Part III

Aspects of Classroom Methods

11

Groupwork and Pairwork

11.1   Introduction: Content and Structure

Various kinds of 'communicative' approaches have influenced the design of materials for English language teaching (ELT) over the last three decades or so. As a result, it is clear that a broader view of the nature of language and language learning has permeated language teaching. From the perspective of methods used in the classroom, asking students to work in groups or pairs has come to be taken for granted as a natural, integral part of communicative methodology and language learning materials. Most teachers are now familiar with these kinds of instructions in their coursebooks:

'Practise the dialogue with a partner'
'Ask your classmates . . . '
'Work in a group of four . . . '
'Give your story to someone else in the class to read'
'Do the quiz in pairs'
'What could happen next? Discuss in groups'
'Discuss your answers with other students'
'Choose a question, and ask as many other students as you can'

We shall see later that, although the relationship between materials and methods is in a sense an obvious one, it is not quite as clear-cut as it might seem, as some of the examples just quoted here imply. We can consider not only the frequency with which a particular activity is used in the classroom, but also to what extent that activity grows out of the materials themselves.

> Check through the coursebook you most frequently use. How often are learners expected to work in pairs or in small groups? What kind of language material is being practised during pairwork and groupwork activities? For example, is it a written dialogue, grammar, free speaking on a given topic?

Richards and Schmidt (2010: 81) define classroom management as:

(in language teaching) the ways in which student behaviour, movement and interaction during a lesson are organized and controlled by the teacher (or sometimes by the learners by themselves) to enable teaching to take place most effectively. Classroom management includes procedures for grouping students for different types of classroom activities, use of lesson plans, handling of equipment, aids, etc., and the direction and management of student behaviour and activity.

It will be useful at this point to make a general distinction in language teaching between content and structure. By 'content' we mean the materials themselves in relation to the selected target for learning: for example, segments of language such as vocabulary and lexical chunks; grammar; discourse; subject matter; genre. 'Structure', on the other hand, is concerned with how classes are managed, and thus with decisions about various classroom options as to who works with whom and in what possible groupings. 'Structure' is procedural, and can be thought of as being content-independent.

This chapter looks at a variety of organizational possibilities for the classroom and also, very selectively, at aspects of classroom methods. Here we discuss, first, the functions of groupwork and pairwork. We then go on to consider the implications of various classroom structures for patterns of interaction between teachers and learners, and of learners with each other. The final section will examine possible advantages and disadvantages in different styles of classroom management. The first part of the chapter is mainly descriptive; the second part, evaluative.

11.2   The Classroom Setting: Functions of Groupwork and Pairwork

The social organization of the classroom

Managing classes so that learners 'work in pairs' or 'divide into groups' is now so much part of the everyday professional practice of large numbers of

English language teachers that the instructions leading to these activities sometimes seem to be 'switched on' automatically, occasionally with a frequency difficult to justify. It happens with all kinds of content – dialogue practice, sharing opinions, reading aloud, comparing answers to questions, doing grammar exercises, formulating questions in an information-gap task – the list could be extended considerably.

While all these can undoubtedly be done in a number of different ways, at least two kinds of objections can be made. The first is the possibility that imposed classroom structures may not always be congenial to the learning styles of individuals in the class: we shall come back to this point in the chapter on individualization that follows this one, and again when considering how teachers, by observing what goes on in their classrooms, can become more sensitive to their students' preferred ways of working. The second objection is that a mechanical organization may pay insufficient attention to the relationship between an activity and its purpose. For example, it may be unhelpful to practise reading aloud in groups or pairs if students are unable to check each other's accuracy. If, however, the aim is to encourage learners to discuss a topic more freely in a personalized way, then a paired format may be the most useful one. The choice of group or pairwork and how we conduct the grouping should be based on sound principles, and the use of grouping should lead to developing real communicative competence.

A more coherent picture of management structure is provided by the notion of the classroom as an aspect of 'social organization' (Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003, provide extensive discussion of group dynamics). Seen from this perspective, any procedural decision by a teacher – asking students to work in pairs, or to divide themselves into groups, or nominating group membership directly – leads to a specific set of interaction patterns and to control of those interactions.

The classroom does not operate in a vacuum, and this patterning is closely related to the role relationships of teachers and learners, and of learners with each other; and thus by extension to the nature of the school and to the whole educational, even socio-cultural, context. We shall need to bear this wider setting in mind when discussing the pros and cons of pair and groupwork. We have already noted similar considerations in relation to some of the cultural implications of communicative language teaching (CLT) more generally, and its appropriacy (or not) both in principle and practice. Dogancay-Aktuna (2005) provides a summary of studies from various parts of the world that investigate whether imported methodologies with inherent assumptions fit with the expectations, attitudes, values, and beliefs of the users in different cultures. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) discuss Chinese 'Cultures of Learning'. Hu (2002) argues that CLT has not achieved the expected impact on ELT in China because of the conflict between the assumptions underlying CLT (e.g. cooperative learning, teacher roles) with the Chinese traditional style of learning (e.g. the importance placed on grammatical analysis, the expected teacher

authority as the expert, the reluctance among students to participate in interactive activities such as groupwork and debates, the importance placed on memorization of knowledge). Dogancay-Aktuna (2005) argues for the need to include socio-cultural awareness in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) teacher training. Qu and Tan (2010) report the result of pre-use evaluation of one set of Chinese and two of English materials used in China which aims to see if there are marked differences in materials for teaching Chinese and English. Their analysis involves comparing various elements of the books such as aims and objectives, structure, design, instructions for activities and tasks. They report commonality and differences. They did note some evidence of a Chinese 'culture of learning' in the Chinese materials in that 'Chinese traditional culture conceptualizes good learning as learner's hard-working, accumulative effort and refined reflection in the process of reading' (Qu and Tan, 2010: 288). They do, however, point out the danger of ignoring many other possible factors that could influence their findings such as the counterarguments to static interpretations of the studies on 'cultures of learning' (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005).

Guest (2002) and Littlewood (2000), among others, argue that studies such as those cited above can further the 'othering' of non-western cultures, and reinforce stereotypes at the expense of ignoring individual preferences and the inherently dynamic nature of (sub)cultures.

Functions of groupwork and pairwork

Various 'communicative' approaches require a link between activities and the organizational structures available to teachers. In the first place, if we are to create opportunities for learners to experience language in use rather than studying language as knowledge, we need to create situations in which learners converse. To consider functional meaning (e.g. persuasion, apology, suggestion), learners will need a situation, roles and purpose for communication. In this sense, it is logical to assume a natural link between the learning of functional aspects of language use and a classroom-based behaviour that requires class members to exchange and share information and ideas. Such a link, for instance, may mean that students learn how to give and follow instructions in a paired format; while to respond appropriately in a typical range of practical social situations may involve the exchange of opinions within a small group. As an extension of such use of classroom organization we have looked in Chapter 10 at various approaches that enable optimal use of integrated skills such as Task-Based Learning (TBL), Content-Based Language Learning (CBLL)/Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Text-Driven Approaches, Project Work and Role Play/Simulations. These approaches provide reasons and an environment for communicative interactions. Pair and groupwork fit into these approaches very well and enable

various patterns of interaction to take place in order to achieve communicative outcomes.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies also seem to support the use of group/pairwork in that the findings often indicate the importance of

- exposure to comprehensible input of language in use (Krashen, 1994; Ellis, 2008; Ortega, 2010)
- use of language for communication to achieve communicative outcomes (Swain et al., 2002; Swain, 2005)
- negotiation of meaning through social interaction (Long, 1996; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006).

Many teachers across the world face the challenges of mixed ability classes of students with different learning preferences/styles in large classes. However capable teachers may be, it is difficult for a single teacher to provide each individual with a suitable kind and amount of language exposure and use. Group/pairwork enables learners of different levels and learning styles to share and pool their resources (e.g. linguistic knowledge, world or subject knowledge, strategies) in a smaller and informal environment. Learners in groups/pairs are more likely to be able to negotiate meaning in optimal ways that suit themselves. In this sense, regardless of cultural traditions, pair and groupwork may have a place as a fundamental facilitator of language acquisition and development in any language classroom.

Further support for the positive effects of group/pairwork on learning comes from studies on Co-operative Learning (CL) from L1 primary to tertiary levels (Baines et al., 2007; Kutnick and Berdondini, 2009). The classroom is clearly a place where people have to work together, essentially requiring a compromise between their own individuality and the dynamics of the whole group. In other words, it is ideally a co-operative environment where structuring activities in different ways can allow for the establishment of a cohesive and collaborative working atmosphere (see McCafferty et al., 2006; Kagan and Kagan, 2009 for a comprehensive introduction to CL in language teaching). CL does not mean abandoning the teacher-fronted mode but it does involve combining various approaches to learning. If teachers and learners only know the teacher-fronted mode they may find other styles somewhat alien. Some teachers may feel apprehensive about possible pitfalls when they switch to unfamiliar CL approaches. For example, teachers may feel that the students' language ability is too low to be able to manage group tasks or discussions in English. Even if they can carry out a group task in English, what happens if a particular task turns out to be beyond the groups' combined ability? In such a case, the students may resort to their L1 and the whole point of ensuring L2 exposure to language in use vanishes into thin air. What happens if some groups finish their work earlier than the other groups? Moreover, group members may not always get along with each

other. There might be some students who do not contribute and leave the assigned task to the rest of the group to complete. If a CL task succeeds in engaging learners, it may result in high volumes of noise which could upset other teachers, parents and even the authorities.

All these apprehensions are understandable, and the literature on CL offers possibilities of learner and teacher development. Mak (2011) reports how trainee teachers in Hong Kong needed training to resolve the conflict between the methods that they were used to and those which they thought were good but unfamiliar. Tomlinson and Dat (2004) report on a survey of the views of 300 intermediate level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) adult learners and 15 teachers in Vietnam in relation to the role of spoken interactions in language lessons. Contrary to teachers' perceptions about learners' cultural reticence, learners were in fact willing to participate but needed support and a relaxed environment to be able to do so. Tomlinson and Bao concluded that pedagogic procedures that have proved effective in one culture may require sensitive and principled adaptation if they are to be readily accepted by users in another culture.

Pairwork and groupwork

Pairwork and groupwork are not synonymous terms: just as they obviously reflect different social patterns, so the ways in which they are adapted and applied in the classroom also have distinctive as well as similar functions. Pairwork requires rather little organization on the part of the teacher and, at least in principle, can be activated in most classrooms by simply having learners work with the person sitting next to them (although other kinds of pairing – for example, according to proficiency – may be more suitable depending on the task). The time taken for pairwork to be carried out need not be extensive, and there is a very large range of possible tasks throughout the whole spectrum of functions we have identified, from fully communicative, 'simulated', structure and vocabulary practice, to those where an important aim is to set up co-operative working habits. The skills chapters in Part II of this book have a number of examples.

A group, on the other hand, even though it can have a comparable range of functions, is by its very nature a more complex structure, which will probably require greater role differentiation between individuals as well as a certain amount of physical reorganization of the classroom. This role differentiation may refer to 'assumed' roles, particularly in a 'communicative' setting (having learners enact a courtroom scene with a variety of 'characters', for example, or 'pretend' to be a town council trying to negotiate a decision about building priorities), or to the structure of the group itself, with members being assigned tasks of chairperson, reporter/note-taker and so on. The timescale often needs to be more extended, to allow for the greater number of interacting participants. Ur (1996: 232–3) makes the point comprehensively: 'The success of groupwork depends to some extent on the surrounding social

climate, and on how habituated the class is to using it; and also . . . on the selection of an interesting and stimulating task whose performance is well within the ability of the group. But it also depends on effective and careful organisation.'

Finally, groups and pairs are not mutually exclusive, and there are a number of variations that bridge these two basic structural activities. For instance: individuals out of a pair can re-form to make a different pair; or pairs can 'snowball' by joining other pairs until eventually the whole class may have re-formed.

At this point in the chapter, it will be useful to consider briefly these two issues, one of which summarizes the discussion so far, the other of which looks ahead:

1   Looking at your comments on the first task in this chapter, to what extent does the use of pair and groupwork in your own materials reflect the different functions we have discussed?
2   How much flexibility do you have in your own teaching in the 'management' of your classroom?

11.3   Interaction and Classroom Structure

Arranging the class

Readers may well recognize one or more of the following possibilities for the physical arrangement of their classroom, as shown in figure 11.1 (where T = teacher, S = student, and the lines = main directions of interaction).

Not all possibilities can be covered here, but we have tried to show a representative sample. These arrangements are not necessarily static, and in a flexible classroom may change during the course of one lesson, both physically as well as in terms of roles and interaction. There may, of course, be straightforward physical restrictions on the possibilities, such as room size or the nature of the classroom furniture (tables, benches, worktop space, mobility). Space considerations not only act as obstacles to the establishment of a more communicative and co-operative classroom: a room that is too small for the number of students may actually force participative working patterns even where they are not appropriate.

Interaction patterns in the classroom

Just as a great deal has been written about different organizational structures in everyday classroom practice, so there is a large and rapidly growing
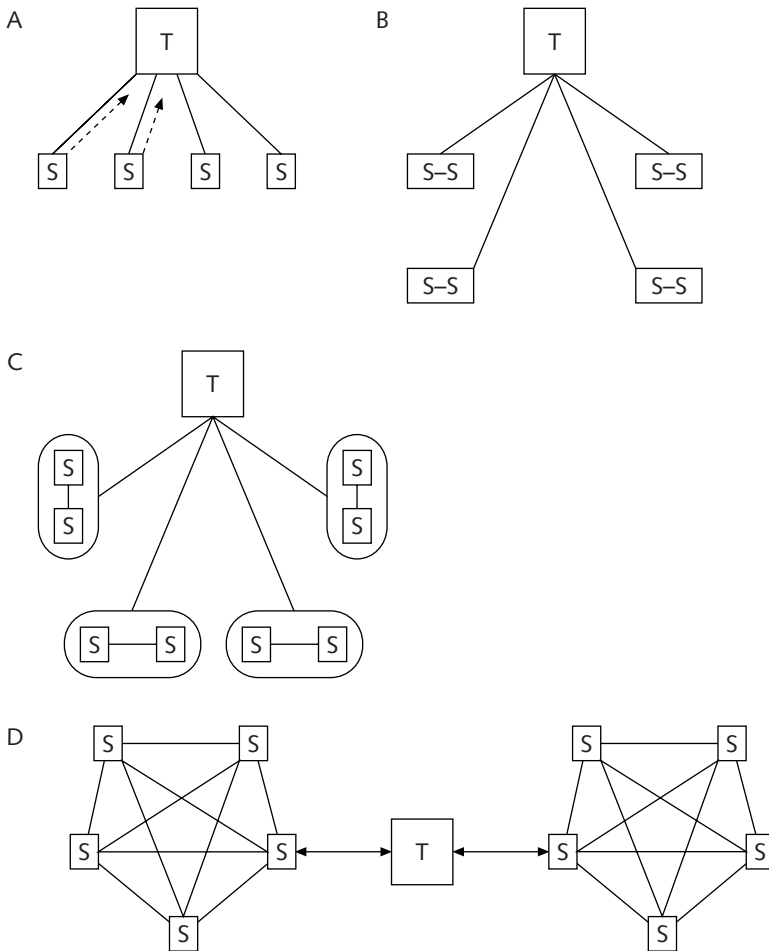
Figure 11.1   Patterns of classroom organization.

research literature concerning the effects of various types of patterning both on aspects of classroom behaviour and on learning outcomes. The research comes particularly from studies in the psychology of SLA, and from work in social psychology and the sociology of small-group behaviour. Here we can only set out very selectively a few of the topics of potential interest to teachers, just to give a flavour of the debate. The bibliography gives several references that go into these topics in more depth, and teachers may wish to evaluate the relevance of these studies to their own classrooms (and ways in which the nature and requirements of research converge and diverge from those of teaching and learning). A further point to consider is how media-assisted language learning might affect group dynamics (see Chapter 5).

Teacher-fronted classes   The area that has received by far the most attention to date is that of the quantity and quality of verbal interaction in the plenary class as opposed to the smaller group setting. A lockstep organization of classroom interaction is represented in simple terms by figure 11.1A. The lockstep mode can be explained in terms of a simple sequence of teacher stimulus → student response → teacher evaluation of student response (a traditional pattern of teacher question → student answer → teacher comment). This is, in other words, a situation where the whole class is moving along together, where all the students are 'locked' into the same activity at the same time and at the same pace and where the teacher is the primary, even the only, initiator. Nunan (2005) provides an overview of classroom research for the last three decades. As one of many studies, he refers to Tsui's research (1985) which investigates the amount and types of teacher talk, teacher speech and interaction and student output. Tsui's data from Hong Kong revealed that over 80% of the talk in the classrooms came from teachers. Note here that SLA research seems to indicate the importance of learners' output for communication in class to achieve communicative outcomes (e.g. Swain, 2005; and see discussions on SLA in Section 11.2). Nunan (2005) also refers to Brock (1986) who investigates two kinds of teacher questions: display and referential questions. Display questions are the ones that the teacher knows the answer to (e.g. comprehension questions after reading a text) whereas referential questions means genuine questions where the answer is not known. Nunan (2005: 228) points out that 'The significance of the study was that learners in classrooms where more referential questions were asked gave significantly longer and more complex responses'.

If a teacher-fronted class happens to be a mixed ability large class of 50 students and if the teacher asks questions in a lockstep manner to individual students, it is not difficult to imagine the limited kinds and amount of interactions. In her review of SLA and classroom research, Tsui (2001: 122) offers this summary:

> It was found that compared to teacher-fronted interaction in whole class work, both pair work and group work provide more opportunities for learners to initiate and control the interaction, to produce a much larger variety of speech acts and to engage in the negotiation of meaning.

Before leaving this point, however, we must be careful not to assume that a whole-class, teacher-fronted methodology is necessarily undesirable. Harmer (2007b) offers a common-sense antidote to some of the more negative comments by enumerating a number of positive advantages of the lockstep class, including its practical usefulness when teachers need to give instructions and explanations, but also its affective role in reinforcing a sense of 'belonging' and, for many educational settings, in creating the security of the familiar. Furthermore, in many EFL contexts, English teachers may be the only ones

who can provide input in the target language. Teacher-fronted lessons may be a good way of providing the necessary meaningful exposure to language in use if the teacher for example reads stories and poems and performs dramas for the learners to enjoy.

