problem?  What do your colleagues know about it?  Is there anything you could read about it?

<b>Research question</b>	<p>What question do you want to answer?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 'I want to see if I &lt;do X&gt; will my Spanish students &lt;do Y&gt;?'</li> <li>■ 'If I persuade my FCE class to &lt;do X&gt; will &lt;Y happen&gt;?'</li> <li>■ 'If I adapt &lt;X procedure&gt; for kids under 10 will they be able to &lt;do Y&gt;?'</li> </ul>
<b>Check it</b>	<p>Ask yourself is it manageable? If not, try to narrow it down.</p> <p>Have you got access to any resources you'll need?</p> <p>Will it take up more time than you can afford to invest?</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	What exactly are you going to do in class?
<b>Evidence</b>	(see next section)
<b>Teach/Act/Reflect</b>	<p>Which lessons will you implement it in?</p> <p>Will you keep a record of each lesson?</p> <p>Think about how it's going.</p> <p>Do you need to make any changes?</p>

## Gathering Evidence

The session then looked at ways that teacher can gather evidence, mainly through these five ways:

- reflective notes (field notes, reflective log, personal private diary, public journal),
- verbal reports (thinking aloud or with a Dictaphone a teacher can make verbal reports about what is done generally or verbal observations about what has been done),
- observations (formal observation, self-observation, reciprocal peer observations that could be structured with an observation task or unstructured, student observation, i.e., the student has an observation task),
- questionnaires (design a questionnaire for the students to fill out to help to inform the teacher), and
- interviews and/or focus group (structured interviews of the students with set questions, unstructured discussion with students about the topic of the research, or a focus group with prompt starter questions/topics that can be extended).



## **Conclusion**

The action research was a popular part of the training programme amongst teachers at Somosaguas Teaching Centre, so we continued with it in the 2009–10 academic year, and are looking to extend it even further in the 2010–11 academic year.

# Harnessing Reflection and CPD

Seamus Harkin

## Introduction

This paper describes the experiences of a group of teachers in Uva Province in Sri Lanka who were asked to keep Teacher Journals. It begins with a description of the course, goes on to outline the development of the journals and concludes with feedback from the IATEFL audience.

Journal writing provided an essential link between the training room and the classroom for 220 novice teachers on a pre-service training programme in Uva Province in Sri Lanka. Comments from these journal entries led to the development of a simple innovation, the Teacher Journal.

## Regional English Support Centres

Uva Province is a remote area of Sri Lanka, high in the hill country. It suffers from an acute shortage of primary English teachers and was struggling to meet central government targets. The Chief Governor invited the British Council to conduct a training programme for new graduates from a range of disciplines who had been appointed as English language teachers.

The network of 30 Regional English Support Centres (RESCs), which are resource and training centres, is one of Sri Lanka's lesser known gems. It was natural for the British Council to draw on the expertise and local knowledge of the trainers in Uva's four RESCs, who became mentors on this 9-month preparation course.

## The Training Programme

Teachers attended one-week training blocks interspersed with three-week teaching blocks. During the teaching blocks there were only very occasional observations by mentors owing to both the remoteness of the schools and the limited resources available. It was essential to accelerate the development of the reflective capacity within these trainees so that they could effectively carry out classroom-based assignments and tasks independently. The introduction of journal writing at an early stage was the main tool used for this. We aimed to help the teachers to consciously make links between the professional knowledge from the training blocks and their personal, practical knowledge from the classroom so that they were better able to make sense of the training and apply it in the classroom. The journals also became the main means of communication between the mentors and teachers.

## Teachers' Concerns

The 16 mentors read and commented on these journals and it was while discussing the contents together that they noticed there seemed to be three main areas of concern being expressed:

- Teachers were worried about the progress they were making without the mentor present to guide and discuss lessons – there was no perception of progress.
- Teachers wanted access to resources so that they could try out ideas from the training course. They also felt isolated in the field and missed the joint preparation of micro-teaching and discussion of ideas.
- The teachers wanted to continue improving their own language skills.

## The Teacher Journal

It was in response to these concerns that we developed the Teacher Journal. There are five sections:

- 1 Diary – this is similar to an organizer and contains weekly planners, important dates and contacts information.
- 2 Reflections – this encourages teachers to continue to make journal entries beyond the course and offers guides on what to include.
- 3 Development – this section contains a range of tools and suggestions for Continuing Professional Development.
- 4 Resources – this provides information about sources of materials and channels of support as well as a bank of low-resource, low-tech classroom activities.
- 5 Notes – this can be used as a note book by teachers.

We included guidance on getting the most from the Teacher Journal in the latter part of the course and have followed up with teachers to find out how teachers use it and how useful they find it. During the session at IATEFL, we watched interviews of teachers who have using the Teacher Journal. Malkanthi Amarapala told us that writing reflections helped her analyse why her learners seemed to understand in lessons but did not perform well in evaluation and to plan how to deal with the problem. J Hemantha explained why he found the resources section so useful to add variety in his lessons. Finally, Duminda Jayasinghe showed us the portfolio he has started compiling and explained that other teachers at his school are doing the same. He said it helps to measure his improvement.

Useful suggestions from participants at IATEFL on making the Teacher Journal more effective by providing space and guidance for teachers to add their own

evaluation and ideas in the resources section have been incorporated into the Teacher Journal.

We concluded by acknowledging that the Teacher Journal does not actually contain anything new but that it has been received very positively by teachers in India and Sri Lanka and is providing useful tools and is helping to foster continuous development.

# Interactive Language Fair presentation

Fitch O'Connell

## Introduction

When I was asked to present at the Interactive Language Fair along with some 18 others on the final day of the 2010 IATEFL I have to admit to being somewhat underwhelmed. It was the first time that ILF was to be tried and, well, we all know what Sunday mornings at the conference can be like. It was, therefore, with some reservation that I agreed to take part and indeed right up to the event itself was filled with misgivings about how effective it would be.

## Revelation

What a revelation it turned out to be. A modest audience of some 80 or so gathered to hear each of the presenters give a two minute sales pitch before they retired back to individual 'stalls', where they had set up shop to await 'customers'. My presentation was based around the work of the BritLit project in which literature – contemporary short stories and poetry – gets used in the language classroom as a language learning tool. Because of the nature of the event it was impossible to plan a standard conference presentation; we had to respond to groups of people who came to listen and whose interests could lead in one direction or another, and the composition of these groups could change quite frequently. This might well mean that the same, or similar, explanations and descriptions would have to be given three, four or even five times over. The trick, it seemed, was to be very well prepared and ready to respond to any and every direction that enquiry might lead.

## Literature in the classroom

I decided to use my two minutes of plenary presentation (for which one slide was allowed) to present my case in the form of a short story to illustrate the metaphor of teachers needing to be persuaded to enlist literature – or narrative structures – in their language classrooms. My premise was that most teachers were under a misconception about what this meant and who believed that the threat of canonic works – Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens and many more dead white men – was what we were talking about. It is not: we embrace the writings of living writers who write about topics that are of interest to enquiring young minds in a language that is relevant to their language learning needs. My references to the Literature Dragon

living on the other side of Paragraph Woods and under the Narrative Falls and the brood of little Short Story dragons seemed to capture a few ears and I soon had a lively and interested crowd around my stall to ask for more information. In fact I did entertain about five different groups of varying sizes over the next hour and a very engaging and exciting time it was too.

Many teachers told me of their desire to do this kind of work but of the difficulties they faced due to syllabus requirements and, more frequently, hostile colleagues and these were common problems in the experience of the project and we were able to discuss these issues and reach some resolution and impart some hope. With other groups, or with changing personnel of a single group, I'm not sure which, we looked at issues to do with presentation, development and follow up. We managed to look in some detail at the need to develop a sense of creative ownership by the students so that they became engaged with reading not as a dreary chore but as something to which they could contribute imaginatively and with flair. We also managed to look at the essential role that critical thinking has in the whole process, underlining the whole of the educational ethos at work: ensuring that different sources of information were absorbed and assessed and balanced and articulated on.

