6 Popular methodology

A Approaches, methods, procedures, and techniques

This chapter looks at how theory has been realised in methodological practice. Within the general area of 'methodology' people talk about approaches, methods, techniques, procedures and models, all of which go into the practice of English teaching. These terms, though somewhat vague, are definable:

- **Approach:** this refers to 'theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching' (Richards and Rodgers 1986: 16). An approach describes how language is used and how its constituent parts interlock – in other words it offers a model of language competence. An approach describes how people acquire their knowledge of the language and makes statements about the conditions which will promote successful language learning.

- **Method:** a method is the practical realisation of an approach. The originators of a method have arrived at decisions about types of activities, roles of teachers and learners, the kinds of material which will be helpful, and some model of syllabus organisation (see Chapter 21A). Methods include various procedures and techniques (see below) as part of their standard fare.

  When methods have fixed procedures, informed by a clearly articulated approach, they are easy to describe. The more all-embracing they become, however, the more difficult it is to categorise them as real methods in their own right.

- **Procedure:** a procedure is an ordered sequence of techniques. For example, a popular dictation procedure starts when students are put in small groups. Each group then sends one representative to the front of the class to read (and remember) the first line of a poem which has been placed on a desk there. Each student then goes back to their respective group and dictates that line. Each group then sends a second student up to read the second line. The procedure continues until one group has written the whole poem (see Example 3 on page 264).

  A procedure is a sequence which can be described in terms such as *first you do this, then you do that* .... Smaller than a method it is bigger than a technique.

- **Technique:** a common technique when using video material is called 'silent viewing' (see Chapter 20, B1). This is where the teacher plays the video with no sound. Silent viewing is a single activity rather than a sequence, and as such is a technique rather than a whole procedure. Likewise the 'finger technique' is used by some teachers who hold up their hands and give each of their five fingers a word, e.g. *He is not playing tennis*, and then by bringing the *is* and the *not* fingers together, show how the verb is contracted into *isn't*.

A term that is also used in discussions about teaching is 'model' – used to describe typical procedures or sets of procedures, usually for teachers in training. Such models offer abstractions of these procedures, designed to guide teaching practice. Confusion occurs when these models are elevated to the status of methods, since their purpose is pedagogic in terms of training, rather than inspirational as statements of theoretical belief.

The way in which people announce and develop new teaching practices can make discussions of comparative methodology somewhat confusing. Some methodologists, for example, have new insights and claim a new 'approach' as a result. Others claim the status of method for a technique or procedure. Some methods start as procedures and techniques which seem to work and for which an approach is then developed. Some approaches have to go in search of procedures and techniques with which to form a method. Some methods are explicit about the approach they exemplify and the procedures they employ. Others are not.

What the interested teacher needs to do when confronted with a new method, for example, is to see if and/or how it incorporates theories of language and learning. What procedures does it incorporate? Are they appropriate and effective for the classroom situation that the teacher works with? In the case of techniques and activities, two questions seem worth asking: are they satisfying for both students and teachers, and do they actually achieve what they set out to achieve?

Popular methodology includes ideas at all the various levels we have discussed, and it is these methods, procedures, approaches (and models) which influence the current state of English language teaching.

A1 Audio-lingualism

Audio-lingual methodology owed its existence to the Behaviourist models of learning that were discussed in Chapter 5A. Using the Stimulus–Response–Reinforcement model, it attempted, through a continuous process of such positive reinforcement, to engender good habits in language learners.

Audio-lingualism relied heavily on drills to form these habits; substitution was built into these drills so that, in small steps, the student was constantly learning and, moreover, was shielded from the possibility of making mistakes by the design of the drill.

The following example shows a typical Audio-lingual drill:

Teacher: There's a cup on the table ... repeat
Students: There's a cup on the table

Teacher: spoon
Students: There's a spoon on the table
Teacher: Book
Students: There's a book on the table
Teacher: On the chair
Students: There's a book on the chair
etc.

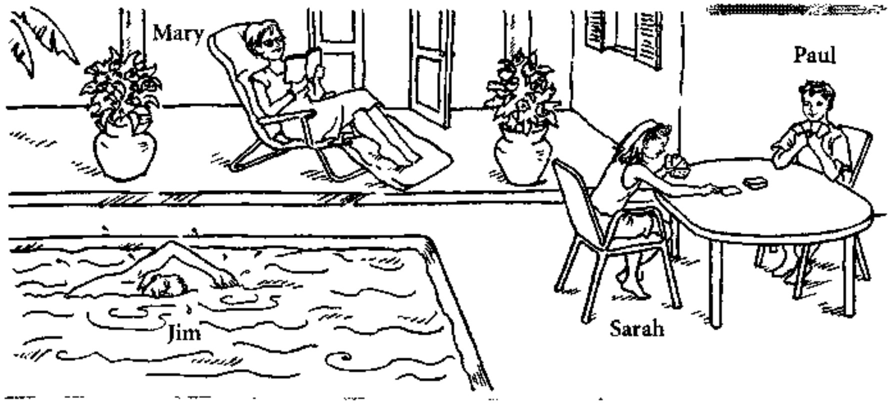
This kind of patterned drilling has some drawbacks quite apart from whether or not it can be shown to lead to grammatical and/or lexical mastery of the structures being focused on (see Chapter 5A). In the first place the language is de-contextualised and carries little communicative function. Second, by doing its best to banish mistakes, so that students only use correct language, such teaching runs counter to a belief among many theorists that making (and learning) from errors is a key part of the process of acquisition. Indeed Audio-lingual methodology seems to banish all forms of language processing that help students sort out new language information in their own minds.

Despite these reservations, however, habit-forming drills have remained popular among teachers and students. The theory behind them still informs some taped materials in language laboratories, for example (see Chapter 10E); teachers who feel insecure with the relative freedoms of some recent methods often feel more confident with the linguistic restriction of such procedures.

A2 Presentation, Practice, and Production

A variation on Audio-lingualism in British-based teaching and elsewhere is the procedure most often referred to as PPP, which stands for Presentation, Practice, and Production. In this procedure the teacher introduces a situation which contextualises the language to be taught. The language, too, is then presented. The students now practise the language using accurate reproduction techniques such as choral repetition (where the students repeat a word, phrase, or sentence all together with the teacher 'conducting'), individual repetition (where individual students repeat a word, phrase, or sentence at the teacher's urging), and cue–response drills (where the teacher gives a cue such as *cinema*, nominates a student by name or by looking or pointing, and the student makes the desired response, e.g. *Would you like to come to the cinema?*). These have similarities with the classic kind of Audio-lingual drill we saw above, but because they are contextualised by the situation that has been presented, they carry more meaning than a simple substitution drill. Later the students, using the new language, make sentences of their own, and this is referred to as production. The following elementary-level example demonstrates this procedure:

- **Presentation:** the teacher shows the students the following picture and asks them whether the people in it are at work or on holiday to elicit the fact that they are on holiday.



The teacher points to the man and attempts to elicit the phrase *He's swimming* by saying *Can anybody tell me ... he's ... ?* or asking the question *What's he doing ... anybody?* The teacher then models the sentence (*He's swimming*) before isolating the grammar she wants to focus on (*he's*), distorting it (*he's ... he is ... he is*), putting it back together again (*he's ... he's*), and then giving the model in a natural way once more (*Listen ... He's swimming ... he's swimming*). She may accompany this demonstration of form rules by using some physical means such as bringing two hands (for *he* and *is*) together to show how the contraction works or by using the finger technique (see Chapter 11, A1).

- **Practice:** the teacher gets the students to repeat the sentence *He's swimming* in chorus. She may then nominate certain students to repeat the sentence individually, and she corrects any mistakes she hears (see Chapter 7). Now she goes back and models more sentences from the picture (*Mary's reading a book, Paul and Sarah are playing cards*, etc.), getting choral and individual repetition where she thinks this is necessary. Now she is in a position to conduct a slightly freer kind of drill than the Audio-lingual one above:

  Teacher: Can anyone tell me? ... Mary? ... Yes, Sergio
  Student: She's reading a book.
  Teacher: Good. etc.

  In this cue–response drill the teacher gives the cue (*Mary*) before nominating a student (*Sergio*) who will give the response (*She's reading a book*). By cueing before nominating she keeps everyone alert. She will avoid nominating students in a predictable order for the same reason.

  Usually the teacher puts the students in pairs to practise the sentences a bit more before listening to a few examples just to check that the learning has been effective.

- **Production:** the end point of the PPP cycle is production, which some trainers have called 'immediate creativity'. Here the students are asked to use the new language (in this case the present continuous) in sentences of their own. For example, the teacher may get the students to imagine that they are all in a holiday villa. They must now say what each of them is doing, e.g. *Sergio's reading a book, Juana's sunbathing*, etc. They might write a 'holiday' postcard home, e.g. *It's great here. The sun's shining. Paul and Sarah are playing football* … etc. or, by changing the situation, they may be asked to say what they think their friends and relations are doing at that moment, e.g. *My mother's working at the hospital. My father's driving to London. My sister's studying.* etc.

As we shall see in A3 (below), the PPP procedure has come in for considerable criticism over the last few years, especially as a model for teacher trainees to follow. And even when it was at its most popular teachers knew that what might be appropriate for beginner and elementary students was less likely to find success at higher levels where accurate reproduction and controlled repetition seem out of place.

A3 PPP and alternatives to PPP

The PPP procedure came under a sustained attack the 1990s. It was, critics argued, clearly teacher-centred (at least in the kind of procedure which we have demonstrated above) and therefore sat uneasily in a more humanistic and learner-centred framework. It also seems to assume that students learn 'in straight lines' – that is, starting from no knowledge, through highly restricted sentence-based utterances and on to immediate production. Yet human learning probably is not like that; it is more random, more convoluted. And, by breaking language down into small pieces to learn them, it may be cheating the students of a language which, in Tessa Woodward's phrase, is full of 'interlocking variables and systems' (Woodward 1993: 3). Michael Lewis suggested that PPP was inadequate because it reflected neither the nature of language nor the nature of learning (Lewis 1993: 190), and one trainer, Jim Scrivener, even wrote that 'it is fundamentally disabling, not enabling' (Scrivener 1994a: 15). Later however, Scrivener advanced what is perhaps the most worrying aspect of PPP, the fact that it:

> only describes one kind of lesson; it is inadequate as a general proposal concerning approaches to language in the classroom. It entirely fails to describe the many ways in which teachers can work when, for example, using coursebooks, or when adopting a task-based approach.
>
> From J Scrivener (1996: 79)

This, then, is the problem. Despite writer Andy Hopkins' assertion that 'no language course these days offers an undiluted diet of the dry meaningless PPP-structured lessons that so many commentators like to set up as a straw-man foe' (1995: 11), large numbers of trainers and trainees still use it as the main default model for the teaching of new language forms.

In response to these and earlier criticisms many people have offered variations on PPP and alternatives to it. Keith Johnson offered the 'deep-end strategy' as an alternative (Johnson 1982: Chapter 18), where by encouraging the students into immediate production (throwing them in at the deep end) you turn the procedure on its head. The teacher can now see if and where students are having problems during this production phase and return to either presentation or practice as and when necessary after the production phase is over. A few years later Donn Byrne suggested much the same thing (Byrne 1986: 3), joining the three phases in a circle (see Figure 13). Teachers and students can decide at which stage to enter the procedure.

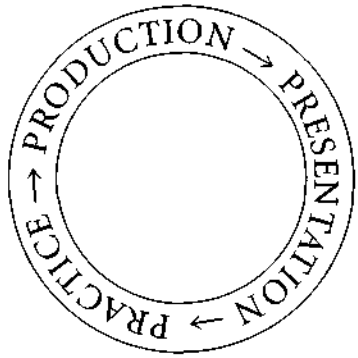


FIGURE 13: Byrne's 'alternative approach'

However, more recent models, usually designed for training purposes, have gone further than this:

- **ARC:** put forward by Jim Scrivener (1994b), this stands for Authentic use, Restricted use, and Clarification and focus. The basic premise here is that most language in the classroom can be described as either A, R, or C. Thus a communicative activity will demonstrate 'authentic' use, whereas a drill, jazz chant, elicited dialogue or guided writing, for example, will provoke restricted use of language by students. Finally Clarification language is that which the teacher and students use to explain grammar, give examples, analyse errors, elicit or repeat things.

  By labelling different parts of any lesson in this way Scrivener is able to describe lessons differently from the old PPP procedure. An old PPP-type lesson can now be described as **CRA** (where the teacher presents a situation, clarifies the language point, institutes restricted (controlled) practice, before getting 'authentic' use), whereas a different lesson – for example, a task-based lesson – might follow a procedure such as **CACACR**. By introducing new terminology, Scrivener forces us to look at things differently, and by producing a descriptive rather than a prescriptive tool, he is attempting to offer an insight into what he called 'the many ways in which teachers can work'.

- **OHE/III:** Michael Lewis claims that students should be allowed to Observe (read or listen to language) which will then provoke them to Hypothesise about how the language works before going on to Experiment on the basis of that hypothesis. Such a description is close to the III of McCarthy and Carter (McCarthy and Carter 1995) where they show students examples of language like the transcripts of conversations (Illustration); they then give them discovery activities and questions about the language – for example *How would* *you rewrite this spoken language formally?* (Interaction) as a result of which, through such a noticing routine, students will grasp new facts about language (Induction). We saw an example of the kind of transcript material they might ask students to study in Chapter 2, A1.

- **ESA:** in the ESA model (see Harmer 1998) three components will usually be present in any teaching sequence, whether of five, fifty, or a hundred minutes.

  E stands for Engage. The point here is that unless students are engaged, emotionally, with what is going on, their learning will be less effective.

  S stands for Study and describes any teaching and learning element where the focus is on how something is constructed, whether it is relative clauses, specific intonation patterns, the construction of a paragraph or text, the way a lexical phrase is made and used, or the collocation possibilities of a particular word.

  A stands for Activate and this means any stage at which students are encouraged to use all and/or any of the language they know. Communicative activities, for example, are designed to activate the students' language knowledge: so too are reading and listening activities when students are doing it for interest and general understanding such as the extensive reading we discuss in Chapter 15, A1.

  ESA allows for three basic lesson procedures. In the first ('straight arrows') the sequence is **ESA**, much like PPP or CRA (see above). A 'boomerang' procedure, on the other hand, follows a more task-based or deep-end approach. Here the order is **EAS**, so that the teacher gets the students engaged before asking them to do something like a written task, a communication game, or a role-play. Based on what happens there the students will then, after the activity has finished, study some aspect of language which they lacked or which they used incorrectly. 'Patchwork' lessons, on the other hand, may follow a variety of sequences such as ones where engaged students are encouraged to activate their knowledge before studying one and then another language element, and then returning to more active tasks, after which the teacher re-engages them before doing some more study, etc.

What all these models demonstrate is a desire to put PPP firmly in its place as one of a number of teaching procedures for the teacher to employ – rather than the central plank of good teaching. The goal is flexibility, not rigidity.

A4 The Communicative approach

The Communicative approach – or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) – is the name which was given to a set of beliefs which included not only a re-examination of what aspects of language to teach, but also a shift in emphasis in how to teach.

The 'what to teach' aspect of the Communicative approach stressed the significance of language functions (see Chapter 2, E2) rather than focusing solely on grammar and vocabulary. A guiding principle was to train students to use these language forms appropriately in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes.

The 'how to teach aspect' of the Communicative approach is closely related to the idea that 'language learning will take care of itself' (see Chapter 5B), and that plentiful exposure to language in use and plenty of opportunities to use it are vitally important for a student's development of knowledge and skill. Activities in CLT typically involve students in real or realistic communication, where the accuracy of the language they use is less important than successful achievement of the communicative task they are performing. Thus role-play and simulation (see Chapter 19, B6) have become very popular in CLT, where students simulate a television programme or a scene at an airport – or they might put together the simulated front page of a newspaper. Sometimes they have to solve a puzzle and can only do so by sharing information. Sometimes they have to write a poem or construct a story together.

What matters in these activities is that students should have a desire to communicate something. They should have a purpose for communicating (e.g. to make a point, to buy an airline ticket, or write a letter to a newspaper). They should be focused on the content of what they are saying or writing rather than on a particular language form. They should use a variety of language rather than just one language structure. The teacher will not intervene to stop the activity; and the materials he or she relies on will not dictate what specific language forms the students use either. In other words such activities should attempt to replicate real communication. All this is seen as being in marked contrast to the kind of teaching and learning we saw in A1 and A2 above. They are at opposite ends of a 'communication continuum' (see Figure 14).

Non-communicative activities	**Communicative activities**
• no communicative desire	• a desire to communicate
• no communicative purpose	• a communicative purpose
• form not content	• content not form
• one language item only	• variety of language
• teacher intervention	• no teacher intervention
• materials control	• no materials control

FIGURE 14: The communication continuum

Not all activities occur at either extreme of the continuum, however. Some may be further towards the communicative end, whereas some may be more non-communicative. An activity in which students have to go round the class asking questions with a communicative purpose, but with some language restriction, may be nearer the right-hand end of the continuum, whereas a game which forces the use of only one structure (with the teacher intervening occasionally), will come near the non-communicative end.

A key to the enhancement of communicative purpose and the desire to communicate is the information gap. A traditional classroom exchange in which one student asks *Where's the library?* and another student answers *It's on Green Street, opposite the bank* when they can both see it and both know the answer, is not much like real communication. If, however, the first student has a map which does not have the bank listed on it, while the other student has a different map with *post office* written on the correct building – but which the first student cannot see – then there is a gap between the knowledge which the two participants have. In order for the first student to locate the bank on their map, that information gap needs to be closed.

The Communicative approach or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) have now become generalised 'umbrella' terms to describe learning sequences which aim to improve the students' ability to communicate, in stark contrast to teaching which is aimed more at learning bits of language just because they exist and without focusing on their use in communication. But while it has been widely accepted for some time that communicative activities are a vital part of a teacher's repertoire, it is less clear whether it is possible to pin down exactly what a communicative approach is. After all, most language teaching aims to improve the students' communicative ability, whatever techniques the teacher uses to promote this. And CLT has also included snatches of drilling and focused language work despite the non-communicative nature of such activities.

Communicative Language Teaching has come under attack from teachers for being prejudiced in favour of native-speaker teachers by demanding a relatively uncontrolled range of language use on the part of the student, and thus expecting the teacher to be able to respond to any and every language problem which may come up. In promoting a methodology which is based around group and pairwork, with teacher intervention kept to a minimum during, say, a role-play, CLT may also offend against educational traditions which it aimed to supplant. We will return to such issues in detail in B1 (below). CLT has sometimes been seen as having eroded the explicit teaching of grammar with a consequent loss among students in accuracy in the pursuit of fluency.

Despite these reservations, however, the communicative approach has left an indelible mark on teaching and learning, resulting in the use of communicative activities in classrooms all over the world.

A5 Task-based learning

The idea of Task-based learning (TBL) was greatly popularised by N Prabhu who, working with schools in Bangalore, southern India, speculated that students were just as likely to learn language if they were thinking about a non-linguistic problem as when they were concentrating on particular language forms (see Prabhu 1987). Instead of a language structure, in other words, students are presented with a task they have to perform or a problem they have to solve. For example, after a class performs some pre-task activities which involve questions and vocabulary checking (e.g. *What is this? It's a timetable. What does 'arrival' mean?*), they ask and answer questions to solve a problem such as finding train-timetable information, e.g. *When does the Brindavan express leave Madras/arrive in Bangalore?* (Prabhu 1987: 32). Although the present simple may frequently be used in such an activity, the focus of the lesson is the task, not the structure.