Group structure   Discussion of the nature of classroom organization also draws on very extensive research into the 'social' structure of groups of participants working on specific tasks. It is interesting to speculate what might happen if we simply tell the whole class to divide into small groups in any way they choose: will they do so randomly, or with friends, or with people of similar proficiency? Furthermore, if we imagine giving a free discussion topic to a subgroup consisting of, say, six or seven of our students, and we then leave them to talk with only a small amount of monitoring, it is probable that some will talk more than others, one or two will want to dominate and control, others will react by withdrawing into silence and so on.

   These kinds of 'natural' grouping, and relatively spontaneous speech and behaviour patterns within an unmonitored group, are clearly quite different from the other end of the spectrum of control, where the teacher specifies both the group and the nature of the task in detail (e.g. a dialogue rehearsal). The majority of classes fall somewhere between the naturally occurring and the completely structured. Harmer (2007b) lists the principles of friendship, streaming (by ability) and chance, as ways of dividing a class into groups. Jacobs (http://www.georgejacobs.net (accessed in November 2011)) provides useful and up-to-date resources for CL. In his PDF article titled 'Cooperative Learning: Theory, Principles and Techniques', he explains CL principles, including heterogeneous grouping (e.g. gender, ethnicity, language proficiency and diligence). He then gives advice for when students are not happy with unfamiliar members: 'Some ideas for addressing this include helping groups enjoy initial success, explaining the benefits of heterogeneity, doing team-building activities to promote trust and to help students get to know each other, and teaching collaborative skills'.

Learning styles

It is often argued that, in lockstep classes, learners are unrealistically assumed to learn what teachers choose to teach them, leaving no room for individual differences. One basic distinction in learning style research is between 'cognitive' factors (to do with the way people think) and 'affective' factors (to do with emotions and what we feel). There is some attempt to relate these to different types of teaching. There is now quite a long research tradition relating to the strategies apparently used by 'Good Language Learners' (Norton and Toohey, 2001; Griffith, 2008), and to the various cognitive and personality types that affect learning (Robinson, 2002; Dörnyei, 2005). A number of writers are now trying to relate methods, not just to ideas about the nature

of communication, but also to what is known about these kinds of psychological variables.

Gardner (2006: 24) warns against 'any belief that all the answers to a given problem lie in one certain approach, such as logical-mathematical thinking' by drawing attention to IQ tests and to the SAT (the college admission test in the United States). His argument seems significant when we use expressions such as 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' learners based on purely linguistic measurement. Gardner (2006: 24) maintains that 'We are all so different largely because we have different combinations of intelligences' and puts forward arguments for multiple intelligences, including 'musical intelligence', 'interpersonal intelligence' and 'intrapersonal intelligence'. If his assertions are right, there are fundamental implications for educational planning, implementation and assessment. In relation to the theme of this chapter, for example, group or pairwork may possibly favour the learners with dominant 'interpersonal intelligence' who are good at working with other people but alienate the learners with 'intrapersonal intelligence' who prefer to work alone. There are other theories of learner differences. Coffield et al. (2004), for example, identified 71 models of learning styles. Behind the theories of learning styles lies an assumption that learners learn best if the ways of learning suit their own styles. Attempts have been made to develop tests such as the VARK (i.e. Visual, Audio, Read/write, Kinaesthetic) questionnaire (Fleming, 1995) in order to identify learning preferences so that learners can learn in the optimal way for fulfilling their potential.

Regarding learning styles, we need to be aware of the danger of careless labelling of student failure: the real cause may be due to incompatibilities between the materials/teaching and the learners' preferred learning routes. It is also necessary, however, to realize that there are many questions that have to be answered in relation to learning styles. After a close examination of 13 influential models of learning styles Coffield et al. (2004) note the lack of consensus among the different models and question the validity and reliability of some models. Pashler et al. (2009) report the results of research commissioned by the Association for Psychological Science (APS) on the scientific validity of learning styles practices. This panel of independent researchers proposes an empirically trustworthy research design on learning styles and examines learning styles studies. Their report reveals that only a few studies use such a research design. Massa and Mayer (2006) is one of the approved studies, but it did not find strong support for giving visual learners and verbal learners different multimedia instructions according to their learning preferences. Pashler et al. (2009) conclude that they see no adequate evidence to justify incorporating learning styles assessments into general educational practice.

So far, we have looked at groupwork and pairwork in the classroom from a number of angles as a procedural, organizational concept, and at some of the related research background. It is now time to turn to an examination of the potential advantages and disadvantages of such procedures.

11.4   Groupwork and Pairwork: Benefits or Drawbacks?

> Before you start to read this section (and looking back at some of your comments earlier in this chapter), consider the feasibility and appropriacy of groupwork and pairwork as 'organizational frameworks' for your own classroom. What are the possibilities and limitations? And to what extent do you need to take into account external views and guidelines, rather than organize your class according to your own preferences?

We must be clear that any discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of particular methods is relative. There can be no absolute pros and cons, and we say again that what is appropriate in Mexico may not be appropriate in Japan. This is why the headings in this section are all printed with a question mark against them, to indicate the difficulties of making generalizations. We have stressed many times that any individual teacher with a single class has to be seen in the wider context of the school and its educational and social environment. In many parts of the world, and in the perceptions of many people, the status of 'teacher' commands great respect, and it would not be regarded as appropriate behaviour for the teacher to take a strongly interactive role. In other words, there are many different notions of 'authority' and 'social position', and the expectations of behaviour that go with them. The implications of such cultural differences for whole class versus small groupwork in the language classroom are clear.

Again, it is often the case that 'knowledge' is regarded as content to be transmitted, so that language becomes a curriculum subject similar to history or physics. In such a context, it is unlikely that exploratory, problem-solving activities will fit naturally into educational philosophy and practice. The picture can become very complex when teachers and learners with different backgrounds and preconceptions meet in the same classroom. Consider, for example, the mutual difficulties of a teacher trained in the 'communicative' tradition with an instinctive preference for small groupwork, and a learner who believes that a teacher's role is to be an explicit instructor. Neither side is right or wrong, but a process of adjustment will certainly be necessary.

At the same time, we have also noted that 'the wider context' will include not only local conditions but also the ELT profession as a whole. From this perspective, research and practice are not static, and what is appropriate at a particular point may well be superseded a few years later. Such concepts as 'power' and 'distance' can, in certain circumstances, vary even during the

course of a single lesson. To deny the possibility of change, then, is to assume that all development is irrelevant. Neither position – the universal application of certain methods on the one hand, or a lack of openness to new ideas on the other – is realistic (see Tomlinson and Bao, 2004 for useful suggestions).

A final consideration in setting out the framework for discussing the pros and cons of groupwork and pairwork is the question of whose perspective is taken into account. Any teacher will have a view; but so will learners, parents, colleagues, head teachers and education authority personnel, and these views will not always necessarily be in harmony.

We now enumerate, first, some of the more frequently heard points in favour of groupwork and pairwork, and then some of the points against. There is insufficient space here to present argument and counter-argument for each of these points, and readers are invited to consider each argument critically and from their own perspective.

Advantages?

Our earlier discussion of the research base put forward a number of reasons why getting learners to work in subgroups in a plenary class is often to be preferred to 'lockstep' (while also acknowledging that certain kinds of practice may best be handled with the whole class paying attention at the same time):

1   In a lockstep framework, there is little flexibility. Students are frequently 'observers' of others, and work to an externally imposed pace. In small-group and pairwork, on the other hand, the possibility of an individual's learning preferences being engaged is correspondingly increased. (We shall see in the next chapter how the individualization of instruction can take learners even further along this path).

2   Groupwork in particular is potentially dynamic, in that there are a number of different people to react to, to share ideas with and so on: exchange of information is sometimes more 'natural' in smaller-scale interaction. The extent to which this is so, however, clearly depends closely on the nature of the task set.

3   Different tasks can be assigned to different groups or pairs. This may lead to a cohesive whole-class environment if these tasks can be fitted together, perhaps in a final discussion. Alternatively, a teacher working with a mixed proficiency group may have the flexibility to allocate activities according to learners' levels.

4   Each student has proportionally more chance to speak and therefore to be involved in language use. Furthermore, the more varied the types of activity, the greater the variety in types of language used.

5   Groupwork can promote a positive atmosphere or 'affective climate' (Arnold, 1999), as distinct from the more public and potentially threatening 'performance' environment of the lockstep classroom. Motivation, too, is often improved if learners feel less inhibited and more able to explore possibilities for self-expression. Arguably, too, co-operation in the classroom is encouraged. These are undoubtedly positive factors, but the individual classroom still needs to be 'in tune' with its educational environment.

6   There is some evidence that learners themselves favour working in smaller groupings. Millar (2011) reports a case study that investigated the cultural adjustment of four 6–8-year-old Korean school children to studying at an Australian government school. The mothers all suggested that constructivist approaches, cooperative learning and play-centred experiences helped their children adapt easily to the new cultural environment (Hill, 1994; Farver et al., 1995; Okagaki and Diamond, 2000). The children were able to relinquish rote-learning and teacher dependence (Lee et al., 2000) and, once language barriers had decreased, to comfortably participate in open-ended, child-centred learning activities (Farver et al., 1995; Millar, 2011: 6).

Millar (2011) reports how Korean mothers and children commented on the vital importance of interpersonal relationships with other students and teachers as one of the main contributing factors to successful cultural adjustment. According to Millar, the mothers all said strong friendship groups were crucial to their children's academic success, though he does comment on occasional discrepancies between the perceptions of teachers and those of Korean participants in the study. Tomlinson and Bao (2004) also comment on the marked differences in the perceptions of teachers and students in their data about the seeming reticence shown during speaking activities. Spratt (1999) and J. McDonough (2002) discuss a similar phenomenon of how much teachers' ratings of the usefulness of activities differ from learners' preferences. For instance, although 'conversation practice' is rated as 'very high' on both sides, pairwork comes out as 'very high' for teachers but low for learners.

It has to be stressed here that published research data are somewhat patchy, and different contexts might produce differential results. In Chapter 13 we shall be looking at some of the small-scale investigations that teachers can carry out in their own classrooms, and the theme of 'learner preferences' provides us with a good example.

Disadvantages?

Many readers will recognize these kinds of stated objections to groupwork and/or pairwork, and as usual, such objections must be evaluated critically

and according to context. Some are practical and straightforward classroom management problems, whereas others are deeper in the sense that they impinge on attitudes to teaching and learning and the whole cultural setting of the classroom.

1   There is some concern that other students will probably not provide such a good 'language model' as the teacher. Barker (2011: 55) reports what happened when he tried to persuade Japanese university students to talk to each other in English outside classes in pairs or groups as a way of compensating for the scarcity of necessary exposure and communication opportunities in an EFL context. The students' objections to his proposal included apprehension such as 'speaking practice is only beneficial if your partner is a native speaker', 'speaking to another non-native speaker is a bad idea because you will 'learn' each other's mistakes' and 'because students won't recognize mistakes, they won't be able to correct each other'.

   It is interesting to note, however, that Barker refers in his chapter to Swain et al. (2002: 181) who state, 'the collaborative dialogue in which peers engage as they work together on writing, speaking, listening and reading activities mediates second language learning'. According to Swain et al. (2002: 18), 'few adverse effects of working collaboratively were noted'. Barker's own study not only confirms the claims of Swain et al. but also shows an increase in self-esteem, confidence and motivation among those who participated in what Barker calls Unstructured Learner Interaction (i.e. learners' regular use of English in pair/group outside classrooms without the teacher's interference).

2   There are several possible institutional objections to rearranging the classroom and to an increased communicative environment. Furniture, for example, may be impossible to move around or may encourage static interaction patterns (such as students sitting in rows on long benches fixed to the floor). Sometimes, too, school authorities or other colleagues may react negatively to what they perceive to be the increased noise levels that come from an active class.
3   Some monolingual classes readily use their mother tongue instead of the target language, particularly where discussion is animated and even more so when the teacher shares the same L1. It is not surprising that interacting in English in these circumstances may initially be perceived as artificial.
4   Learners often have strong preferences, and it is not unusual to find a stated wish for teacher control and direct input of language material. It

is even an expectation in many cases, and there is a point at which a teacher's doubts about its pedagogical effectiveness need to be matched by learners' perceptions of the 'best way' to learn.

5   If the class is divided into smaller units, there may be problems of 'group dynamics' where, for example, students may not wish to work with those of their peers assigned by the teacher to the same group. This may be compounded by feelings of being 'better than' or conversely 'worse than' others.

6   By far the most commonly heard objection to 'alternative' classroom arrangements, and in some ways underlying all the others listed here, is that of class size. It is all very well, the argument runs, to conduct group-work and pairwork if you have only a small, multilingual class of co-operative adults working in a comfortable, modern environment, but 'try doing it with a class of forty!' This is the title of an article by Nolasco and Arthur (1986), in which they try to meet the 'large class' objection head on. Using their experience of teacher training in Morocco, they first of all list nine reasons for teacher resistance to what were perceived as 'new' ideas and techniques. These reasons, some of which we have already met, were as follows:
Students not interested in unfamiliar materials and methods
Discipline problems
Physical constraints
Problems of duplicating material
Students prefer grammar and exam practice
School administration objects to noise
Students talk in L1 in pairs
Students complain they are 'not being taught'
Enthusiasm causes problems of class control.

The authors are sympathetic and sensitive to these objections, and go on to sketch out a phased plan whereby teachers and learners can gradually be introduced to the advantages of groupwork and pairwork. The plan starts from the basis of familiar materials and working patterns, and slowly increases learner responsibility, initiation and control.

The perceived problems by the teachers in Morocco in the 1980s listed in Nolasco and Arthur (1986) include wider issues than just those of groupwork and pairwork. The real issue behind these perceptions seems to come from transplanting CLT in its various incarnations (Task-Based Language Teaching, CBLL) to different contexts. Pham (2007), for example, echoes this in addressing similar problems in Vietnam and adds some more to the list of challenges, such as pressure from traditional exams and teachers' limited expertise. He describes the potential conflicts between imported methods and the local context:

When Vietnamese students are asked to use English to conduct a 'real life' game in pairs, the question raised is whether they are really engaged in genuine communication. Furthermore, the use of 'authentic' material, meaning authentic to native speakers of English, can be problematic in the Vietnamese or Chinese classroom. As Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) point out, what is authentic in London might not be authentic in Hanoi. Also, the large class size in Vietnam (between forty and sixty) also challenges the use of pair work and group work. (Pham, 2007: 196).

Pham (2007: 196), however, does not go down the route of negating CLT altogether. Instead he argues that '. . . while there are certainly problems in the transfer of CLT methods from the Western contexts to others, it is questionable whether these problems negate the potential usefulness of the CLT theory'. He believes that the fundamental tenets of CLT theories seem valid and applicable elsewhere:

CLT sets the goal of language learning to be the teaching of learners to be able to use the language effectively for their real communicative needs, rather than simply to provide learners with the knowledge about the grammar system of that language.
   This goal is consistent with the long-term goal, if not the immediate goal, of English language instruction in many contexts of the world. (Pham, 2007: 196).

Pham (2007) warns against treating CLT as a formulaic, prescriptive classroom technique. Instead he advocates that:

. . . teachers in Vietnam or elsewhere need to make further efforts to develop and generate, within the communicative approach, classroom techniques appropriate to their conditions. However, teachers should not be left alone in this process. Support from peers, students, from policymakers, from training courses as well as findings from empirical research on the use of CLT in certain contexts, particularly in non-Western contexts . . . is deemed important in this process.' (Pham, 2007: 200).

11.5   Conclusion

In this chapter we have tried to show that dividing a class into small groups, asking learners to work in pairs or, by implication, any kind of 'structuring' decision by the teacher, are not merely a set of alternatives that can be mechanically applied. However sound their justification in principle, all such arrangements have to be assessed in terms of the teaching situation in its widest sense – the existing syllabus and materials, expected roles of teachers and learners, the practicalities of physical space, the institution and the whole

educational system. At the same time, we argue again that no teaching environment can be regarded as fixed for all time. New syllabuses are introduced, often in line with shifting perceptions of national and international needs; attitudes of teachers and learners to materials, methods and to each other change; the expectations of individuals develop, both for themselves and alongside wider social changes. As we shall see in the remaining chapters, all these considerations have direct implications for the training and development of both teachers and learners.

1 Draw up a table for your own classroom of the things you like about groupwork and pairwork, and the things you do not like. You will probably be able to think of more points than we have included in our discussion here.
2 If possible, compare your ideas with those of a colleague – it would be particularly interesting if you could work with someone from a different background to your own.
3 What factors do you think influence your opinions? It may be the materials you use, your learners' attitudes, school policy, your view of your own role and so on.

11.6   Further Reading

1 Griffiths, C. (ed) (2008): *Lessons from Good Language Learners*. This provides a comprehensive overview of successful language learning strategies and is useful for learner training.
2 Harmer, J. (2007: ch. 10): *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. This discusses many practical aspects of groups and pairs within some overall principles.
3 McCafferty, S., G. Jacobs and C.D. Iddings. (2006): *Cooperative Learning and Second Language Teaching*. This provides a useful theoretical and practical introduction to the field of cooperative learning (CL) for language teachers with varied experience.

12

Individualization, Self-access and Learner Training

12.1 Introduction

In the last chapter we considered some of the different possibilities of structuring the classroom with groups and pairs of learners in mind. In this chapter we shall be looking at the concept of individualization in language learning and the extent to which this can be implemented both inside and outside the classroom. We shall begin by considering how individualized learning started and the fundamental philosophies behind it. This will help us to see the different strands and understand the somewhat confusing terms associated with individualized learning. We will then think about why we may wish to individualize the classroom. Then we shall examine some issues of individualization, self-directed learning and self-access and try to relate them to actual learning situations. We shall then consider how recent developments in educational technology have provided further possibilities for individualizing language learning. Finally, we consider the area of learner training in relation to individualizing the classroom.

   Growth in the phenomenon of individualization began in the 1970s and was nourished by the Threshold proposals of the Council of Europe (Richterich and Chancerel, 1980) and the notion of 'Permanent Education', or Education for Life, with respect to which pioneering work was undertaken at CRAPEL (Centre de recherches et d'applications pedagogiques en langues), a language teaching and research centre at the University of Nancy, France. Smith (2008: 395–6) provides a concise account of how learner autonomy – one of the newer terms for individualization – started:

In the interests of widening access to education and promoting lifelong learning, CRAPEL began to offer adults the opportunity to learn a foreign language in a resources centre, free from teacher direction. However, it soon became clear that participants did not necessarily – initially, at least – have the full capacity (competence) to take charge of decision-making in all the areas normally determined by an institution, teacher, or textbook, namely:

- objectives
- contents (including materials)
- stages ('syllabus')
- methods and techniques
- pace, time and place
- evaluation procedures.