## **Conclusion**

In short we were able to cover a remarkable amount of ground, far more than would have been possible in a standard stand-up-and-tell session. The very real, up close and personal nature of the event meant that I was able to deal with all the issues that were articulated by individual teachers, a luxury not usually afforded us.

Of course it was all made possible by having a whole trunkful of tried and tested resources at my beck and call. While I had some booklets and leaflets to hand out, I also had my laptop running, on which the BritLit resources – all 1200 hours worth of classroom materials based on 40 stories for all age groups – were available on the Teaching English website. (<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/try/britlit>)

In the end it was one of the most exciting conference events I have ever been asked to represent at and I would love to do it again. Basically, we all stood a good chance of living happily ever after.

# Welcome to the diverse language school!

## The Inclusive Classroom

Roxana Hughes

### Introduction

Make your school appealing for a wider range of students. Say yes to everyone! Overcome obstacles. This report is for anyone who is interested in developing their space to make it more accessible for students with specific needs, particularly those who are approaching this for the first time.

The school system in the UK has been a good model for accommodating students with specific needs for some time now. Increasingly I have found that the same is being asked of British Council Teaching Centres, however, we do not have the same level of training, expertise or facilities in many cases. These students with specific needs might be visually or hearing impaired, physically disabled, have learning difficulties, dyslexia, dyspraxia or any other specific need. Teaching centres need to be able to make changes in order to provide the best possible learning environment for these students. My presentation was written in response to this need, and I hope it will continue to open up the discussions in this area. In this report I will highlight four key areas where any school can make small changes, in order to accommodate students with specific needs.

### Developing Resources

Expanding our bank of resources expands our client base, as we are then able to offer our products to a wider range of students. Braille and producing enlarged copies of the textbooks, worksheets and tests has made our courses accessible to a number of students who were unable to study with us before. These are kept in the Study Support Centre, and students are able to borrow these resources for the duration of their course (the teacher keeps the tests). Having a bank of cut up alphabets, word sets and pictures is very useful for any school, especially when teaching lower levels, but especially useful for students who have difficulty writing. We have also started recording our childrens books onto tape so that during extensive reading time, visually impaired students can listen to the stories, or students with learning difficulties could have the option of listening and reading together. In centres with more advanced technology, installing a hearing loop in classrooms and public areas means that students who use hearing aids can hear the teacher or member of the customer service team more clearly.

I feel that the most important thing about developing resources, is that they are useful for all students, as there are many different ways that students are able to learn, and everyone is different. By expanding our bank of resources we have the choice to teach students in the way that suits them best.

## **Changing Attitudes**

Approaching teaching students with specific needs means tackling and sometimes challenging pre-conceived ideas and attitudes. Teachers may not be used to teaching these students, so may worry about the changes they might have to make to their teaching or approach. They may need more preparation time, for example, or support in class. Attitudes of local staff may be very different to attitudes in the UK – you may have to deal with prejudice, or an idea that students with specific needs are somehow different or not normal. To tackle these ideas it is a good idea to bring in specialists in the field to offer training, or prepare training yourself based on information from websites such as the British Dyslexia association. You may encounter attitudes from other students in the class who feel that they are not getting enough attention. In large classes this can be difficult to manage, but on the whole I have found that other students can be a real benefit, reading out questions or writing for specific students. This does not detract from their own learning but actually supports it. Sometimes the culture you are teaching in is not used to supporting students with specific needs, so they may have been treated differently in the past. They may have become used to special treatment, so sometimes being integrated into a general class can come as quite a shock. In these cases it is important that the students' expectations are managed and that there is someone for them to talk to during the first few weeks of the course.

## **Assistance**

In a few of the areas above I have mentioned the role of an assistant. Having a classroom or teaching centre assistant can be of real added value in these situations. They can help to photocopy and prepare cut-ups or enlarged copies ahead of time for the teacher, arrange furniture in the classroom, or be a point of contact for the student outside of the classroom if they need extra materials or someone to translate a problem. Students can also read their homework onto an mp3 player which the assistant can then transcribe for the teacher. Inside the class, an assistant can read questions to the student, or write for them, or provide extra support to the class while the teacher is helping specific students.



Assistance can also come in the form of websites, handbooks and policies, leaflets and booklets, and in country specialists. The more forms of assistance you have in your centre, the more equipped you will be to deal with any situation.

## **Space**

Space is another area where small changes can mean the difference between students being able to study or not. Obviously wheelchair access is a large project, and often a huge expense. If your school can accommodate one classroom on the ground floor, then this is a good start, as classes can be moved around if a student in a wheelchair registers. If not, a stairlift can be installed even in small schools with narrow staircases. This can be beneficial for elderly students and students with walking difficulties as well as students in wheelchairs.

In the classroom, a lot of things can be done for a range of specific needs. Students who are visually impaired need light to be shining on their teachers' face rather than behind them, so reorganising the furniture can make this possible. Sometimes the glare from the electronic whiteboard can make it difficult to see the words, but the background can easily be changed (beige or rose usually work best). Most new IWBs come with the ability to adjust the height, if you are asking different students to come to the board to write. It is also important to ensure there is storage space for bags and coats, so that students can move about the class easily, without unexpected obstacles.

Outside the classroom, handrails, Braille and large signs and clear lighting will also make it easier for students to move about the building.

## **The inclusive classroom**

We teach to individuals. Tailoring our classrooms and our lessons to appeal to all different kinds of people means they are ready for anyone. Which ever way they prefer to learn, and whatever specific needs they may have, we can ensure that our teaching centre is equipped to provide them with the best possible service. Please display the poster in your schools, as a focal point to open up discussion.

# THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

## RESOURCES

- . BRAILLE
- . LARGE PRINT
- . WORD SETS
- . ALPHABETS
- . CUT UPS
- . PICTURES
- . COLOURED PAPER
- . MAGNIFIERS
- . HEARING LOOP
- . TAPE/CD/MP3 PLAYER AND HEADPHONES

## ATTITUDE

- . TEACHERS
- . LOCAL STAFF
- . THE STUDENT WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS
- . OTHER STUDENTS
- . CULTURE
- . PRECONCEIVED IDEAS
- . PREVIOUS TREATMENT

## ASSISTANCE

- . WEBSITES
- . PARTNERSHIPS
- . HANDBOOKS & POLICIES
- . LEAFLETS & BOOKLETS
- . UK BEST PRACTICE
- . CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS
- . OTHER CENTRES
- . IN COUNTRY SPECIALISTS

## SPACE . . . .

- . STAIRS
- . WHEELCHAIR ACCESS
- . SIGNS
- . ACOUSTICS
- . LIGHTING
- . ARROWS
- . COLOUR OF THE BOARD
- . HEIGHT ADJUSTABLE FURNITURE
- . CLUTTER FREE WORKSPACE

# Right Here, Right Now: Handheld Learning in China

Andrew Newton

## Introduction

In today's society we have a range of digital devices at our disposal. I use the term handheld learning in my title rather than 'mobile' learning as the age we live in allows for mobile phones, digital cameras, gaming consoles, Internet television, and medium sized 'tablets', all of which can provide individual or collaborative learning in and outside the classroom.

Handheld devices allow educators and learners to create, share, and retain content and in turn learning experiences in an easy and portable manner. The exponential growth of handheld devices, in particular mobile, has led to people using their phones as more than just communication devices, and the world is slowly moving towards a perception of less of a mobile phone, but a portable multi media device.

In China, at of the end of 2009, there were 717 million mobile subscribers<sup>1</sup>. Of those, there were 1.2 million 3G sales. 3rd Generation connectivity is growing at such a rate in China that by 2014, it has been predicted<sup>2</sup> that 70% of broadband connections will be mobile broadband.