One way of looking at Task-based learning is to see it as a kind of 'deep-end' strategy (see Johnson 1982), or, in the words of Jane Willis, 'like a sort of PPP upside down' (Willis 1994: 19). In other words students are given a task to perform and only when the task has been completed does the teacher discuss the language that was used, making corrections and adjustments which the students' performance of the task has shown to be desirable. However, as Willis herself makes clear, Task-based methodology is in fact considerably more complicated than this. She suggests three basic stages: the Pre-task, the Task cycle, and Language focus (see Figure 15).

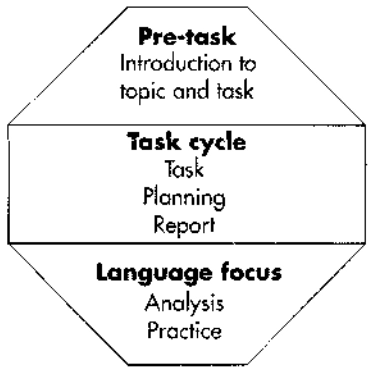


FIGURE 15: The Willis TBL framework (Willis 1996: 52)

In the Pre-task the teacher explores the topic with the class and may highlight useful words and phrases, helping students to understand the task instructions. The students may hear a recording of other people doing the same task. During the Task cycle, the students perform the task in pairs or small groups while the teacher monitors from a distance. The students then plan how they will tell the rest of the class what they did and how it went, and they then report on the task either orally or in writing, and/or compare notes on what has happened. In the Language focus stage the students examine and discuss specific features of any listening or reading text which they have looked at for the task and/or the teacher may conduct some form of practice of specific language features which the task has provoked.

TBL implies a shift away from some traditional teacher roles (see Chapter 4B). We cannot always be acting as a controller if we want students to 'manipulate, comprehend and interact' with a task (Nunan 1989a: 10). It suggests different attitudes to accuracy on the part of the teacher from the Audio-lingual approach and the PPP procedure too. The emphasis on language study will decrease in proportion to the amount of time spent on the tasks themselves.

Critics of TBL have worried about its applicability to lower learning levels – though in fact there are many tasks that are suitable for beginners and/or younger learners. They have also asserted that while it may be highly appropriate to base some learning on tasks, it would be 'unsound' to make tasks 'the basis for an entire pedagogical methodology' (Seedhouse 1999: 155). Seedhouse points out that the kind of interaction which typical tasks promote leads to the use of specific 'task-solving' linguistic forms. These fail to include the kind of language we might expect from discussion, debate, or social interactions of other kinds. There is also a problem with how to grade tasks in a syllabus, as we shall see in Chapter 21, A2.

Despite these caveats, however, tasks are now widely used in language teaching, either as the basis of a language course or as one of its component parts.

A6 Four methods

Four methods, developed in the 1970s and 1980s, have had a considerable impact upon language teaching even if they are rarely used exclusively in 'mainstream' teaching. They are frequently described, together, as humanistic approaches because in three out of the four cases at least, the designers are primarily concerned to lower the students' affective filters (see Chapter 5D), and so remove a psychological barrier to learning. Nevertheless, as many commentators point out, there are elements in the Silent Way or Total Physical Response (see below) which seem entirely teacher-centred and may, indeed, cause exactly the kind of anxiety which humanist theorising aims to prevent.

- **Community Language Learning:** in the classic form of Community Language Learning (CLL) students sit in a circle. It is up to them to decide what they want to talk about. A counsellor or a 'knower' stands outside the circle. The knower provides or corrects target language statements so that if, for instance, a student says something in their own language, the knower can then give them the English equivalent for them to use.

  A student says what he or she wants to say either in English or in his or her first language. In the latter case the knower translates it into English, in effect 'teaching' the student how to make the utterance. The student can now say what he or she wants to the circle. Later, when students are more confident with the language, they can be put in lines facing each other for pairwork discussion.

  In some CLL lessons the students' utterance – helped or provided by the knower – are recorded onto tape to be analysed later. There is often a period for reflection during which students comment frankly on how they felt about the activity. In all of these cases teachers help students achieve what they want, offering help and counsel to the 'community' of the class. The job is to 'facilitate' rather than to 'teach'.

  The influence of CLL in mainstream teaching has been fairly pronounced. The idea that students should reflect upon their learning experiences is now widely accepted as we shall see in Chapter 24, A1. We have already seen in Chapter 4 how teachers need to be conscious of the variety of roles they can adopt in the classroom, and the idea that they should use English to communicate things that they want to say is not disputed.

- **The Silent Way:** one of the most notable features of the Silent Way is the behaviour of the teacher who, rather than entering into conversation with the students, says as little as possible. This is because the founder of the method, Caleb Cattegno, believed that learning is best facilitated if the learner discovers and creates language rather than just remembering and repeating what has been taught. The learner should be in the driving seat, in other words, not the teacher.

In the Silent Way learners interact with physical objects too, especially Cuisenaire rods – which we will describe in more detail in Chapter 10D. There is a problem-solving element involved too, since students have to resolve language construction problems for themselves.

In a classic Silent Way procedure, a teacher models sounds while pointing to a phonemic chart – or to an arrangement of Cuisenaire rods. A student imitates the teacher and the teacher indicates (silently) if he or she is correct. If not, another student is prompted to help the first student. A third or fourth student is prompted if necessary until a correct version of the phoneme is produced. The class continues with the teacher pointing to different phonemes while the students work out what they are – and then how to combine them. Later, students can point to elements on the chart or arrange the Cuisenaire rods in such a way that they have provided a stimulus for the language in the same way as the teacher did. They and their colleagues have to work out what the correct language is.

Through all this procedure the teacher indicates by gesture or expression what the students should do and whether or not they are correct. Examples and corrections are only given verbally if no student can do it first time round. Thus it is up to the students – under the controlling but indirect influence of the teacher – to solve problems and learn the language.

To some, the Silent Way has seemed somewhat inhuman, with the teacher's silence acting as a barrier rather than an incentive. But to others, the reliance students are forced to place upon themselves and upon each other is exciting and liberating. It is students who should take responsibility for their learning; it is the teacher's job to organise this.

The Silent Way has had a direct influence on mainstream teaching by promoting the use of phonemic charts and pointing to objects and sounds (see Example 2 in Chapter 13, B1), and Cuisenaire rods (see Chapter 10D), and an indirect one in the use of discovery techniques (Chapter 11, B2).

- **Suggestopaedia:** developed by Georgi Lozanov, Suggestopaedia sees the physical surroundings and atmosphere of the classroom as of vital importance. By ensuring that the students are comfortable, confident and relaxed, the affective filter is lowered, thus enhancing learning.

  A feature of Suggestopaedia is referred to as 'infantilisation'; that is the teacher and students exist in a parent-children relationship where, to remove barriers to learning, students are given different names from their outside real ones. Traumatic themes are avoided, and the sympathy with which the teacher treats the students is vitally important.

  A Suggestopaedic lesson has three main parts. There is an oral review section in which previously learnt material is used for discussion. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of new dialogue material and its native language equivalent. Finally, in the 'séance' or 'concert' session, students listen to relaxing music (slow movements from the Baroque period at about sixty beats per minute are preferred) while the teacher reads the new dialogue material in a way which synchronises with the taped music. During this phase there are also 'several minutes of solemn silence' (Lozanov 1978: 272) and the students leave the room silently.

The emphasis on lowering the affective filter is now accepted as an important part of all teaching. Music is frequently used in classes too, though not necessarily in the ways and of the type that Lozanov recommended (see Chapters 3, B5, and 16C).

- **Total Physical Response (TPR):** the originator of TPR, James Asher, worked from the premise that adult second language learning could have similar developmental patterns to that of child language acquisition. If children learn much of their language from speech directed at them in the form of commands to perform actions, then adults will learn best in that way too. Accordingly, TPR asks students to respond physically to the language they hear. Language processing is thus matched with physical action.

  Like many other methodology devisers, Asher sees the need to lower the affective filter and finds that organising physical actions in the classroom helps to do this. A typical TPR class might involve the teacher telling students to 'pick up the triangle from the table and give it to me' or 'walk quickly to the door and hit it' (Asher 1977: 54–56). When the students can all respond to commands correctly, one of them can then start giving instructions to other classmates.

  Critics of TPR point out that this kind of teaching may only be appropriate for beginner learners and question how TPR ties in with any real-world needs. Asher himself says it should be included together with other methods. Yet certain features of TPR have had an influence. In TPR students do not have to give instructions themselves until they are ready. This kind of pre-speaking phase was considered of vital importance by Stephen Krashen and Tracey Terrell in their book *The Natural Approach* (Krashen and Terrell 1982). And in responding to commands students get a lot of comprehensible input (see Chapter 5B), and in performing physical actions they seem to echo the claims of Neuro-linguistic programming that certain people benefit greatly from kinaesthetic activity (see Chapter 3, B5).

A7 Humanistic teaching

Concerns about the affective variable (see Chapter 5D) influenced the designers of methods such as Community Language Learning and Suggestopaedia. But humanistic teaching has also found a greater acceptance at the level of procedures and activities, in which students are encouraged to make use of their own lives and feelings in the classroom. Such exercises have a long history and owe much to a work from the 1970s called *Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Classroom* by Gertrude Moscowitz (Moscowitz 1978) in which many activities are designed to make students feel good and remember happy times whilst at the same time practising grammar items. Students might be asked to make sentences with *was* and *were* about their favourite things, for example *When I was a child my favourite food was hamburgers* or *When I was a child my favourite relative was my uncle.*

A more recent example of the same kind of thinking is the following 'choosing the passive' activity. Students are asked to read paired active and passive sentences and to underline the sentence from each pair which best fits their personal story. They can change words too (e.g. from *loved* to *ignored*) if they want.

PASSIVE AND ACTIVE LIST

I was born.	I pushed out of my mother's womb.
I was taught to yawn.	I gave my first yawn.
I was shown how to crawl.	I crawled all over the floor.
I was loved by my Dad.	I loved my Dad.

From *More Grammar Games* by M Rinvolucri and P Davis (Cambridge University Press)

Students then explain their choices to each other and, later, write their own passive and active sentences. By the end of the activity they will have said a lot about themselves, reflected on their lives, and will have come to understand a lot about the relationship between active and passive verb forms.

The decision to use humanistic-style activities will depend on how comfortable teachers and students are about working with real lives and feelings. In one sense it seems crazy not to. Nevertheless, as we saw in Chapter 5D, this has not stopped people from worrying about how appropriate it is to have the teacher encouraging personal disclosure on the part of the students; how well are teachers able to deal with such disclosure(s)? How culturally appropriate is the idea of talking about personal experiences and feelings? However, those who enjoy taking such exercises into class feel that using the students themselves as the topic may help them to 'absorb grammar, as it were, through peripheral vision' (Rinvolucri and Davies 1995: xii).

The Lexical approach

The Lexical approach, discussed by Dave Willis (Willis 1990) and popularised by the writer Michael Lewis (1993, 1997), is based on the assertion that 'language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks' (Lewis 1997: 3). These are the 'lexical phrases' that were discussed in Chapter 2 B4, the collocations, idioms, fixed and semi-fixed phrases which form such an important part of the language. Lewis proposes that fluency is the result of the acquisition of a large store of fixed and semi-fixed prefabricated items which are 'available as the foundation for any linguistic novelty or creativity' (1997: 15).

This highlighting of an area of language that was, perhaps, previously undervalued has played a valuable role in provoking debate about what students should study. A lexical approach would steer us away from an over-concentration on syntax and tense usage (with vocabulary slotted into these grammar patterns) towards the teaching of phrases which show words in combination, and which are generative in a different way from traditional grammar substitution tables. Thus, instead of teaching *will* for the future, we might instead have students focus on its use in a series of 'archetypical utterances' (Lewis 1993: 97), such as *I'll give you a ring, I'll be in touch, I'll see what I can do, I'll be back in a minute,* etc.

In the area of methodology Lewis' account of a Lexical approach is fairly straightforward. Typical activities include asking students to add intensifiers to semi-fixed expressions, e.g. *It's obvious something's gone wrong (quite)* (Lewis 1997: 96), and getting students, once they have read a text, to underline all the nouns they can find and then to underline any verbs that collocate with those nouns (1997: 109). Word-order exercises can be adapted to focus on particular phrase components, as in this example for expressions with *get*:

Rearrange these to make fixed expressions with the verb *(get).* [redacted]

1. Things much can't worse get.
2. What we to there are supposed time get?
3. I you the very weren't happy impression got.
4. We've we as as the for can far moment got.
5. We be to don't anywhere seem getting.
6. What you I can get?

Which of these suggests:

flying   offering a drink   frustration   despair

'Sentence anagrams' from *Implementing the Lexical Approach* by M Lewis (Language Teaching Publications)

Elsewhere, however, Lewis suggests that exposure to enough suitable input, not formal teaching, is the 'key to increasing the learner's lexicon', and that 'most vocabulary is acquired, not taught' (1997: 197).

Suggesting that language should be taught in such a Lexical approach is not without problems, however. In the first place, no one has yet explained how the learning of fixed and semi-fixed phrases can be incorporated into the understanding of a language system. Indeed it can be argued that learning the system is a vital prerequisite of the ability to string phrases together into a coherent whole. Otherwise we are left with the danger of having to learn an endless succession of phrase-book utterances, 'all chunks but no pineapple' (Thornbury 1998: 12).

Another problem is the way in which we might order such phrases for teaching and learning purposes or, if we believe that exposure to enough suitable input is the key, what kind of input that should be.

Finally we need to ask in what way a Lexical approach differs from other accounts of language teaching since there are as yet no sets of procedures to exemplify an approach to language learning.

Despite these reservations, however, the Lexical approach has certainly drawn our attention to facts about the composition of language; what it has not yet done is make the leap from that stage to a set of pedagogic principles or syllabus specifications which could be incorporated into a method.

B What methodology?

With so many different approaches and methods available, many teachers are unsure of which to choose and how to go about making that choice. In this section we will look at some of the cultural implications of the methods we use, and come to some conclusions about the bases on which we can decide on our approach to teaching.

B1 Methods and culture

In the following transcript from a class at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, USA, two students, a Japanese male (S3) and a Malaysian female (S4) are taking part in a role-play about buying a wedding dress. Hovering over them to help and/or correct is the teacher (T2).

S4: The price ...
S3: A little costly ...
T2: (*helping out*) Too expensive.
S3: No ... not ... a little costly?
T2: OK, so you won't choose that because it is too expensive ...
S3: I think it is costly.
T2: Yeah, in English we say too expensive.
S3: I can't say costly?
T2: Well ... (*long pause*). Costly is OK, yeah, but more often ... probably we say expensive ...
S3: OK, you are my teacher ... (*laughs*)
T2: No, you don't have to agree with me ...
S3: I don't have to ... ?

From B Kumaravadivelu (1991: 107)

This exchange is interesting for a number of reasons: in the first place S3 has come across the word *costly* before and is sure it is right, so sure, in fact, that he does not want to let it go. In the second place the teacher's attempts to help, well-meaning as they are, run into an essential problem which so many teachers face in the hurly-burly of the classroom. What is the difference between *costly* and *expensive*? The teacher is left to fall back on the common explanation (since he is unable, on the spot, to summon up the necessary information about why the meanings are different) that *more often ... we say expensive.* But it is what happens next that is most interesting. In a sense S3 gives up the fight, and, accepting that the teacher is ultimately the authority figure in an educational exchange (OK, *you are my teacher*), agrees to change the word he has fought so hard to keep. The teacher is not very sure of his authority, however, believing perhaps that his role is facilitative, that teachers and students are essentially equal as they work towards a common learning goal. *No*, he says, *you don't have to agree with me ...* at which point the student gets really confused, and his (derisory? amused? puzzled?) comment is the question *I don't have to ... ?*

What has happened in this short incident is that two educational cultures seem to have come sharply into conflict, that there is, in Kumaravadivelu's words, a mismatch between 'teacher intention and learner interpretation'. In the same way Greg Ellis points to similar mismatches when 'communicative' teachers who have a facilitative view of the teacher's role in communicative activities try and impose this view of the teacher–student relationship in cultures where students expect the teacher to behave in a more authoritative way (Ellis 1996: 213–218).

As Alistair Pennycook has said, 'we need to see English language teaching as located in the domain of popular culture as much as in the domain of applied linguistics' (Pennycook 1998: 162). Our attitudes to the language, and to the way it is taught, reflect cultural biases and beliefs about how we should communicate and how we should educate each other. And where, as in the example above, there are differing beliefs or expectations, the teaching-learning exchange can become problematic. Dilys Thorp goes further and suggests that where these mismatches are concerned, it is the students – not the teachers – who tend to get judged negatively. What, she wonders, are we to make of the following comment by a British lecturer about an Indonesian student; 'his work shows that he's very bright, but he's quiet in class' (Thorp 1991: 112)? If the comment was made about a British student, she suggests, it might indeed indicate that the student was of a quiet and shy disposition, whereas for the Indonesian student the judgement might not be about that student's personality at all, but rather about norms of classroom behaviour that the student feels are culturally appropriate. 'It is far too easy', she writes, ' to think that our own ideas as to what constitute "good" learning are universal, and forget their cultural specificity' (Thorp 1991: 117).

The fact is that many of the approaches and teaching methods we have discussed in this chapter are based on a very western idea of what constitutes 'good' learning. For example, we have expected active participation in class, and we have encouraged adventurous students who are prepared to 'have a go' even when they are not completely sure of the language they are trying to use. We sometimes ask students to talk about themselves and their lives in a potentially revealing way. We tell students that they should take charge of their learning, that the teacher is a helper and guide rather than the source of knowledge and authority. Yet all of these tenets fly in the face of the educational traditions of some different cultures. Thus British and American teachers working in other countries, for example, sometimes complain that their students have 'nothing to say' when in fact it is not an issue of the students' intelligence, knowledge, or creativity which makes them reluctant to communicate in a British or American way, but their educational culture.

The situation is no easier for the students themselves who are being subjected to methods which they find extremely uncomfortable, or for which they are simply unprepared. Nor is this problem restricted to teachers from one culture teaching students from another. In 1998 an Argentinian teacher, Pablo Toledo, posted a message to a discussion list on the Internet for teachers from South America which he called 'Howl' after the celebrated poem by the American Allan Ginsberg (Toledo 1998). In his posting he lamented the fact that teachers who try 'affective learning' and humanistic teaching, who try drama and role-play and other communicative techniques, fall flat on their faces in secondary classes where the students are not interested and who merely wish to get good grades. He argues passionately for a new kind of methodology to suit that kind of reality since the ideas developed in 'comfy little schools with highly motivated students' just are not right for less 'privileged' contexts, 'not', he writes, 'because there is something wrong with the ideas, but they just were not made for our teaching reality, and do not deal with our problems'.

These are some of the realities of the classroom which methodological theories sometimes ignore. Where teachers blindly follow one or other method or procedure even in the face of student resistance or incomprehension, we get the kind of problems which we have discussed so far. What then is to be done?

Teaching and learning is a contract between two parties for which they both need to agree the terms. It is not a one-sided affair. Teachers need to understand student wants and expectations just as much as they are determined to push their own methodological beliefs. However, this does not necessarily mean that they have to abandon their own theories because the students are not used to what their teacher wants to do. It means, instead, that some accommodation has to be reached between what the two parties want and expect. It means, perhaps, initiating gradual rather than immediate change. If students are not used to giving instant opinions in class, for example, teachers can introduce the procedure gradually. Perhaps, instead of trying to get students to say, in front of their classmates, what they think is beautiful (a question which might meet with an uncomfortable silence) the teacher could dictate this sentence to her students: *One of the most beautiful things I have ever seen is ...* . She can then ask them, individually, to complete the sentence in writing in any way they want (e.g. seriously, humorously, profoundly) with one word or a whole phrase. When they have done this they can read their sentences out. Two sentences, from Japanese students, that stick in my mind are: *One of the most beautiful things I have ever seen is sunrise over Mount Fuji*, and *One of the most beautiful things I have ever seen is my daughter's smile.* If the teacher perceives that students are very worried about making mistakes in their sentence completion, she can check the sentences first before the students read them aloud. There is nothing special about this procedure, of course, but it is possible that activities like this will gradually move students, over time, to a position where they are more prepared to speak spontaneously in class. They bridge the gap between original teacher intention and initial student discomfort.