CRAPEL put in place various kinds of support measures, including learner counselling and 'training', to assist in the 'autonomization' process – the development of learners' abilities to work more effectively in a self-directed fashion.

These pioneering attempts by CRAPEL show various philosophical learner-centred beliefs which have grown into different fields of study. One of these beliefs is catering for individual differences in terms of needs, purpose, preferred ways of learning and timing for learning. Individualization in language learning in this sense is also symptomatic of the development of interest shown in the learner and the learners' needs, particularly, as can be seen in, for example, English for Specific Purposes, which grew apace in the 1980s.

Another of the beliefs underlying the CRAPEL model is a view of learners' innate capabilities to self-direct their own learning. This belief in learners' capacities to conduct and manage their own learning is often referred to nowadays as 'learner autonomy'. The philosophy of learner autonomy has lent its hand to developing terms used for some modes of learning outside classrooms such as 'self-directed learning', 'self-instruction' and 'self-paced learning'.

CRAPEL's beliefs also involved the importance of providing resources for autonomous learners to make use of. This approach is shared among supporters of 'resource-based learning' or 'self-access learning', which we will be looking at later in this chapter. In relation to self-access learning, the use of Information Technology (IT) has been attracting global interest: for example use of multimedia, integrated virtual learning environment, E-learning (i.e. all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching). Furthermore, individualized use of IT in language learning outside institutions seems to be already happening. M-learning, for example, means 'Any sort of learning that happens when the learner is not at a fixed, predetermined location, or learning that happens when the learner takes advantage of the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies' (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MLearning (accessed 08 December 2011)). In M learn-

ing, learners are able to choose time, location, sources and even community of learning buddies and teachers (Chinnery, 2006; Goodwin-Jones, 2008). Mobile devices include not only hardware such as handheld tablet computers, MP3 players, netbooks and mobile/smart phones but also any applications that can be uploaded onto these devices. For further discussion and examples of how new technologies can support and enhance individualized learning, see Chapter 5 in this book. Kervin and Derewianka (2011) and Motteram (2011) are also recommended.

Learners may have an innate capacity to be autonomous but, in practice, they may not be able (at least initially) or willing to take on the responsibilities of the whole spectrum of decision-making required for management of their own learning as was observed in the case of CRAPEL. Counselling and training provide necessary support and such guidance is referred to as 'learner training' or 'learner development'. Individual learning with some support schemes outside classrooms may be called 'guided/supported self-study' or 'directed independent learning'. 'Distance learning' can be considered as one mode of directed independent learning. We will discuss Learner Training later in this chapter.

CRAPEL was a case of 'out-of-class' resource centre-based 'directed independent learning'. In comparison, 'Independent learning', 'Open learning', 'Flexible learning' and 'Blended learning' could take various combinations of learning modes: for example, face-to-face teacher-led learning in classes combined with self-directed learning at a resource centre which offers a Virtual Learning Environment as well as hardware such as DVD, books and magazines.

> Why individualize the classroom? Before reading further, think of some reasons why classroom teachers may wish to individualize language learning.

As one of the Good Practice Guide Projects supported by the Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies (LLAS) in the United Kingdom, Ciel Language Support Network (2000) provides six handbooks. Though the project has now been completed and their handbooks are only available as online archives, the fundamental discussions seem still valid and useful today as they give us a well-considered perspective on evaluating developments in individualized learning. Handbook 1, entitled 'Integrating independent learning with the curriculum', lists some benefits of individualized learning. We will use their categories as a guide to our exploration of possible reasons why we may wish to consider individualized learning as a viable option.

Individualized learning:

1   adds flexibility.
   It is still the norm that language learning takes place in groups. Every class is composed of individuals, each of whom will have different capabilities and work rates; and among these heterogeneous groups it can obviously be a problem for the teacher to allow for the variety of pacing necessary if all students are to learn effectively. We sometimes speak of 'teaching up' to some students or, conversely, 'teaching down' to others. It is quite common to hear other teachers speaking about 'teaching to the middle range of the group' hoping that this will best satisfy students' needs. In this context, individualization can help to break the lockstep of the classroom. Individualization is not just limited to language learning either. 'Open learning' centres are sometimes used in industry as part of an in-service or professional development programme for workers, which may be tailored to their own individual needs and to the pace at which they prefer to learn. Many practitioners believe that all learners can make satisfactory progress in learning a foreign language if given sufficient time plus the possibility of developing their preferred learning styles and habits. It is clear that some learners work better in groups, whereas others prefer to work alone. Some learners have a preference for a particular time of the day, and for many, the place of study can be very important, be it in class, in the SAC or anywhere that mobile devices can be used. In some learning contexts, it can be difficult for learners to attend classes regularly, perhaps because of other commitments, and in these situations, an individualized programme may prove to be an effective mode of learning.

2   extends and enhances classroom learning.
   In order to ensure language acquisition, learners need a lot of time and a large amount of motivated exposure to meaningful input. Timetabled class hours often are not enough. In individualized learning contexts, learners can consolidate or further explore what they have learned in the face-to-face classroom at their own pace with the kinds of resources that would suit their learning preferences, levels and purposes whenever it is convenient for them. Extensive reading and extensive listening, project work or pair/group tasks can be done in self-access/open learning/resource centres, using various kinds of authentic materials.

3   encourages and develops key transferable skills that could enhance future learning and eventual employability.
   Learners can not only learn a language but also acquire life skills such as

   •   setting targets, planning and organizing their own study without guidance

- managing time and resources required
- conducting research and presenting the results
- using new technologies (e.g. use of multimedia in learning, electronic dictionary, wiki, blog) (See Chapter 5 'Technology in ELT')
- collaborating with peers with or without technology (e.g. pair or group tasks and projects online or offline)
- finding ways of solving problems (e.g. seeking advice, critically evaluating sources of information, self-reflection, coming up with innovative ideas).

4   leads to learner autonomy.
   Learners learn to be responsible for and manage their own learning.

In sum, individualization as a concept in education including language teaching and learning aims at providing as many permutations as possible to the learner that the traditional lockstep of the classroom cannot in itself provide.

> How do you cater for individual learner needs in your classroom at present?

12.2   Individualization: Some Issues

Smith (2003) explores the question of whether learner autonomy is a western concept inappropriate for non-western students. Smith (2008: 396) argues that:

> . . . learner autonomy is not a particular method, nor need it be conflated with individualism. From this perspective, the exercise and development of learner autonomy can be seen as an educational goal which is cross-culturally valid and meets with different kinds of constraint according to context. (Palfreyman and Smith, 2003; Barfield and Brown, 2007)

Though the ideas and earlier attempts originated in the west, as we have seen in Section 12.1, individualization of learning seems to have potential for serving many different contexts. Teachers across the world face many challenges such as limited classroom contact hours, large classes, pressures for improving standards and meeting the demands of new kinds of learners with different learning styles and multimedia preferences and expectations from parents in the global world. Institutions 'in the west' are no exception in sharing some or all of these problems, and this is why individualization has been developed as a possible solution. The interest in individualization has grown to such an extent that the first issue of AILA's (International

Association of Applied Linguistics) Applied Linguistics series is on Learner and Teacher Autonomy (Lamb and Reinders, 2008). It is interesting to note that the AILA book discusses teacher autonomy as well as learner autonomy as individualized learning involves reconsideration and changes of teacher roles. Dixon et al. (2006) is a publication by Arabia Learner Independence SIG based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the theme of Self-Access Centres (SACs) or Independent Learning Centres (ILCs). The editorial note says:

> a universally applicable handbook covering an extensive range of practicalities and issues for consideration when planning, implementing and operating an independent learning facility anywhere in the world. (p. ix)

The contributors to this book are not only from the Gulf countries but also from Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and the content covers a lot of case studies of building up learner resources in challenging contexts. There is an Independent Learning Association which holds biannual conferences (http://independentlearning.org/ILA/index.html (accessed on 10 December 2011)).

Autonomy and self-directed learning entail individualization but, as Trim (1976: 1), one of the advisors for the Council of Europe, has shown, 'it is possible to pursue individualization within a highly authoritarian framework. The teacher looks at the individual's problems, but decides herself how different types of individual should be treated'. If we consider the implications of Trim's statement, then an individualized programme in this sense would be the very antithesis of self-direction and autonomy. There is consequently an issue between freedom and control, between autonomous, self-directed learning and externally (teacher) directed learning. It may therefore be useful to see the totally externally directed mode and the totally self-directed mode as two polarities in individualizing language teaching, with the majority of programmes occurring somewhere between the two extremes (see figure 12.1).

It is probably fair to state, therefore, that total autonomy is only pertinent if it results in an efficient and satisfying mode of learning for that particular individual. Individualization is also a partial response to the belief that direct teaching in the classroom does not always result in learning taking place. Teaching can take place without learning, whereas learning can often
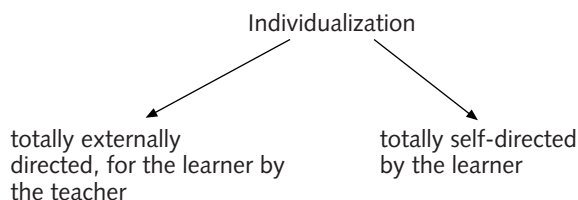

Figure 12.1   An overview of individualization.

occur without any formal teaching. As Riley (1982) points out, learning cannot be done to or for learners; it can only be done by them, and this is one of the basic principles in the definitions of individualization: that learners will assume some responsibility for their own learning at some stage in the process. Whichever approach a teacher chooses, the crucial question to ask is whether acquisition or development of autonomous life skills as well as language skills are taking place. Masuhara et al. (2008) note a trend for global coursebooks to offer multi-component extras on top of traditional paper coursebooks (e.g. audio or video CD, workbook CD, interactive grammar exercises, vocabulary games). Some publishers also offer Web resources for teachers to make use of. Such Internet resources may include photocopiable materials to be downloaded and be used for independent learning outside the class (e.g. extra vocabulary or grammar exercises, interactive quizzes, themes for writing). Some publishers offer teachers authoring software of tests. These ready-made materials may seem enticing to teachers who would like to introduce individualized learning using multimedia or the Internet but do not have time or resources. After reviewing eight recent global adult coursebooks, Masuhara et al. (2008: 310) warn against the danger that 'The ready-made photocopiable materials and tests could lead to unprincipled explicit teaching of discrete item grammar and disguised language drills of trivial content at the cost of overall development of skills and educational development'. Practitioners might like to evaluate these online materials against the philosophies of individualized learning we discussed earlier in this section and ask whether these extra grammar or vocabulary drills are any different from workbook exercises given as homework in the past.

Individualization does not necessarily mean that the students will be working on their own. In some cases, individualization can take place in small groups or pairs where students work on a similar task. At other times the learner may work with a teacher or in a solitary mode.

It is useful to see individualization not as a method per se, but as a possibility of reorganizing the resources and management of the classroom environment, which has many implications for the teacher. Individualization may involve some teachers in hitherto unknown roles such as 'guide', 'helper', 'facilitator'. How we get learners to work in an individualized mode may depend on how much structure we wish to give them. All language learners need to have some purpose to be successful in their learning, and to help in the achievement of this, a teacher may like to analyse the language needs of the learners and then draw up a learning plan with each of them. Points in each plan may include agreement between teacher and learner on learning objectives in relation to different language skills, the level of improvement aimed at, and how and when this may be achieved. After this, it is up to the teacher and learner to decide exactly how to proceed from here. They may decide to allow the learner more or less total autonomy in trying to attain the objectives set, as a teacher from Italy reported to us:

> Ideally I wouldn't interfere with what the students select at all, but during the explanation of the materials I would suggest to students that they choose material in areas where they feel they have problems or which are their weakest areas. But after that, I wouldn't interfere at all . . . they can select what they want and proceed with it themselves . . . they know where their weak areas are. Generally students select the material that's most appropriate to their problems.

12.3   Implementation Inside and Outside the Classroom

It is quite common to hear teachers complain about the many reasons why they feel that they cannot individualize their classrooms. These arguments sometimes relate to the fact that they are non-native speakers; that they are under-resourced in general; that the syllabus is strictly controlled; that class size is too large (perhaps even more reason for needing to individualize); that materials are 'fixed'; furniture is screwed to the floor, thereby restricting movement of learners; that they work in a school and not a university. In other words, all the variables and constraints that we mentioned in Chapter 1.

Miller et al. (2007) note that governments in many countries (e.g. Hong Kong, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore) have acknowledged the importance of learner autonomy in their national curricula of language learning. Miller et al. (2007) then explain how the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) of the Hong Kong Government asked a project team to explore ways of implementing autonomous learning in secondary schools. It is interesting to note that three volunteer schools developed different plans as the most suitable:

> one school integrated SALL [Self Access Language Learning] into their classroom lessons; the second decided to approach SALL via project work; the third school determined to establish a self-access centre (SAC). (Miller et al., 2007: 221)

The cases in Hong Kong secondary schools that Miller et al. (2007) report are confirmation of how individualized learning can be flexibly incorporated depending on the contexts and the decisions made by the participants (i.e. government, school, teachers and learners in the case of Miller et al., 2007).

In this next section we hope to show that the provision of a measure of individual choice need not entail a full-scale reorganization of the classroom and resources and that individualization may be started in a relatively modest way.

One way of attempting to provide a measure of individual choice in the classroom is to use self-access activities where learners choose the tasks and activities that they wish to pursue with or without the help of a teacher. For

example, learner X might have problems with reading skills and might opt to do extra work in this area, while learner Y might have a need to do some extra listening work. Of course self-access activity does not have to be remedial (implying that one is asking the learners to begin from a linguistic lack): some learners want to work in areas they enjoy and where they wish to enhance their performance. Some teachers programme self-access work into their weekly timetable – perhaps for two sessions a week to begin with – and build up from there. Self-access might be offered as integral to a particular course, or in a supplementary mode in a resource or SAC (see later in this chapter).

Something to note at this stage is that a self-access operation does not have to be a full-scale one to begin with. Where resources are limited we hope to show that the provision of a measure of individual choice need not entail a full-scale reorganization of the classroom and resources and that individualization may be started in a relatively modest way.

One way of attempting to provide a measure of individual choice in the classroom is to set up the classroom as a mini SAC with different parts of the room being used for different activities – perhaps reading in one corner, listening with CDs and headphones in another, and some computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in another. As materials and hardware can perhaps be stored easily and transported on a trolley, a small-scale beginning may enable teachers working within administrative constraints or working with sceptical colleagues to start a self-access operation with the hope of extending it later. As teachers we all have to prepare materials for lessons and provide feedback to our learners anyway – either in class or through marked homework assignments (homework is in any case often set and marked on the lockstep principle outlined above). One suggestion, therefore, might be for two colleagues to collaborate over a mini self-access project by building up a small 'bank' of self-access materials. Dixon et al. (2006) include cases in which teachers began in a small-scale way but succeeded in implementing Self-Access Language Learning (SALL) in classrooms.

> Consider your own teaching situation. What kind of self-access activities would be appropriate for your learners and, if they do not exist already, how could they be set up within your institution?

Reading is one of the areas that provides ample scope for developing self-access work. Teachers can either design their own self-access boxes, perhaps working with other colleagues, as we suggested above, by dividing materials into different levels according to topic and level, or can use and adapt commercially available materials, depending on the types of students in the group, their proficiency level, the purpose of the course and so on. Note here that

grading of reading materials can be done intuitively by the teachers and learners rather than following the predetermined grades purely based on vocabulary and structural specifications. Maley (2008) provides an interesting discussion on limitations of Graded Readers which are purely based on linguistic simplification and suitability of the level of reading materials. He rightly reminds us that readability is affected by many factors such as topic familiarity and motivation. In this sense, sensitive and sensible grading done by the teachers and learners who understand the context may turn out to be more theoretically sound than external mechanical grading based on some vocabulary frequency database or readability formulae.

Class self-access is possible even in resource-poor environments. Tomlinson (personal communication) refers to an Indonesian school teacher who asked her students to bring some reading materials in English to fill a class library box. Involving learners in creating their own self-access boxes can lead to raising their affinity with and pride in their own self-access corners so that they may be more likely to use the resources. Moreover, Maley (2008) proposes student- or teacher-generated texts as a possible solution to the problems of lack of appropriate reading materials. Maley (2008: 139) points out that 'One problem for learners, particularly those from non-European backgrounds, is their unfamiliarity with the cultural settings and background assumptions of much of what is available from metropolitan publishers'. He suggests teachers and students write fiction for their own students to read and reports two successful cases in Asia of student- or teacher-generated text projects (Denmark and Miles, 2004–2007; Maley and Mukundan, 2005; Maley, 2007a, 2007b; Maley, 2009). Maley explains why student- and teacher-generated readers make sense:

> The great strengths of this kind of material are that it not only reflects the students' own interests but it also solves at one stroke the issue of language level. Students can obviously only write at their level, which is more or less the level of those who will read the completed books. Bingo! (Maley, 2008: 139)

Maley discusses two modes for extensive reading: in class and out of class. After discussing the pros and cons of each mode, he points out some cases of in-class reading programmes in which institutional constraints distort Extensive Reading (ER) so much that the programme loses its values and effectiveness to facilitate language acquisition and development:

> Real readers read at different rates, with different degrees of attention or commitment, with differential comprehension and interpretation and with different personal preferences for what they read and how they read it. To require everyone to read the same text at the same pace and for the same purpose (usually in order to answer questions about it) is a seriously distorted version of ER. (Maley, 2008: 143)

If teacher intervention is required, Maley (2008) refers to some support that could help the learners to want to read individually. For example, a teacher could regularly read aloud an extract from a story taken from the self-access box. This simulates L1 bed-time story reading by caretakers. The objective is to entice learners to want to continue reading individually. Other suggestions include use of audio books or recording of the story or video or fostering a Reading Circle in which learners in small groups read and discuss the content. Fenton-Smith (2010) provides a comprehensive overview of the ER debate between proponents of 'free, pleasurable reading without any added activities' and of 'extensive reading with added activities (e.g. pre-reading and/or post-reading). He acknowledges that contextual constraints such as assessment requirements and accountability in many institutions means the former (i.e. ER without) is very difficult to realize in the majority of educational settings. After proposing various follow-up activities and evaluating their impact, Fenton-Smith concludes that

> The key point is that ER (as an activity, not a subject) can have a significant, positive effect on a student's second language proficiency, but a poorly designed ER course can negate or disrupt that effect in a multitude of ways (e.g. by decreasing motivation due to boredom, or hampering opportunities to read due to a heavy additional workload). We therefore need materials that satisfy contextual constraints while maintaining the integrity of enjoyable, extensive reading. (Fenton-Smith, 2010: 59–60).