## Mobile Learning

With that in mind, the British Council in China, and other parts of the world, has seen mobile as a way of engaging new audiences, in a way that no other technology can. Mobile is also a device which provides inspiration, aspiration and integration in self access and collaborative learning. Inspiration comes through feeling motivated to practise English learning, aspiration as new and engaging content can help learners to reach their academic and career goals, while mobile devices are inclusive as more people have a mobile phone than any other electronic device.

This was highlighted after the tragic earthquake in 2008 in Sichuan province. The British Council worked with local partners and Nokia to provide English learning opportunities to students whose class rooms were brought to rubble.

Students were given the opportunity to have English training and use English

<sup>1</sup> BDA China Telecom Market Update 2009

<sup>2</sup> BDA China Telecom Market Update 2009

learning materials on Nokia devices. Feedback from the primary school learners was extremely enthusiastic: 'This is my opportunity to learn more about the world around me'. Such feedback demonstrates how cultural relations through learning English is extremely important, and can be facilitated with low cost technology, such as mobile, providing an instant window to a wider world.

Our work with Nokia is continuing, as we are a content partner for their new product Ovi Life Tools. Ovi Life Tools focuses on essential information and content brought to users in both rural and urban areas via Nokia phones. Apart from accessing essential agricultural information, users can also subscribe to educational content, including basic expressions in English, focussing on phatic language alongside topics which would be beneficial in the workplace. The service will launch in August 2010, and hopes to reach the millions of mobile users across China.

Although basic mobile services are extending into rural areas, the amount of sophisticated interaction with mobiles in urban areas is growing amongst a young generation of smart, motivated audiences.

## **Young People**

Through my own work, I have discovered that young people in urban areas between 20–30 years of age can fall into three main areas of 'aspirant': the student with international goals, the young entrepreneur and the style follower. The student has a desire to study abroad and needs English in order to do so. Unable to gain access at university to a computer, as the computer rooms are always booked, they access content from their cramped dormitory room via their mobile device.

The young entrepreneur has migrated from the country to the city, and has set up a small business, often with a focus on technology. Keen to expand the business via IT outsourcing, they require English learning resources, which give them skills for socialising which they feel is important in embedding relationships with overseas customers, often via Instant Messaging on a mobile or computer.

The style follower is not an early adopter but someone who waits and then follows the latest trend. Realising that more and more of their peers are using English, or needing English for their own career prospects, 'style followers' will download English learning content from their friends through word-of-mouth rather than from a direct subscription. Once committed, they are also more likely to persevere with a particular course or piece of content till its completion, while early adopters have already moved on to something else.

In developing content for more sophisticated devices, the majority of our work has been with young, urban trendsetters in China, with a particular focus in Beijing. In March 2010, we gathered a group of young trendsetters at the British Council offices who were digital natives, and early adopters of smartphone devices to help shape our products through an offline meet up and some prototype testing.

When interviewed, most of the trendsetters wished they had a variety of learning content which offered specific learning outcomes but in a fun and enjoyable way rather than traditional practice activities which are replicated in text books. Another priority was around sharing content, and being able to collaborate with other learners. This reinforced to me that devices such as mobiles and even more so, with iPad like devices that the ability to socialise, learn and collaborate with others would be important factors in the development of educational applications for handheld devices.

Other handheld initiatives we pursued in China was a three month pilot around teachers in the cloud. We partnered with Idapted; a company who provide the platform for 1-2-1 live on-demand training. We created a business English course which was delivered to young professionals in multinational companies. Over 3,000 young Chinese professionals took part. The results of the pilot were very positive, and highlighted the scope for future opportunities of 'teachers in the cloud' and live, on demand tuition.

## **The Future**

For 2010 and beyond, the British Council is looking to release a suite of new content for teachers and learners across the world, some of which will be offered via mobile. In developing applications such as my WordBook, a vocabulary database maker, we are striving to bring quality British Council English learning content into the 21st Century in a new and innovative way, as part of a wider ecosystem of quality digital content across all channels.

# I don't 'do' politics... do I?

Danny Whitehead

## Introduction

'Politics' is much more than electioneering, or considerations of right/left theory. Politics concerns principles of power and status at all levels, including the classroom. The process of language teaching and the materials of language teaching are inherently political, with concerns of linguistic imperialism or creeping Anglophone hegemony reinforced by content-lite textbooks pushing the cult of celebrity and assuming (depositing) Western assumptions of life and lifestyle. As English language teachers, we can't avoid 'doing' politics.

The question for the English teacher is therefore not whether to 'do' politics or not, the question is how to 'do' it well.

And this isn't necessarily bad thing. Politics is a 'real' subject which motivates learners: it is relevant, and stimulates cognitive involvement. Indeed, the L2 classroom is an ideal environment for encountering challenging issues, as ELT has great potential to create counter-hegemonic discourses. Widely-quoted broad-brush criticisms of the spread of English, and of the organisations (such as the British Council) who work towards the promotion of English and the improvement of English language teaching standards (see Edge, 2003; Edge (ed.), 2006; Ngûgî, 1986; Pennycook, 1994; and Philipson, 1992) often fail to recognise the global demand for English, and its benefit in socio-economic development. Indeed, those who are motivated by these criticisms are often ironically seen by learners, parents, and teachers as imperialist in themselves, by denying (or obstructing) access to English language training due to an ideologically driven, 'we-know-what's-best-for-you' paternalist attitude.

A longitudinal study in DRC explored the use of politics in the classroom, and the empowering potential of English in learners' creation of counter-hegemonic dialogues. Following the research, I identified seven key precepts (outlined below with suggested activities) which could be called, with referential mock gravitas, 'The Teacher's Manifesto'.

## The Teacher's Manifesto

### **1 I will try to use critical praxis in my lessons.**

'Critical praxis' is teaching practice which recognises the power of English, but seeks to subvert it or use it for the creation of new identities and counter-hegemonic discourses. This is the foundation of the Teacher's Manifesto; the following clauses explore the praxis itself.

### **2 I will help my learners to explore who they are, who they want to be, and how English will help them get there.**

Post-structuralism has increasingly brought into question previously held theories of learners' integrative motivation (which were based on the work of Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner (1985)) as the whole concept of a 'model' English speaker has become obsolete in the post-modern globalised world. Dörnyei has led the development of this focus in the field of motivational research, which sees identification with future self-concept, rather than an external group, as the major motivating factor (Dörnyei and Csizér, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). This has developed into Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei 2005, 2009) which is based on the central idea of possible selves.

A starting point for analysis is the current self, or the existing self. Dörnyei states that the tension or difference between the current-self and the ideal-self is one of the primary catalysts for motivation; to understand and recognise this motivation, however, one has to understand where one is now – where and who the current identity is. Gramsci also recognised this:

*The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited<sup>1</sup> in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory. First, it is necessary to create such an inventory. (Gramsci, 1975: 1376)*

While Dörnyei does not say so explicitly, a starting point for the implementation of this system with learners is to support strong self-criticism so that learners can get a realistic sense of where they are, their identity now, and how they might develop.

A key component of this theory (and a key contrast to Gardnerian theory which rested on past experiences and previously constructed aims and goals) is the ideal future self – its activation and generation. Role models are important for learners and their development, and it is important they are chosen personally by the learners themselves rather than being shallow celebrities chosen by a textbook designer with little imagination playing to the Western European market. If role models are chosen by an external person (also for example, by an expatriate teacher from the alien hegemonic culture), this has the potential to covertly force

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to compare Gramsci's use here of depositing, and the term as it was adapted and used by Freire (1970); implications for ELT praxis and the link between Freire and Gramsci could be fruitful in future research.

hegemonic values as it is the hegemonic outsider who chooses who these role models are and which values they present. There is a danger that the teacher would guide learners based on the teacher's own views and thereby delegitimize the views of the learners.

To ensure progress towards the ideal future self, the second component Dörnyei advocates (drawing on sports psychology and child development psychology) is supporting learners in the development of a realistic and achievable road-map, or plan of their progress: a 'procedural strategy' (p36) comprising of:

- visualisation of success;
- positive visualisation of ideal future self and current self in tandem to reduce anxiety.