Dilys Thorp, whose article was cited above, had the same kind of problem with her students in China when they were confronted with listening tasks. An important skill for students is listening for gist (general understanding) without getting hung up on the meaning of every single word (see Chapter 14, A4). Yet Thorp's students were not used to this idea; they wanted to be able to listen to tapes again and again, translating word for word. It is worth quoting her response to this situation in full:

> In listening, where they needed the skill of listening for gist and not every word, and where they wanted to listen time and time again, we gradually weaned them away from this by initially allowing them to listen as often as they liked; but in return – and this was their part of the

> bargain – they were to concentrate on the gist and answer guided questions. These guided questions moved them away from a sentence-by-sentence analysis towards inferential interpretation of the text. Then, we gradually reduced the number of times they were allowed to listen. This seemed to work: it was a system with which they were happy, and which enabled them to see real improvements in their listening skills.
> From D Thorp (1991: 115)

Teaching and learning is about making the kind of bargain that Thorp describes. Even where teachers and students come from the same town, village, or social group they are likely to live in different cultures – that of teacher and student. Reaching an accommodation between those two cultures (which may involve moderating beliefs, and making compromises – for example, where teacher and students have different views on how often the textbook should be used) is part of what all teachers do to a greater or lesser extent. It is one of the things which makes teaching consistently challenging.

B2 Making choices

It is extremely difficult to come to conclusions about which approaches and methods are best and/or most appropriate for our own teaching situations. As previous chapters have suggested, both theorists and practitioners argue constantly about how languages are learnt and the best ways to encourage this. Yet certain conclusions can be drawn:

- **Exposure to language:** students need constant exposure to language since this is a key component of language acquisition.
- **Input:** students need comprehensible input but this is not enough in itself, unless there is some language study or some opportunity for noticing or consciousness-raising to help students remember language facts.
- **CLT:** communicative activities and task-based teaching offer real learning benefits, though neither tasks nor communicative activities on their own are sufficient for a whole language programme.
- **The affective variable:** anxiety needs to be lowered for learning to take place.
- **Discovery:** where culturally appropriate, students should be encouraged to discover things for themselves, as this is likely to lead to better retention in the long run.
- **Grammar and lexis:** lexis is as important as grammar. Showing how words combine together and behave both semantically and grammatically is an important part of any language learning programme.
- **Methodology and culture:** teaching methodology is rooted in popular culture. Assumptions that methodologists and teachers make are not

necessarily shared by students from different traditions. Compromise may be necessary.

All this amounts to a pragmatic eclecticism where decisions about what and how to teach are based, essentially, on what seems to work. The alternative models to PPP discussed in A3 offer coherent frameworks for the operation of such an eclecticism. What seems to work will depend upon the age and character-type of learners, their cultural backgrounds, and the level they are studying at – not to mention the teacher's own beliefs and preferences. Course designers and materials writers have a large part to play here since any coursebook that is used embodies approaches and methods. Writers of current coursebooks tend to mix work on language skills with various kinds of study, providing communicative activities alongside more traditional grammar practice, and mixing in elements of learner training (see Chapter 24, A1) and activities designed to encourage humanistic engagement.

What really matters, for teachers who wish to grow and develop as they teach (and for the students whom they work with), is that practices should be constantly scrutinised to see if they are working and why or why not. That is why action research is so important, as we shall see in Chapter 24, B1. If we and our students constantly monitor our classes and adjust what we do accordingly, there is a really good chance that the methods and techniques we use will be the best for the classes we teach.

Pragmatic eclecticism does not just mean that 'anything goes'. On the contrary, students have a right to expect that they are being asked to do things for a reason, and that their teacher has some aim in mind which he or she can, if asked, articulate clearly. Teaching plans should always be designed to meet an aim or aims (see page 314).

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Approaches and methods**

  For a discussion of approach vs. method, etc. see J Richards and T Rodgers (1986: Chapter 2).

- **Audio-lingualism**

  For a concise description of Audio-lingualism, see Williams and Burden (1997: 10–13). Chapters 2 and 3 of Richards and Rodgers (1986) put Audio-lingual methodology into its context.

- **PPP and teaching models**

  For a classic description of PPP, see D Byrne (1986: Chapter 1). Some of the books and articles which influenced the PPP debate of the 1990s are Lewis (1993, 1996) whose critiques became increasingly pronounced, articles in Sections 1 and 2 of J and D Willis (eds.) (1996), T Woodward (1993), and J Harmer (1996).

- **Communicative approaches**

  For a discussion of what a communicative activity really is, see J Harmer (1982).

  The appropriacy of the Communicative approach both in and outside inner circle countries (see Chapter 1, B1) has come under attack from P Medgyes (1986) and G Ellis (1996).

  The whole value of the Communicative approach was the subject of a bitter clash in the mid-1980s between M Swan (Swan 1985) and H Widdowson (Widdowson 1985).

- **Task-based learning**

  On TBL in general, see C Crookes and S Gass (1993a and b) and D Willis (1990). J Willis (1996) suggests a specific approach to TBL.

  On teacher and learner roles in TBL it is well worth reading D Nunan (1989a: Chapter 4).

- **Four methods**

  H Douglas Brown (2000: 103–108) calls these 'Designer methods'. See also M Celce Murcia (1981). J Richards and T Rodgers (1986) have excellent separate chapters for each.

  On Community Language Learning, see C Curran (1976) and L La Forge (1983).

  On the Silent Way, see C Gattegno (1976) and R Rossner (1982).

  On Suggestopaedia, read G Lozanov (1978). More easily accessible examples can be found in J Cureau (1982) and M Lawlor (1986). On Total Physical Response, see J Asher (1977).

- **The Lexical approach**

  A major populariser of the Lexical approach has been M Lewis (1993, 1997). D Willis (1990) wrote about a lexical syllabus.

  An impressive critique of Lewis' work is S Thornbury (1998). An enthusiast for the Lexical approach is M Baigent (1999).

- **Methodology and culture**

  C Kramsch and P Sullivan (1996) write about appropriate pedagogy from their experiences of teaching and researching in Vietnam.

  We should avoid making assumptions about what students from different methodological cultures appreciate. J Flowerdew, for example, shows how groupwork is appropriate in a Hong Kong setting (Flowerdew 1998). W Littlewood (2000) urgently reminds us that not all the individuals in a culture share the same educational beliefs or respond in the same way.

7 Mistakes and feedback

Feedback encompasses not only correcting students, but also offering them an assessment of how well they have done, whether during a drill or after a longer language production exercise. The way we assess and correct students will depend not only upon the kind of mistakes being made (and the reasons for them), but also on the type of activity the students are taking part in.

A Students make mistakes

One of the things that puzzles many teachers is why students go on making the same mistakes even when such mistakes have been repeatedly pointed out to them. Yet not all mistakes are the same; sometimes they seem to be deeply ingrained, yet at other times students correct themselves with apparent ease.

In his book on mistakes and correction Julian Edge suggests that we can divide mistakes into three broad categories: 'slips' (that is mistakes which students can correct themselves once the mistake has been pointed out to them), 'errors' (mistakes which they cannot correct themselves – and which therefore need explanation), and 'attempts' (that is when a student tries to say something but does not yet know the correct way of saying it) (Edge 1989: Chapter 2). Of these, it is the category of errors that most concerns teachers, though the students' attempts will tell us a lot about their current knowledge – and may well provide chances for opportunistic teaching (see Chapter 11, A2).

It is now widely accepted that there are two distinct causes for the errors which most if not all students make at various stages:

- **L1 interference:** students who learn English as a second language already have a deep knowledge of at least one other language, and where L1 and English come into contact with each other there are often confusions which provoke errors in a learner's use of English. This can be at the level of sounds: Arabic, for example, does not have a phonemic distinction between /f/ and /v/, and Arabic speakers may well say *ferry* when they mean *very*. It can be at the level of grammar where a student's first language has a subtly different system: French students often have trouble with the present perfect because there is a similar form in French but the same time concept is expressed slightly differently; Japanese students have problems with article usage because Japanese does not use the same system of reference, and so on. It may, finally, be at the level of word usage where similar sounding words have slightly different meanings:

librería in Spanish means 'bookshop', not 'library', *embarazada* means 'pregnant', not 'embarrassed' (such so-called 'false friends' are common between Romance languages).

- **Developmental errors:** for a long time now researchers in child language development have been aware of the phenomenon of 'over-generalisation'. This is best described as a situation where a child who starts by saying *Daddy went, They came*, etc. perfectly correctly suddenly starts saying **Daddy goed* and **They comed.* What seems to be happening is that the child starts to 'over-generalise' a new rule that has been (subconsciously) learnt, and as a result even makes mistakes with things that he or she knew before. Later, however, it all gets sorted out, as the child begins to have a more sophisticated understanding, and he or she goes back to saying *went* and *came* whilst, at the same time, handling regular past tense endings.

  Foreign language students make the same kind of 'developmental' errors as well. This accounts for mistakes like **She is more nicer than him* where the acquisition of *more* for comparatives is over-generalised and then mixed up with the rule that the student has learnt – that comparative adjectives are formed of an adjective + *-er.* Errors of this kind are part of a natural acquisition process. When second language learners make errors, they are demonstrating part of the natural process of language learning.

Errors are part of the students' **interlanguage**, that is the version of the language which a learner has at any one stage of development, and which is continually reshaped as he or she aims towards full mastery. When responding to errors teachers should be seen as providing feedback, helping that reshaping process rather than telling students off because they are wrong.

B Assessing student performance

Assessment of student performance can come from the teacher or from the students themselves.

B1 Teachers assessing students

Assessment of performance can be explicit when we say *That was really good,* or implicit when, during a language drill for example, we pass on to the next student without making any comment or correction (there is always the danger, however, that the student may misconstrue our silence as something else).

Because the assessment we give is either largely positive or somewhat negative students are likely to receive it in terms of praise or criticism. Indeed, one of our roles is to encourage students by praising them for work that is well done, just as it is one of our duties to say when things have not been successful (see Chapter 4, B3). Yet the value of this praise and blame is not quite as clear-cut as such a bald statement might imply.

While it is true that students respond well to praise, over-complimenting them on their work – particularly where their own self-evaluation tells them they have not done well – is likely to prove counter-productive. Williams and Burden (1997: 134–136) show that to be effective, praise has to be combined, in the students' eyes, with the teacher's genuine interest in their work. They report on research (Caffyn 1984) in which secondary students reported their need to understand the reasons for the teacher's approval or disapproval. Such students were likely to respond better to private assessment which leads to successful future action than to public recognition. Punishment was seen as completely counter-productive.

What this suggests is that assessment has to be handled with subtlety. Indiscriminate praise or blame will have little positive effect – indeed it will be negatively received – but measured approval and disapproval which demonstrates a teacher's interest in and attention to a student's work may well result in continuing or even increased motivation (see Chapter 3C).

It is sometimes tempting to concentrate all our feedback on the language which students use such as incorrect verb tenses, pronunciation, or spelling for example, and to ignore the content of what they are saying or writing. Yet especially when we involve them in language production activities (see Chapters 17–19) this is a mistake. Whenever we ask students to give opinions or write creatively, whenever we set up a role-play or involve them in putting together a school newspaper, or in the writing of a report, what they choose to say is just as valuable as they how they choose to say it.

Apart from tests and exams (which we will consider in Chapter 23) there are a number of ways in which we can assess our students' work:

- **Comments:** commenting on student performance happens at various stages both in and outside the class. Thus we may say *good*, or nod approvingly, and these comments (or actions) are a clear sign of a positive assessment. When we wish to give a negative assessment we might do so by indicating that something has gone wrong (see C2 below), or by saying things such as *That's not quite right* or *Your invitation language was a bit mixed up.* When we make comments about our students' written work we can write speaking-like comments at the end of a piece of writing such as *You've written a very interesting composition*, or *Paragraph 2 is confusing because the sequence of events is not clear.* We can write our comments in note form in the margins, or use comment symbols (see D1 below).

- **Marks and grades:** when students are graded on their work they are always keen to know what grades they have achieved. Awarding a mark of 9/10 for a piece of writing or giving a B+ assessment for a speaking activity are clear indicators that students have done well.

  When students get good grades their motivation is often positively affected – provided that the level of challenge for the task was appropriate. Bad grades can be extremely disheartening. Nor is grading always easy and clear cut. If we want to give grades, therefore, we need to decide on what basis we are going to do this and be able to describe this to the students (see Chapter 23, C2 on marking tests).

  When we grade a homework exercise (or a test item) which depends on multiple choice, sentence fill-ins, or other controlled exercise types, it will be relatively easy for students to understand how and why they achieved the marks or grades which we have given them. The same is less obviously true with more creative activities where we ask students to produce spoken or written language to perform a task. In such cases our awarding of grades will necessarily be somewhat more subjective. It is possible that despite this our students will have enough confidence in us to accept our judgement, especially where it coincides with their own assessment of their work. But where this is not the case – or where they compare their mark or grade with other students and do not agree with what they find – it will be helpful if we can demonstrate clear criteria for the grading we have given, either offering some kind of marking scale (see Chapter 23, C2), or some other written or spoken explanation of the basis on which we will make our judgement.

Awarding letter grades is potentially awkward if people misunderstand what letters mean. In some cultures success is only achieved if the grade is 'A', whereas for people in other education systems a 'B' indicates a good result. If, therefore, we wish to rely on grades like this our students need to be absolutely clear about what such grades mean – especially if we wish to add plus and minus signs to (e.g. C++ or A–).

Though grades are popular with students and teachers, some practitioners prefer not to award them, because they find the difference between an A and a B difficult to quantify, or because they cannot see the dividing line between a 'pass' and a 'distinction' clearly. Such teachers prefer to rely on the kind of comments mentioned above.

If we do use marks and grades, however, we can give them after an oral activity, for a piece of homework, or at the end of a period of time (a week or a semester).

- **Reports:** at the end of a term or year some teachers write reports on their students' performance either for the student, the school, or the parents of that student. Such reports should give a clear indication of how well the student has done in the recent past and a reasonable assessment of their future prospects.

  It is important when writing reports to achieve a judicious balance between positive and negative feedback, where this is possible. Like all feedback students have a right (and a desire) to know not only what their weaknesses may be, but also what strengths they have been able to demonstrate.

Reports of this kind may lead to future improvement and progress. The chances for this is greatly increased if they are taken together with the students' own assessment of their performance.

B2 Students assessing themselves

Although, as teachers, we are ideally placed to provide accurate assessments of student performance, students can also be extremely effective at monitoring and judging their own language production. They frequently have a very clear idea of how well they are doing or have done, and if we help them to develop this awareness, we may greatly enhance learning.

Student self-assessment is bound up with the whole matter of learner autonomy since if we can encourage them to reflect upon their own learning through learner training (Chapter 24, A1) or when on their own away from any classroom (see Chapter 24, A3), we are equipping them with a powerful tool for future development.

Involving students in assessment of themselves and their peers occurs when we ask a class *Do you think that's right?* after writing something we heard someone say up on the board, or asking the class the same question when one of their number gives a response. We can also ask them at the end of an activity how well they think they have got on – or tell them to add a written comment to a piece of written work they have completed, giving their own assessment of that work. We might ask them to give themselves marks or a grade and then see how this tallies with our own.

Self-assessment can be made more formal in a number of ways. Students can be given material to guide them in making their own judgements, as in the following example from a coursebook review unit for intermediate students:

B

Checklist

Use this checklist to record how you feel about your progress. Tick if you are satisfied with your progress. Put a cross if you are not satisfied.

I can	Yes/no	I know	Yes/no
deal with misunderstandings		how to get my meaning across in a conversation	
use questions tags correctly		some American colloquial expressions	
express my opinions		how to listen actively	
take part in meetings		more about effective communication	
agree and disagree politely		how to interrupt politely in meetings	
give compliments		more about using connectors and conjunctions	
use prepositions of time		some different ways of learning vocabulary	
recognise and pronounce weak forms of prepositions		more about my learning preferences	
use the simple present passive		how well I'm doing	

From *Activate your English Intermediate* by B Sinclair and P Prowse (Cambridge University Press)

A final way of formalising an assessment dialogue between teacher and student is through a 'record of achievement' (ROA). Here students are asked to write their own assessment of their successes and difficulties and say how they think they can proceed. The teacher then adds their own assessment of the students' progress (including grades), and replies to the points the student has made.

A typical ROA form might look like this:

Student comment	Signed: ....
Teacher comment	Signed: ....

Such ROAs, unlike the more informal journal and letter writing which students and teachers can engage in (see Chapter 24, A1), force both parties to think carefully about strengths and weaknesses and can help them decide on future courses of action. They are especially revealing for other people who might be interested in a student's progress, such as parents.

Where students are involved in their own assessment there is a good chance that their understanding of the feedback which their teacher gives them will be greatly enhanced as their own awareness of the learning process increases.

C Feedback during oral work

Though feedback – both assessment and correction – can be very helpful during oral work teachers should not deal with all oral production in the same way. Decisions about how to react to performance will depend upon the stage of the lesson, the activity, the type of mistake made, and the particular student who is making that mistake.

C1 Accuracy and fluency

A distinction is often made between accuracy and fluency. We need to decide whether a particular activity in the classroom is designed to expect the students' complete accuracy – as in the study of a piece of grammar, a pronunciation exercise, or some vocabulary work for example – or whether we are asking the students to use the language as fluently as possible. We need to make a clear difference between 'non-communicative' and 'communicative' activities (see Chapter 6, A4); whereas the former are generally intended to ensure correctness, the latter are designed to improve language fluency.

Most students want and expect us to give them feedback on their performance. For example, in one celebrated correspondence a non-native speaker teacher was upset when, on a teacher training course in Great Britain, her English trainers refused to correct any of her English because they thought it was inappropriate in a training situation. 'We find that there is practically no correcting at all,' the teacher wrote, 'and this comes to us as a big disappointment' (Lavezzo and Dunford 1993: 62). Her trainers were not guilty of neglect, however. There was a principle at stake: 'The immediate and constant correction of all errors is not necessarily an effective way of helping course participants improve their English', the trainer replied on the same page of the journal.

This exchange of views exemplifies current attitudes to correction and some of the uncertainties around it. The received view has been that when students are involved in accuracy work it is part of the teacher's function to point out and correct the mistakes the students are making. In Chapter 6, A4 we called this 'teacher intervention' – a stage where the teacher stops the activity to make the correction.

During communicative activities, however, it is generally felt that teachers should not interrupt students in mid-flow to point out a grammatical, lexical, or pronunciation error, since to do so interrupts the communication and drags an activity back to the study of language form or precise meaning. Indeed, according to one view of teaching and learning, speaking activities in the classroom, especially activities at the extreme communicative end of our continuum (see Chapter 6, A4), act as a switch to help learners transfer 'learnt' language to the 'acquired' store (Ellis 1982) or a trigger, forcing students to think carefully about how best to express the meanings they wish to convey (Swain 1985: 249). Part of the value of such activities lies in the various attempts that students have to make to get their meanings across; processing language for communication is, in this view, the best way of processing language for acquisition. Teacher intervention in such circumstances can raise stress levels and stop the acquisition process in its tracks.