Look at the self-access material in the extract overleaf, which appears in Tomlinson (2011c). Think about how some of his ideas or sequences could be used with your learners. Would any adaptations be necessary, and if so, what would they be?

Ideas for materials development

An example of access-self material
Samples of modern literature
Sample 1 – *My Son's Story*

Introduction

This is one of a series of units which is based on modern literature and which is designed for learners who are at an intermediate level or above. Each unit introduces you to extracts a book and aims to give you access to that book in such a way that will help you to develop your language skills and to acquire new language. It is also hoped that the extracts and activities will give you an interest in the book and that you will go on to read the book for yourself.

Try the unit and if you get interested in it, carry on and do most of the activities (you don't have to do them all). If you then want read the book for yourself, take it, out form the library. If you don't want to read the book, do another of these sample units and see if you want to read that book instead.

You can do this unit by yourself or you can work on it with other learners if you prefer.

Activities

1. You're going to read the beginning of a novel called *My Son's Story*, The novel begins:

'How did I find out?
I was deceiving him.'

Think of different possible meanings for this beginning of the novel and then write answers to the following questions:

(a) Who do you think 'I' might be?
(b) What do you think the discovery could be?
(c) Who do you think 'him' might be?
(d) What do you think the deception could be?

2. Read the first paragraph of the extract from *My Son's Story* on page 1 of the Text Sheet [see Figure 17.1] and then answer questions 1 (a–d) again.

3. Check your answers to 2 above against those on page 1 of the Commentary [see page 422].

4. Read all of extract 1 form the novel on pages 2–3 [see Figure 17.1] of the text sheet and try to picture in your mind the people and the setting as you read.

If you found the extract interesting, go on to question 5. if you didn't find it interesting, choose a different sample from the box.

420

5. Draw a picture of the narrator's meeting with his father. Don't worry about the artistic merit of your drawing (you should see my attempt); just try to include the important features of the scene.

6. Compare your drawing of the meeting with the drawings on page 1 of the Commentary [see page 425]. what do all three drawings have in common? What are the differences between the drawings?

7. If you're working individually, pretend you're watching a film of *My Son's Story* and act out in your head the meeting between the narrator, his father and Hannah. Try to give them different voices. if you're working in a group, act out the scene together.

8. Compare your scene with the suggested film script for the scene on page 2 of the Commentary [see page 425–6].

9. Imagine that the narrator is talking to his best friend the next day and that he's telling him about the meeting with his father. write the dialogue between the two friends.

10. Compare your dialogue with the suggested dialogues on page 3 of the Commentary [see pages 426–7].

11. Write answers to the following questions:

(a) Why do you think the narrator is so disturbed by the encounter with his father?
(b) How old do you think the narrator was at the time of his encounter with his father and Hannah? Why?
(c) Who does 'us' refer to in 'Cinemas had been open to us only a year or so'?
(d) Explain in your own words the meaning of 'the moment we saw one another it was I who had discovered him, not he me'
(e) Why do you think his father opened the conversation by saying, 'You remember Hannah, don't you –?' Why did he not ask him why he was not studying?
(f) When had the narrator met Hannah before? Why did he not recognise her when he first saw her outside the cinema?
(g) What does the narrator mean by, 'And the voice was an echo from another life'?
(h) What does the narrator's description of Hannah tell you about his attitude towards her?
(i) Why do you think the narrator mentions that his father was wearing 'his one good jacket'?
(j) What does the narrator mean when he says he was 'safe among familiar schoolbooks'?

12. Compare your answers to 11 with the suggested answers on pages 3–4 of the Commentary [see pages 427–8].

421

Ideas for materials development

13. Find examples in the text of the use of the past perfect tense. For each example say why you think the writer used the past past perfect instead of the simple past.

14. Compare your answers to 13 with the suggested answers on pages 4–5 of the Commentary [see pages 428–9].

15. Later in the novel, the father asks his son to go on his new motor-bike to Hannah's house to deliver an important parcel to her.

(a) Write the dialogue in the scene in which the father asks the son to deliver the parcel.
(b) Imagine that you are the narrator. write the scene from the novel in which you deliver the parcel to Hannah's house.

16. Compare your answers to 15 to the answers on pages 5–6 of the Commentary [see pages 429–30]. These are answers which were written by other learners.

17. Read Extract 2 from the novel on page 2 of the Text Sheet in which the narrator goes to Hannah's house on his motorbike [see Figure 17.1]. If you'd like any further feedback on any of the written work that you've done in this unit, put your name on it and put it in the Feedback Box.

18. If you're still interested in the story, take the novel, *My Son's Story*, from the library shelf. Write down what you think the significance is of the illustration on the front cover.

Read the novel in your own time and then, if you wish, talk about in with one of the other students who's already read the book (their names are on the back cover). Add your name to those on the back cover.

Source: B. Tomlinson, From 'Openings', Penguin 1994. Copyright © Brian Tomlinson. Reprinted with permission.

Earlier in the chapter we mentioned that self-access work can be done on a larger scale outside the classroom. Ciel Language Support Network (2000) lists six key areas required for successfully implementing SALL:

1 Policymaking
2 Management
3 Staff development
4 Learner development
5 Learning resources
6 Curriculum design and assessment.

In the cases cited in Miller et al. (2007), the government, advisory panel and secondary schools all collaborated. Their report describes how a SAC was established by making sure that stakeholders such as management, teachers and students are all involved from the beginning and that both teacher and learner development take place systematically as the centre is being planned and developed. The project included staff development by the advisory group and teachers, learner development by the teachers and by the students themselves, and materials development by the teachers in order to ensure resources are suitable for their local context. They conclude that SALL implementation requires careful planning based on each context and that inclusion of stakeholders from the beginning helped 'a culture of SALL being promoted very quickly within the school, and a sense of ownership of the SAC among the students' (Miller et al., 2007: 227).

Regarding resources, Cooker (2008), after comparing SACs in Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, notes the following software and hardware to be typically housed in resource room/s or in purpose-built centre building:

• Authentic materials such as magazines, television programmes, films and music
• Graded readers (some with audio components)
• Language learning software/Web-based resources (CALL materials)
• Drama-based language learning materials
• Coursebooks
• Texts for specific skills (e.g. listening, reading, speaking, writing, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation)
• Examination preparation texts.

She establishes criteria for evaluating self-access materials, reports her evaluation results for each kind and makes overall suggestions. The criteria she uses are as follows:

1 Exposure to English in authentic use
2 Meaningful English

 3   Interest
 4   Achievable challenge
 5   Affective engagement
 6   Cognitive engagement
 7   Opportunities for discovery about how English is used
 8   Opportunities for meaningful use of English
 9   Feedback on the effectiveness of use of English
10   Positive impact
11   Navigability
12   Learner training
13   Attractiveness

In addition to Cooker, there might be other possibilities for SAC resources:

• listening (self-monitoring) section or laboratory
• computer facilities with programmes on vocabulary, testing, reading and communication games
• video/DVD/blu-ray facilities
• wall charts analysing at a quick glance all materials available
• classified folders, drawers or boxes containing all the materials available in the centre as well as online catalogues
• answer sheets or self-correcting keys where appropriate.

Some centres may have consultation room/s for individual counselling with specially trained advisors.

> 1   If you do not have the possibility of either setting up or using a SAC in your institution, think of ways open to you for reorganizing your resources in small ways to individualize your classroom more effectively.
> 2   If you do have a self-access facility, think about some of your learners and their individual characteristics, and devise a plan of activities for each learner who will visit the centre for up to six hours per week on three separate occasions.

Once students have found their way around the centre, they can begin to devise an individualized plan that may, for example, include listening to general, social English, listening to lectures, some intensive reading (both general and perhaps subject specific), CALL practice and video listening with note-taking practice.

Many variables are involved in the setting up of a centre of these proportions, not least of which will be a range of staffing and budgetary issues. Materials will have to be prepared and written; the centre will have to be maintained and regularly added to, perhaps by learners themselves in some cases; the centre will have to be supervised and students will have to be advised/counselled.

We have attempted here to show the different proportions that self-access activities might take. As suggested earlier, it is possible for an institution, or even an individual teacher, to start off in a small way to begin with and to develop the facility when circumstances permit.

Advantages and shortcomings

Operating a self-access system will offer learners a wide choice of material and the possibility of becoming much more self-reliant and less teacher dependent. Learners should begin to understand more about their needs and how they prefer to learn. On the other hand, it has to be stressed that setting up a self-access system will involve a lot of time and work, usually on the part of the teaching staff, and that institutional constraints might mean that a full-scale centre will never become operational. However, if it is at all possible, the result is worthwhile.

From the materials point of view, there is a danger in providing too much that is related to classroom work: the materials become 'further practice' or 'follow-up activities' rather than allowing the students to explore and learn new things by themselves.

12.4   Focus on the Learner through Diary Studies

In recent years, some EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers have been exploring the advantages offered by learner diaries as yet another way of focusing on the learner as an individual with needs. There is now a growing awareness of how these diaries can establish an effective channel of communication between teacher and learners.

The process works as follows: the teacher enters into an individual 'contract' with each learner in the class whereby the learners keep a daily record of events that happen to them. The teacher will discuss contents of the diary in private with learners, who are free to develop the diary in whatever ways they wish. It may include observations of what they did on a particular day; observations and feelings about classes, teachers, peers, landladies; thoughts on how they feel they are learning with respect to a task, a class or the whole course. It is important for learners to understand the rationale behind the

diary writing, and the following example of guidelines developed for learners can be useful in establishing this:

Learner Diary

The diary is a very important part of your studies here and will be of most help if you write it regularly. Your diary will enable you to express your opinions on all the classes that you take, and will help you to understand exactly what you need in your studies, as well as keeping a record of all the work you do. It will also give you valuable extended writing practice.

For the next few weeks we would like you to write each day about the lessons you have taken. There is no limit to the amount you can write, but we suggest that you spend at least 20 minutes a day on the diary. Your tutor will ask you to hand in the diary weekly; it will then be corrected, returned and discussed in tutorials.

It would be useful if your diary could include some of the following information:

• date/lessons followed
• how you think you performed
• what difficulties you had
• how you think that you might overcome these difficulties
• what you found most enjoyable/least enjoyable
• what you found most useful/least useful
• what you feel about a specific lesson/the course/group/teacher/yourself
• what you did in your spare time to practise your English
• any other thoughts, feelings and experiences relevant to your personal progress on the course.

Please look upon the diary as an exercise in writing fluently: your diaries will not be graded or strictly corrected, but frequent and important language errors will be pointed out to you. All diary entries will be treated confidentially.

Diary entries allow learners to report on a range of different observations according to the needs and wishes of each learner. Some learners may offer a simple account of what they have done during a particular day from a general point of view. Other learners, however, prefer to focus on particular classes that they have attended or a specific learning issue, such as how they feel they are progressing with vocabulary or with listening.

Diary writing can be very useful for learners. What sort of information for future work do you think the teacher might be able to get from reading the diaries?

As well as giving each student authentic written practice, these diaries can help the teacher with counselling the learner on specific learning problems that may not have surfaced in the classroom. They can sometimes offer a teacher a fresh insight into the study techniques of a particular learner, which, again, are not always apparent in the classroom, especially when the teacher may be dealing with large numbers. Nunan (1999: 167) provides samples of learner diary entries based on the learners' views of a writing class they had just taken. As a result of reading the diaries, it may also be possible for teachers to adjust materials and methods and to rearrange group dynamics in subsequent classes. For teachers wanting to investigate particular issues within their own classroom, they offer numerous possibilities of looking at the ways that individuals approach tasks and how they conceptualize and categorize teaching and learning events. By adding other data as well, it may be possible for the teacher to do a longitudinal study of a particular learner or small group of learners over a period of time – perhaps four to six months – in order to see what sort of learning/study profiles emerge for these learners.

12.5 Learner Training

We have examined individualization and some of its possible ramifications, such as using self-access activities both within and outside the classroom. We now start to look at other concrete possibilities for helping learners to learn more effectively by making them aware of their different language learning needs. As teachers, many of us have been involved in some aspects of learner training to a greater or lesser extent, by giving suggestions for organizing vocabulary books to using dictionaries more effectively, to how to exploit the environment outside the classroom for learning the target language wherever possible. As learner training can only really work effectively if we have some account of what a 'good' language learner actually does, let us briefly examine what has been studied and what we know. Griffiths (2008a) offers an edited collection of chapters on up-to-date research and pedagogical application, covering a comprehensive range of studies on the 'good' language learner. Attempts to develop systematic learner training can be traced back to research carried out in Canada in the 1970s by Naiman, Fröhlich and Stern into the strategies of 34 adults known to be 'good' language learners. They were interested in finding out the common characteristics of successful learners so that the findings can be applied to the teaching of less successful learners.

> Before reading further, what do you feel would be the characteristics of a 'good' language learner?

From Naiman et al. (1975), the following generalized strategies emerge as being of most importance. Good language learners

- are aware of their own attitudes and feelings towards language learning and to themselves as language learners
- realize that language works as an organized system and is a means of communication and interaction
- assess and monitor their progress regularly
- realize that language learning involves hard work and time and set themselves realistic short-term goals
- involve themselves in the L2 and learn to take 'risks' in it
- are willing to experiment with different learning strategies and practice activities that suit them best
- organize time and materials in a personally suitable way and fully exploit all resources available.

Oxford and Lee (2008: 306) provide an update in that subsequent studies since the 1970s have found that

> The assumption of identifiability of a single set of characteristics possessed by the good language learner, and possible transferability of these characteristics to less fortunate learners gradually gave way to the realization that no single ideal set of characteristics existed. Instead, researchers . . . show that many different kinds of successful learners ply their varied talents in a wide range of settings.

Griffiths (2008a) classifies 'good language learner' studies into two sections: one on learner variables such as motivation, age, gender, learning styles, strategies, metacognition, autonomy, culture and aptitude; the other on learning variables such as linguistic content (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, functions), skills, methodology and error correction. Oxford and Lee (2008: 312–31) summarize the implications of all these studies on teaching:

1   Teachers must understand the crucial roots of language learning such as age, gender, personality and aptitude. It is especially important for teachers to remember that a slightly lower aptitude can be balanced by strong motivation and positive use of strategies. Teachers should never assume that a given learner lacks the aptitude to learn a language.
2   Teachers need to recognize that just as there is no single good language learner model, there is no single perfect instructional method or error correction technique that works for all students in all settings. Learners are different, every single one, even though some general categories can be identified. In response to learner diversity, principled eclecticism is required.

3   Because motivation is the fire that creates action, it is crucial for teachers to tend the fire. If learners are intrinsically motivated by challenge, personal satisfaction and interest, they will be active and involved. If they believe that language learning is unimportant, that they have no talent for learning languages, or that their cultural values and personal identity are about to be subverted, they will not have the motivation to learn the language.

4   Teachers must realize that they can provide strategy instruction that empowers and strengthens their students. Strategy instruction can occur in the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, as well as in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Through strategy instruction, teachers can help learners discover how to identify strategies that meet task demands and that relate to learners' styles. In doing so, teachers can become catalysts in the growth of culturally appropriate patterns of learner autonomy. However, strategy instruction must take into account learners' cultural expectations and beliefs; otherwise it will fail. If a shift of beliefs is essential in order for a student to learn new strategies, the teacher must first think carefully whether such a change in beliefs and strategies is necessary, worthwhile, culturally respectful, and linguistically appropriate. Only then should strategy instruction take place, and communication during and around it should be as open as possible. Understanding the cultural context is crucial for strategy instruction, just as it is for any other aspect of language learning and teaching.

It is interesting to note that Oxford and Lee emphasize the role of motivation as the vital driving force to successful learning and pay special attention to studies on volitional strategies. Such humanistic variables have often been neglected in past research due to the difficulties of quantifying such concepts, but they advocate more investigation in the future. We welcome such trends when we think of the fundamental fact that we may be able to help the learners to become aware and able to use strategies, but if they are not motivated to use them, the instructions may fall short of achieving success.

The research base for identifying issues dealing with language learning strategy training developed apace in the 1990s. Griffiths (2008b) provides a historical overview of attempts to classify and define strategies. Anderson (2008) focuses on metacognition and good language learners. According to Vandegrift (2002: 559), 'metacognitive strategies are crucial because they oversee, regulate, or direct the language learning task, and involve thinking about the learning process'.

Materials that purport to help learners for independent learning and autonomy have been developed for classroom use. Lowes and Target (1998) have some practical suggestions for achieving learner autonomy through a series of tasks designed to offer students choices about their learning, particularly in instances where students may come from educational backgrounds with

very different cultural assumptions. The material is also designed to help teachers to reflect on the ways in which their teaching might help learners to make choices. The book also contains information on finding and using resources. Brown (2001) provides a very practical guide for teachers and learners in understanding the process of applying learning strategies. G. White (2008) provides a useful list of teachable strategies for listening and discusses an approach to training in strategy development and use. Oxford (2011) provides a comprehensive list of strategies in relation to the Strategic Self-Regulation Models. Her list includes cognitive, affective and socio-cultural strategies. She also discusses practice and theories that support them and provides useful references. Goh (2010) describes in detail a theoretical framework for listening material that is designed to nurture learners' self-regulation and self-appraisal during the listening process. Her framework consists of two major components: integrated experiential listening tasks and guided reflections on listening. In the former, 'learners are encouraged to arrive at an understanding of what they hear but are at the same time sup-ported by activities that enable them to discover and use listening strategies as well as understand the nature of second language listening' (Goh, 2010: 188). The latter, that is, guided reflections 'encourage learners to attend to implicit processes in listening and help them make their knowledge of listen-ing explicit' (Goh, 2010: 195) through, for example, the use of listening diaries or process-based discussions. The box overleaf shows a programme planning sheet for 'listening buddies', one of the integrated experiential listen-ing activities. It shows how a pair of students are guided to collaborate in conducting a self-designed listening programme with a specific goal, plan and appraisal afterwards.

Listening as process: Learning activities for self-appraisal   193

Our personal listening program

Listening buddies: _____ and _____
Week _____
(Write your responses on separate sheets of paper)

Session 1
Listening material: _____
Type of text:
Source:
Equipment:
Date:
Time:
Other considerations, if any:

Our listening goal

    1. Why are we listening to / viewing this recording?
    2. What do we hope to achieve?
    3. How many times should we listen to / watch this recording? Why?

