Introduction

This course provides you with the necessary skills in order to plan, implement and evaluate your language lessons. It is necessary for you—an English teacher—to be well aware of the different management techniques that can be used in order to successfully accomplish your course objectives. To do so, it is essential to have a mastery of different kinds of activities and of the different ways of structuring a lesson; tools that would allow you to take informed decisions so as to identify what works better for the lesson objective and the characteristics of the group. As the aim of any language course is to promote communication in the target language, English teachers need to identify and implement different interaction patterns which could mirror real life interaction patterns and which might foster communication among learners. All this information, however crucial, would not be enough if teachers weren’t capable of identifying and analysing their own lessons; therefore the need to promote self observation through tasks specifically developed to develop critical thinking. These self-reflection tasks are aimed at fostering self-developing skills; that is, it is expected that both through the readings and the tasks, you develop a critical awareness of your teaching practice.

The readings here selected are all intimately related to the above mentioned aims of the course. Through these readings you will get acquainted with all relevant topics which could help you increase your understanding to have better classroom dynamics.
Teaching Language as Interaction among People

Language learning and teaching can be an exciting and refreshing interval in the day for students and teacher. There are so many possible ways of stimulating communicative interaction, yet, all over the world, one still finds classrooms where language learning is a tedious, dry-as-dust process, devoid of contact with the real world in which language use is as natural as breathing.

-Rivers 1987, 14

How Do EFL/ESL Teachers Provide Opportunities for Students to Interact in English?

Some EFL classes are taught in a fairly teacher-centred fashion. Interaction is dominated by the teacher who, for example, gives lengthy explanations and lectures, drills repetitively, asks the majority of the questions, and makes judgments about the students' answers. However, other EFL teachers see value in getting students involved in interacting in English, and in this section, based on a framework provided by Littlewood, I discuss how this can be done.

Some teachers who aim at having an interactive classroom begin lessons with what Littlewood calls "precommunicative activities". Used primarily with beginner and intermediate level students, the purpose of precommunicative activities is for the teacher to isolate specific elements of knowledge or skill that comprise communicative ability, giving students opportunities to practice them without having to fully engage in communicating meaning. Littlewood discusses two types of precommunicative activities: structural and quasi-communicative. Structural activities focus on the grammar and lexicon (vocabulary) of English, while quasi-communicative activities focus on how the language is used to communicate meaning. Quasi-communicative activities are often in the form of dialogues or relatively simple activities in which students interact under highly controlled conditions.

Allow me to illustrate these two types of precommunicative activities by describing a beginning-level class I observed in Hungary. The teacher's goal was to teach students how to ask about food likes and dislikes. The teacher first taught a grammatical item, the use of the auxiliary verb do when used in a yes-no question (a structural activity). She began by giving several examples, such as this one:

Statement: You like (to eat) cake.
Question: Do you like (to eat) cake?

She then did a vocabulary-building activity (another structural activity) in which she put large pictures of food items on the wall and matched them with the names of food items she had written in big bold letters on separate pieces of paper. She gave students chances to read the names of food items, say them aloud as a whole class, and copy the names while drawing their own pictures of each item.
In order to further build up to a communicative activity, the teacher gave students the sample precommunicative activity hand out shown on page next page.

Then the teacher held up a picture of each item (e.g., of a piece of cake), and as she did this, she asked the whole class, “Do you like to eat cake?” The students then shouted out “Yes!” or “No!” depending on their own preference. There was lots of laughter, especially when she asked, “Do you like to eat toilet paper?”

The teacher then handed out a dialogue that combined grammatical and vocabulary items and added a little new language:

A: Do you like cake?
B: Yes, I do.
A: Do you like bananas?
B: Yes. Very much.
A: How about fish? Do you like fish?
B: I don't know. Maybe.

The teacher read the dialogue out loud, had students repeat it after her, and had students practice it in pairs. Next, the teacher divided students into pairs and placed a set of pictures of different food items face down on their desks. The students took turns picking a picture from a pile, then using the picture as a cue, asking each other about their likes and dislikes. The teacher included a few comical items, such as a picture of soap, and a few students made up their own comical items, such as “chicken ice cream.”

Some teachers follow up precommunicative activities with what Littlewood calls ‘communicative activities’. As a way to illustrate what communicative activities are and how they can follow precommunicative activities, let’s return to my observation on food items and preferences. After doing structural and quasi-communicative activities with the students, the teacher had the students write letters to students in one of her other classes. Although the teacher encouraged the students to ask about what food they liked, she also encouraged them to express themselves freely.