This also needs to be offset by the development of thought about the ought-to self and possible conflicting future actions. One must also think about the feared self, as fear of failure and negative emotion pushes one further towards the ideal future self.

The third and final component put forward by Dörnyei is the L2 learning experience and environment. Interestingly, Dörnyei provides little guidance on this. He states:

*This component is conceptualised at a different level from the L2 self guides, and future research will hopefully elaborate on the self aspects of this bottom-up process. (Dörnyei, 2009: 29)*

The Teacher's Manifesto is an attempt to contribute to further development of Dörnyei's theory by investigating its implementation in an EFL setting.

*Suggested Activities:*

- Learners critically assess positive and negative factors in their lives in individual extensive writing uncorrected for accuracy.
- Learners imagine what their 'best possible self' is, considering who they want to be in the future, what their aspirations and goals are, and complete a piece of open, extensive writing describing this self. Learners may use multiple media if they wish. These texts should not be corrected.
- Learners consider what role (if any) English will have in their 'best possible self', and create realistic ideas of developmental pathways (adapted from Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, 2006).



- To activate motivation, learners choose and research a role model from their mother culture, focusing on values and successes.

### **3 I will explore challenging issues in the classroom, ensuring that the environment is supportive.**

Challenging issues<sup>2</sup> are motivating, and learners' exploration of these issues contributes towards their developing counter-hegemonic dialogues. Learners' responses to challenging issues are far stronger than their responses to the textbook writer's stock of stale and unfunny 'anecdotes', contrived scenarios populated by cardboard characters, or safe (yet turgid) discussion points on bedtimes, teenagers' rights, or other such inoffensive (and un-engaging) issues. By introducing challenging issues in a humanist manner, the teacher can take advantage of the special nature of the L2 classroom: learners' L2 identities are fluid, complex, and divorced somewhat from the prejudices, fears, and emotions of the more easily damaged L1 self. The distancing effect of L2, and the separate L2 identity, allows learners to engage with challenging issues in a more detached, less threatening manner. The session also put forward the notion that teachers have a responsibility to bring these issues forward for learners' consideration, for if not teachers, then whom?

*Suggested Activity:*

- Given the concerns with raising negative affective filters when addressing challenging issues, Tomlinson's (1998) 'access-self' activities prove useful. These activities encourage reflection and reduce anxiety: tasks are open ended, engage the learners personally as human beings, and stimulate both left- and right-brain activities. Post-reading activities elicit holistic responses, and feedback is provided through commentaries and suggested answers rather than an answer sheet; follow-up activities (possibly involving other learners) are encouraged (Tomlinson, 1998: pp 322–323). Therefore, teachers should seek to create 'access-self' materials in a range of relevant challenging issues.

### **4 I will encourage my learners' pride in their L1, and use this positively in the classroom.**

Learners should be encouraged to view positively the facets of their existing indigenous language identity, and not to see English as 'better', 'more powerful', or indeed a threat. Learners should be encouraged to use of L1 in class if they think that concepts are better expressed in L1; this L1 usage will foster language mixing skills when communicating with learners with the same L1 thereby creating a realistic communication act.

<sup>2</sup> 'Challenging issues' are taken to be sensitive issues with a social, political, or personal impact, or those which question values or beliefs

*Suggested Activities:*

- Learners and teachers negotiate the choice of texts for classroom study, ensuring a mixture of L1 and L2 texts. ELT activities can be stimulated by L1 texts, too!
- Learners think of proverbs and idioms in L1, then attempt to translate them into English. Translation is first 'word for word', followed by a semantic translation of meaning, exploring the richness of L1, and its value.
- Learners compare grammatical structures in English and L1, and whether this leads to difference in thought.

**5 I will raise learners' awareness of embedded cultural hegemony in texts.**

Learners should be given the skills and capacity to recognise cultural or linguistic hegemony in texts which they encounter – be they classroom texts or real (non-ELT) texts. Sarah Benesch (2006) provides an excellent example of raising critical awareness of hegemonic cultural deposits with media analysis activities – in developing classroom activities, she argues that the goal should be to encourage learner exploration for self-awareness through guided discovery, not instruction.

*Suggested Activities:*

- Learners critically explore the meaning and symbolism of pictures and images in textbooks.
- Learners compare newspapers in L1 and English, or on-line news texts, or news texts in other media, examining the choice of news, and representations of different groups.
- Learners assess the accents chosen in listening texts, and their relevance.
- Learners examine artistic representations of different groups in popular culture and create own multimedia representations of self and other.

**6 I will encourage language mixing, and the development of learners' spontaneous grammar.**

This potentiality leads from Gramsci's (1975) discussions of the grammars of hegemony: normative grammar, and spontaneous grammar.

Normative grammar, Gramsci said, is 'the reciprocal monitoring, reciprocal teaching, reciprocal 'censorship'... to create a grammatical conformism, [and] to establish 'norms' of correctness and incorrectness' (Gramsci, 1985: 180). Normative grammars are coerced by fear, or coerced subconsciously by hegemonic forces in society, and are often described as the way people 'should' talk.

Spontaneous grammar, by comparison, is that which utilises maximum individualism and free-will in its construction. It is not dictated to by persuasion, coercion, historical pressure, nor is it limited by external structures.

Gramsci acknowledges that spontaneous grammars can (and ideally will) become normative given time as they will unify into one language. Ives (2004) explains Gramsci's ideal:

*The goal is to achieve a common language, not a singular, dominant interpretation of everything . . . this hegemonic (or counter-hegemonic) language must be unified enough, coherent enough, to yield effective resistance to capitalist hegemony (and its language). (Ives, 2004: 114)*

Through critical praxis, and through the encouragement of spontaneous grammars, there is the possibility for English as a foreign language to produce counter-hegemonic discourses. If spontaneous grammars can be encouraged in the classroom, and focus can be given to learner-ownership of the language through subversion, learners can create identities (and even their own 'language') counter-hegemonic to colonial language identities, and separate from an English language identity.

Language mixing activities are an excellent means of stimulating spontaneous grammar, particularly in activities which aim to develop learners' textual identities. Mixed textual identities are inherently complex, and highlight the limitations of binary, dichotomous theories of language identity development. In their complexity, they delegitimise the hegemonic dichotomous framework of English through the subversion of English itself. Therefore, by combining extensive writing with language mixing, there is potential for real exploration of identity and creation of spontaneous grammars and counter-hegemonic discourse if a critical experience could be induced.

*Suggested Activities:*

- Learners examine real examples of language mixing, and examine why particular languages were chosen in each case.
- Learners experiment with language mixing.
- After learners have practised 'fun' activities, language mixing is encouraged in extensive writing to show developing complex identities.

### **7 I will not ‘do nothing’, because that in itself is political.**

Learners are political beings, just as classrooms are political spaces. Choosing to ‘do nothing’, to continue without further thought and with existing materials, is a political choice which perpetuates the problem.

The research in DRC indicated the development of complex language identities, and of emergent and empowering spontaneous grammars. Interestingly, participants in Harrogate reciprocally questioned the ethics of using (or depositing) the manifesto in non-native English speaking teachers; this should be examined in further research.