Our listening plan

    1. What do we know about this topic?
    2. What type of information can we expect to hear (and see)?
    3. What words can we expect to hear? (*Use a dictionary, if necessary*.)
    4. What difficulties can we expect?
    5. What strategies should we use when we encounter these difficulties?

Our listening report

    1. Why did we choose this recording / listening text?
    2. What was the most interesting thing about it?
    3. Are we satisfied with what we have understood? Why?
    4. Were we able to make use of our prior knowledge about the topic?
    5. What difficulties did we face? Were our strategies useful?
    6. What did we discuss after our listening?
    7. What did we agree or disagree about?
    8. What have we learned from each other about listening?

Figure 8.3: Outline for a personalized listening program for listening buddies

Source: C. Goh, Figure 8.3 on p. 193 from 'Listening as process: learning activities for self-appraisal and self-regulation'. In N. Harwood (ed), *English Language Teaching Materials: Theory and Practice* (2010). Copyright © Cambridge University Press 2010. Reprinted with permission.

Let us finish this section by looking at the following quotation from an EFL teacher being interviewed by Nunan (1991: 185), whose remark neatly encapsulates the feeling that a growing number of practitioners have with respect to the importance of learner training on their courses:

> As a teacher I see my role as being twofold. One is, yes, I am teaching the language, but I feel my other very important role is to assist the learners to take a growing responsibility for the management of their own learning. Within our programme, learners are with us for only a relatively – a short time, and we have to prepare them so that their learning can continue outside, erm, the length of their course.

On the whole, evidence tends to suggest that teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the various opportunities that individualizing the language classroom can offer to both learners and teachers alike.

> Consider the concept of learner training in your own teaching situation and the extent to which it would be feasible to incorporate it into your regular classes.

12.6   Conclusion

We began this chapter by looking at the concept of individualization by examining some definitions of the term, and have suggested various ways of implementing it both inside and outside the language classroom by incorporating combinations of self-access work, diary writing and learner training. We have tried to show that the most appropriate way of implementing individualization will depend, to some extent, on the context of the teaching operation that we work in. We have also attempted to illustrate that individualization is one way of reorganizing the management and resources of the classroom to try to maximize learning potential for as many people in the class as possible.

12.7   Further Reading

1   Cooker, L. (2008): *Self-access Materials*. This provides useful evaluation results of various kinds of materials for self-access learning.
2   Griffiths, C. (2008): *Lessons from Good Language Learners*. This is a comprehensive account of theories of Good Learner studies since its inception.

3 Kervin, L. and B. Derewianka. (2011): *New Technology to Support Language Learning.*
4 Maley, A. (2008): *Extensive reading: maid in waiting,* is a very informative and stimulating chapter on theories and practice of extensive reading. Useful links and references.
5 Motteram, G. (2011): *Developing Language Learning Materials with Technology* offers plenty of ideas for teachers wanting to explore individualization by the use of technology.

13

Observing the Language Classroom

13.1 Introduction

In this chapter we shall be looking at language classrooms in order to analyse in some detail what occurs in them. We shall begin by considering why the classroom might be a useful place to observe. Then we shall move on to examine, as teachers in the classroom, some of the different issues we might want to look at to become better informed about our own practice, and thus to improve our own teaching. After this we shall look at some of the different methods that have been used by teachers/researchers to gather data from classrooms. Our final aim in the chapter is to make some suggestions for observation tasks that could be of use to teachers working in a wide variety of classrooms, and to apply these tasks to transcripts of actual classroom interaction. We hope this analysis will help teachers to become further informed about their own practice.

13.2 Why Focus on the Classroom?

We noted in the previous chapter that what we teach does not necessarily result in learning taking place, nor does the best prepared lesson plan result in that plan being followed absolutely in the classroom. However carefully and skillfully prepared, the plan may impose a framework upon the class which could restrict rather than aid some learners. Because of this, what is

often noticeable about classrooms is that they are not necessarily neat, organized places, while interaction patterns that occur in them can be highly erratic and variable as genuine interaction cannot be completely planned for and requires co-operative effort. The co-operation required in the classroom setting involves everyone (teacher and learners) in managing many things at the same time, including who gets the chance to speak, what they speak about, what each participant does with the different opportunities to speak, and what sort of classroom atmosphere is created by learners and the teacher. For us as teachers, it is important to observe the interaction within the classroom because it can determine the learning opportunities that students get. We might also suggest that learners do not learn directly from a syllabus, but what they learn, or not, is the result of the manner in which this syllabus is 'translated' into the classroom environment, in the form of materials but also of their use by the teacher and learners in the class.

Lawson (2011) differentiates between two kinds of observation: 'observation as inspection' and 'observation as CPD (i.e. Continuing Professional Development)'. Observations as part of supportive continuing professional development seem to lead to positive results. For example, Joyce and Showers (2002) report that peer coaching reduces the stress that many of those being observed experience when being watched and is more likely to lead to professional development compared with observation 'as inspection'. Smith et al. (2004) point to the crucial importance of providing teachers with opportunities to participate in professional dialogues during planning, conducting observation and feedback discussion. Observation of this kind can provide opportunities for self-reflection and improvement of practice (Reeves and Forde, 2004).

13.3 What to Observe

> Think about your own classroom situation. If you had the chance to observe your own or a colleague's class, what sorts of things would you want to look at?

Tsui (2001) notes how current trends in classroom research tend to be of a more ethnographic, naturalistic nature rather than being strictly experimental. Within English language teaching (ELT) over the last decade several practitioners have attempted to focus on the language classroom within this perspective. Allwright and Hanks (2009) advocate the value of teachers finding answers through exploratory teaching in which they try out

something that has been attracting their attention. Burns (2005) explains the concept of 'action research', which involves teachers asking questions and researching their own classrooms from an angle often empathetic to learners' experiences in the classroom. She reports action research projects in ELT from various parts of the world in which teachers were helped to raise awareness, improve skills and build up confidence. She discusses the strengths of practitioner research and the contribution it could make in supplementing published academic research. For further discussion of the teacher as researcher, see Chapter 14.

As we mentioned in the previous section, the classroom is the basic focus of the teaching and learning process, and there are literally hundreds of different permutations of classroom processes that we may wish to focus on: some of them perhaps very 'macro' or wide-ranging, such as how a particular teacher/group of learners use a textbook during a class; and some very 'micro', such as how a teacher elicits responses with a given class or how a particular learner or small group of individuals initiate turns in an oral skills class. We may wish to classify the information we get from observing the classroom into different areas such as information that focuses primarily on the teacher, the interaction patterns of learners in general, interaction of learners in pairs and/or groups, and the interaction of certain individuals with the teacher. If we wish to focus on the teacher, the following criteria could be offered as factors for observation. We may wish to investigate each one in turn, or we may decide to focus on some or all of them during a particular lesson:

- the amount of teacher talking time (TTT) contrasted with student talking time (STT) during the course of a particular class
- the type of teacher talk that takes place in a given class and where it occurs in the lesson
- the teacher's questioning/elicitation techniques
- how the teacher gives feedback to learners
- how the teacher handles 'digressions' in the classroom
- the different roles a teacher takes on during the class ('manager', 'facilitator' etc.)
- the teacher's use of encouragement and praise with learners
- the technical aids and materials a teacher uses to create learning contexts, and how the teacher involves the learners in these activities
- how 'tightly' a particular teacher corrects the learners' work.

There are many more possibilities, of course.

Think about other criteria that interest you as a teacher and add them to ours.

Nunan (1990) reports on a teachers' workshop where one of the groups participating in the workshop offered the following criteria as aspects of the class that they would like to look at. These were

> wait time; repair techniques; 'fun'; questioning; materials; student–teacher interaction; scope of student response; amount of direction offered; class organization; lesson objectives; student and teacher talk time; control and initiative; who asks questions; context for language practice; how language is practised; methods used; digressions; variety of activities; interaction between students; lesson cohesion; teacher language; eliciting techniques; evaluation possibilities.

It is possible, of course, to extend these criteria, or combinations of them, to different classes in order to gain comparative data. For example, we may wish to compare the metalanguage (the language the teacher uses in the classroom to explain things) of the same teacher across a range of different classes – perhaps of different proficiency levels – in order to ascertain what similarities and differences exist across the various groups; or we may wish to observe how different teachers who teach the same class use the textbook or set of materials with that class. Some teachers feel that it would be useful to observe classes with a fundamentally different focus, such as a 'traditional', grammar-based class, in contrast to a more 'communicative' one, to see which could be deemed more successful from the learners' point of view. In a similar vein, we may wish to observe various things that occur in a given classroom with the learners themselves.

As Dörnyei and Murphy (2003) advocate, it may be useful to observe the group dynamics of a particular class during a language lesson in order to observe the interaction patterns that occur as a result of the exercises/tasks that the teacher sets up and manages. We might observe how well the learners seem to work together as a whole group, in small groups, in pairs or, indeed, if some learners prefer to work individually. Allwright and Hanks (2009) comment on the idiosyncratic nature of the language classroom and the fact that from the same lesson different learners will take away very different things. Analysing and perhaps contrasting two or more different learners in a class can help us as teachers to understand how these learners are using the classroom context to maximize their own learning potential, if at all.

To further illustrate the essentially puzzling nature of language learning in different classrooms, Allwright (1992) offers the following comments from teachers and learners, in different contexts, on what they found was particularly bewildering about language learning in their classrooms:

Teachers:

> Why do students feel that they have to know all the vocabulary in order to understand a text?
> Why do students use so little English in group work?

Do students work better in small groups or pairs?
What do students really want to learn from our lessons?

Learners:

Nobody ever explains the purpose of the exercise.
I don't understand why I don't understand English.
We try to understand the words not the lessons.
Teachers expect us to remember what we did in the last lesson but we don't operate like this.
Why does a teacher only ask me a question when I don't know the answer?

Being armed with an awareness of these factors can make classroom observation highly fruitful in that we may be able to make corrective adjustments to classroom teaching and management as a result of analysing the data we collect.

13.4   Different Approaches to Classroom Observation

We have already examined some recent trends in classroom observation at the beginning of this chapter and, having decided on the criteria we would like to observe in the classroom, we then have to decide which method we would like to use to gain access to the classroom for observation purposes. Allwright and Bailey (1991) list three main approaches classroom observers have typically used in classroom observation. The first of these is an experimental observation in which the teacher/researcher exercises a high degree of control over the classroom and purposefully becomes involved in the setting to try to discover the effects of the intervention. A control group would typically be set up. This 'scientific' approach to observation usually implies a one-way, (usually) top-down approach to classroom observation, since the teacher and class will be observed from the 'outside' by a linguistic 'expert' who will probably distinguish theoretical issues from actual classroom practice. The second main approach is called 'naturalistic enquiry' and may involve observers as participants either in their own or in someone else's class to 'see what happens'. The essential feature of this approach is to act as a fly on the wall and, where possible, not to influence normally occurring patterns of instruction and interaction.

Another way of implementing the approach is to video a class or to have one's own class videoed. However, sitting in on a class and/or videoing the experience are never neutral, because an unaccustomed presence in the class is bound to cause some disruption and alter the normal patterns of interaction. One advantage of this approach is that data from different classrooms can easily be seen and compared.

   The third approach, already outlined earlier in this chapter, and an increasingly popular one, may be of more interest to practitioners as a whole as it is performed by teachers themselves from within the classroom.

   Wajnryb (1992) comments how classroom observation has often been perceived in judgemental terms of assessment, evaluation or experimentation. Assessment and evaluation through observing the classroom are still an integral part of many teacher training programmes across the world and are deemed useful, especially where it is thought that the trainee might benefit from the evaluation and feedback of a more experienced teacher or trainer. As was discussed in Section 13.2, 'Why focus on the classroom?' Lawson's (2011) overview of teacher observation studies provides evidence of the benefits of observation as part of teacher support and development. In fact, there is a growth of emphasis on extending knowledge and understanding of what happens from inside the classroom (perhaps with some small-scale intervention). This is done by teachers themselves, perhaps collaborating with a colleague, either as part of a teacher development or classroom research project. (Classroom research by teachers is explored in the following chapter.) In this third approach, observation may include some naturalistic observation (perhaps of a colleague's class), but will typically involve teachers in the setting up of some small-scale intervention that will then be monitored by the teachers themselves over a period of time. Topics for this type of classroom research may be the development of oral competence of a learner/learners, why the content of certain materials appears not to stimulate students, or whether 'active' tasks actually improve language learning.

   Although the data for the observation may be gathered over a period of time, the teachers' observations are 'recycled' or fed back into the classroom process. Hence, within this framework, classroom observation does not occur from the outside, but instead the impetus comes from within the classroom in a 'bottom-up' fashion that allows the teachers themselves to decide which areas they wish to investigate. The observation involved in classroom research can be quite small-scale; it does not have to run to the dimensions of a large project. Stillwell et al. (2010) report on a collaborative materials development project in Japan which was combined with self-initiated peer observation and discussion, as part of an action research project. Four colleagues individually developed learner-centred materials. Each of them then invited the others to observe the materials being taught. They then discussed in meetings how the materials and the teaching could be improved. They also kept personal diaries during the process. The testimonials from the participating teachers and from the students seem to indicate that this endeavour resulted in enhanced materials and professional development.

   Being observed at some stage during one's career as a teacher is usually mandatory. In the United Kingdom, for example, there is a (non-compulsory) national accreditation scheme for both public and private sector ELT, run by the British Council. Institutions are inspected according to several sets of

criteria, one of which covers the expertise in the classroom of the teaching staff. Teachers working on the course are therefore observed during their lessons, inspectors paying attention to such factors as classroom rapport, teachers' knowledge of linguistic systems, involvement of learners in the lesson, monitoring of participation, error correction and so on. Many inspectors or assessors take notes on what they observe in the classroom and a possible 'observation of teaching' schedule is printed below.

> Before reading this observation of teaching schedule, what areas would you want to look at if you were observing a teacher in a class? After reading, see how many similarities and differences you noted.

Observation of teaching (20–30 minutes max.)

Group:

Class/Session:

A.   Preparation of lesson

- specification of clear aims
- choice of appropriate material
- choice of appropriate teaching aids

B.   Organization of lesson

- introduction
- progression of activities
- management of resources

C.   Responsiveness to students' needs

- appropriate teaching techniques
- checking of students' understanding
- provision of helpful feedback
- involvement of students at all stages

D.   Links between lesson and overall aims/syllabus
E.   Evidence of professional expertise of teacher
F.   Overall description of lesson and critical evaluation

> If you have been involved in any type of classroom observation, think about the approach you used. What were the advantages/disadvantages of this approach?

Professional development and peer observation have been attracting attention as they benefit both employers and employees in educational institutions. Some UK universities, for example, offer guidelines for observation on their web sites. The Professional Development page on the University of Nottingham web site, for example, offers advice on ways of conducting peer observation, advice for the observers and those who are being observed, as well as a putative training programme. It also provides an observation form that is much simpler and more flexible to use than many such forms. See http://pd.nottingham.ac.uk/eng/Learning-Teaching/Peer-Observation (accessed 24 January 2012).

Using video/digital recordings

If we are interested in understanding classrooms through observation in a co-operative way outside the realm of experiment/assessment (e.g. within a teacher development programme), there are a number of advantages in using pre-recorded video ('video' also represents various digital devices, e.g. digital video recorder) as a way of stimulating interest in the classroom for observation purposes. Sometimes, various administrative constraints may make it impossible to work with colleagues or in a team, and in such cases, videotaped classes can give teachers access to situations that they would not otherwise be able to observe. Videotaped lessons may also provide a springboard for the teacher-initiated research outlined above, in that the issues raised on the tape may have relevance to the observer's own classroom and could help in the formulation of an action plan for that teacher.

There are a few collections of videotaped lessons available in commercial packages for teacher education purposes as well as somewhat ad hoc collections on Youtube. 'Looking at Language Classrooms' by Lubelska and Matthews (1997) might be useful to teachers as it links topics from Wajnryb's Classroom Observation Tasks (1992) to corresponding video material.

The topics include attending to the learner, the learner as doer, the teacher's metalanguage, the language of feedback to error, lesson planning, grammar as lesson content, eliciting and giving instructions (refer to Lubelska and Matthews, 1997: 110 for more details).

Using video for classroom observation also has the advantage of being easy to set up – you do not have to disturb a class or organize one especially for the purpose, and you, the observer, have total control in that you may view, pause, replay and so on. Videotaped lessons are also useful to the extent that it is possible to focus on a single issue for one viewing, such as teacher talk, and then replay the tape to focus on a different issue, perhaps to observe how a pair of learners work together on an information-gap activity. It can be very motivating to see how other teachers work in the classroom without the threat of being evaluated oneself. When videos are viewed as a group

activity with other teachers, any difference in perception and/or opinion that occurs can be usefully discussed. There is sometimes a danger, however, that we might see these lessons as offering a perfect model or, conversely, that we might be overcritical of what we consider to be the shortcomings of a particular teacher, rather than trying to get as balanced a perspective as possible.

As with all media, there are drawbacks to using video. We can rarely see the whole class performing as the camera can offer us only a partial view of the classroom. As lessons are usually edited, this also results in the observer getting an incomplete picture of the whole lesson. Nevertheless, given its versatility as a resource, videotaped material offers many possibilities for classroom observation.

13.5   Devising Classroom Observation Tasks

Earlier in the chapter we suggested that we might wish to observe the 'macro' details of the classroom or to analyse a particular aspect in more depth – such as observing the teacher in as comprehensive a way as possible or looking at a subtopic, such as the amount of teacher talk in a given class. In this section, we shall offer some suggestions for analysing different aspects of one area – that of teacher talk in the classroom – and then consider some criteria that we might wish to include in a general observation task sheet that could be used as an aid to provide an initial 'overview' of a classroom. Later we shall apply some of these details to the analysis of transcripts of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes to see how they might operate on 'real' data in practice. Teacher talk in classrooms has been an area of interest to researchers for a long time. What often surprises teachers themselves, as Nunan (1991) points out, is the sheer amount of talking that they themselves do in the classroom, sometimes up to 80% of the total class.