If that is the case, the methodologist Tony Lynch argues, then students have a lot to gain from coming up against communication problems. Provided that they have some of the words and phrases necessary to help them negotiate a way out of their communicative impasses, they will learn a lot from so doing. When teachers intervene, not only to correct but also to supply alternative modes of expression to help students, they remove that need to negotiate meaning, and thus they may deny students a learning opportunity. In such situations teacher intervention may sometimes be necessary, but it is nevertheless unfortunate – even when we are using 'gentle correction' (see C3 below). In Tony Lynch's words, '... the best answer to the question of when to intervene in learner talk is: as late as possible' (Lynch 1997: 324).

Nothing in language teaching is quite that simple, of course. There are times during communicative activities when teachers may want to offer correction or suggest alternatives because the students' communication is at risk, or because this might be just the right moment to draw the students' attention to a problem. Furthermore, intensive correction can be just as unpleasant during accuracy work too. It often depends on how it is done, and, just as importantly, who it is done to. Correction is a highly personal business and draws, more than many other classroom interactions, on the rapport between teacher and students. As one student once told me, a good teacher 'should be able to correct people without offending

pick & choose what to correct

them' (Harmer 1998: 2). This means, for example, not reacting to absolutely every mistake that a student makes if this will de-motivate that student. It means judging just the right moment to correct. In communicative or fluency activities it means deciding if and when to intervene at all.

C2

Feedback during accuracy work

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, correction is usually made up of two distinct stages. In the first, teachers show students that a mistake has been made, and in the second, if necessary, they help the students to do something about it. The first set of techniques we need to be aware of, then, is devoted to showing incorrectness. These techniques are only really beneficial for what we are assuming to be language slips rather than embedded errors. The students are being expected to be able to correct themselves once the problem has been pointed out. If they cannot do this, however, we need to move on to alternative techniques.

- **Showing incorrectness:** this can be done in a number of different ways.
  1. Repeating: here we can ask the student to repeat what they have said, perhaps by saying *Again?* which, coupled with intonation and expression, will indicate that something is not clear.
  2. Echoing: this can be a precise way of pin-pointing an error. We repeat what the student has said emphasising the part of the utterance that was wrong, e.g. **Flight 309 GO to Paris?* (said with a questioning intonation). It is an extremely efficient way of showing incorrectness during accuracy work.
  3. Statement and question: we can, of course, simply say *That's not quite right*, or *Do people think that's correct?* to indicate that something has not quite worked.
  4. Expression: when we know our classes well, a simple facial expression or a gesture (for example a wobbling hand), may be enough to indicate that something does not quite work. This needs to be done with care as the wrong expression or gesture can, in some circumstances, appear to be mocking or cruel.
  5. Hinting: a quick way of helping students to activate rules they already know (but which they have temporarily 'disobeyed') is to give a quiet hint. We might just say the word 'tense' to make them think that perhaps they should have used the past simple rather than the present perfect. We could say 'countable' to make them think about a concord mistake they have made. This kind of hinting depends upon the students and the teacher sharing **metalanguage** (linguistic terms) which, when whispered to students, will help them to correct themselves.
  6. Reformulation: an underrated correction technique is for the teacher to repeat what the student has said correctly, reformulating the sentence, but without making a big issue of it, for example:

     Student: I would not have arrived late if I heard the alarm clock.
     Teacher: If I had heard ...
     Student: ... if I had heard the alarm clock.

In all the procedures above, teachers hope that students will be able to correct themselves once the teacher has indicated that something was wrong. However, where students do not know or understand what the problem is because we are dealing with an error or an attempt that is beyond the students' knowledge or capability, the teacher will want to help the students to get it right.

- **Getting it right:** if the student is unable to correct herself, or respond to reformulation, we need to focus on the correct version in more detail. We can say the correct version emphasising the part where there is a problem (e.g. *Flight 309 GOES to Paris*) before saying the sentence normally (e.g. *Flight 309 goes to Paris*), or we can say the incorrect part correctly (e.g. *Not 'go'. Listen, 'goes'*). If necessary we can explain the grammar (e.g. *We say 'I go', 'you go', 'we go', but for 'he', 'she' or 'it' we say 'goes', for example 'He goes to Paris', or 'Flight 309 goes to Paris'*), or a lexical issue (e.g. *We use 'juvenile crime' when we talk about crime committed by children; a 'childish crime' is an act that is silly because it's like the sort of thing a child would do*). We will then ask the student to repeat the utterance correctly.

  Sometimes we ask students to correct each other. We might say *Can anyone help Jarek/Krystyna?* and hope that other students know the correct version of the utterance – after which the student who made the mistake should be able to say the sentence, question, or phrase accurately.

  Student-to-student correction works well in classes where there is a genuinely cooperative atmosphere; the idea of the group helping all of its members is a powerful concept. Nevertheless it can go horribly wrong where the error-making individual feels belittled by the process, thinking that they are the only one who does not know the grammar or vocabulary. We need to be exceptionally sensitive here, only encouraging the technique where it does not undermine such students.

C3 Feedback during fluency work

The way in which we respond to students when they speak in a fluency activity will have a significant bearing not only on how well they perform at the time but also on how they behave in fluency activities in the future (see Chapter 17C on how to counter negative expectations in productive skill activities). We need to respond to the content not just the language form; we need to be able to untangle problems which our students have encountered or are encountering, but these are things we may well do after the event, not during it. Our tolerance of error in fluency sessions will be much greater than it is during more controlled sessions. Nevertheless, there are times when we may wish to intervene during fluency activities, just as there are ways we can respond to our students once such activities are over.

- **Gentle correction:** if communication breaks down completely during a fluency activity, we may well have to intervene. If our students cannot think of what to say, we may want to prompt them forwards. If this is just the right moment to point out a language feature we may offer a form of correction.

Provided we offer this help with tact and discretion there is no reason why such interventions should not be helpful.

Gentle correction can be offered in a number of ways. We might simply reformulate what the student has said in the expectation that they will pick up our reformulation (see C2 above), even though it hardly interrupts their speech, for example:

Student: I am not agree with you ...
Teacher: I don't agree ...
Student: I don't agree with you because I think ...

It is even possible that students can learn something new in this way when they are making an attempt at some language they are not quite sure of.

We can use a number of other accuracy techniques of showing incorrectness too, such as echoing and expression, or even say *I shouldn't say X, say Y*, etc. But because we do it gently and because we do not move on to a 'getting it right' stage – our intervention is less disruptive than a more accuracy-based procedure would be.

Over-use of even gentle correction will, however, be counter-productive. By constantly interrupting the flow of the activity, we may bring it to a standstill. What we have to judge, therefore, is whether a quick reformulation or prompt may help the conversation move along without intruding too much or whether, on the contrary, it is not especially necessary and has the potential to get in the way of the conversation.

- **Recording mistakes:** as we saw in Chapter 4, B8, we frequently act as observers, watching and listening to students so that we can give feedback afterwards. Such observation allows us to give good feedback to our students on how well they have performed, always remembering that we want to give positive as well as negative feedback.

  One of the problems of giving feedback after the event is that it is easy to forget what students have said. Most teachers, therefore, write down points they want to refer to later, and some like to use charts or other forms of categorisation to help them do this, as in the following example:

Grammar	Words and phrases	Pronunciation	Appropriacy

In each column we can note down things we heard, whether they are particularly good or especially incorrect or inappropriate. We might write down errors such as **according to my opinion* in the words and phrases column, or **I haven't been yesterday* in the grammar column; we might record phoneme problems or stress issues in the pronunciation column and make a note of places where students disagreed too tentatively or bluntly in the appropriacy column.

We can also record students' language performance on audio or videotape. In this situation the students might be asked to design their own charts like the one above so that when they listen or watch they too will be recording more and less successful language performance in categories which make remembering what they heard easier. Another alternative is to divide students into groups and have each group watch for something different – for example, one group focuses on pronunciation, one group listens for the use of appropriate or inappropriate phrases, while a third looks at the effect of the physical paralinguistic features that are used. If teachers want to involve students more – especially if they have been listening to audiotape or watching the video – they can ask them to write up any mistakes they think they heard on the board. This can lead to a discussion in which the class votes on whether they think the mistakes really are mistakes.

Another possibility is for the teacher to transcribe parts of the recording for future study. However, this takes up a lot of time!

- **After the event:** when we have recorded student performance we will want to give feedback to the class. We can do this in a number of ways. We might want to give an assessment of an activity, saying how well we thought the students did in it, getting the students to tell us what they found easiest or most difficult. We can put some of the mistakes we have recorded up on the board and ask students firstly if they can recognise the problem, and then whether they can put it right. Or, as in the example above, we can write both correct and incorrect words, phrases, or sentences on the board and have the students decide which is which.

  When we write examples of what we heard on the board, it is not generally a good idea to say who made the mistakes since this may expose them in front of their classmates. Indeed, we will probably want to concentrate most on those mistakes which were made by more than one person. These can then lead on to quick teaching and re-teaching sequences which arrive opportunistically in this way (see Chapter 11, A2).

  Another possibility is for teachers to write individual notes to students, recording mistakes they heard from those particular students with suggestions about where they might look for information about the language – in dictionaries, grammar books, or on the Internet.

D Feedback on written work

The way we give feedback on writing will depend on the kind of writing task the students have undertaken, and the effect we wish to create. When students do workbook exercises based on controlled testing activities, we will mark their efforts right or wrong, possibly pencilling in the correct answer for them to study. However, when we give feedback on more creative or communicative writing (such as letters, reports, stories, or poems) we will approach the task with circumspection and clearly demonstrate our interest in the content of the students' work.

D1 Written feedback techniques

When handing back students' written work (on paper), or using a computer 'reviewing program' to give feedback on word-processed documents (see Chapter 10F), we can use a number of devices to help them write more successfully in the future:

- **Responding:** one way of considering feedback is to think of it as 'responding' to students' work rather than assessing or evaluating what they have done. When we respond, we say how the text appears to us and how successful we think it has been – and, sometimes, how it could be improved. Such responses are vital at various stages of the writing process cycle (see Chapter 18, B1). Thus students may show us a first draft of their work; our response will be to say how it is progressing and how we think they might improve it in subsequent drafts. The comments we offer them need to appear helpful and not censorious. Sometimes they will be in the margin of the student's work (or, on a computer, written as viewable 'comments'), or if more extensive may need a separate piece of paper – or separate computer document. Consider this example in which the teacher is responding in the form of a letter to a student's first draft of a composition about New Year's Eve:

Dear Gabrielle,

I really enjoyed reading your draft You have some good expressions, e g

you look to the dark sky and it seems like a special party

Why don t you begin with that sentence? e g

I looked up at the dark sky and it seemed a special party It was like an explosion everywhere People were throwing fireworks into the sky, and everywhere there were lights

Now at this point you can tell the reader what night it is

It was New Year's Eve and everyone was celebrating

Then you can explain what New Year's Eve means in Uruguay, how families and friends come together and how everyone has hopes for the future You can end by coming back to the idea of fireworks

You can organise your essay to have two times

Past	*I looked up* *it seemed*	Introduction
General present	*Family celebrations in Uruguay are very important* *People usually send greetings to each other*	
Past	????	Conclusion

From *Process Writing* by Ron White and Valerie Arndt (Pearson Education Ltd)

This type of feedback takes time, of course, but it can be more useful to the student than a draft covered in correction marks. However, it is designed specifically for situations in which the student will go back and review the draft before producing a new version.

When we respond to a final written product (an essay or a finished project) we can say what we liked, how we felt about the text, and what they might do next time if the students are going to write something similar.

Another constructive way of responding to students' written work is to show alternative ways of writing through reformulation (see C2 above). Instead of providing the kind of comments in the example above, we might say *I would express this paragraph slightly differently from you,* and then rewrite it, keeping the original intention as far as possible but avoiding any of the language or construction problems which the student's original contained. Such reformulation is extremely useful for students since by comparing their version with yours they discover a lot about the language. However it has to be done sympathetically, since we might end up 'steamrollering' our own view of things, forcing the student to adopt a different voice from the one they wanted to use.

- **Coding:** some teachers use codes, and can then put these codes either in the body of the writing itself, or in a corresponding margin. This makes correction much neater, less threatening, and considerably more helpful than random marks and comments. Frequently used symbols of this kind refer to issues such as word order, spelling, or verb tense as in the following table:

SYMBOL	MEANING	EXAMPLE
S	Incorrect spelling	S S I recieved jour letter.
W.O.	Wrong word order	W.O. We know well this city. W.O. Always I am happy here.
T	Wrong tense	If he will come, it will be too late.
C	Concord. Subject and verb do not agree	C Two policemen has come. C The news are bad today.
WF	Wrong form	WF We want that you come. WF That table is our.
S/P	Singular or plural form wrong	S We need more informations.
λ	Something has been left out	They said λ was wrong. He hit me on λ shoulder.
[ ]	Something is not necessary	It was too [much] difficult
?M	Meaning is not clear	?M Come and rest with us for a week. ?M The view from here is very suggestive.
NA	The usage is not appropriate	NA He requested me to sit down.
P	Punctuation wrong	P P Whats your name P He asked me what I wanted?

From *Teaching Writing Skills* by D Byrne (Pearson Education Ltd)

When we use these codes we mark the place where a mistake has been made and use one of the symbols in the margin to show what the problem is. The student is now in a position to correct the mistake.

We can decide on the particular codes and symbols we use with our students, making sure that they are quite clear about what our symbols mean through demonstration and example. We might also consider having a two-stage approach with simple and more complex codes for students at different levels (Cox and Eyre 1999).

It is worth remembering, however, that one of the marks that students respond to best is ticks when they have used language well, or made a particularly telling point.

A way of avoiding the over-correction of scripts, which also has the advantage of helping students to concentrate on particular features of written English, is **focusing.** In this mode we restrict feedback to a particular aspect of language. We can tell students that we will only give feedback on, say, spelling for the next piece of writing. On other occasions we can say that we are going to focus only on punctuation or tense usage or linking words or paragraph construction – or any other written feature we consider important for our students at that stage. Because we tell students this before they write, we guarantee their close attention to the features we have singled out.

2 Finishing the feedback process

Except where students are taking achievement or proficiency tests (see Chapter 23, A1), written feedback is designed not just to give an assessment of the students' work, but also to help and teach. We give feedback because we want to affect our students' language use in the future as well as commenting upon its use in the past (see 'homework' in Chapter 24, A1).

When we respond to first and second written drafts of a written assignment we expect a new version to be produced which will show how the students have responded to our comments. In this way feedback is part of a learning process, and we will not have wasted our time. Our reasons for using codes and symbols is the same: if students can identify the mistakes they have made they are then in a position to correct them. The feedback process is only really finished once they have made these changes. If students consult grammar books or dictionaries as a way of resolving some of the mistakes we have signalled for them, the feedback we have given has had a positive outcome.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Feedback and correction in general**
  See P Ur (1996: Module 17), and J Edge (1989). M Rinvolucri (1998) and R Bolitho et al. (1994) discuss many of the issues surrounding feedback and correction.

- **Written feedback**
  See J Muncie (2000) on the kind of feedback teachers should give.
- **Analysing errors**
  On interlanguage and analysing errors, see H D Brown (2000: Chapter 8).
- **Student self-assessment**
  M Harris (1997) shows how self-assessment is useful both for autonomous learners, but also for students in a more formal educational setting.
- **Teachers' attitudes to feedback and correction**
  In a fascinating teacher-training activity R Tanner (1992) shows how teachers do not necessarily enjoy the feedback methods which they use in class when they themselves are being corrected.

8 Grouping students

A Different groups

There is no real limit to the way in which teachers can group students in a classroom, though certain factors such as over-crowding, fixed furniture, and entrenched student attitudes may make things problematic. Nevertheless, teaching a class as a whole group, getting students to work on their own, or having them perform tasks in pairs or groups all have their own advantages and disadvantages; each is more or less appropriate for different activities.

A1 Whole-class teaching

When people think of teaching and learning they frequently conjure up a picture of students sitting in rows listening to a teacher who stands in front of them. For many, this is what teaching means, and it is still the most common teacher–student interaction in many cultures. Though it has many limitations, whole-class grouping like this has both practical advantages and disadvantages:

- **Advantages of whole-class grouping:**
  - It reinforces a sense of belonging among the group members, something which we as teachers need to foster (Williams and Burden 1997: 79). If everyone is involved in the same activity, then we are all 'in it together'. Such experiences give us points of common reference to talk about and can be used as reasons to bond with each other. It is much easier for students to share an emotion such as happiness or amusement in a whole-class setting. Twenty people laughing is often more enjoyable than just two; forty people holding their breath in anticipation create a much more engaging atmosphere than just the person sitting next to you.
  - It is suitable for activities where the teacher is acting as a controller (see Chapter 4, B1). It is especially good for giving explanations and instructions, where smaller groups would mean having to do these things more than once. It is an ideal way of showing material whether in pictures, texts, or on audio or videotape. It is also more cost-efficient, both in terms of material production and organisation, than other groupings can be.
  - It allows teachers to 'gauge the mood' of the class in general (rather than on an individual basis); it is a good way for us to get a general understanding of student progress.

- It is the preferred class style in many educational settings where students and teachers feel secure when the whole class is working in lockstep, and under the direct authority of the teacher.

- **Disadvantages of whole-class grouping:**
  - It favours the group rather than the individual. Everyone is forced to do the same thing at the same time and at the same pace.
  - Individual students do not have much of a chance to say anything on their own.
  - Many students are disinclined to participate in front of the whole class since to do so brings with it the risk of public failure.
  - It may not encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning (see A2 below and Chapter 24A). Whole-class teaching favours the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student rather than having students discover things (see Chapter 11, B2) or research things for themselves (see Chapter 12).
  - It is not the best way to organise communicative language teaching (see Chapter 6, A4) or specifically task-based sequences (see Chapter 6, A5). Communication between individuals is more difficult in a group of twenty or thirty than it is in groups of four or five. In smaller groups it is easier to share material, speak quietly and less formally, and make good eye contact. All of these contribute to successful task resolution.

2 Students on their own

At the opposite end of the spectrum from whole-class grouping is the idea of students on their own, working in a pattern of individualised learning. This can range from students doing exercises on their own in class, to situations in which teachers are able to spend time working with individual students, or when students take charge of their own learning in self-access centres or other out-of-class environments (see Chapter 24A). Such individualised learning is a vital step in the development of learner autonomy.

If we wish students to work on their own in class we can, for example, allow them to read privately and then answer questions individually; we can ask them to complete worksheets or writing tasks by themselves. We can give them worksheets with different tasks and allow individuals to make their own decisions about which tasks to do. We can hand out different worksheets to different individuals depending upon their tastes and abilities. We can allow students to research on their own or even choose what they want to read or listen to – especially where this concerns extensive reading (or 'learner literature' – see Chapter 15, A1).

- **Advantages of individualised learning:**
  - It allows teachers to respond to individual student differences in terms of pace of learning, learning styles, and preferences (see Chapter 3, B3).
  - It is likely to be less stressful for students than performing in a whole-class setting or talking in pairs or groups.

- It can develop learner autonomy and promote skills of self-reliance and investigation over teacher-dependence.
- It can be a way of restoring peace and tranquillity to a noisy and chaotic situation.

- **Disadvantages of individualised learning:**
  - It does not help a class develop a sense of belonging. It does not encourage cooperation in which students may be able to help and motivate each other.
  - When combined with giving individual students different tasks, it means a great deal more thought and materials preparation than whole-class teaching involves. When we work with individual students as a resource or tutor (see Chapter 4, B6 and B7), it takes much more time than interacting with the whole class.

A3 Pairwork

In pairwork students can practise language together, study a text, research language or take part in information-gap activities (see Example 5 in Chapter 19C). They can write dialogues, predict the content of reading texts, or compare notes on what they have listened to or seen.