## **References**

- Benesch, S.** (2006). ‘Critical Media Awareness: Teaching Resistance to Interpellation’ in **J. Edge (ed.)**. (2006), *(Re)Locating TESOL in an age of empire*, pp 49–64, New York: Palgrave.
- Dörnyei, Z.** (2005). *The Psychology of the Language Learner. Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Dörnyei, Z.** (2009). ‘The L2 Motivational Self System’ in **Z. Dörnyei and E. Ushioda (eds.)** (2009). *Motivation, Language Identity, and the L2 Self*, pp 9–42, Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z.** and **Csizér, K.** (2002). ‘Some Dynamics of language attitudes and motivation: results of a longitudinal nationwide survey’, *Applied Linguistics* 23 (4), pp 421–462.
- Edge, J.** (2003). ‘Imperial Troopers and Servants of the Lord.’ *TESOL Quarterly* 37, pp 701–709.
- Edge, J.** (ed.) (2006). *(Re)Locating TESOL in an age of imperium*, New York: Palgrave.
- Gardner, R. C.** (1985). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning. The role of attitudes and motivation*, London: Edward Arnold.
- Gardner, R. C.** and **Lambert, W. E.** (1972) *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Gramsci, A.** (ed. **Gerratana, V.**). 1975. *Quaderni del Carcere*. Turin: Einaudi.
- Gramsci, A.** *Selections from Cultural Writings* (trans. W. Boelhower), edited by **Forgacs, D.** and **Nowell Smith, G.** (1985). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Ives, P.** (2004). *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*, London: Pluto
- Ngũgĩ, wa T.** (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Pennycook, A.** (1994). *The cultural politics of English as an international language*, London: Longman.
- Phillipson, R.** (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism*, Oxford: OUP
- Sheldon, K.** and **Lyubomirsky, S.** 2006. 'How to increase and sustain positive emotion: the effects of expressing gratitude and visualizing best possible selves'. *Journal of Positive Psychology* **1** (2), pp 73–82.
- Silverstein, M.** (1998). 'Contemporary transformations of local linguistic communities', *Annual Review of Anthropology* **27**, pp 401–426.
- Tomlinson, B.** 1998. 'Access-Self Materials' in **B. Tomlinson** (ed.) *Materials Development in Language Teaching*, pp 320–336. Cambridge: CUP.

# Teaching English for Sustainability

Rachel Bowden

## Introduction

English Language Teaching (ELT) has evolved alongside the emergence as English as a world language. In this essay I will suggest why, as a result of its evolution, ELT can and should be a medium for critically evaluating and reforming global ways of knowing. I will start with a brief exploration of sustainability, go on to consider the connection between education and sustainability and finally argue why, as English Language professionals, we have a unique and significant role to play in the realisation of education for sustainability.

Sustainability implies indefinite continuation or survival – whether for individuals, communities, ecosystems, businesses. It has become increasingly clear, to me, that the way many of us are living is wholly unsustainable, in terms of its impact on communities, environments and even, since the crash last year, economies.

The last fifty years of dominant western thought have been, I would contend, characterised by a belief in the power of the market and the omnipotence of science and technology to liberate humanity from the constraints of nature and society (Berthaud, 1997). The associated mechanistic world view has seen the commoditisation of food, labour and the environment. As a result whole populations have become disconnected from themselves, each other and their surroundings with disastrous consequences for the global system (Robert, 1992). Consequently, according to Simon Lewis (2009), we are now entering a new geological epoch, the ‘anthropocene’, in which ‘humanity is having planet wide impacts on the Earth’s workings’ (Lewis, 2009).

## How is education connected to sustainability?

The creation and maintenance of sustainable societies depends on learning as ‘sustainable systems are those which are (. . .) able to learn in order to maintain and adapt themselves’ (Sterling, 2001 p.54). However both the nature of the learning, and the sustainable societies we aim for are complex and ill-defined. Sterling (2001) highlights the mutuality and interdependence of these concepts in suggesting that we need a deeper understanding of the ecological world view, an ‘emergent’ paradigm, alongside which ‘an educational culture and paradigm can be developed’ (Sterling, 2001 p.11). In this process ‘how we see the world shapes the world and this in turn shape us’ (Sterling, 2001 p.50).

It has been argued that Education for Sustainability (EfS) should not simply be education about the environment, but a 'transformational' process which will facilitate new ways of seeing, knowing and acting and as such must encompass perceptual, conceptual and practical dimensions (Sterling, 2001 p.60-61). Indeed EfS challenges functional paradigms of education that prepare people to contribute as toward economic growth and follow behavioural norms of society (Bartlett, 2004 p.79). Instead the onus is on creating 'citizens capable of designing and maintaining sustainable societies' (CEL, 2009). This implies developing the range of critical and reflective competencies such as those described by the Centre for Eco-Literacy (CEL, 2009) (Appendix 1).

This marks a shift away from the purpose of education as transmitting previously and centrally defined knowledge or ways of being to the negotiation of ways of knowing at being at local levels. Central to this idea is the reconnection of individuals to local communities and environments and the ability to participate in wider dialogues and debates about world issues. This demands developing a critical awareness to evaluate current practices, explore assumptions and articulate an inclusive shared vision.

## **What are the connections between EfS and ELT theory and practice?**

### **What we teach**

EfS is 'a way of thinking as much as what we are thinking about' (Wheeler and Bijur, 2000 cited in Bhandari and Obe, 2003 p.23). This illustrates the complexity of EfS which is not simply education *about* sustainability, but must more broadly be education for sustainability, and even education *as* sustainability (Sterling, 2001). From this perspective we can see that methodology (how) is fundamentally connected to content (what) within a wider ideological framework.

Within ELT the English language was traditionally *what* was taught. However, over the past 50 years, views on language teaching and learning have shifted. Previously accepted teaching methods saw language as objective, for example grammar translation where learners memorised and translated written texts (Richards and Rogers, 1986). In contrast current approaches, such as the communicative approach, see language as inherently subjective in both production and interpretation, functional (both interactional and transactional (Brown and Yule, 1987 p.22)), and part of a system of interacting 'messages' operating within a specific context (Richards and Rogers, 1986). In my view, this evolution of understanding mirrors the move from a mechanistic to an ecological educational paradigm (Sterling, 2001 p.58-59).

Furthermore, shifts in methodology have echoed shifts in thinking about language itself. For example, in the now widely practised Lexical Approach (Lewis, 1993) vocabulary is taught in contextualised chunks, rather than isolated words, and the emphasis is on learners noticing patterns of use in context rather than learning fixed rules connected to single words. From this view demarcations such as grammar and vocabulary are increasingly obsolete as language is seen as systemic, and words gain meaning through relationships with other words and the surrounding context.

With over a billion speakers all over the world English is no longer simply a language of the British. It is used to express a diversity of views and narratives in global discourse, and is itself the medium for emerging ideas (Crystal, 2003). I believe that in exploring English language it is necessary to locate and trace assumptions of the western ideology, especially the development discourse as in *The Development Dictionary* (1992). It is, however, crucial that English language teachers are prepared to reflect on the implicit and explicit assumptions in the language they use and teach, and facilitate this critical awareness in their learners. Teachers must realise that 'the acquisition and development of literacy is not, and cannot be, a neutral process' (Bartlett, 2004 p.81).

### **How we teach**

Current ELT practice, called the eclectic or sometimes simply the communicative approach is in fact a mixture of many different methodologies, or 'tools'. Within a set of emergent beliefs about the nature of teaching, learning and language, teachers select from a range of methodologies to suit each learning context (Hedge, 2000).

EFL teaching has come to embrace a humanistic approach, seeing the learner as centre of their own learning process and considering issues such as the motivation, principles and commitment of the learner to be crucial (Stevick, 1980). Methodologies such as community based learning recognise the value of a learning community which, I think, reflects a systems view where the whole is considered greater than the sum of its parts (CEL, 2009) (Overfield, 1997). This can be seen in the layout of ELT classrooms where tables are arranged to promote various dynamics of collaborative working for example 'islands', 'horse shoe' or 'circles' (Overfield, 1997)(Hedge, 2000).



## Where/who we teach

In my view the scale of the EfS project demands global participation in debates about society and sustainability and resultant changes in behaviour. This participation must happen at all levels, within dialogue between the personal, local and social. This vision of EfS calls for local negotiation of meaning, and so argues for decentralised planning. At the same time, EfS demands leaning from all sectors of society, civil, state and business, indeed cross sectoral learning gives us the biggest chance of societal change.