Depending on the aims of a particular lesson, the amount of teacher talk may vary; for example, a teacher may wish to focus on the explanation of a certain function or structure in one class that will entail a high degree of teacher talk, to be followed on by a range of student-centred tasks in the next class, which will include a higher amount of student talk. In the late 1970s, in the heyday of the communicative approach in Britain, it was generally thought that teachers should strive for a high degree of STT and a low amount of TTT in the classroom. However, some practitioners feel TTT is useful, not merely for organizing the classroom, but also because it can offer pertinent language acquisition and development opportunities, since the caretaker's speech used by the teacher can be considered as 'genuinely communicative' and 'comprehensible' and may be of considerable benefit to the learners.

Consider your own teaching situation. Think carefully about how much time you spend talking in the classroom as a proportion of the total lesson. Does this surprise you?

We may wish to observe how the teacher talk relates to the specific function of the teacher in the class at that point in time. Park (2010) describes a study in which she investigated teacher talk, especially in terms of the ratio of display and referential questions. 'Display question' means the asker already knows the answer as in a teacher asking a student, 'What's the opposite of "up" in English?' (Park, 2010: 160). A 'Referential question' is characterized as 'genuine information seeking' – a teacher may ask a student, 'Why were you absent yesterday?' because she does not know the reason and is interested in what the student has to say. Referential questions are considered closer to real-life communication (Ellis, 2008). Park's data provide evidence that the teacher used more display questions when she introduced new vocabulary and more referential questions when she was improvising as part of a drama activity. A similar tendency is reported in Ghosn (2010) when she describes a five-year research project which looked at the differences between literature-based and skill-based ESL courses. Her classroom observation transcripts show a lot more occasions of spontaneous and voluntarily meaning-focused interactions in the literature-based classes than the skill-based classes using a coursebook.

Nunan (1991) outlines three factors that ought to be considered when assessing the appropriateness and quantity of teacher talk. These are the point at which the talking occurs; whether it is planned or spontaneous, and if spontaneous, whether the digression is helpful or not; and the value of the teacher talk as potentially useful input for acquisition purposes. What constitutes appropriacy and quality may be thought of as matters of judgement and may be subject to considerable variation. Evidence also tends to suggest that the questions a teacher asks in the classroom can be extremely important in helping learners to develop their competence in the language. It is useful to observe whether teachers put questions to learners systematically or randomly, how long they wait for a response, and the type of question asked, from that requiring a simple one-word reply to higher-order referential questions where learners can provide information the teacher does not know. Similarly, in the case of feedback and correcting learners, we can observe how and when the teacher does this, and whether all learners receive treatment systematically.

Thus far, we have looked at some of the factors we might wish to observe pertaining to the teacher in the classroom. We could also, for example, turn

our attention to one learner or to a pair of learners to compare how each of them tends to individualize whole-class instruction to their own benefit.

Let us now consider some of the general criteria we might find useful in order to observe as many facets of the language classroom as possible in the context of one language lesson. We have set these out in the form of a general observation task sheet as an example, which can be used as a prompt for making notes during an observation session:

1   Focus on Learners
    a) Group dynamics. How well do they work together as:
        • a whole group
        • small groups
        • pairs.
        Do some prefer to work individually?
    b) How well do they appear to relate to and interact with the teacher?
    c) Is the students' apparent interest in learning sustained or enhanced?
2   Focus on the Teacher
    a) Context of teaching
        How is a context for the lesson established?
    b) Teacher's role
        What are the different roles assumed by the teacher during the class?
    c) TTT
        What is the approximate amount of TTT in the lesson? What kind of teacher talk (e.g. display questions vs. referential questions) does she use?
    d) Clarity
        Were the explanations given readily understood by the students?
    e) Emotional support
        How much encouragement and care is offered to the learners and how is it done?
    f) Use of aids/materials
        • If aids/materials are used what is their purpose in the lesson?
        • How effective are the aids/materials in amplifying or reinforcing the teaching points?
        • How effective are the aids/materials in helping the learners to understand and achieve learning?
    g) Activity
        • What activity/activities are the students asked to perform?
        • Do they seem to be pertinent/useful in realizing the objectives of the lesson?
    h) Classroom management
        • Are the activities smooth and effectively managed?
        • Do students seem to be clear about what they should be doing?

   i) Correction/Feedback
- How does the teacher give feedback to students at various stages of the activities? (e.g. positive encouragement, supportive reformulation of student's utterances, expansion of student's utterances, responsive and supporting attitudes to students' questions)

   j) Motivation
- How would you characterize the atmosphere of this class? For example, alert, hard-working, good humoured, keenly motivated and so on.
- Note down any particular motivating features of this lesson.

3   Overall Comments/Observation

> If you have the opportunity, try this observation schedule with a colleague by observing each other's classes and producing feedback to each other. Add any other factors you feel are important to you in your teaching situation.

13.6   Applying the Tasks to Classroom Data

In this section we intend to look at the application to actual classroom practice of some of the observation tasks discussed above. We shall analyse materials and transcripts of different language classes in order to gain an overview of what is occurring in each of the classes. Clearly it would be useful to have access to the video material, but the transcripts also show a lot of detail.

2B   Lesson planning

BEFORE VIEWING

Individual teachers vary in the amount of planning they do.
Look at the following diagram of lesson planning areas:
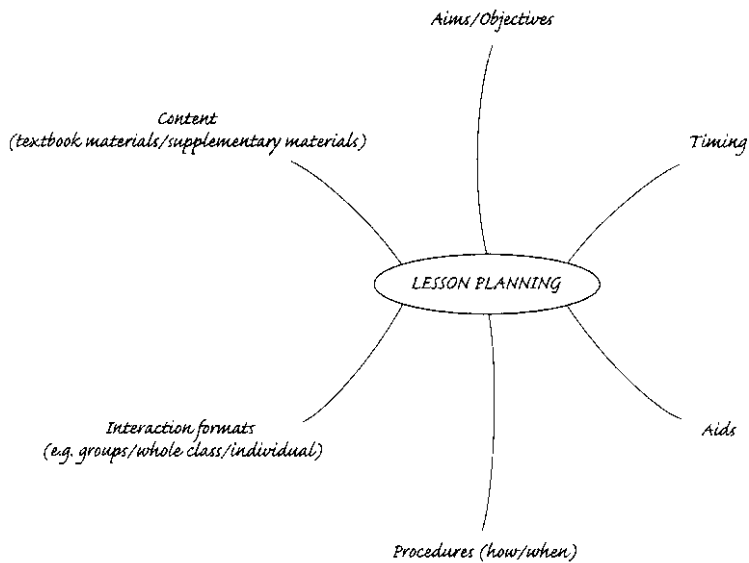
In pairs, rank these areas in order of importance, and discuss the reasons for your decision.
Discuss your ranking with the rest of the group, and add to the diagram any other points which
have come up in your discussion.

Sequence **2B** **Lesson planning**

WHILE VIEWING

1 You are going to watch part of a lesson based on the structures *used to* and *didn't use to*. Here is an outline plan for the lesson. It contains details about the content, timing and aids, but no information about interaction formats or procedures. As you watch the lesson, add details to the outline plan about these two aspects. Then, after comparing your notes with a partner, watch again to check them.

Note: Some parts of the lesson are not shown in the video extract.

```
                          Lesson plan

Aim:                By the end of the lesson, learners will be
                    able talk about past habits.
Target structures:  Used to / didn't use to
Aids:               Cassette recorder, cassette
Book material:      Blueprint Two, Unit 31.

1 Present language (5 mins).
   e.g.   I used to live in Cuba.
          I didn't use to be a teacher.
2 Listening and True/False statements (10 mins).
3 Asking and answering questions about past life (18 mins).
          • appearance
          • spare time
          • books
          • places
   e.g.   Did you use to have long hair?
          Yes I did.
          So did I. / I didn't.
4 Game - 'Call My Bluff' (7 mins).
   (Making statements about a partner's past life.)
```

2 Consider the way in which this lesson plan was written.
Would you write out your plan in this way? If not, how would you remind yourself what to do during the lesson?
Discuss the presentation of plans with the rest of the group.

Sequence **2B   Lesson planning**

WHILE VIEWING   (40 mins)

1 It will probably be necessary for participants to watch the video twice to do this task. Suggested annotations are as follows:

Lesson plan

Aim: By the end of the lesson, learners will be
                    able to talk about past habits.
Target structures: *Used to / didn't use to*
Aids: Cassette recorder, cassette
Book material: *Blueprint Two*, Unit 31.

1 Present language (5 mins).
  e.g.   I used to live in Cuba.
         I didn't use to be a teacher.

  Write sample sentences on board and <u>leave there</u>.

2 Listening and True/False statements (10 mins).

  Individual work: learners write down T or F.

3 Asking and answering questions about past life (18 mins).
         • appearance
         • spare time
         • books
         • places
  e.g.   Did you use to have long hair?
         Yes I did.
         So did I./ I didn't.

  Give an example of dialogue orally → Learners practise in pairs →
  Some pairs present dialogue to class.

4 Game – 'Call My Bluff' (7 mins).
  (Making statements about a partner's past life.)

  Learners prepare sentences about partner (true or false) → Two teams.
  One learner keeps score on board.

2B   Lesson planning

School: Escuela Oficial de Idiomas, Las Arenas, Spain
Teacher: Ileana Reguera

Voiceover:	At the start of the lesson, the teacher introduces the structure 'used to'.
Teacher:	[writes on board] 'I didn't use to' pay attention to the negative. 'Use to', 'use to', hmm? Different from 'used to'. I didn't use to...work...as a teacher.
Tape:	Woman 1: Exercise one. Dialogue.
Voiceover:	The students then listen to the structure being used in a recorded dialogue, and answer some questions.

Tape:	Man:	There's the school I used to go to, when I was little.
	Woman 2:	It looks a bit old and depressing!
	Man:	I know! But it's all right inside. And you see that house over there?
	Woman 2:	What, the one with the white fence?
	Man:	Yes. I used to live there.

Teacher:	Now, I would like you to work in pairs, with your partner, and, er...let's try to reproduce, sort of dialogue. [writes on board] You can talk about, er...your appearance...you can talk about, er...your spare time, or...the books...you read, or...the places...you went to...and so on. So thi...there are some cues, but of course you can speak about whatever you like. Er...the dialogue will consist of, er...A, for example, says, er...'What...', make a question...makes a question to B, for example, 'What did you use to look like when you were a little girl?' And B answers, 'Well, I used to have long, curly hair'. And A agrees, or disagrees. Hmm? If she agrees, 'Oh! So did I'. If she disagrees, 'Oh, I didn't'. And then B makes another question, to A; 'And what about you, did you use to wear glasses?' for example, and A answer 'Oh, yes, I did'. Right, so try to use short answers, 'yes I did', hmm? 'No, I didn't', or 'Nor did I'. Hmm? Is it clear? Just two minutes in pairs, and then you will speak aloud. Right? And you want to ask me any question, I will be ready to help you.
[Students work in pairs]	
Student 1:	What did you use to go, in the...
Student 2:	I, er...used, er...to spend my holidays in Bilbao or Palencia because I used to live in Madrid.
[Fade out and in]	
Teacher:	OK? So, let's begin. Hmm? Let's break the ice. Estivaliz, can you play with, er...Rocio?
Student 3:	Er...what did you use to look like as a child?
Student 4:	Er...when I was a child...I used to be very fat, but now I don't eat too much, and I was thin.
Teacher:	Yes, great! What about you, can you make...?
Student 3:	No, I didn't. I was very thin, and...I used to have short, blonde hair.
Teacher:	Really?
Student 4:	And, what did use to...to do in your spare time?
Teacher:	Good!
Student 3:	I used to play with my sisters, at home.
Student 4:	I...didn't.

Teacher:	You didn't?
Student 4:	No.
Teacher:	Did you like...er...do you have any, I mean, have you got sisters or brothers to play with?
Student 4:	Yes, er...I wa...well, *bueno* [=well], I am, er...one, er...sister, but I was, er...ten years, er...he was, er...one year.
Teacher:	Oh, I see. So different ages. Good. What about you two, Elisa and, er...Rosa?
Student 5:	Er...what did you use to look like as a child?
Student 6:	I used to have short hair.
Student 5:	Er...oh, I didn't, I used to have long hair.
Teacher:	Did you? Long hair? What about now? What have you done with your long hair?
Student 5:	Is more...I don't...*comódo* [=comfortable].
Teacher:	Comfortable?
Student 5:	Comfortable.
Teacher:	Yes, good.
Student 6:	Er...what did you use to do in your spare time?
Student 5:	Er...I used to play tennis.
Student 6:	Er...I didn't. I used to go with my friends.
Teacher:	Did you? And what did you do with...what did you use to do with your friends? What did you use to play with, er...your friends? Or what did you use to go, or do?
Student 6:	Mmm...we used to...to walk, er...
Teacher:	Mm hmm. Along...
Student 6:	Along, er...Las Arenas.
Teacher:	Right. Mm hmm. Did you use to go and...for a picnic, from time to time, with your friends?
Student 6:	Yes. Some...sometimes, ermm...on Saturdays, for example.
Teacher:	Mm hmm. Yes. Did you enjoy it? Yes?
Student 6:	Yes.
Teacher:	Right. What about you two?
Student 2:	Er...what did you use, er...to...er...spend your holidays?
Student 1:	I used to go...Europe...
Teacher:	To Europe?
Student 1:	French, and...and sometimes, *bueno* [=well]...when I have, er...a big time, I, er...I pass my...my holidays on, er...on climb mountains.
Teacher:	Yes, you spend your holidays, ermm...practising exercise, you mean? Climbing up and down the mountains?
Student 1:	Yeah.
Teacher:	With your friends?
Student 1:	Yeah.
Teacher:	And you...and you?
Student 2:	No, no I didn't.
Teacher:	You didn't. You don't look like a...being a climber!
Student 2:	No! I spend...I used to spend my holidays in Palencia. Or, er...I used to, ermm...go to know, er...the ous...the outskirts, the...Mad...of Madrid.

Teacher: Good.

Student 2: Er...the bor...bordering province.

Teacher: Yes. Good. So you...

Student 2: Such as Toledo, Segovia...

Teacher: Right. It's a very good thing, at least you know places. And, er...anybody can tell me...

[Fade out and in]

Teacher: Right, so...Umm...you are going to...for example, every pair of students, every pair of you, er...is going to think...or to say aloud three...well, three would be too much, two...two each, eh? Two each, four altogether. Two sentences talking about, er...past habits, eh? Past routines. But the more incredible the better, do you know why? Because then the other group, hmm?...has to tell if the sentences they said, hmm?...were true or false. Right?

[Fade out and in]

Student: True. And the second is false.

Teacher: Right, so. You have a...perfectly right. So, er...

Student: Two points.

Teacher: Two points, for group B. Two points. Right, er...Sonia and, er...Fagita. Come on.

Fagita: Er...Sonia w...when Sonia was ten, er...she used to live on a farm.

Teacher: On a farm? Good. Another one?

Fagita: Er...when Sonia was, er...five, er...she used to have bl...very blonde hair.

Teacher: [laughs] Good. What about you? Oh, I have forgotten about yours, Margerita. All right?

Sonia: Er...when Fagita was ten I used, er...to speak five language.

Teacher: She used to speak five languages. Or you? Fagita or you?

Sonia: Fagita.

Teacher: Fagita used to speak five languages. Good. And another one?

Sonia: Er...when she, er...he was, er...four I used to help, ermm...his mother.

Teacher: You used to help her mother.

Sonia: In the cooking.

Teacher: Cooking. Doing the cooking and so on? What's your opinion, er...[inaudible} on Fagita's sentences, true or false?

Student 7: I think, er...the last sentence in...is true, and, er...first is false.

Teacher: What's your opinion? Were you bluffing, or were you telling the truth? ·

Fagita: I, er...wa...bluffing.

Teacher: You were bluffing? Number one? So?

Fagita: No.

Student: Yes!

Fagita: No, the two. The two sentences are, er...bluffing.

Teacher: So, how many points?

Student: One.

Teacher: Only one? OK. But I forgot about Margerita, so I have to for...forget about it. So only one person in each group, all right? What about you two? Come on!

Carmen: When did you...?

Teacher: [laughs] Don't be so impatient, Carmen!

Student 8: Er...no, er...Carmen, the last year, er...met, er...handsome man, er...and she is going to get married with...

Carmen: Yes! I am going to marry! This year!

Teacher: We are not using 'used to', but it's OK. And the second one? Try to use 'used to'.

Student 8: OK, er...er...she used to...to have, ermm...ermm...ermm...I don't...know...

Teacher: A small...? Cat, at home?

Student 8: No...in the...

Teacher: A what?

Student 8: A snake.

Teacher: A snake?

Student 8: Yes.

Teacher: My goodness! She used to have a snake at home. Right, remember them. What about you, Carmen? Tell me something incredible about you.

Carmen: I used to, ermm...working a nurse.

Teacher: As a nurse?

Carmen: As a nurse.

Teacher: Oh! Good. She used to work as a nurse. And, er...another one.

Carmen: Er...Santa Marina, er...

Teacher: No, another sentence. A new one. Another one, yes.

Carmen: Only one, now.

Teacher: [laughs] Just one sentence! And enough, for you. A lot of work. All right. Could you tell me if, ermm...just to finish, if, er...it is false?

Student 3: I think, er...your name?

Student 4: Arantxa.

Student 3: Arantxa is bluffing.

Teacher: Yes?

Student 3: In both.

Teacher: In both?

Student: In both.

Teacher: Were you bluffing?

Student: Yes, I was.

Teacher: So you are completely right. So...

Student: Two points. [pron: as French]

Teacher: Poi...no, two points [pron: correct]. Team B. OK, so we cannot go on, so we can say that...the winner is...group B!

[Fade out]

Talking about teaching

Teacher: Of course, I think, er...drills are very useful. But, er...in some ways, I mean, I prefer to present the new language first...I mean make them feel motivated with, er...the language, try...I...I try to make them, um...use the language, the new language, as their own. So, when I present a...a new passage, hmm?...first of all I...I make, er...questions about, ermm...their own life, their own feelings, their own, ermm...hobbies. Hmm? So I...I force them to use the new language, using them. And, er...well after...presenting the...the, umm...the new language of course, er...I...I made...I made them, er...work in pairs, hmm? So, this is something they like a lot. Because they...they don't feel on their own but, er...with a partner's help they...they

do it much better. And if I play some background
music [laughs]...even better! Because they feel more
relaxed and, er...they...they speak, er...more loudly
and so on.
Of course they commit, ermm...mistakes. But, today
was not the, ermm...the day to force them to speak
accurately. But just should get familiar with, er...the
new structure, the new language, and reproduce it,
and...getting it as their own.

In this first extract we are invited to consider the area of lesson planning. The first task is to 'brainstorm' the topic with a colleague wherever possible.