There are many other possible examples of precommunicative and communicative activities teachers can have students do in classrooms. The point here is that as teachers, we can create lessons that aim at
getting students involved in communicating with the teacher and each other in meaningful ways in English. As I illustrated through my observations, this can be done with students just starting to learn English. We do not have to wait until students have mastered the grammar of English to give students chances to communicate. We can focus on what it is that students already know and are now studying, as well as on creating communicative activities that allow students to make use of this knowledge.

It is also possible to omit precommunicative activities, especially if we are teaching students beyond a basic level. Instead, we can challenge the students by using communicative activities. Students can begin with a task, such as writing and producing their own play, giving oral and written presentations on topics they researched through interviewing and library research, and solving problems in small groups. As students work on these tasks, their attention will sometimes shift to language use - for example, they might ask the meaning of a word or how to express an idea - but the thrust of the lesson is for students to communicate with the teacher and each other in meaningful ways.

What Makes an Interactive Classroom Interactive?

There are at least five closely related factors that can contribute to making interactive classrooms interactive. One is reducing the central (and traditional) position of the teacher. This does not mean that we teachers have to give up control of the class; the teacher can maintain control of what goes on in the classroom while still giving freedom to students to initiate interaction among themselves and with the teacher.

Factors contributing to making classrooms interactive include

- Reduction in the centrality of the teacher
- An appreciation for the uniqueness of individuals
- Chances for students to express themselves in meaningful ways
- Opportunities for students to negotiate meaning with each other and the teacher
- Choices, both in relation to what students say and how they say it

Genuine communicative interaction is enhanced if there is an appreciation for the uniqueness of individuals in the class. Each student brings to the classroom unique language-learning and life experiences (both successful and unsuccessful), as well as feelings about these experiences (including joy, anxiety, and fear).
As teachers, we need to be sensitive to each individual’s background and affective state. To create a classroom atmosphere conducive to interaction, we need to understand and accept each student as he or she is; which sometimes can require considerable effort.

Also, providing chances for the students to express themselves in meaningful ways potentially contributes to creating an interactive classroom. Students need chances to listen to each other, express their ideas in speech and writing, and read each other’s writing. Negotiation of meaning needs to become the norm, and while negotiating, students need chances to ask for and receive clarification, confirm their understanding, generally ask questions, respond to questions, and react to responses. If true negotiation of meaning is going on, students will be fully engaged in using English to understand the meaning intended by others, as well as to express their own meaning as clearly as possible. Negotiation of meaning also implies that students have choices as to what they want to say, to whom they want to say it, and how they want to say it.

What Experiences Do EFL/ESL Students Bring to the Interactive Classroom?

Although approaches to teaching English are changing, it is safe to say that many students’ language-learning experiences are relatively traditional in nature. In some schools, English is treated like an academic subject, like history or geography, and considerable emphasis is placed on learning to read and translate. During class, students read orally, repeat after the teacher, do grammar drills, listen to grammar explanations given in the teacher’s native language, and generally study about language, often oblivious to the use this language has to communicate meaning.

Some students experience a functional curriculum in which they study about and practice the functions of language -for example, how to make a request, ask for permission, ask for information, make a suggestion, complain about something, agree/disagree, and so on. Usually, the class follows a text, and with some teachers, students practice using the functions of language to express themselves through dialogue practice, role plays, and other activities. However, generally most of the students who enter our classrooms do not have much experience interacting with native speakers of English or much ability in communicating in English.
It is fairly easy to accept students as having diverse backgrounds and interests, because students in our classes tend to come from multiple cultural backgrounds. However, when considering EFL students, we need to remind ourselves not to over generalize; it is easy to assume that students attending our classes are fairly much alike. However, we need to remind ourselves that these students have different personal interests. Some students like kick boxing, others cooking. Some prefer science, others history or art or psychology. Some want to travel or read novels in English; others are interested in hotel management or folk dancing.

Likewise, students enter our classes with different attitudes. Some are enthusiastic about having the chance to interact in English; others are shy and find it very difficult. Some have had teachers who have been responsive to their emotional needs. Such teachers have recognized that learning a language can be a threatening experience, and they have worked with the students to create a nondefensive and secure classroom atmosphere. However, other students have experienced teachers who have unintentionally intimidated them, resulting in students being defensive and recoiling to a half-in, half-out engagement.