- **Advantages of pairwork:**
  - It dramatically increases the amount of speaking time any one student gets in the class.
  - It allows students to work and interact independently without the necessary guidance of the teacher, thus promoting learner independence.
  - It allows teachers time to work with one or two pairs while the other students continue working.
  - It recognises the old maxim that 'two heads are better than one', and in promoting cooperation helps the classroom to become a more relaxed and friendly place. If we get students to make decisions in pairs (such as deciding on the correct answers to questions about a reading text), we allow them to share responsibility rather than having to bear the whole weight themselves.
  - It is relatively quick and easy to organise.

- **Disadvantages of pairwork:**
  - Pairwork is frequently very noisy and some teachers and students dislike this. Teachers in particular worry that they will lose control of their class.
  - Students in pairs can often veer away from the point of an exercise, talking about something else completely, often in their first language (see Chapter 9D). The chances of 'misbehaviour' are greater with pairwork than in a whole-class setting.
  - It is not always popular with students, many of whom feel they would rather relate to the teacher as individuals than interact with another learner who may be just as linguistically weak as they are.

– The actual choice of paired partner can be problematic (see B2 below), especially if students frequently find themselves working with someone they are not keen on.

A4 Groupwork

We can put students in larger groups too, since this will allow them to do a range of tasks for which pairwork is not sufficient or appropriate. Thus students can write a group story or role-play a situation which involves five people. They can prepare a presentation or discuss an issue and come to a group decision. They can watch, write, or perform a video sequence (see Chapter 20); we can give individual students in a group different lines from a poem which the group has to reassemble.

In general it is possible to say that small groups of around five students provoke greater involvement and participation than larger groups. They are small enough for real interpersonal interaction, yet not so small that members are over-reliant upon each individual. Because five is an odd number it means that a majority view can usually prevail. However, there are occasions when larger groups are necessary. The activity may demand it (see the poem activity above where the number of students depends on the number of lines in the poem), or we may want to divide the class into teams for some game or preparation phase.

- **Advantages of groupwork:**
  - Like pairwork, it dramatically increases the amount of talking for individual students.
  - Unlike pairwork, because there are more than two people in the group, personal relationships are usually less problematic; there is also a greater chance of different opinions and varied contributions than in pairwork.
  - It encourages broader skills of cooperation and negotiation than pairwork, and yet is more private than work in front of the whole class. Lynne Flowerdew (1998) found that it was especially appropriate in Hong Kong where its use accorded with Confucian principles which her Cantonese-speaking students were comfortable with. Furthermore, her students were prepared to evaluate each other's performance both positively and negatively whereas in a bigger group a natural tendency for self-effacement made this less likely.
  - It promotes learner autonomy by allowing students to make their own decisions in the group without being told what to do by the teacher.
  - Although we do not wish any individuals in groups to be completely passive, nevertheless some students can choose their level of participation more readily than in a whole-class or pairwork situation.

- **Disadvantages of groupwork:**
  - It is likely to be noisy (though not necessarily as loud as pairwork can be). Some teachers feel that they lose control, and the whole-class feeling which has been painstakingly built up may dissipate when the class is split into smaller entities.

- Not all students enjoy it since they would prefer to be the focus of the teacher's attention rather than working with their peers. Sometimes students find themselves in uncongenial groups and wish they could be somewhere else.
- Individuals may fall into group roles that become fossilised, so that some are passive whereas others may dominate (see B2 and B3 below).
- Groups can take longer to organise than pairs; beginning and ending groupwork activities – especially where people move around the class – can take time and be chaotic.

A5 Ringing the changes

Deciding when to put students in groups or pairs, when to teach the whole class, or when to let individuals get on with it on their own will depend upon a number of factors:

- **The task:** if we want to give students a quick chance to think about an issue which we will be focusing on later we may put them in buzz groups (see Chapter 19, B3) where they have a chance to discuss or 'buzz' the topic amongst themselves before working with it in a whole-class grouping. However, small groups will be inappropriate for many explanations and demonstrations, where working with the class as one group will be more appropriate.

  When students have listened to a tape we may let them compare answers in quickly organised pairs. If we want our students to practise an oral dialogue quickly pairwork may the best grouping too.

  If the task we wish our students to be involved in necessitates oral interaction we will probably put students in groups, especially in a large class, so that they all have a chance to make a contribution. If we want students to write sentences which demonstrate their understanding of new vocabulary, on the other hand, we may choose to have them do it individually.

  Although many tasks suggest obvious student groupings, however, we can usually adapt them for use with other groupings. Dialogue practice can be done in pairs, but it can also be organised with two different halves of the whole class. Similarly, answering questions about a listening extract can be an individual activity, or we can organise students to discuss the answers in pairs, or we can have different students listen to different bits of a 'jigsaw' (see Example 4 on page 237) so that they can reassemble the whole text in groups.

- **Variety in a sequence:** a lot depends on how the activity fits into the lesson sequences we have been following and are likely to follow next (see Chapter 22, B4). If much of our recent teaching has involved whole-class grouping there may be a pressing need for pairwork or groupwork. If much of our recent work has been boisterous and active, based on interaction between various pairs and groups, we may think it sensible to allow students time to work individually to give them some breathing space. The advantage of having different student groupings is that they help to provide variety, thus sustaining motivation.

- **The mood:** crucial to our decision about what groupings to use is the mood of our students. Changing the grouping of a class can be a good way to change its mood when required. If students are becoming restless with a whole-class activity – and if they appear to have little to say or contribute in such a setting – we can put them in groups to give them a chance to re-engage with the lesson. If, on the other hand, groups appear to be losing their way or not working constructively, we can call the class back into plenary session and redefine the task, discuss problems that different groups have encountered, or change the activity.

B Organising pairwork and groupwork

Sometimes we may have to persuade reluctant students that pairwork and groupwork are worth doing. They are more likely to believe this if pair and group activities are seen to be a success. Ensuring that pair and group activities work well will be helped if we have a clear idea about how to resolve any problems that might occur.

B1 Making it work

Because some students are unused to working in pairs and groups, or because they may have mixed feelings about working with a partner or about not having the teacher's attention at all times, it may be necessary to invest some time in discussion of learning routines. Just as we may want to create a joint code of conduct (see Chapter 9, B1), so we can come to agreement about when and how to use different student groupings.

One way to discuss pairwork or groupwork is to do a group activity with students and then, when it is over, ask them to write or say how they felt about it (either in English or their own language). Alternatively we can initiate a discussion about different groupings as a prelude to the use of groupwork and pairwork. This could be done by having students complete sentences such as:

I like/don't like working on my own because ....

....

I like/don't like working in pairs because ....

....

I like/don't like speaking in front of the whole class because ....

....

They can then compare their sentences with other students to see if everyone agrees. We can also ask them to list their favourite activities and compare these lists with their classmates.

When we know how our students feel about pairwork and groupwork we can then decide, as with all action research (see Chapter 24, B1), what changes of method, if any, we need to make.

We might decide that we need to spend more time explaining what we are doing; we might concentrate on choosing better tasks, or we might even, in extreme cases, decide to use pairwork and groupwork less often if our students object strongly to them. However, even where students show a marked initial reluctance to working in groups we might hope, through organising a successful activity demonstration and/or discussion, to strike the kind of bargain we discussed in Chapter 6, B1.

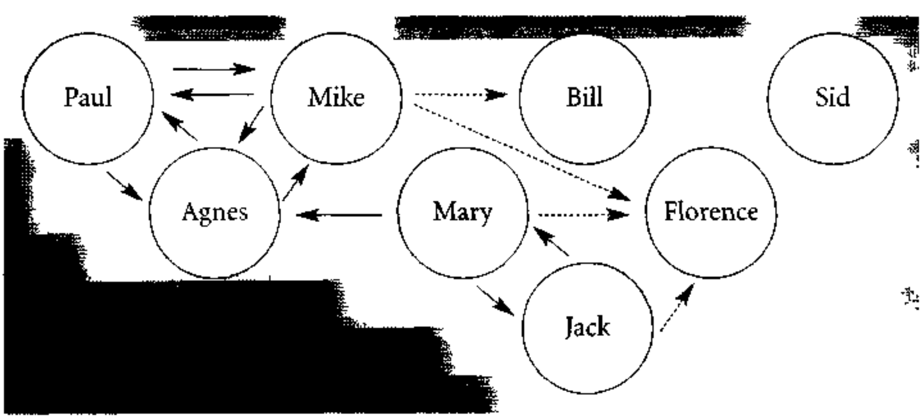
B2 Creating pairs and groups

We have to decide how to put individual students into pairs and groups, and with which of their classmates. We can base such decisions on any one of the following principles:

- **Friendship:** a key consideration when putting students in pairs or groups is to make sure that we put friends with friends, rather than risking the possibility of people working with others whom they find difficult or unpleasant. Through observation, therefore, we can see which students get on with which of their classmates and make use of this observation later. The problem, of course, is that our observations may not always be accurate, and friendships can change over time.

  Perhaps, then, we should leave it to the students, and ask them to get into pairs or groups with whom they want to. In such a situation we can be sure that members of our class will gravitate towards people they like, admire, or want to be liked by. Such a procedure is likely to be just as reliable as one based on our own observation. However, letting students choose in this way can be very chaotic and may exclude less popular students altogether so that they find themselves standing on their own when the pairs or groups are formed.

  A more informed way of grouping students is to use a sociogram. In this procedure students are asked to write their name on a piece of paper and then write, in order of preference, the students they like best in the class. They know that only the teacher will look at what they have written. On the other side of the piece of paper they should list the people they do not like. We can now use the information they have written to make sociograms like this imaginary one (——► = likes, ...► = doesn't like):



From *Roles of Teachers and Learners* by T Wright (Oxford University Press)

This will then allow us to make informed choices about how we should pair and group individuals. However, sociograms are time consuming, and fail to answer the problem of what to do with unpopular students. In the end, we will still have to put them in some pair or group, and will therefore have to fall back upon our own judgement in order to do so appropriately.

- **Streaming:** much discussion centres round whether students should be streamed according to their ability. One suggestion is that pairs and groups should have a mixture of weaker and stronger students. In such groups the more able students can help their less fluent or knowledgeable colleagues; the process of helping will help such strong students to understand more about the language themselves. The weaker students will benefit from the help they get.

  If we are going to get students at different levels within a class to do different tasks, it makes sense to create groups where all the students in that group are at the same level (a level that will be different from some of the other groups in the class). This gives us the opportunity to go to a group of weaker students and give them the special help they need but which stronger students might find irksome. It allows us to give groups of stronger students more challenging tasks to perform. However, some of the value of cooperative work – all students helping each other regardless of level – may be lost.

  Apart from streaming groups by ability we might also decide to stream them on the basis of participation. If we see that some students participate less than others, we might make a group of weak participators. Now they will find it less easy to hide behind their more talkative colleagues. We can also make groups of especially talkative students too.

  Streaming is a complex task, since it forces teachers to divide students by level or behaviour. It demands constant monitoring to make sure that students are not in inappropriate groups, especially since they may change both language level and the nature of their participation as a course develops.

- **Chance:** we can also group students by 'chance' – that is for no special reasons of friendship, ability, or level of participation. This is by far the easiest way of doing things since it demands little pre-planning, and, by its very arbitrariness, stresses the cooperative nature of working together.

  One way of grouping people is to have students who are sitting next or near to each other work in pairs or groups. A problem can occur, though, with students who always sit in the same place since it means that they will always be in the same pairs or groups which could give rise to boredom over a prolonged period.

  A way of organising pairwork is the 'wheels' scenario (Scrivener 1994b: 95). Here half of the class stand in a circle facing outwards, and the other half of the class stand in an outer circle facing inwards. The outer circle revolves in a clockwise direction and the inner circle revolves in an anti-clockwise direction. When they stop, students work with the person facing them.

We can organise groups by giving each student in the class (in the order they are sitting) a letter from A to E. We now ask all the As to form a group together, all the Bs to be a group, all the Cs to be a group and so on. Depending upon the size of the class we end up with groups of more than five, but this may not be a problem if the task is appropriate (see A5 above). We can also arrange random groups by asking people to get out of their chairs and stand in the order of their birthdays (with January at one end of the line and December at the other). We can then group the first five, the second five, and so on. We can make groups of people wearing black or green, of people with or without glasses, or of people in different occupations (if we are in an adult class).

It is interesting to note that modern computer language laboratories often have a 'random' pairing and grouping program so that the teacher does not have to decide who should work with whom (see Chapter 10E).

- **Changing groups:** just because we put students in groups at the beginning of an activity does not mean that they have to stay in these groups until the end. The group may change while an activity continues, as described in Chapter 15, A3, where students start by listing vocabulary and then discuss it first in pairs, then in groups of four, then in groups of eight – or even sixteen. In an interview activity students can start working in two main groups and then break into smaller groups for a role-play. If groups are planning something or discussing, members from other groups can come and visit them to share information and take different information back to their original group. A longer sequence may start with the teacher and the whole class before moving between pairwork, individual work, and groupwork until it returns back to the whole-class grouping.

We make our pairing and grouping decisions based on a variety of factors. If we are concerned about the atmosphere of the whole class and some of the tensions in it, we may try and make friendship groups. If our activity is based on fun (such as Example 4, 'Julia's story', on page 265), we may leave our grouping to chance. If, on the other hand, we are dealing with a non-homogeneous class (in terms of level) or if we have some students who are falling behind, we may stream groups so that we can help the weaker students while keeping the more advanced ones engaged in a different activity. We might, for example, stream pairs to do research tasks (see Chapter 12D), so that students with differing needs can work on different aspects of language.

B3 Procedures for pairwork and groupwork

Our role in pairwork and groupwork does not end when we have decided which students should work together, of course. We have other matters to address too, not only before the activity starts but also during and after it:

- **Before:** when we want students to work together in pairs or groups we will follow the 'engage–instruct–initiate' sequence we detailed in Chapter 4, B2.

This is because students need to feel enthusiastic about what they are going to do. They need to understand what they are going to do, and they need to be given an idea of when they will have finished the task they are going to get involved in.

Sometimes our instructions will involve a demonstration – when, for example, students are going to use a new information-gap activity or when we want them to use cards (see Chapter 10A). On other occasions, where an activity is familiar, we may simply give them an instruction to practise language they are studying in pairs, or to use their dictionaries to find specific bits of information.

The success of a pairwork or groupwork task is often helped by giving students a time when the activity should finish – and then sticking to it. This helps to give them a clear framework to work within. Alternatively in lighter-hearted activities such as a poem dictation (see Example 3 on page 264), we can encourage groups to see who finishes first. Though language learning is not a contest (except, perhaps a personal one), in game-like activities 'a slight sense of competition between groups does no harm' (Nuttall 1996: 164).

The important thing about instructions is that the students should understand and agree on what the task is. To check that they do we may ask them to repeat the instructions, or, in monolingual classes, to translate them into their first language.

- **During:** while students are working in pairs or groups we have a number of options. We could, for instance, stand at the front or the side of the class (or at the back or anywhere else in the room) and keep an eye on what is happening, noting who appears to be stuck or disengaged, or about to finish. In this position we can 'tune in' to a particular pair or group from some distance away. We can then decide whether to go over and help that pair or group.

  An alternative procedure is to go round the class watching and listening to specific pairs and groups. We can stay (with their agreement) for a period of time and then intervene if we think it is appropriate or necessary, always bearing in mind what we have said about the difference between accuracy and fluency work (see Chapter 7, C1). If students are involved in a discussion, for example, we will correct gently (see Chapter 7, C3); if we are helping students with suggestions about something they are planning, or trying to move a discussion forwards, we will be acting as prompter, resource, or tutor (see Chapter 4B). Where students succumb to the temptation to use their first language, we will do our best to encourage or persuade them back into English (see Chapter 9D).

  When students are working in pairs or groups we have an ideal opportunity to work with individual students whom we feel would benefit from our attention. We also have a great chance to act as observer, picking up information about students' progress (see Chapter 4, B8) – and seeing if we will have to 'troubleshoot' (see below). But however we intervene or take part in the work of a pair or group it is vital that we bear in mind the most appropriate way to do so.

- **After:** when pairs and groups stop working together we need to organise feedback (see Chapter 7). We want to let them discuss what occurred during the groupwork session and, where necessary, add our own assessments and make corrections.

  Where pairwork or groupwork has formed part of a practice session (see Chapter 11, B3), our feedback may take the form of having a few pairs or groups quickly demonstrate the language they have been using. We can then correct it, if and when necessary, and this procedure will give both those students and the rest of the class good information for future learning and action.

  Where pairs or groups have been working on a task with definite right or wrong answers, we need to ensure that they have completed it successfully. Where they have been discussing an issue or predicting the content of a reading text, we will encourage them to talk about their conclusions with us and the rest of the class. By comparing different solutions, ideas, and problems, everyone gets a greater understanding of the topic.

  Where students have produced a piece of work, we can give them a chance to demonstrate this to other students in the class. They can stick written material on notice boards; they can read out dialogues they have written or play audio or videotapes they have made.

  Finally, it is vital to remember that constructive feedback on the content of student work can greatly enhance students' future motivation. The feedback we give on language mistakes (see Chapter 7C and D) is only one part of that process.

B4 Troubleshooting

When we monitor pairs and groups during a groupwork activity we are seeing how well they are doing, and deciding whether or not to go over and intervene. But we are also keeping our eyes open for problems which we can resolve either on the spot or in the future:

- **Finishing first:** a problem that frequently occurs when students are working in pairs or groups is that some of them finish earlier than others and/or show clearly that they have had enough of the activity and want to do something else. We need to be ready for this and have some way of dealing with the situation. Saying to them *Okay, you can relax for a bit while the others finish* may be appropriate for tired students but can also make some students feel that they are being ignored.

  When we see the first pairs or groups finish the task we might stop the activity for the whole class. That removes the problem of boredom, but it may be very de-motivating for the students who have not yet finished, especially where they are nearly there and have invested some considerable effort in the procedure.

  One way of avoiding the problems we have mentioned here is to have a series of spare activities handy so that where a group has finished early, we can give them a short little task to complete while they are waiting. This will show the students that they are not just being left to do nothing. When planning groupwork it is a good idea for teachers to make a list of the extras that first-finishing groups and pairs can be involved in.

Even where we have set a time limit on pair and groupwork we need to keep an eye open to see how the students are progressing. We can then make the decision about when to stop the activity based on the observable (dis)engagement of the students and how near they all are to completing the task.

- **Awkward groups:** when students are working in pairs or groups we need to observe how well they interact together. Even where we have made our best judgements – based on friendship or streaming – it is possible that apparently satisfactory combinations of students are not ideal. Some pairs may find it impossible to concentrate on the task in hand and instead encourage each other to talk about something else, usually in their first language. In some groups (in some educational cultures) members may defer to the oldest person there, or to the man in an otherwise female group. People with loud voices can dominate proceedings; less extrovert people may not participate fully enough. Some weak students may be lost when paired or grouped with better classmates.

  In such situations we may need to change the pairs or groups. We can separate best friends for pairwork; we can put all the high-status figures in one group so that students in other groups do not have to defer to them. We can stream groups or in other ways reorganise them, so that all group members gain the most from the activity.

  One way of finding out about groups, in particular, is to simply observe, noting down how often each student speaks. If two or three observations of this kind reveal a continuing pattern we can take the kind of action suggested above.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Pairwork and groupwork**

  On the advantages and disadvantages of pairwork, see S Haines (1995).

  M Courtney (1996) looks at both pairwork and groupwork for oral tasks. J Reid (1987) found that students have definite views about class grouping, and T Woodward (1995) worries about issues related to pair and groupwork.

- **Group dynamics**

  On group dynamics, see J Hadfield (1992).

- **Sociograms**

  The use of a sociogram for organising groups was described many years ago in M Long (1977).