If you have access to the video, the 'while viewing' task is for teachers to add details of the interaction formats or procedures (the trainers' notes contain answers).

Finally, examine the transcript and reflect on the teacher's comments at the end.

Consider the following questions in relation to the transcript. Again work with a colleague if at all possible.

1   Analyse the four main activities that the teacher asks the learners to perform. Consider them in relation to the concept of integrated skills.
2   Observe what the learners appear to be doing during these activities. Analyse pair/group arrangements in relation to activity.
3   Do the activities seem useful in realizing the objectives of the lesson?
4   How much teacher talk is there in relation to student talk? What are the different functions of the teacher talk and when does it occur?
5   How much correction and feedback does the teacher provide? Does it seem to be equal for all learners?
6   Do you feel that this is a teacher- or a student-centred lesson? Why? Note what the teacher says themself.
7   Allwright and Bailey (1991) mention the 'atmosphere' created in the classroom co-production. How would you characterize the atmosphere of this particular class?

When you have completed the above, read the two transcripts below, taken from Ghosn (2010: 31). The first transcript is taken from a primary school classroom in Lebanon where English is taught as the first foreign language, using a 'communicatively orientated, content-integrated, world-wide marketed ESL course'. The second transcript is also from an equivalent primary school classroom but the material they are using is an American literature-based reading anthology. What differences do you notice in the two transcripts in terms of teacher–student interactions, learner engagement and 'atmosphere' in the classes?

S1:   Do your parents give you pocket money?
S2:   My *dad* gives me pocket money.
S1:   How much do they
 T: He said his *dad* gives him
S1:   How much he
 T: How much *does* he
S1:   How much does he give you?
S2:   He gives me three pounds.

 T: Don't read what Rick's dad gives him! Say how much *your* dad gives *you*.
S2:   ((I don't get pocket money.)) [in a quiet voice, blushing, looking down]
      [giggles from some students]
 T: Oh, OK. Pretend that he gives you, say, five thousand pounds.

Source: I.-K. Ghosn, pp. 31–2, Chapter 2. In B. Tomlinson and H. Masuhara (eds) 2011, *Research for Materials Development in Language Learning*. London: Continuum. Copyright © Irma-Karina Ghosn.

 T: [reads] 'I've made some cookies for tea,' said Ma
S1:   The lady she the mother ((not the maid like Hadia said))!
 T: Right, she is Sam's and Victoria's mother. See the cookies she has made
      [points to the illustration]. Mmm! That's a big plate of cookies.
[Several children lick their lips and make 'mmm' sounds.]
S1:   Miss! Me, my mother she make cookies ((very tasty)).
 T: Uhhuh! Your mother makes delicious cookies too! Did you hear that?
Ruba's mother also makes delicious cookies, like Sam's and Victoria's mother.

Source: I.-K. Ghosn, Transcript between T and S1 and transcript between T, S1 and S2, from pp. 31–2, Chapter 2. In B. Tomlinson and H. Masuhara (eds) 2011, *Research for Materials Development in Language Learning*. London: Continuum. Copyright © Irma-Kaarina Ghosn. Reprinted with the kind permission of the author and by kind permission of Continuum International Publishing Group, a Bloomsbury company.

13.7   Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the reasons why classrooms are useful sources of information about teaching and learning and have considered some of the different criteria that we might want to observe in them. After this, we moved on to look at some of the different options open to us for observing the classroom. We then suggested that we might wish to concentrate in some detail on one aspect of the language classroom, such as teacher talk, or that we may wish to observe several criteria together, depending on our purpose. We then proposed a set of general observation criteria that we might find useful in order to get an overview of what is happening in a classroom. Finally, we examined transcribed data from different classrooms and applied focusing tasks to this data to try to gain further access to, and understanding of, what was occurring in these classrooms.

> How might your approach to what you do in the classroom be affected as a result of reading this chapter?

13.8   Further Reading

The following books give a useful overview of the area of classroom observation:

1   Allwright, D. and J. Hank. (2009): *The Developing Language Learner: An Introduction to Exploratory Practice.*
2   Bailey, K. and D. Nunan (eds) (1996): *Voices from the Language Classroom.*

In addition, the following chapter reports how teachers collaborated and used observation for materials and professional development:

3   Stillwell, C., B. McMillan, H. Gillies, and T. Walker. (2010): *Four teachers looking for a lesson: developing materials with lesson study.*

14

Views of the Teacher

14.1   Introduction

Chapters on 'the teacher' are often, even traditionally, to be found at the end of books concerned with aspects of language teaching methodology. While such a format might be criticized on the grounds of relegating teachers to last place on a scale of importance, with learners certainly, but also materials and methods, having primacy, in the present book this is emphatically not the intention, and the position of this chapter is deliberate. It has been chosen because the teacher arguably represents the most significant factor in any language teaching operation. The teacher is typically a 'constant' in the throughput of different students in the institution, and works in different ways at the interface of several systems – the classroom, the school, the educational environment – all of which affect a teacher's professional attitudes and behaviour. A principal aim of this chapter, then, is to offer a view of the teacher as a synthesizer of all the aspects we have covered, as a professional who has to make sense of the decisions, opinions and perceptions of many different people. Certainly teachers will often experience this as pressure and conflict, which may be difficult to resolve. Nevertheless, we wish to stress the importance of a positive and active professional self-image, rather than a more passive and reactive one.

   The chapter is broadly divided into three sections. In the first of these we examine the concept of 'role' and explore its possible dimensions for English

language teachers in general. We then go on to look particularly at the teacher's classroom role, focusing on the implications of innovation and change in materials and methods. These two sections, in other words, will be concerned first, with contextualizing 'role' and, secondly, with differences over time. Finally, a number of issues to do with the training and development of teachers will be raised, including a brief survey of the growing importance of teacher-research in English language teaching (ELT). We have included more activities and things to think about because of the nature of the topic and its reflective orientation, and the chapter finishes, quite intentionally, on an open-ended note.

14.2 The Teacher's Role

Make a few notes on what you actually do as a teacher in a regular working week. Keep the notes – we shall refer back to them later.

Our own list looks something like this:

Preparing timetables
Spending a certain number of contracted hours in class
Preparing materials and handouts
Seeing students individually
Attending staff meetings
Arranging out-of-class activities
Writing reports
Marking tests and examinations
Planning courses and their associated teaching activities
Liaison with outside bodies and other institutions.

There are two obvious points to be made here. The first concerns the fact that any job specification is part of a network of interacting and overlapping roles; secondly, and related to the first point, we do our job in the context of a whole 'environment'. This now takes us full circle, and we shall be referring back explicitly to the points first raised in Chapter 1.

The concept of role

The list you have just made will show that you carry out a range of specified tasks within the social framework of an institutional structure. It is, then,
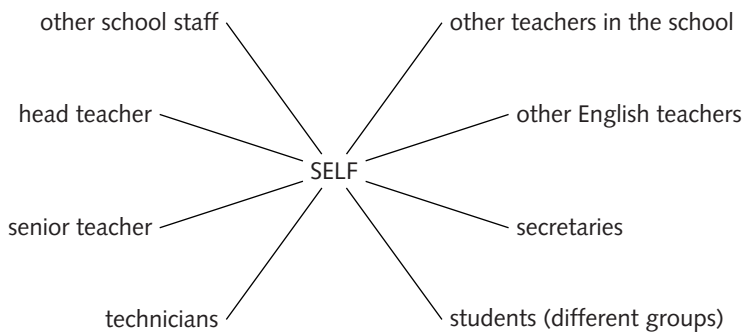
Figure 14.1   The role network.

self-evident that your work is not done in isolation, but that you need to interact, directly or indirectly, with a number of others – with students, obviously, with other teachers, with the head teacher (or head of department/principal), with non-teaching staff and so on. Both in your professional and in your private life you are a member of a role set, the group of people with whom you interact in any particular situation. Taking yourself as the focal person, you might like to represent your own most important role sets in diagrammatic form as in figure 14.1.

You could also do this with family and friends as the set, or alternatively for any leisure activity that you do regularly.

Teacher's roles may also be expressed in some kind of hierarchical relationship to each other where each person accepts or at least understands the organizational chain of authority and accountability. One example of how this view works in practice can be found in the scheme organized by the British Council for inspecting and recognizing private language schools in the United Kingdom. As well as the obvious categories of 'teaching' and 'professional qualifications', the extent to which a school performs its central teaching function is also evaluated in terms of the overall management structures, in addition to resources and the physical environment of the institution. Thus, a classroom teacher might be accountable to a senior teacher and through him to the principal, but also 'laterally', to colleagues with special areas of responsibility such as resource management.

The concept of 'role' has been studied in social psychology and related areas, including the investigation of behaviour in industrial and organizational settings. Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) argue that ELT professionals do not pay enough attention to group dynamics and the various roles that the teacher and the student play in the language classroom. Let us then consider three aspects of teacher roles that follow from the general features that we have just outlined:

1   We noted above the significant members of our own role set in any specific situation. The 'mirror image' of this, of course, is that we fulfil certain roles in the role sets and networks of other people: we are therefore at any one time colleagues, employees, perhaps authority figures in the classroom, somebody's superior, a casual acquaintance and so on. There will also be differences in what is accepted as appropriate institutional behaviour, and great variation in patterns of power and authority.

2   There is arguably a great deal of truth in the assertion that 'we are as others see us'. In other words, our image of ourselves as professionals will be an amalgam of a whole range of perceptions and expectations, and this takes us beyond the idea of a role as simply a list of tasks to be carried out, or an officially issued job description. Bush (1984), for example, refers to the theatrical image used by several writers in which the actor plays out a role in accordance with the expectations of an audience. This implies, however, that the actor is rather a passive figure: Bush goes on to remind us that a role is not tidy and objective, but that 'in practice the role-occupant brings to the position his or her values, perceptions and experience and these will interact with other expectations to determine the way the part is played' (Bush, 1984: 76). Moreover, the notion of a 'network' indicates that different people's expectations will carry different degrees of importance: for instance, an organization with a powerful authority figure at the head may lead to a reduction in the weight attached to student views and needs.

3   Most writing in the field of role theory recognizes – as indeed the previous points imply – that people inevitably perceive their own role as multiple and complex. A number of secondary notions have therefore evolved that reflect this. Handy's (1985, ch. 3) list is comprehensive, and makes rather negative but probably realistic reading. He points out that a role occupant can experience one or more of the following, which are interrelated:

   • *Role conflict* – for example, our role as a classroom teacher and as an institutional examiner may not be fully compatible.
   • *Role ambiguity* – defined by uncertainty as to what is expected at any particular time.
   • *Role overload* – not the same as work overload – where the focal person is not able to integrate roles that are too many and too varied. Many teachers who are required to take on increased administrative or external duties may experience this as a problem.
   • *Role stress* – which Handy divides into role pressure (positive, where synthesis of roles and expectations remains possible), and its opposite, role strain.

Earlier in this section you drew up a simple 'role set' diagram with yourself as the focal person.

Consider now the range of roles that you play in your own institution. To whom are you responsible, and who is responsible to you?

Do any of Handy's points match your own experience, for example, as a result of increasing role diversification? In particular, is your own perception of your role(s) fully in line with what you take to be the expectations of others?

The wider environment

Up to now, we have been thinking of teachers in the setting of their own institutions. However, crucial as that is, the concept of 'role' cannot be restricted to the institution in which we work, and in a sense, our workplace is a microcosm of the wider environment. In the first chapter of this book we proposed a framework for thinking about materials and methods in which a number of contextual variables – management decisions, resource factors, types of learners and many more – were considered. Here we re-examine them from the perspective of the teacher as a 'focal person', and taking into account such factors as the teacher's potentially multiple roles, the expectations of others, and the inherent possibilities for conflict, pressure and so on. We might represent the situation as in figure 14.2 to show both the importance of the teacher as well as the direct and indirect effects of all these different 'layers' on the teacher's role.

Beyond the immediate environment of your own institution/school, try to enumerate from the outer layers in particular (a) the people (the other 'actors') and (b) the variables that you think have most influenced your understanding of your own role.

You may have listed your family and friends, or your own tutors; your students' peer groups and parents; external inspectors or advisers; the authorities who draw up your contract and decide on your salary and conditions; the writers of commercially published materials; agencies and organizations sponsoring students to take your programmes. For example, low pay sometimes indicates low social esteem of the profession and even low self-esteem,
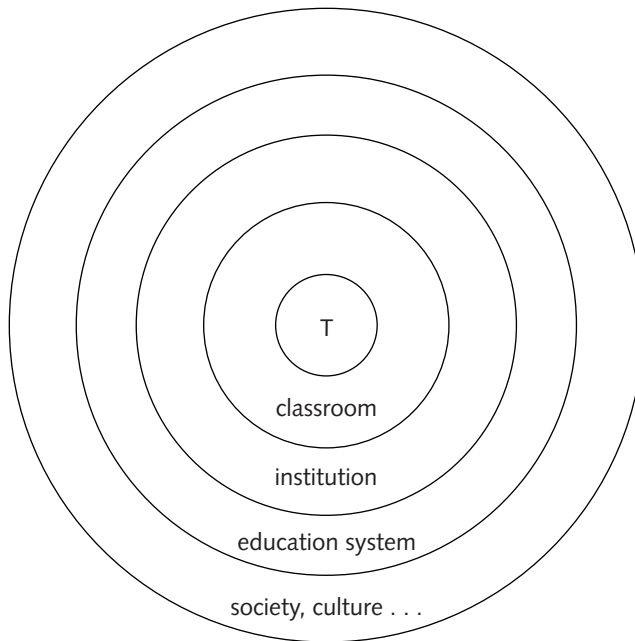
Figure 14.2   The teaching environment.

and may in turn mean there is a need to take on extra work, leaving no time for any more than routine preparation of classes, certainly not professional development. Conversely, the combination of a consultative environment that considers the views of everyone involved both within and outside the institution, and a recognition that teachers may be more active and productive if they are given time to develop resources, for example, will clearly lead to a more positive working atmosphere.

A useful way of looking at these issues from the teacher's point of view may be to differentiate the two broad headings of community-controlled variables and teacher-controlled variables (following Strevens, 1979). A few representative examples are given here. Community-controlled variables include

- cultural norms and restrictions, for instance, on materials or teaching styles
- standards of teacher training
- status of teachers in society
- attitudes to target language.

Under this heading you may also like to include institutional factors, such as class size, resources, time available and so on. Sometimes, of course, these

may be directly within an institution's control; often they are not. Teacher-controlled variables include

- approaches to syllabus design
- materials evaluation (and production)
- choice of methodology, techniques, classroom organization (see next section for a fuller discussion).

You may of course disagree with some of the details of where exactly the responsibility lies, but the 'control' notion is helpful in describing the many different facets of a teacher's role.

14.3   Teachers in the Classroom: Change and Innovation

No teaching/learning situation is really static. Political and educational circumstances change, as do resources available for teacher training; views of methodology change, as does the language itself; research is gradually disseminated; teachers develop; learners' expectations change; and we are seeing dramatic changes in terms of English as a lingua franca or world Englishes (Graddol, 2006, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2011). Most of our discussion in this section will focus on the teacher's classroom role, picking up the key implications for teachers of the materials and methods examined in this book.

> We would like you at this point to try to set out the most important changes in your own job, and role, over the last few years (5–10 years might be a useful period if you have been teaching that long). For example, do you have new areas of responsibility, either administrative or pedagogic? Have there been many innovations in the types of materials used? Have your students' attitudes to learning English changed in any discernible way? Are there any techniques you have adopted in the classroom that you did not use a few years ago, or conversely, have you abandoned any? Some of the changes you identify will be concerned with your role within the classroom, some with your role outside. In so far as they are separable, please take more time to think about the classroom context – learners, materials, methods.

Teachers will all have their own version of changing circumstances. The present writers, who teach English at most proficiency levels to adults coming to Britain for a variety of purposes, noted these general trends:

- Students will often have spent time in an English-speaking country already.
- Classes have become increasingly participatory.
- More detailed attention to needs and expectations is required of us, and for an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teacher, this often includes some familiarity with learners' jobs or subject specialisms.
- There is a great amount of published material now available, appropriate in varying degrees.
- We spend more time engaged in various forms of individualized instruction.
- We need to respond to learners' needs for different kinds of delivery (e.g. blended learning, distance learning, overseas delivery).

In sum, we think it likely that your role will have become more diversified on many fronts.

Before going on to identify some of the more specific aspects of classroom-based change, it is worth reflecting for a moment on innovation in language teaching. In education we are often expected to adapt to changes and innovations. Such changes may include

- the adoption of new textbooks
- the introduction of pedagogical/methodological 'reforms' that teachers have not been trained to implement
- the establishment of new goals for a language teaching programme
- the prescription of new teacher–learner role relationships (as when a central authority specifies less 'teacher-fronted' and more 'learner-centred' work).

Any of these changes might well involve various small and large conflicts and disturb teachers' mental frames as they can threaten their routines and sense of security. The level of disturbance that teachers feel may be different depending on who proposes the change and how it is implemented and also on teachers' perceptions of how much it is likely to lead to improvements. In figure 14.2 we have shown how teachers are surrounded by various layers of the teaching environment. Waters and Vilches (2008: 20) discuss the '. . ."two cultures" situation, where the policy level "ethos" may exhibit a lack of empathy for that of the implementation level'. The policy level involves curriculum developers, decision-makers and advisors whereas the implementation level involves principals and teachers. The policymakers are not directly affected by their decisions but the implementors are, often significantly within a short span of time. The lack of fit between the policy and its implementation, reported in the recent literature on managing innovation in ELT, could result in unsuccessful, partial or distorted implementation (Waters, 2009; Kennedy and Tomlinson, 2012). Waters (2009) provides an

overview of studies on innovation and explores various models of successful management of change. Kennedy and Tomlinson (2012) discuss how innovation may be implemented in materials.

Change, materials and methods

The main purpose of this book has been to survey current trends in materials and methods for ELT, to trace the sources and development of those trends, and to link our everyday practice as teachers with the principles on which that practice is based. Let us now briefly review some of the themes that have recurred with reference to the classroom context.