Similarly, students’ learning-style preferences can be quite different. Language students’ learning channels can be grouped into four basic perceptual modalities. They can use visual learning (reading, studying charts), auditory learning (listening to lectures, audiotapes), kinesthetic learning (total physical involvement with a learning situation), and tactile learning (hands-on learning, such as building models). It is obvious that Mexican students from vary in their learning-style preferences.

What Roles are English Teachers Expected to Play?

Here is a sample of roles EFL teachers take on: drama coach, puppet maker, creative-writing specialist, folksinger, mime, photographer, cross-cultural trainer, public speaker, counsellor, film critic, poet, storyteller, discussion leader, team builder, grammarian, jazz chanter, reading specialist, error analyst, gaming specialist, values clarifier, computer program specialist, materials developer, curriculum planner, curriculum evaluator, interviewer, friend, language authority, interaction manager, cultural informant, needs assessor, language model, joke teller, disciplinarian, language tester, text adapter, parent, strategy trainer, artist.

As the list shows, teaching is multifaceted, and much of the complexity involves how to assume roles that capitalize on our abilities in English while we at the same time take on roles that contribute to creating
interaction in the classroom that is meaningful for both teacher and students. In this section I address only those roles related to our management skills.

**Roles Related to Creating Meaningful Interaction**

A number of educators encourage language teachers to take on the role of needs assessor. Doing so includes learning about students’ language-learning history, goals, interests, study habits, learning strategies, and language-learning styles. They suggest we interview students, have them complete questionnaires, and generally observe what they do and say.

With small classes, I personally like to use dialogue journals to learn about the students. As I use them, dialogue journals are like informal letters being written back and forth between the student and myself, the teacher. The purpose of the journal entries is to give students chances to communicate ideas in writing, and as a result, it is possible to learn about what each student is interested in and cares about. Dialogue journals can be a way to discover what really bothers students or to discuss topics that are personal in nature—for example, why a student is not doing his or her homework or how a student can work at overcoming the excessive anxiety she or he feels when asked to speak English.

The teacher can also take on the role of text adapter. Quite often, the textbook and the teacher’s manual become the teacher’s main resource, but the text does not necessarily provide enough ways to promote the kind of interaction the teacher wants to have in the classroom. To foster interaction, we teachers can go beyond the text by adapting materials and activities to the lessons in the text or introducing new activities unrelated to the text. We can add such things as role plays, games, movies, TV shows, songs, readings, news programs, and more. Likewise, we can have birthday parties, plan trips, tell stories, interview guest speakers, and undertake other activities that promote genuine interaction. The main point here is the importance for teachers to go beyond the text, to adapt to their classroom lessons authentic materials and media and creative activities that address the needs and interests of the students and engage them in meaningful interaction.

Another role the teacher can take on to promote interaction is that of classroom manager. As this is the core of this course, here I will simply show the complexity of classroom management by listing some of the things that we, as teachers, need to be able to do as skilled classroom managers. To manage classrooms, we need to be able to:
• Engineer the amount of classroom talk we do
• Manipulate our questioning behaviours
• Control the way we give instructions
• Orchestrate group and pair work
• Keep learners on task
• Make language comprehensible to students
• Handle affective variables of classroom life

We are sometimes asked to take on the role of entertainer, and I have included this role because it is controversial. Some students can be very good at getting us to tell stories about ourselves and others, tell jokes, and even sing. Students can be a great audience. Many will laugh at jokes, attentively listen, and encourage us to continue, and when this happens, some of us will strongly argue that our job is not to entertain.

However, some of us see value in the teacher’s role as entertainer. It can provide a way to lower the students’ level of anxiety. In addition, if students are genuinely interested in listening to our stories or jokes and can comprehend them, they can benefit.

What Problems do Some Teachers Face when Teaching English as Interaction among People?

In this section, I address the kinds of problems teachers have that block them from teaching English as interaction among people. I also provide suggestions on how teachers might resolve these problems.

Problems some EFL/ESL teachers face include the following:

• The "bandwagon" problem. The teacher discovers a new exciting method and accepts this way of teaching with great enthusiasm as the best way to teach.
• The "overly anxious" problem. Some students have such high levels of anxiety that they cannot take advantage of opportunities to learn English.
The "engagement" problem. The teacher is not fully committed to teaching English as interaction and will not fully engage in interacting with the students or arranging activities for them to use English as a means of communication in the classroom.