9 Problem behaviour and what to do about it

Most teachers, in many different learning cultures, have moments when their students fail to cooperate in some way, thus disrupting the learning which should be taking place, sometimes getting significantly 'out of control'. Such moments of disruption can be unsettling not just for teachers but also for students.

Problem behaviour can take many forms; Paul Waddon and Sean McGovern list disruptive talking, inaudible responses, sleeping in class, tardiness and poor attendance, failure to do homework, cheating in tests and unwillingness to speak in the target language (Wadden and McGovern 1991). Of course their list may reflect the educational culture where they were teaching rather than being universal. In other contexts we might add behaviours such as insolence to the teacher, insulting or bullying other students, damaging school property, and refusing to accept sanctions or punishment. However, what is characterised as indiscipline '... depends on what counts as a well-ordered or disciplined classroom for the individual teacher' (Brown and McIntyre 1993: 44).

Whatever form problem behaviour takes, though, we need to know why it occurs, how we can prevent it, and what to do if it arises.

A Why problems occur

There are many reasons for problem behaviour. It can stem from a student's reactions to their teacher's behaviour, from other factors inside the classroom, or from outside factors:

- **The family:** students' experiences in their families have a profound influence on their attitudes to learning and to authority. Sometimes indiscipline can be traced back to a difficult home situation. Sometimes home attitudes to English, to learning in general, or even to teachers themselves can predispose students to behave problematically.

- **Education:** previous learning experiences of all kinds affect students' behaviour. Even at the level of *the last teacher let me ...*, students are influenced by what went before, and their expectations of the learning experience can be coloured either by unpleasant memories (see Chapter 3, A3), or by what they were once allowed to get away with.

- **Self-esteem:** a student's self-esteem is vitally important if effective learning is to take place. Self-esteem may result partly from teacher approval (especially for children), from a student's peers (especially for adolescents), or as a result of success (see Chapter 3, C3). A lack of respect from teacher or peers – or being asked to do something where they are almost certainly bound to fail – can make students feel frustrated and upset. In such a situation disruptive behaviour is an attractive option. It can impress peers, and does, at least, force the teacher to take them seriously.

- **Boredom:** when students are engaged with a task or a topic they are unlikely to behave disruptively. But if they lose that engagement they may misbehave. When pairs or groups finish early and are left unattended, boredom may lead to disruption (see Chapter 8, B4); when the chosen topic or activity is inappropriate, students sometimes show their lack of interest by behaving badly.

- **External factors:** some external factors may affect students' behaviour too. If they are tired they will not be able to concentrate. If the classroom is too hot or too cold this may result in students being too relaxed or too nervy. Discomfort then leads to disengagement. Noise from outside the classroom can impact badly upon students' concentration.

  Teachers at primary level, especially, notice significant behaviour changes in different weathers, so that a high wind, in particular, tends to make their children 'go wild'.

- **What the teacher does:** a lot will depend on how we behave in class, especially when problem behaviour first takes place. Students who feel their self-esteem to have been damaged by the way we discipline them – especially if we appear unfair – are more likely to be badly behaved in the future (see B2 below).

B Preventing problem behaviour

There are a number of strategies that teachers can make use of to avoid problems occurring in the first place, because prevention is always better than the disciplining cure.

B1 Creating a code of conduct

An important part of effective classroom management is for the students to 'know where they stand'. This is often done, with younger learners especially, by establishing a code of conduct – although in fact, such a code can be equally valid for use with unenthusiastic adult classes.

An effective way of establishing a code of conduct is to include the students' own opinions in the code; these will frequently be as responsible and forthright as anything a teacher might come up with. With a class of adults, for example, the teacher and students together can talk about a range of issues such as how often homework is expected, what a good learner is, attitudes to mistakes and feedback, and the use of their mother tongue (see D below). When a teacher and students have divergent views about what is acceptable and what is not, the teacher should take their opinions into account, but ultimately he or she will have to be firm about what he or she is prepared to accept. With low-level classes teachers may need to hold the discussion in the students' first language. Where this is not possible – as in a multilingual class – they will need to show quickly and calmly, through example, what is expected and what is not acceptable.

Some teachers adopt a formula where teacher and students produce a chart which says *As your teacher/a learner I expect ...*, *As your teacher/a learner, I will ...*. This document can be put on the class noticeboard for all to see. Then, when students are disruptive or uncooperative, they can be referred to the code of conduct and expected to abide by rules and norms which they themselves agreed to.

When a code has been thus democratically arrived at – with everyone having a say and coming to an agreement – it has considerable power.

B2 Teachers and students

Just as a teacher's behaviour may itself sometimes be the cause of disruptive events, so the way we teach, and the relationship we have with students, can help to prevent problem behaviour from ever occurring. In particular, maintaining our students' interest and relating to them in appropriate ways holds the key to this.

- **Interest and enthusiasm:** students who are interested and enthusiastic do not generally exhibit problem behaviour. When we plan our classes, therefore, we need to bear in mind the need for such qualities as flexibility and variety (see Chapter 22). We also need, for example, to think how we can engage students in a reading or listening text before starting detailed work on it (see Chapter 14, B2 and B3); we need to do our best to introduce topics that are relevant to our students' experience.

  Interest can be also be generated by a teacher's performance. There is no doubt that students can be engaged by the energy and enthusiasm of their teachers (see Chapter 4C).

- **Professionalism:** students generally respect teachers who show that they know what they are doing. This can be demonstrated not only by our knowledge of our subject, but also by evidence that we have invested time in thinking about and planning our lessons.

  Professionalism also means practising what we preach. If we insist on students handing their homework in promptly, then marking it and giving it back promptly are also obligatory (see Chapter 24, A1). If we berate students for coming to class late, we will have to be seen to arrive punctually ourselves.

  We must not be seen to issue idle threats. It is no good saying *If you do this again I will ...* if we cannot or will not take the action we have promised.

- **Rapport between teachers and students:** a critical aspect in the prevention of problem behaviour is the rapport we have with our students. This can be greatly enhanced by making sure that we listen to what they say with interest (see Chapter 7), and that we look at them when we talk to them; we need to ensure that we do not only respond to the students at the front – or the more extrovert ones – but that we try and work with all of the people in our class.

C Reacting to problem behaviour

Whatever the reason for problem behaviour, it should not be ignored when it happens. How a teacher reacts to it should depend upon the particular type of disruption and the person exhibiting the behaviour. Nevertheless it is advisable to have some general guidelines in mind for such situations:

- **Act immediately:** it is vital to act immediately when there is a problem since the longer a type of behaviour is left unchecked, the more difficult it is to deal with. Immediate action sometimes means no more than stopping talking, pausing, and looking at the student in question (Brown and McIntyre 1993: 42). Sometimes, however, it may demand stronger action.

- **Focus on the behaviour not the pupil:** we should take care not to humiliate an uncooperative pupil. It is the behaviour that matters, not the pupil's character. Though it may sometimes be tempting to make aggressive or deprecatory remarks, or to compare the student adversely to other people, such reactions are almost certainly counter-productive: not only are they likely to foster hostility on the part of the student and/or damage their self-esteem, they may also be ineffective in managing the situation.

  The way in which we deal with problem behaviour has an effect not just on the 'problem student' but also on the class. We need to treat all students the same (something that adults as well as younger students are conscious of, though it is especially at younger ages that favouritism is resented – by the favourite as well as everybody else); we must treat the individual fairly, not overreacting, nor making light of disruption, particularly if we and the class had agreed earlier it was unacceptable.

- **Take things forward:** where a simple look or brief comment is not sufficient, we need to think carefully about how we respond. It is always better to be positive rather than negative. It is usually more effective for a teacher to say *Let's do this*, rather than saying *Don't do that*. Taking things forward is better than stopping them in other words. Our objective will be to move on to the next stage of an activity or to get a new response rather than focusing on the old one. In extreme cases we may decide to change the activity in order to take the steam out of the situation and allow students to refocus. However, we should be careful not to base such decisions only on the inappropriate behaviour of one or two students.

  Other ways of going forward are to reseat students, especially where two or more of them have encouraged each other. Once separated in an effective (but not humiliating) way, students often calm down and the problem behaviour dies away.

- **Reprimand in private:** it is appropriate to discuss a student's behaviour in private, and talk about how to improve it. This is not always possible, of course, but disciplining a student in front of his or her classmates will not help that student's self-esteem at all. When we deal with individuals during class time eye contact is important; a personal, though formal, relationship has to be established if and when we are required to assert our authority. Ideally, however, we will try and deal with problem behaviour with the student after the class.

  One way in which we can attempt to change students' behaviours, is by writing to them – a general letter to each member of the class expressing a problem and asking students to reply in confidence. In this way students have a chance to make contact with us without other people listening, or the student having to face us directly. However, this kind of correspondence takes up a lot of time, and there are dangers of over-intimacy too. Nevertheless, the use of letters may help to break the ice where teachers have found other ways of controlling misbehaviour to be unsuccessful.

  Dealing with indiscipline is often a matter of 'pastoral' care, helping students to recognise the problem behaviour and start to find a way towards changing it. This is far less likely to happen in class with everybody listening, than in private ongoing communication with the student outside the class.

- **Keep calm:** in many students' eyes teachers who have to shout to assert their authority appear to be losing control. Shouting by the teacher raises the overall level of noise in the classroom too. It is usually more effective to approach the student who is being disruptive and speak more quietly. Many teachers have also reported the benefits of restoring order and/or silence by either speaking very quietly to the class as a whole – so that students have to stop talking in order to hear what is going on – or by raising a hand, having previously agreed with students that they are expected then to raise their hands in reply and go quiet. As more and more hands go up, all the students realise that it is time to quieten down.

- **Use colleagues and the institution:** it is no shame to have disruptive students in our classroom. It happens to everyone. So when there is a problem we should consult our colleagues, asking them for guidance. When the problem is threatening to get beyond our control (for example, a pattern of disruption which continues for a series of lessons), we would be well advised to talk to coordinators, directors of studies and/or principals. They should all have considerable experience of the kind of problems being faced and will be in a position to offer the benefit of their experience.

However much we worry about discipline, it is important to realise that, like almost all of our colleagues, we will suffer disruptive or uncooperative behaviour from our students at some time. Usually the problem is minor and can be easily dealt with, especially if we can refer to a previously established code of conduct, and if our responses to indiscipline are based on the principles and strategies we have outlined above.

D 'Please speak English!'

One thing that can drive teachers wild is when their students are apparently unwilling to use English in the classroom, especially during communicative activities. This is often seen as an example of student/teacher failure. After all, if students are not using English everyone is wasting their time. However, there are many understandable reasons why students revert to their own language in certain activities.

Why students use the mother tongue in class

A principal cause of this L1 use is the language required by the activity. If we ask beginners to have a free and fluent discussion about global warming, for example, we are asking them to do something which they are linguistically incapable of. Their only possible course of action, if they really want to say anything about the topic, is to use their own language. In other words the choice of task has made the use of L1 almost inevitable: students can hardly be blamed for this.

Another reason why students use their own language in the classroom is because it is an entirely natural thing to do; when we learn a foreign language we use translation almost without thinking about it, particularly at elementary and intermediate levels. This is because we try to make sense of a new linguistic (and conceptual) world through the linguistic world we are already familiar with. Code-switching between L1 and L2 is naturally developmental (Eldridge 1996: 310), and not some example of misguided behaviour.

Students use their L1 when performing pedagogical tasks, especially when one student is explaining something to another. This is a habit 'that in most cases will occur without encouragement from the teacher' (Harbord 1992: 354).

Another cause of mother tongue use can be teachers themselves. If, they frequently use the students' language (whether or not they themselves are native speakers of that language), then the students will feel comfortable doing it too. Teachers need, therefore, to be aware of the kind of example they themselves are providing (see D2 below).

Finally, it is worth pointing out that the amount of L1 use by particular students may well have a lot to do with differing learner styles and abilities. Some use mostly English from the very beginning, whereas others seem to need to use their L1 more frequently.

2 Attitudes to mother tongue use in the classroom

The idea that all use of the mother tongue in the language classroom should be avoided stems from the advent of the Direct Method at the beginning of the twentieth century (where the language itself was talked and taught rather than being talked about in the students' L1), and from the training of native-English speaker teachers who either had to deal with multilingual classes and/or teach in countries before they were themselves competent in the language of their students.

More recently, however, attitudes to the use of the students' mother tongue have undergone a significant change. David Atkinson argued that 'it is not difficult to think of several general advantages of judicious use of the mother tongue' (Atkinson 1987: 242), suggesting that such activities as grammar explanations, checking comprehension, giving instructions, discussing classroom methodology and checking for sense fell into this category. If teachers can use the students' language, he claims, these tasks will be expedited more efficiently.

This view is not shared, however, by Peter Harbord who points out that the giving of instructions and many other teacher–student interactions are 'an ideal source of language for student acquisition' (Harbord 1992: 353).

No one is in any doubt that students will use their L1 in class, whatever teachers say or do; the question is whether we should try and stop it. John Eldridge thinks not, suggesting that there is no evidence to suggest that this would improve learning efficiency. He claims that most of the code-switching he has observed is 'highly purposeful, and related to purposeful goals' (Eldridge 1996: 303).

Two issues seem to arise here. In the first place since students are likely to use their L1 anyway, there is little point in trying to stamp it out completely. Such an approach will not work, and may only discourage the students who feel the need for it at some stages. However, a lot will depend on when students use their L1. If they are working in pairs studying a reading text, for example, the use of their L1 may be quite acceptable since they are using it to further their understanding of English. If, on the other hand, they are doing an oral fluency activity, the use of a language other than English makes the activity essentially pointless. Furthermore, as teachers we will want to promote as much English use as possible. So we will try and insist on the use of English in language study and oral production activities, but be more relaxed about it in other pedagogic situations, though we will continue to encourage students to try to use it as often as possible.

As for teachers, they are a principal source of comprehensible input (see Chapter 5B); teacher-talking time (TTT) has an important part to play in language acquisition (see Chapter 4, D3). It therefore makes sense for us to speak English as much as possible in the class, especially since if we do not, students will not see the need to speak too much English either. However there are times, especially at lower levels, where the use of L1 may help both teacher and students such as in an explanation or discussion of methodology, or the giving of announcements which would be impossibly difficult in English.

D3 What to do about it

There are a number of actions which teachers can take to promote the use of English and explain clearly what is expected of students:

- **Set clear guidelines:** students need to know when mother tongue use is permissible and when it is not. Part of the agreed code of conduct with a class will be just this understanding of when it is more or less 'okay' and when it is seriously counter-productive. Students need to be aware of when English is absolutely essential.

  As with other issues in the code, our own adherence to it will be vital if it is to succeed.

- **Choose appropriate tasks:** we should choose tasks which the students, at their level, are capable of doing in English. While there is nothing wrong in 'stretching' them with challenging activities which engage them, it is clearly counter-productive to set them tasks they are unable to perform.
- **Create an English atmosphere:** if we create an English environment, making English the classroom language as well as the language to be learnt, and perhaps even anglicising our students' names (see Suggestopaedia in Chapter 6, A6), then there will be more chance of the students making the classroom truly English themselves.
- **Use persuasion and other inducements:** teachers all over the world spend a lot of their time going round to students, especially during speaking activities, saying things like, *Please speak English!* or *Stop using Turkish/Arabic/Portuguese/Greek,* etc. and it often works! If it does not, we can stop the activity and tell students there is a problem. This sometimes changes the atmosphere so that they go back to the activity with a new determination.

  One teacher I knew used to make students pay a fine if they used the mother tongue in speaking activities, a course of action not recommended for the faint-hearted! But however it is done – the art of persuading students to have a go in English depends on the guidelines that were set, the agreement we made with them, and the friendly encouragement and persuasion we use while activities are taking place. This, together with other measures that have been suggested, generally ensures that most students are speaking English most of the time.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Code of conduct**

  C Kyriacou (1992: Chapter 8), calls the establishing of a code of conduct 'pre-empting misbehaviour'. J Harmer (1998: 174) has a chart-based code.

- **Self-esteem**

  Teacher approval is not just important for children. T Lowe (1987) quotes diaries from English teachers who became students of Chinese. In their Chinese classes they were very keen for approval from their teacher.

- **Writing (letters) to students**

  See M Rinvolucri (1983, 1995) and Chapter 24, A1.

- **Mother tongue**

  P Ur (1996: 122) suggests appointing class monitors to remind students to keep using English.

10 Educational technology and other teaching equipment

As language teachers we use a variety of teaching aids to explain language meaning and construction, engage students in a topic, or as the basis of a whole activity. In this section we will look at a variety of items that can be helpful both for practical and for motivational reasons. Some teaching aids will be dealt with elsewhere, however. We will look at the use of coursebooks in Chapter 21. We will be detailing examples of using audio material in Chapter 16, and video material in Chapter 20. The dictionary, perhaps the most useful aid a student can ever have, is discussed in Chapter 12A.

A Pictures and images

Teachers have always used pictures or graphics – whether drawn, taken from books, newspapers and magazines, or photographs – to facilitate learning. Pictures can be in the form of flashcards (smallish cards which we can hold up for our students to see), large wall pictures (big enough for everyone to see details), cue cards (small cards which students use in pair or groupwork), photographs, or illustrations (typically in a textbook). Some teachers also use projected slides, images from an overhead projector (see B below), or projected computer images (see F below). Teachers also draw pictures on the board to help with explanation and language work (see C below).

Pictures of all kinds can be used in a multiplicity of ways, as the following examples show:

- **Drills:** with lower-level students a traditional use for pictures – especially flashcards – is in cue–response drills (see Chapter 6, A2). We hold one up (the cue) before nominating a student and getting a response. Then we hold up another one, and nominate a different student and so on. Flashcards are particularly useful for 'drilling' grammar items, for cueing different sentences, or practising vocabulary.

  Sometimes teachers use larger wall pictures, where pointing to a detail of a picture will elicit a response such as *There's some milk in the fridge* or *John's swimming in the pool*, etc.

Sometimes teachers put students in pairs or groups and give them some cue cards so that when a student picks up the top cue card in a pile he or she has to say a sentence that the card suggests. Thus the student picks up a picture of a piece of cheese and has to make the question *How much cheese have you got?*; the next student picks up a picture of eggs and has to ask *How many eggs have you got?* and so on.

- **(Communication) games:** pictures are extremely useful for a variety of communication activities, especially where they have a game-like feel, such as describe and draw activities (see Chapter 19, B2) where one student describes a picture and a paired classmate has to draw the same picture without looking at the original. We can also divide a class into four groups (A, B, C, D) and give each group a different picture that shows a separate stage in a story. Once the members of the group have studied their picture, we take it away. New groups are formed with four members each – one from group A, one from group B, one from group C, and one from group D. By sharing the information they saw in their pictures, they have to work out what story the pictures together are telling.

  Teachers sometimes use pictures for creative writing. They might tell students to invent a story using at least three of the images in front of them (on cue cards, for example). They can tell them to have a conversation about a specified topic, and at various stages during the conversation, they have to pick a card and bring whatever that card shows into the conversation.

- **Understanding:** one of the most appropriate uses for pictures is for the presenting and checking of meaning. An easy way of explaining the meaning of the word *aeroplane*, for example, is to have a picture of one. In the same way it is easy to check students' understanding of a piece of writing or listening by asking them to select the picture (out of, say, four) which best corresponds to the reading text or the listening passage.

- **Ornamentation:** pictures of various kinds are often used to make work more appealing. In many modern coursebooks, for example, a reading text will be adorned by a photograph which is not strictly necessary, in the same way as in newspaper and magazine articles. The rationale for this is clearly that pictures enhance the text, giving readers (or students) a view of the outside world.