1   There has been a significant shift towards more 'communicative' views of both language and behaviour.
2   We have a deeper understanding of language and how it is used. An analysis of language goes beyond sentence grammar to the level of 'discourse' – of paragraph structure and longer texts. Corpora studies have shown how spoken and written discourses are different, and what may be regarded as errors in writing may in fact be features of speech. These findings have been filtering through to teaching methods and materials.
3   A variety of classroom 'management' techniques have been introduced to allow for more realistic practice of language in use.
4   Syllabuses and materials are often based not only on one or two, but on several organizing principles linked together in quite complex ways as can be seen in the 'multi-component' construction of recent global coursebooks.
5   Research into the characteristics of language skills has contributed to gradual changes in the materials we use for teaching the four skills. For instance, the range of possible activities has been extended a long way beyond the traditional procedures of reading/listening, followed by a test of understanding through comprehension questions. In other words, we can now work with a notion of language-as-process, as well as language-as-product.
6   Our methodology has also been affected by increased understanding of differences in learning styles and strategies, justifying the distinction between whole-class and smaller group work, and also allowing, where feasible, for the individualization of instruction in various formats.
7   The global trend of English being used as a lingua franca is affecting both theory, practice and materials. What kinds of language? What are the optimal targets for language learning? What kinds of language achievements are acceptable in exams and in the multilingual and multicultural world?
8   Computer-assisted language learning has been developing rapidly not only at an institutional but also at an individual level, as seen in M-learning

where autonomous learners can use mobile technology and manage learning anywhere any time. In resource-rich contexts, teachers need to be aware of possible different modes of delivery inside and outside the class.

Not all of these developments have taken place simultaneously, of course. The various aspects of change have had differential impact and usefulness, and have naturally occurred at different times in different contexts, as you will be well aware from your own teaching situation. Note, too, that sometimes an innovation has direct implications for what a teacher in some sense needs to know (knowledge about text structure, for example, or the psychology of comprehension). At other times it influences attitudes and perceptions about appropriate roles and behaviour as well (such as restructuring the classroom arrangement or introducing self-access material). We can now reflect on how these perspectives have contributed to the diversification of the teacher's role that we referred to earlier.

> 1   Reflect upon your roles you have considered in Section 14.2 'The teacher's role' earlier in this chapter. You have considered various roles you play in networks and in the hierarchy in the educational system that you belong to.
> 2   What is your view now in relation to the teacher's overall role?

A number of writers on methodology and teacher training have proposed various ways of labelling the language teacher's potential roles. Harmer (2007a: pp. 108–17) offers these:

1   The teacher as controller of everything that goes on in the classroom.
2   The teacher as prompter who provides sensitive encouragement for the learner to steer their learning.
3   The teacher as participant in student activities.
4   The teacher as a resource who provides information, ideas and advice.
5   The teacher as tutor, particularly useful with small groups and individuals working on longer pieces of work.
6   The teacher as organizer of a range of activities.
7   The teacher as assessor. Obviously the 'examiner' role is one of our traditional functions, but Harmer extends it to include the importance of giving regular feedback, as well as just correction and grading.

8   The teacher as observer, both to give feedback and also to evaluate materials and methods.

Tudor (1993) discusses teacher roles with specific reference to the notion of the 'learner-centred classroom', arguing that this shift of focus will have obvious implications. Far from the traditional conception, then, of 'knower' and 'activity organizer', the teacher will need to

- prepare learners (for awareness of goals, language and so on);
- analyse learner needs;
- select materials;
- transfer responsibility; and
- involve learners

which are challenging roles for many of us.

Finally, Smith (2011), referring specifically to Norway, discusses the multifaceted roles that teacher educators are expected to play in accordance with Norwegian and international innovations in education. Teachers are expected to manage being

- versatile pedagogues who are 'able to build a bridge between theory and practice' (Smith 2011: 342)
- role models 'as teachers and as academic researchers' (Smith 2011: 343)
- researchers as 'consumers of research, producers of research and teachers of research' (Smith 2011: 343)
- administrators who are in charge of planning and delivering the course, who offer support, assess the students' achievement and evaluate the whole course.

In addition she notes that much of the administrative work is now handled with ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), and this requires teachers to be IT literate. Smith (2011: 344) then points out how complex and demanding an ideal educator is expected to be:

> To sum up, the teacher educator should fit into all the roles stated above, and have attributes characterised as self-reflective, empathetic, communicative, collegial, open-minded, flexible, organised and assertive (yet without being perceived as 'difficult'), which leads one to wonder whether this ideal really exists.

Smith also emphasizes the importance of establishing support systems for professional development programmes that build on the strengths of diverse members of staff.

1 Look back over the list of teacher functions that you made earlier: to what extent does it overlap with/differ from the (fairly representative) list that we have just set out?
2 Now try to put the individual points in order of importance for your own teaching circumstances. For instance, are you primarily an instructor/assessor and only secondarily a 'resource' for your students?
3 If you are studying/working with other teachers, it will be interesting to compare your order of priority with theirs. Do colleagues working in the same situation necessarily have identical perceptions? And do teachers from different contexts see things differently from you?

As a short commentary on this activity, and to conclude this section, two observations can be restated. First of all, the roles and tasks that we perform result from a complex network of factors, and an objective definition, however necessary, will not be sufficient. They derive from our own perceptions, from the attitudes and expectations of many others, and not least from the language teaching materials that we are expected (or choose) to work with. Secondly, and finally, it should be remembered that this whole discussion has been based on the assumption that change and innovation are an inevitable part of our professional lives, and therefore no individual role description can be regarded as frozen in time.

14.4   Preparing the Teachers

The 'good language teacher'

In Chapter 12, we discussed recent updates by Oxford and Lee (2008) on 'good language learner' studies. It is now widely accepted that many kinds of successful learners make use of their strengths in various ways to achieve their goals. Researchers have questioned the feasibility and usefulness of trying to identify a single set of characteristics possessed by the good language learner so that they can be transferred to less successful learners.

In a similar vein, the sheer number of variables involved in teaching will probably mean that identifying the characteristics of a good language teacher remains an impossible task, especially when we consider the sheer diversity of teaching contexts around the globe (Canagarajah, 2005). Even if we were to take the very straightforward criterion that a 'successful' teacher is one

whose learners achieve good examination results, this in fact tells us rather little: we do not learn much about the relative importance of the teacher's preferred style and method, nor about the role of materials, and certainly nothing specific about the part played by different elements in an individual learner's success. Indeed this may have more to do with motivation, attitude, interest and so on, than with anything the teacher has to offer directly. Nevertheless, and despite the impossibility of precise measurement, most of us will have an opinion as to what constitutes a 'good language teacher'.

> Assume that you have some responsibility for the selection of English language teachers for the specific context in which you work. Make a list of the qualities you would be looking for in that selection process.

Your suggested list may contain some of the following, and you may have others that we have not thought of:

Knowledge of the language system
Good pronunciation
Experience of living in an English-speaking country
Qualifications (perhaps further training taken, or in-service development)
Classroom performance
Evidence of being a good colleague
Length of time as a teacher
Ability to write teaching materials
Careful planning of lessons
Same L1 as students, or a sound knowledge of it
Experience of a variety of teaching situations
Personal qualities (outgoing, interested in learners and so on)
Publications
Knowledge of learning theories
Wide vocabulary
Ability to manage a team of teachers.

We should note here that this list includes factors of different kinds: knowledge, skills awareness and personal attributes. Knowledge may include theories and practice of teaching and learning of the English language. Skills may involve planning, delivering the course, managing the classroom, assessment and evaluation. Awareness may derive from experience of working with colleagues and students in a variety of teaching situations. Lastly, but not least, is what the teacher as an individual brings into the classroom (e.g.

personality, enthusiasm). As Oxford and Lee (2008) emphasize, the teacher's ability to 'ignite the fire' seems to help the learners to spark off their own initiative and drive in learning.

Although it is difficult to categorize our list of teacher qualities under one heading or the other in any precise way, the basic distinction of knowledge, awareness, skills and personal attributes is quite helpful when considering the 'training' of teachers, to which we now turn.

Teacher training, teacher education and continuing professional development

Opinions as to the necessary and desirable qualities of a teacher form the basis for the specification (whether by education authorities, training bodies, colleges and so on) of the goals of teacher training and teacher education programmes. Detailed design of such programmes will in turn derive from this setting of aims and objectives.

There is a large literature on the issue of 'training' versus 'education', and on the more concrete design specifications for a variety of training programmes for different levels of experience, different contexts, differing in duration and with varying degrees of generalizability. A few references are given in the further reading section at the end of this chapter. It has not been the purpose of this book to conclude with a detailed proposal for a particular kind of teacher preparation programme, a topic well covered elsewhere (e.g. Harmer, 2007b; Richards and Farrell, 2011; Scrivener, 2011), but rather to trace developments and trends in materials and methods in our field and then to ask, in this final chapter, what might be the most appropriate perspectives on the role and training of teachers. With this in mind we look, firstly, at the relevance of the training/education debate, and secondly, invite you to formulate your own ideas for the in-service preparation of teachers.

Sometimes the notion of 'training' is used to refer to pre-service programmes for new teachers, with 'education' the preferred term for in-service work with experienced professionals. The idea here is that the narrower concept of training is more applicable to people who need to acquire a knowledge of the basic 'tools' of the job, whereas education implies a broader range of knowledge and skills. More usually, it is argued that both beginning and experienced teachers need elements of each, albeit with differing emphasis and depth. If we glance back at the list of possible teacher qualities, it is quite difficult to claim that some are relevant in pre- or, conversely, in-service situations. Pennington (1990: 134) relates the issue to the concept of professionalism, and argues that teachers require both 'a repertoire of skills' and 'judgement to apply these skills'. Richards (1990) puts forward a similar distinction with the terms 'macro' and 'micro' as approaches to teacher preparation. By 'micro' he means techniques – what teachers actually do that is directly observable and quantifiable (amount of teacher talk, questioning

techniques, types of classroom tasks and the like). By 'macro' he means a 'holistic' approach that focuses on 'the total context of classroom teaching and learning in an attempt to understand how the interactions between and among teachers, learners and classroom tasks affect learning' (Richards: 1990: 9). In other words, a macro approach is concerned with a teacher's ability to make judgements and inferences, to explore the relationship between different types of activity and their effect on learning, and to raise questions about one's own practice. It is both exploratory and generative. Clearly, a teacher needs to be familiar with both kinds of approach.

1   We would like to ask you now to consider the design of a possible teacher preparation programme. In order to keep the task within manageable proportions, we suggest a number of guidelines.
2   Assume you have responsibility for planning an in-service course for teachers. Think in terms of a short programme of one or two weeks' duration, and relate your planning to a teaching context with which you are familiar.
   • What components would you wish to include?
   • Approximately what proportion of time would you devote to each one?
   • What would be your preferred methodology – lectures, workshops, discussion, observation of teaching?
   • To what extent, if at all, would you give consideration to participants' personal proficiency?
   • If possible, try also to decide whether you are more concerned with 'macro' or 'micro' approaches, and with 'subject matter' or 'action-system' knowledge, as we defined them earlier in this section.

We have worked with a number of different groups of teachers from many different countries, and have also asked them to design a teacher programme along these kinds of lines. Some groups have chosen to work on a specific area or theme only. Examples would be 'Approaches to Skills Teaching and Learning', 'The Development of Self-access Materials' or 'Communicative Methodology'. More often, these teachers have designed a broader-based programme, and the following content headings are typical (the points are not given in any particular order and are illustrative, not rules):

Errors and mistakes: analysis, feedback and guidance
Syllabus design and lesson planning
Materials evaluation
Principles of learning
Audio-visual aids
Observation of teaching (using video if possible)
Preparing supplementary materials
Using English outside the class
Sharing problems
Test design
Sound system of English.

Suggested methodology of presentation is a mixture of lecture input and workshop-discussion, depending on the area under consideration. Our groups have placed particular emphasis on the importance of working out in advance the needs and interests of teachers on such an in-service course, and on the principle that a starting point of enquiry in everyday practice will usually be more fruitful than a rundown of theory for its own sake, however stimulating.

14.5 Teacher Development and Teacher Research

At several points in the preceding section we indicated the importance of seeing language teachers not only as carriers of knowledge about language and techniques, but as active and questioning professionals who are able to make generalizations and inferences from the basis of their own practice. The three overlapping but distinct views of teacher preparation – training, education, development – are seen by Wallace (1991) as three models, which he terms (1) the 'craft' model, where a range of practical techniques is learned from an experienced person; (2) the 'applied science' model, implying a one-way application, and often therefore separation, of theoretical research to practice; and (3) the 'reflective' model, with the teacher as a 'reflective practitioner'.

In Chapter 12 we considered the values of nurturing learner autonomy and ways of helping learners to manage their own learning. Likewise, considering the diverse situations and different teachers' needs, it would be best for each teacher to play an active role in their own development processes. In his state-of-the art review, Mann (2005: 108) discusses teachers' autonomy in this process and points out that 'a number of studies have demonstrated that more reflective teachers are better able to monitor, make real-time decisions and respond to the changing needs of learners than less reflective teachers'. Mann also gives a detailed account and references for various ways of

encouraging reflection, self-evaluation, exploration, research and collaboration in teacher development.

The notion of critical reflection is a rapidly growing area of attention because it is seen as the first step for teachers to become investigators of pedagogical issues, that is, classroom researchers. There is a long tradition in general education of encouraging classroom teachers to be initiators of research and development, as well as recipients of external investigation and results (e.g. by professional researchers or educational administrators). Research, in other words, is done 'by', not only 'on' or 'to' teachers, and is thus much more readily integrated into questions of practice. Hopkins (2002) offers a clear overview of 'the teacher as researcher', and also introduces the closely related concept of 'action research' or 'classroom research by teachers' as he prefers to call it. The key point, in Hopkins's words (2002: 5) is 'the teacher's ability . . . to think systematically and critically about what he or she is doing and to collaborate with other teachers. Central to this activity is the systematic reflection on one's own classroom experience to understand it and to create meaning out of that understanding'. Richards and Farrell (2005) provide a number of procedures for self-monitoring and self-evaluation and suggest various forms of lesson reports, checklists and questionnaires.

In ELT there is a growing literature on ways in which a 'reflective' approach – put simply, an attitude of curiosity – can lead to teacher-generated investigations. Burns (1999, 2005, 2010), although referring to 'action research', makes the following point that is relevant to any kind of teacher-generated research: 'The major focus of action research is on concrete and practical issues. . . . It is conducted in naturally occurring settings. . . . Its approaches are essentially "participatory" in that they are conducted by and with members of the actual community under study' (Burns, 1999: 24). She lists a wide range of areas nominated by teachers as starting points for such research, including affective factors, course design, materials and resources, learning strategies, classroom dynamics, the teaching of specific skills, and assessment (Burns 1999: 56–8). A similar perspective is put forward by Richards and Lockhart (1994), who discuss the following 'dimensions', each of which can of course be subdivided, as suitable for reflection and practical investigation:

- Exploring teachers' beliefs.
- Focus on the learner.
- Teacher decision-making.
- The role of the teacher.
- The structure of a language lesson.
- Interaction in the second-language classroom.
- The nature of language learning activities.
- Language use in the classroom.

There is no space here to discuss methods in detail. Briefly, however, all the following methods are possible even within modest and small-scale teacher research projects. In no particular order:

1 Classroom observation (systematic, open, descriptive).
2 Teaching and learning diaries and logs.
3 Introspection and verbal reports (such as think-aloud).
4 Questionnaires and surveys.
5 Interviews (structured, semi-structured, ethnographic).
6 Experiments and quasi-experiments.
7 Case study (not strictly a 'method'; normally uses a mix, to study individuals, groups or specific contexts).

For details of available research methods, and for discussion of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, readers are referred to the references at the end of the chapter.

Finally, teacher development can also be equated with personal development. There are many activities that teachers can in principle engage in if they wish to extend their understanding of their role. They may, for instance, put themselves in the position of their students by learning another language (Gower, 1999; J. McDonough, 2002). They may choose to attend courses or workshops, join a local teachers' network, go to conferences, write a regular teaching diary, learn something about educational management or counselling. Obviously each individual's working environment will determine to what extent these courses of action are realistic. This whole area has been incorporated into various teachers' organizations, including TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language). IATEFL, for example, has associate organizations in a number of countries, and also runs several Special Interest Groups (SIGs), one of which in fact is concerned with Teacher Development.

Wallace's (1991: 166) conclusion offers an appropriate ending to this book too, which has throughout attempted to encourage teachers to think critically about the major aspects of their own everyday professional reality. Wallace writes:

> An important aim of the reflective approach to teacher education is to empower teachers to manage their own professional development. Surely few things could be more conducive to raising the standards of teaching than a cadre of teachers who have the skills, ability and motivation to develop their practice. . . . A second aim of this approach is to enable teachers to be more effective partners in innovation. In many situations teachers themselves are not recognized as possible agents of change . . . innovation is always a top-down affair. . . . If foundations have been laid where, during their training period, at least some

teachers have had an opportunity to be reflective and collaborative, then it might be possible for their professional expertise to be harnessed to implement innovation more effectively.

We would like you to consider two final questions here relating to your own development as a teacher:

1 What kinds of activities have you done – or would you like to do – outside the daily classroom context that are of professional interest to you? A little earlier we gave just a few examples, which you might like to refer back to.
2 What are some of the issues that concern you as a teacher? For instance, would you like to have a clearer picture of the contribution of groupwork techniques to learning? Are you interested in the 'acceptability' to different people of the errors that your learners make? Would you like to compare your experiences of a particular class with those of a colleague? How useful are bilingual dictionaries, and do they affect a student's memory for vocabulary? Would it be useful to carry out a longitudinal 'case study' of an individual learner? How can we match more closely the statutory teaching materials to learners' needs and interests?

But these only represent a few of our questions, and we leave you now to generate some of your own.

14.6   Further Reading

1 Hopkins, D. (2002): *A Teachers Guide to Classroom Research*. This book was written in the context of mainstream education. The title is self-explanatory, as a way into issues of professional development.

2 The following books offer an overview for language teacher preparation:

Harmer, J. (2007b): *The Practice of English Language Teaching*.
Richards, J. C. and T. Farrell. (2011): *Practice Teaching: A Reflective Approach*.
Scrivener, J. (2011): *Learning Teaching – The Essential Guide to English Language Teaching*.

3 For practical discussion of teacher reflection and research in ELT, see:

Burns, A. (2010): *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching*.
Richards, J. C. and T. Farrell. (2005): *Professional Development for Language Teachers – Strategies for Teacher Learning*.

4   For a comprehensive overview of methods in the broader context of the theory and principles of research, see:

Cohen, L., L. Manion and K. Morrison. (2007): *Research Methods in Education*.

Denscombe, M. (2010): *The Good Research Guide: For Small-scale Social Research Projects*.

Dörnyei, Z. (2007): *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methodologies*.