The use of English by speakers of other languages is widespread, with learners extending far beyond the realm of formal education:

*The evidence suggests that English is now the dominant voice in international politics, banking, the press, the news agencies, advertising, broadcasting, the recording industry, motion pictures, travel, science and technology, knowledge management, and communications. No other language has achieved such a widespread profile – or is likely to, in the foreseeable future (Crystal, 2003)*

Moreover, English language teaching often surpasses the boundaries of language instruction. In the British Council worldwide a significant proportion of all courses are run off site in state, NGO or corporate sectors. Courses such as communication skills, report writing, team building, leadership, creativity, and critical thinking reflect the now widely held understanding that language and communication skills are interconnected. As beliefs and values are implicit in any process of communication I feel the classroom can be an ideal site for their exploration.

Within the ELT classroom cultural norms that restrict people communicating together are often removed. This can have a ripple effect into the wider community, as Kennet (2009) suggests that approaches used in the classroom, functioning as a microcosm of community, can directly transfer to use in the workplace, and wider society. Moreover, this learning does not have to be imposed as people are motivated to learn using approaches which result in competencies, as well as English language, which meet the demands of their workplaces and are often not met through formal education systems (Kennet, 2009).

## How can ELT move towards EfS?

Although as stated above I believe there are many connections between EfS and ELT, the fact that this is not discussed limits the association. Although Cambridge CELTA and DELTA qualifications place heavy emphasis on reflective practice, connections between teaching methodologies and their wider ideological context are not explored. An understanding of these connections would enable teachers,

in my opinion, to actively select 'tools' coherent with this vision as well as engaging students in this process. For both teachers and students a personal orientation on the sustainability debate would encourage them to engage with discussions on all levels, enabling them to be agents for change.

Using visions of EfS as a basis there are many ways in which the sustainability focus of ELT could be strengthened by teachers. Here are a few suggestions:-

Relating teaching material to both personal and local concerns as well as connecting it to wider debates. For example by using learners' own experiences and opinions as the basis for discussion rather than set texts, or incorporating authentic texts and subjecting them to critical analysis.

Connecting to broader changes in education opens up a wealth of educational material, for example the Open spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry (OSDE, 2008 [www.osdemethodology.org.uk](http://www.osdemethodology.org.uk)), Action Aid's Get Global (Action Aid, 2003 [www.actionaid.org.uk/schoolsandyoung/getglobal/index.html](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/schoolsandyoung/getglobal/index.html) Food Inc). The movie <http://www.foodincmovie.com/spread-the-word.php> British Council. ELTons 2010 winner: Global Issues in the ELT Classroom [www.globalissues.eu](http://www.globalissues.eu)

Further developing our expertise in related skills through English such as critical and creative thinking, interpersonal skills and collaborative working, intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity, managing change and conflict.

Greater connection with the local community and local issues, for example inviting local people to present ideas or going out and interacting, for example, conducting surveys, recording narratives.

Ongoing dialogue with the wider learning institution, aiming for a clear policy statement making transparent views about learning and societal change. This could include equality and diversity, and environmental impact and would ensure that curricula and organisational practices are coherent with this view and help to transform learning organisations at all levels.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay I outlined the concept of sustainability, showing how rather than being a fixed idea it is a complex emerging concept to which education and learning are central. I have illustrated the connections between EFL theory and practice and societal change/transformation paradigms. Moreover, I hope that I have shown how English, itself a site of ambiguity, can be used as a medium for identifying assumptions and reformulating knowledge (Rushdie, 1991 p.17)

To strengthen the impact of ELT on sustainability it is important to open the vision, image and design of sustainable education to discussion. I believe that empowering ELT teachers and learners to engage with the wider society in exploring, developing and manifesting sustainability values will enable them to act as agents for change.

## References

**Action Aid**, 2003 *Get Global!* [Accessed online at <http://www.actionaid.org.uk/schoolsandyoung/getglobal/>]

**Bartlett, S., Burton, D. and Peim, N.** (2004) *Introduction to Education Studies*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing

**Bhandari, B. and Abe, O.** (eds.) (2003) *Education for Sustainable Development in Nepal. Views and Visions*. IGES Japan [Online] <http://enviroscope.iges.or.jp/modules/envirolib/view.php?docid=1515> [09/09/2009]

**Brown, G. and Yule G.** (1983) *Teaching the Spoken Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

**Centre for Eco-Literacy** [online] <http://www.ecoliteracy.org> [07/09/2009]

**Crystal, D.** (2003) *English in the New World* [Online] [http://www.matefl.org/\\_mgxroot/page\\_10658.html](http://www.matefl.org/_mgxroot/page_10658.html) [09/09/2009]

**Feire, P.** (1985) *The Politics of Education*. Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey

### Food inc.

**Hedge, T.** (2000) *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

**Kennet**, (2009) *English as a tool for conflict transformation*. Presented at the 8th International conference in Language and Development. Dhaka Bangladesh.

**Lewis, M.** (1993) *The Lexical Approach*. Language Teaching Publications (LTP)

**Lewis, S.** (2009) *Humans, a Crushing Force of Nature*. In *The Guardian Weekly*, 31/07/2009: p19

**Orr, David**, (2009) *On Climate Change and Applied Hope*. [Online] Centre for Eco-Literacy [online] <http://www.ecoliteracy.org> [07/09/2009] Reprinted from *Down to the Wire: Confronting Climate Collapse*, by **David W. Orr**, with permission from Oxford University Press, Inc. Copyright 2009 Oxford University Press, Inc.

## OSDE reference

**Overfield, Denise,** (1997) *From the Margins to the Mainstream: Foreign Language Education and Community-Based Learning*. Foreign Language Annals Volume 30 Issue 4 Pp. 485–49: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Inc.

**Richards and Rogers,** (1986) *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.

**Robert, Jean.** (1992) *Production* In: **Sachs, W.** (ed.) (1992) *The Development Dictionary*. New York: Zed books

**Sachs, W.** (1992) *Environment* In: **Sachs, W.** (ed.) (1992) *The Development Dictionary*. New York: Zed books

**Sterling, Stephen** (2001) *Sustainable Education. Re-visioning Learning and Change*. Green Books.

**Stevick E.W.** (1980) *Teaching languages, A Way and Ways*. Newbury House.

**Rushdie, Salman,** (1991) *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Granta

## Appendix 1

<http://www.ecoliteracy.org/education/competencies.html>

Centre for Eco-Literacy [online] <http://www.ecoliteracy.org> [07/09/2009]

### Head

- Ecological knowledge
- The ability to think systemically
- The ability to think critically, to solve problems creatively, and to apply environmental ethics to new situations
- The ability to assess the impact of human technologies and actions and to envision the long-term consequences of decisions

### Heart

- A deeply felt, not just understood, concern for the well-being of the Earth and of all living things
- Empathy and the ability to see from and appreciate multiple perspectives
- A commitment to equity, justice, inclusivity, and respect for all people
- Skills in building, governing, and sustaining communities

## **Hands**

- The ability to apply ecological knowledge to the practice of ecological design
- Practical skills to create and use tools, objects, and procedures required by sustainable communities
- The ability to assess and make adjustments to uses of energy and resources
- The capacity to convert convictions into practical and effective action

## **Spirit**

- A sense of wonder
- A capacity for reverence
- A deep appreciation of place
- A feeling of kinship with the natural world, and the ability to invoke that feeling in other

# **AVALON to Shakespeare: Language learning and teaching in virtual worlds**

Joe Pereira

## **Introduction**

Current advances in technology and the impact of socio-constructivist learning principles in online education have made virtual worlds such as Second Life viable and accepted environments for learning. Here, I will describe two projects I am involved in as a member of the British Council, which take place within the virtual world of Second Life, and which in distinct ways provide opportunities for language learning.

## **Virtual worlds in education**

A virtual world can be described as a 3D environment, accessed via a computer connected to the Internet, where the user interacts with the environment and other users through an avatar – a 3D virtual representation of the user. Other inherent characteristics of these environments are that they are persistent – they continue to exist outside the user’s direct interaction, they are scalable – they allow for hundreds of users from geographically dispersed areas to be in the same space simultaneously and contrary to other computer mediated communication tools, they allow for a very high level of social presence - the ability of participants in a community to project themselves socially and emotionally, as ‘real’ people.