The "Bandwagon" Problem

A problem can occur in EFL classrooms when teachers jump on the latest methodological bandwagon. For the phrase to jump on a bandwagon, Roget's Thesaurus gives the alternatives "to float or swim with the stream; to join the parade, go with the crowd; to be in fashion, keep in step, keep up with the Joneses". With this in mind, bandwagons are the 'latest word', the trendy, the fashionable, the most up-to-date in methods, materials, and techniques.

As Earl Stevick stated at the 1982 TESOL Conference, bandwagons provide confidence, the company of others who believe in the same thing, and useful techniques. Those who are new to teaching often welcome a method of teaching that provides these things. So why is this problematic? It is only problematic if we teachers cannot see beyond the 'in' way of teaching, cannot accept the bandwagon as simply other people’s prescriptions about teaching, based on their personal set of beliefs about the relationship between teaching and learning. If we blindly follow a certain way of teaching because it is said to be the best way to teach, we become unreceptive to other possibilities. We teachers can be liberated, free to make our own informed teaching decisions, if we know how to become aware of teaching behaviours, analyse their consequences, and generate new teaching behaviours based on this awareness. Reflecting on our teaching through classroom observation, talking with other teachers, and writing about teaching are far more important to teachers than jumping on the latest bandwagon. While bandwagons provide us with confidence, company, and techniques, they do not liberate us to be able to make our own informed teaching decisions.

The "Overly Anxious" Problem

Tom Scovel defines anxiety as "a state of apprehension, a vague fear". H. D. Brown adds that "it is associated with feelings of uneasiness, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry". There are reasons for anxiety. Here are some of the factors that could raise the level of anxiety in language students.

- Inability to pronounce strange sounds and words
• Not knowing the meaning of words or sentences
• Inability to understand and answer questions
• Reputation of the language class as a place for failure
• Peer criticism
• Not knowing or understanding course goals or requirements
• Testing, especially oral testing
• Previous unsuccessful language-learning attempts
• Encountering different cultural values and behaviours

In some EFL classroom settings, anxiety can create so much apprehension that the student cannot function normally. Most of us have experienced this type of anxiety. The teacher asks a question in the new language, and with heart slightly racing, all we can do is sit, mouths slightly open, staring at the book or at the teacher, nothing coming to mind. Facilitative anxiety, in contrast, can be motivating, creating just the right amount of tension to bring out the best in us. This is what happens to some actors and public speakers before they appear on stage. It can also happen to students before taking a test, and it can happen to our students in situations where they are given chances to use English.

If students in our classes have high degrees of anxiety that are debilitating them, there are things we can do to possibly reduce their anxious feelings. Students who have high levels of anxiety about being in an EFL classroom do not need criticism on their language performance. Rather than being critical, we can show understanding. To do this, when a student expresses an idea we can use an “understanding response” by really listening to the student and paraphrasing back to the student what he or she said. Such paraphrasing not only can provide a way for the student to reflect on his or her own language in a noncritical way but can also improve understanding. When we consistently and sincerely work at trying to understand the students’ meaning without expressing verbal or nonverbal judgment of the language used by the student, a positive, trusting relationship between the student and teacher can develop, one that also reduces anxiety about being in a language classroom.

It is suggested that students analyse their own propensity for anxiety through the use of personal diaries. If the student sees value in writing about his or her feelings in a journal addressed to the teacher, the topic of student’s anxiety could be pursued by the teacher or even initiated by the student.
The "Engagement" Problem

Promoting interaction in the classroom governs that the teacher steps out of the limelight. It requires that the teacher yield to the students so that they feel free to interact with the teacher and each other. However, this is not necessarily easy for some teachers. As Wilga Rivers puts it, “Never having experienced an interactive classroom, [teachers] are afraid it will be chaotic and hesitate to try”. Adding to this problem are the students’ attitudes. As discussed earlier, students quite often come to our classrooms with little experience in initiating and participating in interaction in English. As such, they will also hesitate to interact, afraid that things will become out of control, frenzied, and embarrassing.

To avoid this half-engagement problem, it is our responsibility to provide the kind of atmosphere that is conducive to interaction. As teachers, we need to show emotional maturity, sensitivity to the students’ feelings, and a perceptiveness and commitment that interaction in English is not only appropriate but also expected and necessary for the students if they want to learn to communicate in English. As Rivers puts it, “when a teacher demonstrates such qualities, students lose their fear of embarrassment and are willing to try to express themselves”.