  Some teachers and materials designers object to this use of pictures because they consider it gratuitous. But it should be remembered that if the pictures are interesting they will appeal to at least some members of the class strongly. They have the power (at least for the more visually oriented) to engage students (for more on the issue of engagement, see Chapter 6, A3).

- **Prediction:** pictures are useful for getting students to predict what is coming next in a lesson. Thus students might look at a picture and try to guess what it shows (are the people in it brother and sister, husband or wife, and what are they arguing about – or are they arguing? etc). They then listen to a tape or read a text to see if it matches what they expected on the basis of the picture. This use of pictures is very powerful and has the advantage of engaging students in the task to follow.

- **Discussion:** pictures can stimulate questions such as: *What is it showing? How does it make you feel? What was the artist's/photographer's purpose in designing it in that way? Would you like to have this picture in your house? Why? Why not? How much would you pay for the picture? Is the picture a work of art?*

  Pictures can also be used for creative language use, whether they are in a book or on cue cards, flashcards, or wall pictures. We might ask students to write a description of a picture; we might ask them to invent the conversation taking place between two people in a picture, or in a particular role-play activity, ask them to answer questions as if they were the characters in a famous painting.

We can make wall pictures, flashcards, and cue cards in a number of ways. We can take pictures from magazines and stick them on card. We can draw them. We can buy reproductions, photographs, and posters from shops or we can photocopy them from a variety of sources (though we should check copyright law before doing this).

The choice and use of pictures is very much a matter of personal taste, but we should bear in mind three qualities they need to possess if they are to engage students and be linguistically useful. In the first place they need to be appropriate not only for the purpose in hand but also for the classes they are being used for. If they are too childish students may not like them, and if they are culturally inappropriate they can offend people.

The most important thing for pictures in the end is that they should be visible. They have to be big enough so that all our students – taking into account where they will be sitting – can see the necessary detail.

Lastly, we will not want to spend hours collecting pictures only to have them destroyed the first time they are used! Thought should be given about how to make them durable. Perhaps they can be stuck to cards and protected with transparent coverings.

B The overhead projector

Overhead projectors (OHPs) are extremely useful pieces of equipment since they allow us to prepare visual or demonstration material. They require little technical knowledge, and usually are easy to carry around. It is not surprising they are so widely used.

Just about anything can go on overhead transparencies (OHTs): we can show whole texts or grammar exercises, pictures or diagrams, or students' writing. Because transparencies can be put through a photocopier or get printed from any computer, they can be of very high quality. Especially where teachers are unimpressed by their own handwriting, the overhead transparency offers the possibility of attractive well-printed script.

One of the major advantages of the overhead projector is that we do not have to show everything on an OHT all at once. By covering some of the transparency with a piece of card or paper we can blank out what we do not want the students to see. So, for example, we might show the first two lines of a story and ask students what is going to happen next, before revealing the next two lines and then the next, gradually moving the paper or card downwards. We might have questions on one side of the transparency and answers on the other. We start the teaching sequence with the answers covered, and use the same 'gradual revelation' technique to maintain interest.

Because transparencies are, as their name suggests, transparent, they can be put on top of each other so that we gradually build up a complex picture, diagram, or text. This is done by putting down the first transparency, say of a room, and asking students what kind of a room it is and what happens there. Then a new transparency can be laid over that one with pictures of one person in that room who the students can speculate about, before we lay down another transparency on top of that with more people. A diagram can start with one simple feature and have extra elements added to it in the same way. We can put up a gapped text and have students say what they think goes in the blanks before putting a new transparency with some or all of the filled-in items on top of the gapped one.

Sometimes we can put a text with blanks on the OHP and then lay a blank transparency on top of it so that students, using OHP pens can come up and write in what they think should go there. Alternatively, students working in groups can list the points they want to make after they have discussed a topic (e.g. whether or not children under twelve should have a curfew from ten o'clock every evening) and show their transparency to the class while they make their presentation.

Overhead projectors are extremely versatile, but they can pose some problems too. They need electricity of course, and bulbs do fail from time to time. Some models are quite bulky too. They are not that powerful either, especially when they are up against natural light coming in from windows and doors. When projected onto shiny surfaces such as boards they can be uncomfortable to look at, and when projected onto some other surfaces it can be very difficult to make out what is on them.

A lot depends on how big or small the projector 'square' is on the wall or screen and whether the image is in focus. A mistake that some users make is to put too much on the transparency so that when they ask *Can people see this at the back?* the answer they get is a frustrated shaking of the head. However, if all these potential problems are taken into account and resolved, the OHP is an extremely useful resource.

C The board

The most versatile piece of teaching equipment is the board – whether this is of the more traditional chalk-dust variety or the whiteboard, written on with marker pens. Boards provide a motivating focal point during whole-class grouping (see Chapter 8, A1).

We can use boards for a variety of different purposes, including:

- **Note pad:** teachers frequently write things up on the board as these come up during the lesson. They might be words that they want students to remember, phrases which students have not understood or seen before, or topics and phrases which they have elicited from students when trying to build up a composition plan, for example.

Where we write up words we can show how that word is stressed so that students can see and 'hear' the word at the same time (see Figure 16). We can sketch in intonation tunes or underline features of spelling too. We can group words according to their meaning or grammatical function. Some teachers use different colours for different aspects of language.

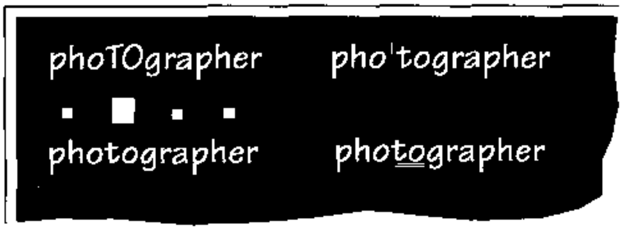


FIGURE 16: Different ways of recording word stress

- **Explanation aid:** boards can be used for explanation too, where, for example, we show the relationship between an affirmative sentence and a question by drawing connecting arrows (see Figure 17). We can show where words go in a sentence by indicating the best positions diagrammatically, or we can write up phonemic symbols (or draw diagrams of the mouth, for example) to show how a word or sound is pronounced. The board is ideal for such uses.

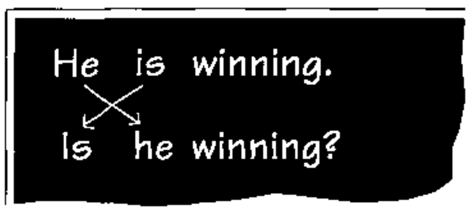


FIGURE 17: Using the board to show sentence/question relationships (elementary)

- **Picture frame:** boards can be used for drawing pictures of course, the only limitation being our 'artistic ability'. But even those who are not artistically gifted can usually draw a sad face and a happy face. They can produce stick men sitting down and running, or make an attempt at a bus or a car. What is more, this can be done whenever it is required because the board is always there, helping students to understand concepts and words.

- **Public workbook:** a typical procedure is to write up fill-in sentences or sentence transformation items, for example, and have individual students come up to the board and write a fill-in item, or a transformed sentence. That way the whole class becomes involved in seeing what the correct version is.

  Teachers sometimes write mistakes they have observed in a creative language activity on the board. They can ask class members who think they know how to correct them to come up and have a go.

By focusing everyone's attention in the one place such activities are very useful.

- **Game board:** there are a number of games that can be played using the board. With noughts and crosses, for example, teachers can draw nine box frames and write different words or categories in each box (see below). Teams have to make sentences or questions with the words and if they get them right they can put their symbol (0 or X) on the square to draw their winning straight line.

  A popular spelling game involves two teams who start off with the same word. Each team has half the board. They have to fill up their side with as many words as possible, but each new word has to start with the last letter of the word before. At the end of a given period of time the team with the biggest number of correct words is the winner.

FIGURE 18: Noughts and crosses (tic-tac-toe)

- **Noticeboard:** teachers and students can stick things on boards – pictures, posters, announcements, charts, etc. This is especially useful if they are metallic boards so that magnets can be used.

Handwriting on the board should be clear and easy to decipher; we should organise our material in some way too so that the board does not just get covered in scrawls in a random and distracting fashion. We could, for example, draw a column on one side of the board and reserve that for new words. We can then put the day's or the lesson's programme in the left-hand column, and use the middle of the board for grammar explanations or games.

It is probably not a good idea to turn our back to the class while we write on the board, especially if this goes on for some time. This tends to be de-motivating and may cause the class to become restless. Indeed it is better to involve the students with board work as much as possible, either getting them to tell us what to write, or using them to actually do the writing themselves.

When the class is over, courteous teachers clean the board and leave it ready for their colleagues to use.

Bits and pieces

Of course there is no limit to the various bits and pieces which we can bring into the classroom. It might be photographs of our family, letters we have received (see Burbidge et al. 1996), or even a pet. Just as children in primary school are often asked to 'show and tell' about objects they hold dear, so we can base lesson sequences on objects that we think our students might find interesting – though of course this has to be done with discretion and a large dose of common sense about what will be appropriate in terms of age and culture.

Three particular items are worth considering in this category:

- **Realia:** with beginners and particularly children, 'real' or lifelike items are useful for teaching the meanings of words; teachers sometimes appear in the classroom with plastic fruit, cardboard clock faces, or two telephones to help simulate phone conversations.

  Objects that are intrinsically interesting can provide a good starting-point for a variety of language work and communication activities. We can find an object with an obscure use and ask students to speculate what it is for (*it might be/could be/probably is*) and/or design various explanations to account for it (*it is used for-ing*). The class could vote on the best idea. Where we bring in more than one object, especially where they are not obviously connected, students can speculate on what they have in common or they can invent stories and scenarios using the various objects. They can choose from a collection of objects which three they will put in a time capsule, or which would be most useful on a desert island, etc.

  Some teachers use a soft ball to make learning more enjoyable. When they want a student to say something, ask a question, or give an answer, they throw a ball to the student who then has to give the answer. The student can then throw the ball to a classmate who, in his or her turn, produces the required response before throwing the ball to someone else. Not all students find this appealing however, and there is a limit to how often the ball can be thrown before people get fed up with it.

  The only limitations on the objects which we bring to class are the size and quantity of the objects themselves and the students' tolerance, especially with adults who may think they are being treated childishly. As with so many other things, this is something we will have to assess on the basis of our students' reactions.

- **Language cards:** many teachers put a variety of cards and posters around the classroom. Such posters can have notes about language items on them, or be a collection of ways of apologising or inviting, for example. Sometimes, with new groups, teachers get students to write about themselves on a card and put their photograph next to what they have written so that the class all know who everyone is. Students can also make presentation posters of projects they have worked on. In multinational classes, for example, many students enjoy providing short guides to their countries.

  Cards are also useful for matching activities, where students have to find another student in the class with a similar card or one that has the answer to the question on his or her card. They can be asked to place cards in the correct column for sounds, or with the correct lexical group on a board or on a poster. Students can each be given word cards to hold in front of them and then be asked to move around until they form a line where all the cards together form a question or a sentence.

- **Cuisenaire rods:** these are small blocks of wood of different lengths (see Figure 19). Each length is a different colour. The rods are featureless, and are only differentiated by their size and colour. Simple they may be, but they are useful for a wide range of activities. For example, we can say that a particular rod is a pen or a telephone, a dog or a key so that by holding them up or putting them together a story can be told. All it takes is a little imagination.

  The rods can be used to demonstrate word stress too: if one is bigger than the others (in a sequence representing syllables in a word or words in a sentence) it shows where the stress should be (see Chapter 13, B2).

  We can also assign a word or phrase to each of, say, five rods and the students then have to put them in the right order (e.g. *I usually get up at six o'clock*). By moving the *usually* rod around and showing where it can and cannot occur in the sentence the students get a clear visual display of something they are attempting to fix in their minds.

  Rods can be used to teach prepositions. Teachers can model with the rods sentences like: *The red one is on top of/beside/under/over/behind (etc.) the green one.* They can show rods in different relative positions and ask students to describe them. Students can then position the rods for other students to describe (in ever more complex arrangements)!

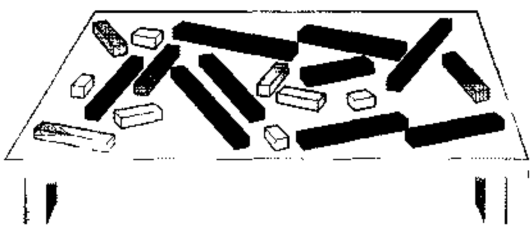


FIGURE 19: Cuisenaire rods

Cuisenaire rods are also useful for demonstrating colours (of course), comparatives, superlatives, and a whole range of other semantic and syntactic areas, particularly with people who respond well to visual or kinaesthetic activities.

The language laboratory

A modern language laboratory has between ten or twenty booths, each equipped with a tape deck, headphones, microphone, and now computers. The technology is used in such a way that students can work on their own, can be paired or grouped with other students, or can interact (though their headphones and microphones) on a one-to-one basis with the teacher. The teacher can broadcast the same taped (or filmed) material to each booth, or can have different students or groups of students work with different material. Students can interact with each other, and written texts can be sent to each computer screen.

Language laboratories have three special characteristics which mark them out from other learning resources:

- **Double track:** the design of tapes and machines means that students can listen to one track on their tapes and record on another. They can then listen back not only to the original recording on the tape, but also to what they themselves said into the microphone which is attached to their headset.

- **Teacher access:** apart from the separate language booths, laboratories also have a console and/or computer terminal manned by a teacher who can not only listen in to individual students, but can also talk, with the use of microphones and headsets, with one student at a time. Modern systems allow teachers to join booths in pairs or groups, irrespective of their position in the laboratory, by selecting them on the screen. This can be done on the same basis as we create pairs and groups in classrooms (see Chapter 8, B2), or, by selecting the right computer command, randomly.

  Laboratories equipped with computers for each booth allow teachers to read what students are writing and make corrections individually either by talking to the student or by using the editing facility attached to their word-processing package.

- **Different modes:** from the console the teacher can decide whether or not to have all the students working at the same time and speed – in 'lockstep' – because they are all listening to a master tape. In computer-equipped laboratories, they can all watch a video which the teacher is broadcasting to their individual monitors.

  An alternative is to have students working with the same material, but at their own individual speed. Thus teachers may broadcast an audiotape which records onto each individual tape at each booth. Each student can now work at their leisure. In computer-equipped laboratories the teacher can send the same text to each machine for them to read and/or manipulate according to their own needs.

  Finally, since teachers can group students mechanically, each pair or group can be given different material to work with.

E1 Advantages of the language laboratory

In many self-access centres or SACs (see Chapter 24, A2) there are audiotape machines, videos, and computers which perform some of the functions of a language laboratory, giving students opportunities for both extensive and intensive listening and reading. The sound quality for audio and videotapes is likely to be significantly better than that for individuals in classrooms, since in SACs and laboratories tapes are listened to through headphones.

Language laboratories offer the same potential as SACs, but also have other special advantages which make them a welcome addition to any school's resources:

- **Comparing:** the double track allows students to compare the way they say things with the correct pronunciation on a source tape. In this way they can monitor and get feedback on their own performance, even without the intervention of a teacher.

- **Privacy:** students can talk to each other (through their microphones), record onto the tape, wind and rewind tapes or type on computer keyboards without disturbing their colleagues. Since every student is cocooned by their headphones, they are guaranteed some privacy, and are free from the intrusion that the work of others would cause in a normal classroom setting.

- **Individual attention:** when teachers want to speak to individual students in a laboratory they can do so from the console. Unlike the situation in the classroom where this is often difficult because it stops them from working with the rest of the class – who may resent such private conversation – in a laboratory all the other students are working away on their own. The attention that teachers give to one student does not distract the others.

- **Learner training:** the language laboratory helps to train some students to really listen to what they say and how they say it. When they compare their pronunciation with the correct version on the tape, they begin to notice the differences, and this awareness, over a period, helps them to hear and pronounce English better.

  Not all students find comparisons easy, however. Different students are better or worse at hearing sounds (see Chapter 13, A2). It will be up to the teacher, from the console, to guide individual students who are experiencing difficulties into noticing differences and similarities.

- **Learner motivation:** a worry about learner autonomy in general, and self-access centres in particular, is that some students are better at working on their own than others. The language laboratory (where teachers take the whole group into the laboratory) offers a good half-way house between teacher control and learner autonomy since, although students work at their own pace, they are more open to the guidance of the teacher.

Activities in language laboratories

- **Repetition:** the simplest use of a double-track laboratory is repetition. Students hear a word, phrase, or sentence on the tape. A space (indicated by a bleep or buzz signal) is left for them to repeat what they have heard, and the word, phrase, or sentence is then said again, so that they get instant feedback on whether they have spoken correctly. A basic pronunciation item might, therefore, look like this:

  Tape voice: information
  Buzz signal: … (Pause of 3 seconds)
  Tape voice: information

- **Drills:** based on Audio-lingual methodology (see Chapter 6, A1), language laboratories have often been used for substitution drills, using the same basic model as the repetition example above. The difference is that the student has to work out what to say (based on a cue) before the tape voice then gives the correct response, as in the following example practising the present perfect:

Tape voice: Do you watch television every night?
Cue: Three nights.
Buzz signal: (Pause)
Tape voice: No, I haven't watched television for three nights.

Tape voice: Do you listen to the radio every day?
Cue: Last Monday.
Buzz signal: (Pause)
Tape voice: No I haven't listened to the radio since last Monday.

From Adrian-Vallance (1986: 211)

- **Speaking:** language laboratories can give students the opportunity of speaking (apart from repetition and drilling) in a number of ways. They can record their own talks and speeches and then listen back to them and make adjustments in the same way as they draft and redraft written text in a process-writing approach (see Chapter 18, B1). But the tape can also ask them a series of questions which encourages them to practise language which they have recently been focusing on as in the following example for beginners:

  Tape voice: What's your last name?
  Buzz signal: (Pause)
  Tape voice: What's your first name?
  Buzz signal: (Pause)
  Tape voice: Where do you live?
  Buzz signal: (Pause)

  In a language laboratory individual students can play and replay questions until they are sure what they are being asked. From the console, teachers can listen in and give focused individual feedback too.

- **Pairing, double-plugging, and telephoning:** almost any interactive speaking activity can be performed by students at different booths who are paired together (or two of whom plug their headphones into the same machine). They can describe objects or people for others to identify. They can give directions for their pair to follow on a map and they can make decisions, or role-play dialogues. Together they can plan and tell stories.

  In modern laboratories students can also dial the number of different booths and have telephone conversations with the person who answers.

- **Parallel speaking:** Adrian Underhill (1994: 181, 186–187) gives two examples of parallel speaking, where students are encouraged to imitate the way the teacher says something and, because of the double-track system, do so at the same time as the teacher is speaking.

From the console the teacher can record a rhyme or story (first in separate phrases, but later as a whole) onto all the individual student machines. At first, as the material is being recorded the students just listen. But then, once they have the recording of (all or part of) the rhyme or story, they speak along with the teacher's taped voice, doing their best to imitate the teacher's pronunciation and the speed at which he or she speaks. The aim is 'to try and do the same as you, not because you are right, but as an exercise in attention and noticing, and to gain insight from experience' (Underhill 1994: 187). Later, they record the material independently onto their machines, at which point the teacher can listen in and give feedback where appropriate.

- **Listening:** listening of all kinds can be practised in the language laboratory. Activities such as note-taking, dictation, finding differences between a written text and a taped account of the same events, and answering comprehension questions can all be performed successfully in the laboratory setting. Tapes can be accompanied by written worksheets and/or students can be asked questions on the tape which they have to record their answers to on the student track. In computer-equipped laboratories, questions and texts can be provided on the computer screen.

  Because teachers can group students differently, the laboratory is an ideal location for jigsaw listening (see Example 4 on page 237).