The use of virtual worlds for education has garnered a great deal of attention and research from many fields in the last few years (see de Freitas, 2009). Language learning, in particular, is an area which can benefit from the affordances offered by this technology, namely the communication tools, the socio-constructivist learning environment and the possibility of communication with people from all over the world. Additionally, the immersive quality of virtual worlds gives a powerful feeling of ‘being there’, which allows for more authentic social communication. The most popular social virtual world and the one with the largest educational community is Second Life, which is where the following two projects have taken place.

## Language Learning Quests

One of the preferred hobbies of millions of young learners (and adults as well) around the world is playing video games. Video games, also known as digital games, have many qualities which can be used to foster learning such as being engaging, motivating and most importantly, fun. Moreover, while having fun, learners are given the opportunity to apply cognitive skills such as lateral and critical thinking, making quick decisions on the fly and multi-tasking, which are skills that can be applied throughout their lives. Two teachers from the British Council in Barcelona, who understood the potential of video games in education, saw in Second Life the opportunity to merge the engaging and fun characteristics of video games with the social and immersive qualities of virtual worlds. As a result of their ideas and research, the British Council commissioned the building of three islands in the Second Life Teen Grid – a safe environment where only 13 to 17 year olds and approved adults working for educational projects are allowed access. These islands would contain replicas of famous British landmarks and cultural references, such as the London Eye, the Giant's Causeway, Robin Hood and William Shakespeare. In addition to being a kind of 3D virtual museum where learners could learn more about British culture, these references were also integrated into digital game-based learning tasks, dubbed Language Learning Quests.

The Language Learning Quests can be compared to the latest generation of adventure video games, such as *Myst*, where clues must be discovered amongst a 3D environment and its objects manipulated in order to solve puzzles, but with a clear pedagogical focus – the practising of English skills and specific vocabulary and grammar input. However, as the main premise was to attract learners to the islands to play these quests and to be motivated enough to complete them, they incorporate many of the learning principles found in video games, as argued by Gee (2006) and Prensky (2007), in their design and are therefore, challenging and fun. This is an example of using Second Life for the autonomous learning of English as a by-product of engagement during play. An in-depth explanation of the rationale behind their design and a case study can be found in Pereira (2009). Of course, Second Life can also accommodate more traditional teaching/learning approaches, and an example of direct instruction in virtual worlds will now be given.

## The AVALON project

Second Life allows its users to simulate practically any environment a designer can imagine, from a classroom, to an airport, to the inside of a blood cell flowing through veins in the human body! And although teaching in a virtual classroom does have its place in virtual education, as it bridges the gap between the familiar

and unfamiliar, the possibilities for simulation and role-play are enormous. Because virtual worlds are new learning environments, these new tools and new pedagogies need to be the focus of research and evaluated.

The team behind the LearnEnglish Second Life for Teens project, consisting of two British Council staff in Barcelona and one in Porto, were invited to participate in a research project which would involve 10 educational institutions managed by The University of Manchester and including the British Council, represented by its Second Life project team. The Access to Virtual and Action Learning ONline (AVALON) project is a two-year European-funded project which aims to create materials and guidelines for best practice in teaching in 3D virtual environment as well as to run a pilot teacher training course in Second Life with language teachers. The materials and best practice guidelines were initially created during the running of various language learning courses such as Business English, Italian and North-Sami, which were offered to learners for free. The courses took place over six weeks and afterwards, the materials were refined and improved in order to be included in the pilot teacher training course, which involved five experienced tutors and over 20 practising language teachers from all over Europe as students.

## **Lessons Learned**

As a way for young learners to have access to authentic language in a safe and engaging environment, the British Council's Second Life for Teens islands have been a success. Research on the Language Learning Quests has found that they are a fun and motivating way for young learners to practise their English autonomously. However, it has also found that learners expect more gaming elements to be implemented in the quests (such as fighting and driving) and that the four English skills need to be more evenly implemented in their design. The three islands are now being transferred onto the Second Life main grid, and we can expect adult learners to take advantage of the language Learning Quests for autonomous learning as well. Additionally, having a presence on the Second Life main grid, will also allow English teachers from all over the world to explore the islands and share them with their own adult students. The island space has also been used on various occasions to promote British Council and external projects, and is expected to host various round-table discussions on language learning and other topics in the future.

The AVALON project has been incredibly successful thus far. A second iteration of the Business English course has just been run, with exceptional participation from the students and the teacher training course received over eighty applicants and very positive feedback. Another teacher training course is already being prepared for November and if there is continued demand, it may be run as a paid



course in the future. The project has also created an ever-growing community of educators who engage in discussion and host educational events in Second life and other platforms. Access to the community and further information can be found at <http://avalon-project.ning.com>.

It is my view that virtual worlds have much to offer language learners and teachers - both through digital-game based autonomous learning and virtual face-to-face instruction. The British Council's Second Life islands and the AVALON project are two projects which are successfully promoting the use of virtual worlds for language learning, and as the community of educators and learners they have fostered grows, so will the recognition and use of virtual worlds as serious learning tools.

## References

**de Freitas, S.** (2008). 'Serious virtual worlds: a scoping study'. *Joint Information Systems Committee*, [online], Available: <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/serious-virtualworldsv1.pdf> [30 June 2010]

**Garrison, D.R., Anderson, T. and Archer, W.** (2000). 'Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education'. *The Internet and Higher Education*. 2(2-3):87-105.

**Pereira, J.** (2009). 'Language Learning Quests in Second Life: A framework for blending digital game-based learning and virtual worlds'. Unpublished Master's Dissertation, The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK, [online], Available: <http://theswanstation.com> [30 June 2010]

**Gee, J.P.** (2007). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

**Prensky, M.** (2007). *Digital game-based learning: practical ideas for the application of digital game-based learning*. St. Paul, MN. Paragon House.

# Computer Gaming to Learn

Kyle Mawer

## What is a computer game?

A computer game is a game played on a personal computer rather than on a video game console or on an arcade machine. It's possible to buy commercial computer games in video game shops and department stores (to play on operating systems such as Windows) as well as from many of the publishing companies that may well have printed the coursebooks your language learners use. However, I believe it is more practical to find, adapt and use computer games that are free and available to play on the internet.

## Why computer games?

Two prominent advocates of the educational benefits to gaming are James Paul Gee and Marc Prensky. Gee identified 36 learning principles evident in the game design of good games and argues that these lead to the development of valid world skills and should be applied to learning within the classroom. Prensky's focus is more directly aimed at helping teachers change their pedagogy in partnership with 21st century students. Both see a more digital game based learning pedagogy as necessary to produce a more effective pedagogy.

## Why not language computer games?

Game design of language computer games is dictated by an agenda that has pedagogical goals in mind that are primarily to learn, practise or test language elements. There is no doubt that these games can be useful tools especially as a way of testing in a fun way. This is why language computer games are chosen by the teacher for learners to play. Unfortunately these games tend to be too overtly language based. By effectively subverting many of the complexities that modern computer games have evolved they lose their popular appeal. This is the reason why such games as 'The Sims' have become such a commercial, social and cultural phenomena and 'vocabulary space invaders' will not.

## Why online games?

First of all, if you have a computer with an internet connection and flash installed then you have access to thousands of free online games. The game design of these online computer games is concerned more with what makes a game popular, fun and engaging. This has not only meant more detailed graphics, more

engrossing story lines and more advanced titles but, most importantly, these are the games that our learners choose to play. By viewing these online computer games as authentic material it can be a simple matter for language teachers to design language tasks that capitalise on the fun factor yet focus on the language.

## How do you adapt online games for language?

### Lower range language levels

Dress up games is a very popular online computer game genre where you simply design a character and dress them up in clothes designs and colours of your choosing. It's a very simple matter for a teacher to produce a written text by playing one of these games at a planning stage, print the picture off and write a graded physical description. The text can be used as a relay dictation in a computer room for learners to reproduce the teacher's character on the same website. Alternatively, learners can produce their own characters, print them off and write their own texts. Physical descriptions, abilities, everyday habits, bios, role plays and a bunch of other activities can develop from the material your learners produce. You may wish to be careful which dress up games you choose. A game such as heromachine focuses on designing superheroes and can prove quite timeless and appeal to both boys and girls. The popular film series *Twilight* also has its fair share of dress up games but may prove not as timeless and appeals mainly to girls.

### Middle range language levels

Point and click adventure games are possibly the most popular genre of online computer games. These types of games have a plot and usually involve a central character having to solve and complete a series of puzzles to either 'escape a room' (a sub genre in itself), get an object, defeat a foe and sometimes all three. The popularity of these games combined with the sheer fact that they can contain complex and difficult to solve puzzles has meant that a writing genre called *walkthroughs* has evolved. A walkthrough is a set of written instructions usually produced by a gamer in order to assist another gamer in completing parts of a game that they are having difficulty completing. Walkthroughs are rich in vocabulary, prepositions and imperatives. By re-editing a walkthrough it's possible for a teacher to expand the range and complexity of the language content to contain such language items as phrasal verbs, conditionals, adjectives, sequencers and narrative devices to produce material to be used before, during or after playing the game. Alternatively, learners can be set the task of producing these language elements from a basic walkthrough or by simply playing the game. Games such as *MOTAS* (mystery of Time and Space), *Samorost2*, *3wish: hamster rescue* and *grow cube* are visually engaging fun games with walkthroughs of varying length and complexity.

### Higher range language levels.

Online computer games that tackle world issues can prove very useful tools for stimulating a discursive writing activity that can either be completed in class or for homework. I like to play these types of games with the class divided into teams. Teams can then take notes on vocabulary items, discuss the decisions needed to play the game, elect a spokesperson to present their arguments to the class, vote on how to proceed or play the game and discuss the results. Different types of strategy games provide platforms for different issues. *Stop disasters* focuses on several different natural disasters. *Third world farmer* focuses on the situation that many third world farmers have to face and is an interesting game in that you can't win – highlighting the 'no win' situation that many third world farmers are in fact in. *Against all odds* looks at three situations facing immigrants – living in an oppressive regime, escaping across the border and settling in a new country. In this series of games the player has to read text to make choices, play short video game sequences and interpret the images they see in the game.

Of course there are many online text based computer games that offer excellent opportunities for reading practice. Much in the same way walkthroughs provide reading skills practice where comprehension is tested by being able to play the game itself. Traditionally reading activities required the learner to read the text and answer questions. With game based reading activities learners read the text and need to comprehend the content in order to play the game as effectively as possible. Games such as *runescape* (a dungeon and dragons style game) are very visual and complex and so offer tutorials in which the gamer receives instructions to some of the many tasks they would have to be aware of if they were to start playing the game in earnest. These tutorial games offer reading skills practice that follows a seemingly TPR (Total Physical Response) pedagogy – although VPR (Virtual Physical Response) is probably a more appropriate term.

Lesson plans, downloadable material and further information on all the games mentioned in this article can be found on the following blog:

**Mawer, Kyle** and **Stanley, Graham** (2009) *Digital Play*, [online], Available: Digital Play [17.06.2010]

## References

**AB, Paregos.** (2007) *Against all odds*, [online], Available: UNHCR [23 .06.2010]

**Albartus, Jan**(2001) *MOTAS - Mystery Of Time And Space*, [online], Available: Albartus [23 .06.2010]

**Amanita design** (2006) *Samorost 2*, [online], Available: Samorost2 [23 .06.2010]

**Eyezmaze** (2005) *Grow cube*, [online], Available: Eyezmaze [23 .06.2010]

**Gee, James Paul** (2003) *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

**Hermund, Frederik** (2005) *Third World Farmer*, [online], Available: 3rdworldfarmer [23 .06.2010]

**Mink@3wish** (2005) *Hamster rescue*, [online], Available: Gamershood [23 .06.2010]

**Playerthree** (2005) *Stopdisasters*, [online], Available: ISDR [23 .06.2010]

**Prensky, Marc** (2006) *Don't Bother Me Mom - I'm Learning* Minnesota: Paragon House Publishers

**Sweety, Cocoa** (2009) *Twilight dress up game*, [online], Available: Twilight dress up game [23.06.2010]

**Ugo Networks** (2006) *Heromachine*, [online], Available: Heromachine [23 .06.2010]

# Breaking down the classroom walls: web-based tasks with real outcomes

Ann Foreman

How can we motivate our students to see learning English as not just another academic subject but as a communication tool that will be useful for them throughout their lives? My method for tackling the problem is to create tasks which are relevant to them and produce tangible results.

## Case study: presenting a recipe task

Here's a sample task I've used with a group of adult students. We had set up a class blog and identified that pronunciation was an area they wanted to focus on (See <http://tiny.cc/136in>).

- First, the students studied a model. In pairs, they selected a recipe from Videojug (<http://www.videojug.com/>) – a web site that uses videos to give advice about how to do things and contains hundreds of recipes. Each video includes a text version of the instructions. The students paid attention to sentence stress and intonation and made a note of any new vocabulary they felt critical to understanding their recipe.
- Next, we commented together on what language, intonation and word stress were used in the recipes and reviewed new vocabulary.
- The students then changed partners and took turns to describe the recipe they'd looked at to their new partner, who hadn't seen it.
- Back in their original pairs, they decided on a recipe of their own to present.
- With help from me, a volunteer from the group demonstrated how to use VoiceThread (<http://voicethread.com/>) to present their recipes. VoiceThread is a web resource which allows you to create an on-line slideshow with a recorded commentary. I used the demonstration as an opportunity to highlight the language that students needed for the task e.g. What about that photo? No, not that one, this one. Scroll down a bit further. It's my turn. The students noted this language down.
- Afterwards, they practised this process language in pairs with a role play.

- Working again in pairs, they found photos of the ingredients of their recipes on the internet, uploaded them to VoiceThread and recorded their recipes.
- Once completed, they embedded their VoiceThreads into post on their blog.
- I then spent time with each pair listening to their VoiceThreads and focussing on any problems they'd had.
- Finally, everybody discussed and commented on each other's recipes.

An example (<http://tiny.cc/sbl9m>) of the completed task.

## **Using a collaborative platform and employing scaffolding techniques**

I always use a blog, or some other collaborative online platform, for task-based work. Setting one up is a combined effort between me and my students: they choose its title, layout and invite themselves to become members. This establishes from the outset their ownership of what's published on the blog and helps them to see it as a space where they can express themselves freely.

Putting tasks on the class blog takes the spotlight off me and gives me time to devote to individual students and make use of the scaffolding techniques that are so productive in language learning. I listen to or read with each student what they have produced, and by gauging where they're at, help them by hints and prompts to bridge the gap between what they have achieved and what they would like to achieve.

## **Task design and focussing on process language**

I try to design tasks that cover a content area that's wide enough for students to pick on a particular aspect that interests them; that require them to be creative; and that stretch them, but don't overwhelm them. Challenging students to be inquiring and creative motivates them to think for themselves, collaborate with their class mates, reflect on what they know and need to know, structure their thoughts and, ultimately, find the language that suits the occasion.

A crucial part of the task is ensuring that students have the necessary language for carrying it out. That's why I spend time to focus on the process language we use when demonstrating the web tools we use for a task. If students don't know how to say such things as "it's my turn, you're making a right mess of it, let me have a go" or "click there, scroll down a bit further, it's the one at the top of the page" they'll inevitably revert to their first language. This language is the stuff of life and what I'm perhaps most interested in students practising.

## **Real results**

It's really important that the platform for all this is the internet, an authentic communication channel, and that students are using their language skills to negotiate with the real world. When students publish their work on the internet, they experience real and tangible results from their efforts; by contributing to the body of information and knowledge that all of us have access to, they actively break through the confines of the classroom.

So, to come full turn to where we started with the sample task; from one who has had the opportunity to try out the recipes published by the students, the proof is in the pudding, they are very tasty indeed!