  Students at their separate booths can also do a variety of video-watching activities.

- **Reading:** students can read texts and then record their answers on tape. In computer-equipped laboratories both text and answers can be supplied on the computer screen itself. The teacher can also have all students reading material from the same Internet web site.

- **Writing and correcting writing:** language laboratories allow teachers to give individual, private spoken feedback on students' written work. In computer-equipped laboratories students can write at their individual machines and the teacher can then correct their work either orally or in writing since he or she can look at each student's work from the console.

What computers are for

Although computer use is still restricted to a fraction of the world's population, the use of computers (and the Internet) in education generally, and in the teaching of English in particular, continues to increase at an extraordinary speed – quite apart from its use in language laboratories (see above). As with any technological advance such as the language laboratory, video, and even the tape recorder, the proper place for the various riches which computers have to offer is still under discussion. All we know is that at any moment there are exciting new developments just round the corner. Currently, the main uses for computers in language teaching include the following:

- **Reference:** one of the chief uses of computers, either through the Internet or on CD/DVD-ROMS, is as a reference tool. This can be connected to teaching, the English language or general facts about the world (see Figure 20). There are already a number of popular encyclopedias available on CD-ROM (for example, Encarta, Grollier, Hutchinson, etc.) and all sorts of other information is also available, whether it is about plant life, animals, aircraft design or music history. One of the great advantages of computers is that with the right equipment, we can do all this research at home or in self-access centres (see Chapter 24, A2).

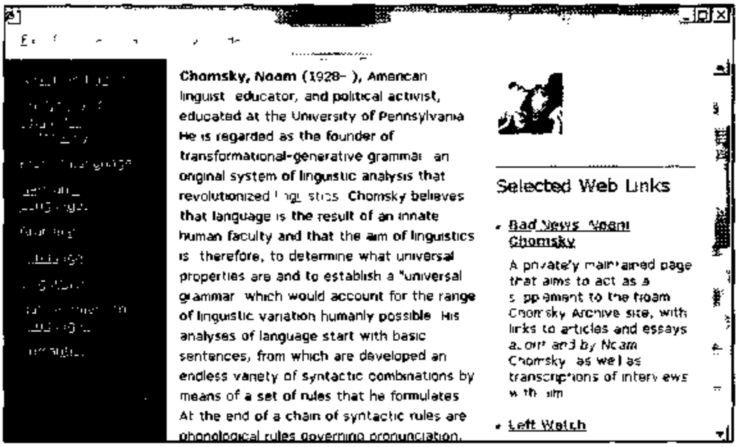


FIGURE 20: A screen from the Encarta encyclopedia

The availability of research material such as this means that we can send students to the computer to prepare for all sorts of task and project work, following up references in coursebooks, or finding out about topics they are interested in. Many of the programs have excellent visuals and sound which make the material very attractive.

There are now a number of ELT dictionaries available on CD-ROM too, which offer, apart from definitions, spoken pronunciation of words and practice exercises and activities. Increasingly, publishers are also making dictionaries available online. And whether on CD-ROM or through the Internet, students can now access language corpora to search for facts about English (see Chapters 2, B1 and 12C).

The greatest potential for the computer as a reference tool is, of course, the Internet, where, by accessing directories and search engines (such as 'Alta Vista', 'Google', and 'Hotbot'), users can look for information on just about any subject under the sun. However, as any regular 'surfers' will attest, these searches often throw up a huge amount of irrelevant material so that a simple search can become a protracted trawl through a number of useless web sites. When we encourage students to use search engines to find information on the Internet, we should prepare the ground beforehand – by suggesting search methods and/or narrowing down the focus of the enquiry – so that students do not waste a whole class period searching. We also need to keep an eye on proceedings to avoid a situation in which students just surf the net, becoming distracted by what they find there, and thus lose sight of the original task. However, if these drawbacks are taken into account, the Internet is an extraordinary resource which has changed the face of information gathering both in and outside the classroom (see also web sites below).

- **Teaching and testing programs:** language teaching software packages, often supplied on CD-ROM, offer students the chance to study conversations and texts, to do grammar and vocabulary exercises, and even to listen to texts and record their own voices.

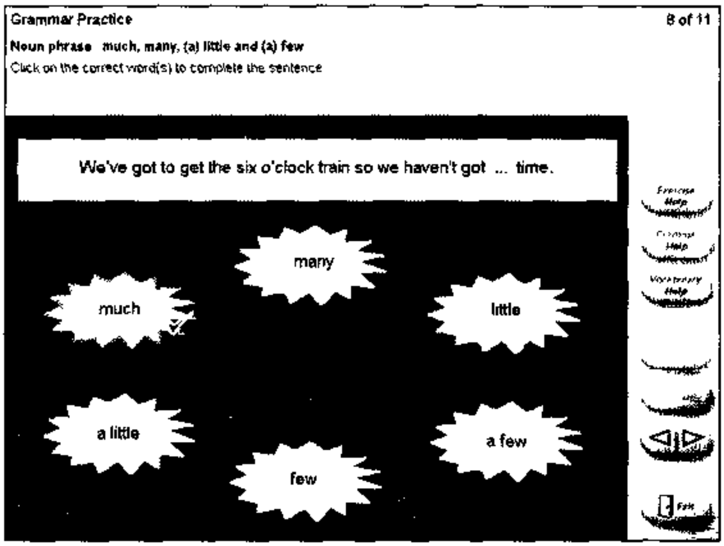
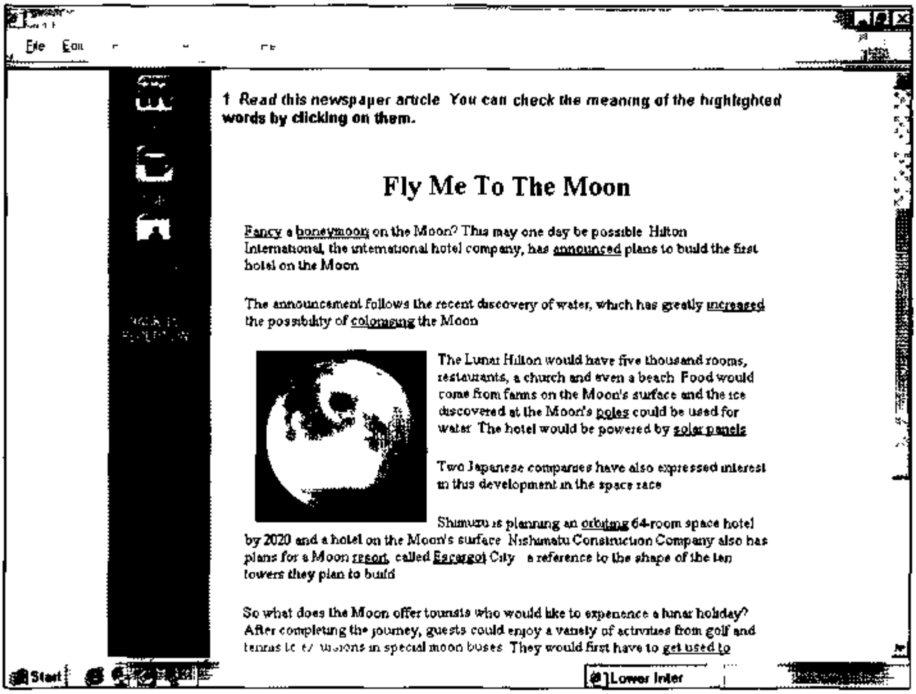


FIGURE 21: A screen from *The FCE Grammar ROM* (Pearson Education Ltd)

Although some teachers have criticised computer-based programs of this kind as being only dressed-up workbook exercises, it would be unwise to underestimate their usefulness for variety and motivation. Students who have been sitting behind their desks for hours might well find going over to a computer to 'play' with some language exercises a welcome relief. Such programs now include extensive reference resources as well.

A trend which will almost certainly gather pace is the attachment of CD-ROM-based packages to accompany coursebooks, full of extra input material and exercises. Some of these will be available, too, on the Internet. However, there are also web sites where students can sign up for complete self-study courses, which include all the regular features of a coursebook together with the possibility of sending work to a tutor who will monitor progress. The following example (for lower intermediate students) written and designed at International House, Barcelona, is a reading text which is then followed by comprehension questions which users answer on screen and can then check to see if they were right. They can also click on words in the text for a quick definition.



A screen from International House Net Languages at http://www.netlanguages.com/

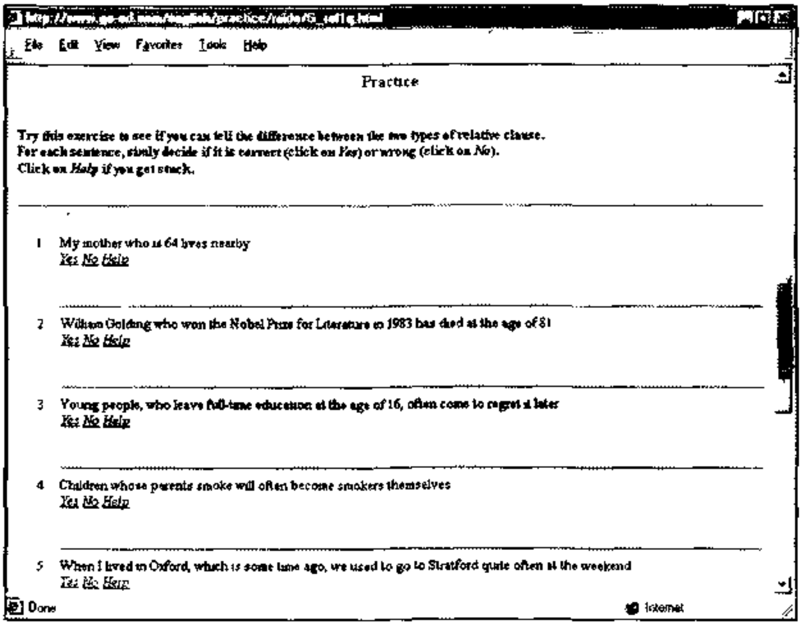
A number of language tests have gone or are in the process of going electronic as well. Students can send their answers straight from the computer screen to the examinations centre (see page 333 for listings of tests).

- **E-mail exchange:** one of the main uses for computers which are hooked up to the Internet is as senders and receivers of e-mail, allowing easy access to people all over the world. This makes the idea of pen-pals (or mouse-pals – see the references on page 268 for pen-pal sites) and/or contact between different schools much more plausible than the 'snailmail' equivalent. Getting students from different countries to write to each other has greatly increased both their English development and especially their motivation.

  It should be remembered, however, that e-mails are often written in a special speaking-like informal style (see Chapter 17, A3). There is less of an obligation for grammatical correctness or even correct spelling. So while e-mailing may promote written fluency, and while it may give students a real chance to communicate, it may not enhance accuracy or help students to write in more than one or two genres.

  Of particular interest to teachers and students is the fact that documents can be attached to e-mail and sent along with them, so that students can send word-processed work to their teachers who can then send back feedback in the same way (see 'the word processor' below).

- **Web sites:** almost any web site has potential for students of English. They can go and visit a virtual museum for a project on history or science. They can go to a web site which offers information and song lyrics from their favourite rock group and they can access timetables, geographical information, and weather facts. There are also a number of sites designed specially for students of English as a foreign language where they can exchange e-mails, do exercises, and browse around reading different texts, playing games, or doing exercises. The following web site, for example, provides practice in relative clauses:



Relative clause practice from Edunet Ltd at
http: www.edunet.com/english/practice/rside/Home.html

One of the real advantages of the Internet is that now, for the first time, teachers and students have access to 'authentic' English wherever they happen to be working. There is reading material available and, increasingly, there are audio and video sites too where music, news, and film can be listened to, though the downloading and/or classroom use of any such material will depend upon the copyright restrictions attached to it.

Some teachers plan whole lessons around the Internet. In her book on Internet use Dede Teeler gives a number of such sequences including designing a lesson around students visiting a teenage advice web site, or getting students to make their own newspapers and using a web site for that purpose (Teeler 2000: Chapter 5). We could also ask students to look at a number of different newspaper web sites from Britain or the USA (for example) to compare which stories they think are the most important and how those stories are told. We might get them to look up film reviews to make a class choice about which one to see, or download song lyrics which they can then put blanks in to 'test' their colleagues. The potential is almost literally endless; training students to use that potential sensibly will be of great benefit to them, especially if and when they wish to continue studying on their own (see Chapter 24, A3).

- **The word processor:** in an article published in 1987, Alison Piper suggested that the most successful educational use of the computer at that time was as a word processor, with students grouped around a screen drafting and redrafting collaboratively (Piper 1987). Unlike pen and paper, word processors allow students to compose as they think, and change their minds in the course of writing. Because the writing takes place on a screen all the students in a small group can see what is happening and contribute in a cooperative way.

  There is no reason to revise Alison Piper's judgement even though many years have elapsed since it was made. Though computers are ideal for students working on their own, they also have enormous potential for students working together, either operating a program or offering suggestions about what to do next. Word processing is the simplest and most obviously cost-effective way of tapping into this potential. However, as we have already seen in Section E (above), there is also scope for individually word-processed work which the teacher can give feedback on (see Chapter 7D) using the editing program which comes with the word processor. Students can now send such work as attached documents via e-mail so that teachers can give feedback at their leisure and 'hand back' the work the moment they have finished.

The widespread use of the computer – indeed the digital revolution generally – changed late twentieth-century life as surely as the industrial revolution impacted on the world over a century before. In language teaching, too, things will never be the same again with computer-based materials finding their way into coursebook packages, self-access centres, and classrooms everywhere. Such developments will be of inestimable value.

Yet we need to remind ourselves that there are still huge areas of the world where access to a computer is impossible or very difficult. Though there are wonders and marvels a-plenty on the Internet, there is a lot of rubbish too, and worse. We might also observe our students in class and conclude that groups of people talking and working together are still (and always will be) vitally important in language learning. Finally, we should remain conscious of the fact that different people learn and respond in different ways. The American writer Theodore Roszak argues that putting computers in schools is a bad use of money, pushing our expenditures on other vitally important items such as materials and teachers to one side. His views may be somewhat extreme, but it is difficult to argue with the opinion that:

> There are about as many kids born computer-proficient as there are born piano-proficient or poetry-proficient. It is mere folklore that all children born since 1980 have mutated into brilliant computer-users.
>
> From T Roszak (1996: 14)

G Homegrown materials production

Many of the pictures, cards, OHTs or realia items which we bring into class will have been made or designed by teachers themselves. We may also want to record our own audiotapes (see Chapter 16, A2) or produce our own videos (see Chapter 20).

Homegrown materials range from grammar worksheets to word/sentence cards (see Section D above), from OHTs with words or exercises to photocopied texts (or texts taken from the Internet) that we design our own exploitation for. 'Do-it-yourself' teachers who choose not to use coursebooks end up producing a lot of such material themselves (see Chapter 21, C1), but even where we are using ready-made material that we are happy with, we will still want to supplement it from time to time with material that we have prepared especially for our own groups (see Chapter 21, C2).

When we make our own materials for classroom use (having taken care that our materials are legible, clear, attractive – and durable so that we can use them more then once) we can follow a simple five-stage procedure:

- **Planning:** homegrown materials start with planning. We need to decide what our aims and objectives are, what activity we want to involve the students in, how we want them to be grouped, and what the content of our materials should be. Once this is done we can move on to producing the materials, bearing in mind the characteristics we mentioned above.
- **Trialling:** it is absolutely vital to try out our material before taking it into the lesson. Ideally we will get a colleague or colleagues to comment on what we have made and/or do the exercises we have written. If this is not possible we can get a friend or another student to go through it. In this way we can avoid problems, and hope that other eyes will spot spelling mistakes or ambiguities which we missed.
- **Evaluating:** when we have produced and trialled our material we take it into the lesson and use it. This is where we need to observe carefully in order to evaluate its appropriacy. That way we can redesign it for future use and/or come to conclusions about how or when to use it in the future. Evaluating material we have produced will also help us to make decisions about what material to make in the future.
- **Classifying:** when we have used material in the classroom we need to find some way of storing it and classifying it so that we can lay our hands on it quickly the next time we want to use it. We might want to do this alphabetically by topic, by vocabulary area, or by grammar point. As with any other filing system we use, the way we organise our categorisation is a matter of personal preference and style.
- **Record-keeping:** we need to keep a record of what material we have used together with evaluations of how well it has worked. This will prevent us from

using the same material twice with the same class, and it will help us with our long-term planning (see Chapter 22).

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Pictures**

  One of the best books on pictures is still A Wright (1984). See also A Wright and S Haleem (1991).

  N Cundale (1999) shows different uses of news pictures. M Early (1991) discusses the advantages of wordless picture books for language production with young students.

- **Picture/card-based communication games**

  Some of the best collections of card-based communication games for pairs and groups are Jill Hadfield's elementary, intermediate, and advanced games (Hadfield 1984, 1990, and 1987).

- **Cuisenaire rods**

  For a straightforward introduction to Cuisenaire rods, see J Scrivener (1994b: 169–172).

- **The Internet**

  An excellent book on the Internet and what it has to offer teachers and students of EFL is D Teeler (2000). See also S Windeatt et al. (1999) and D Sperling (1998).

  S Mace (1998) wrote an information-packed short article on designing tasks using the Internet.

  P Sweeney (1998) found that getting young learners to access the Internet was far more time consuming, teacher intensive, and generally chaotic than he and his colleague had anticipated! For excellent advice on training people to use the Internet in the classroom see D Teeler (2000: Chapter 4).

- **Internet sites**

  There are literally millions of Internet sites for students and teachers of English. However, a good place to start for advice on various sites is in book form, as in D Teeler (2000: Appendix D) and D Sperling (1998).

  One of the best web sites with materials for students and teachers, and links to EFL sites of all kinds is Dave Sperling's Internet café at http://www.eslcafe.com/.

  Any teacher educator can set up their own site, so teachers and students will just have to try out the ones that look interesting. At the time of writing, Wolfgang Rothfritz in Germany, for example, has an EFL business site at http://econscience.unipaderborn.de/WiWi/English/home.htm/, while Karin Cintron in California runs Karin's ESL 'partyland' at http://www.eslpartyland.com/default.htm/.

In the end Internet users may want to type in requests for grammar exercises, news sites, teacher resource sites, etc. on search engines such as the following:

All the web at www.alltheweb.com
Alta Vista at www.altavista.com
Google at www.google.com
Hotbot at www.hotbot.com

- **The language laboratory**

  Very little is currently being written about language laboratories, but see P Ely (1984) and D Horner (1987).

- **Computer-based material**

  All the major publishers have CD-ROM-based dictionaries. Pearson Education also have the *Longman Web Dictionary* which allows users to look up any word that appears on the Internet at http://www.longmanwebdict.com. It is also possible to access Cambridge University Press's *CIDE* dictionary on the Internet.

  For an overview on the use of computers in language learning, see M Warschauer and D Healey (1998) and H Jarvis (2000).

- **E-mail exchange**

  Michael Legukte offered an inspiring example of this (students in Germany corresponding with students in the Bronx) in his plenary to the IATEFL conference in Manchester, UK, April 1998.

  H Hennigan (1999) shows how the idea of pen-pals can be adapted to become 'keypals'. D Teeler (2000: 75–76) has a good discussion of things to watch out for when organising keypals.

  B Skinner and R Austin (1999) discuss the use of computer conferencing as a motivating activity.

- **Homegrown materials**

  P Ahrens (1993b) designed her own rod system which used clothes pegs and loops of string to hang pictures from in her classroom. With one string of pictures at the front wall and one at the back, classes could do information-gap activities even though there were too many of them for pairwork.

  D Block (1991) and A Maley (1998) discuss DIY ('do-it-yourself') materials production.