Options, decisions and actions

In the previous section I suggested that the teacher’s most important job might be to create the conditions in which learning can take place. If this is true then the skills of creating and managing a successful class may be the key to the whole success of a course. An important part of this is to do with the teacher’s attitude, intentions and personality and in her/his relationships with the learners. However, the teacher also needs certain organizational skills and techniques. Such items are often grouped together under the heading of ‘classroom management’. Classroom management involves both decisions and actions. The actions are what is done in the classroom - e.g. rearranging the chairs. The decisions are about whether to do these actions, when to do them, how to do them, who will do them, etc. The essential basic skill for classroom management is therefore to be able to recognize options available to you, to make appropriate decisions between these options, and to turn them into effective and efficient actions. As you grow in experience your awareness of possible options will grow.

Recognizing and responding to options

At every point in the lesson the teacher has options. To say one thing or to say something different. To stop an activity or to let it continue for a few more minutes. To take three minutes to deal with a difficult question or to move on with what you had previously planned. To tell off a latecomer or to welcome him. To do something or to do nothing. These options continue throughout the lesson; at every step your decision will take you forward on your particular route. There is no single correct answer, no single route through a lesson - though some routes may in the end prove to be much more effective than others. Different people or different situations create different solutions. Your total lesson is created by your choices.

Fig. 2.1: Options
What influences and informs your decisions between different options? The following are some factors to bear in mind:

* What is the aim of this activity?
* What is the objective of the whole lesson?
* Is what we are doing useful?
* What is hindering the effectiveness of what we are doing?
* What have I planned to do?
* What would be the best thing to do now?
* Is it time for a change of mood or pace?
* Are we using time efficiently?
* How do the students feel?
* How do I feel?
* What are the possible outcomes of my doing something?

I could add two further factors that are frequently involved in teacher decisions and actions:

- ignorance of other options
- avoidance of other options

Classroom decisions and actions are also greatly determined by the teacher’s own attitudes, intentions, beliefs and values. What do you believe about learning? What is important for your learning? What is your genuine feeling towards your students? In Fig. 2.2, each level is rooted in the one beneath it.

![Diagram](image-url)
For example, a teacher may ask a student to write on the board (rather than doing it himself). This decision may have grown from his intention to involve students more in the routine duties of the class. This may have grown from his belief that trusting his students more and sharing some responsibility with them is a useful way of increasing their involvement in the learning process.

**Classroom Interaction**

Five types of student grouping are common in the classroom: the whole class working together with the teacher; the whole class mixing together as individuals; small groups (three to eight people); pairs; individual work. In any one lesson a teacher may include work that involves a number of these different arrangements. Varying groupings is one way of enabling a variety of experiences for the learners.

In this section we examine the rationale for making use of pairs and small groups as well as whole class work. There are some suggestions and guidelines for maximizing useful interaction in class - and there are some warnings about how you might prevent learning!

**Maximizing student interaction in class: some ideas**

Remember the characteristics suggested by Carl Rogers for creating an effective learning environment:

- Be as honest to yourself as you can be.
- Respect the learners.
- Work on seeing things from their perspective as well as your own.
- Encourage a friendly, relaxed learning environment. If there is a trusting, positive, supportive rapport amongst the learners and between learners and teacher, then there is a much better chance of useful interaction happening.
- Ask questions rather than giving explanations. When you want students to discuss something, ask ‘open’ questions (e.g. where, what, who, why, how, when questions that require a longer answer) rather than ‘closed’ questions (e.g. verb-subject questions that require nothing more than yes or no). For example, instead of ‘Is noise pollution a bad thing?’ (answer = yes or no) you could ask ‘What do you think about noise pollution?’
- Allow time for students to listen, think, process their answer and speak.
- Really listen to what they say. What they say really affect what you do next. Work on listening to the person, and the meaning, as well as to the language and the mistakes.
- Allow thinking time without talking over it. Allow silence.
- Increase opportunities for STT (Student Talking Time)
- Use gestures to replace unnecessary teacher talk.
- Allow students to finish their own sentences.
- Make use of pairs and small groups to maximize opportunities for students to speak. If possible, arrange seating so that students can all see each other and talk to each other (i.e. circles, squares and horseshoes rather than parallel rows).
- Remember that the teacher doesn’t always need to be at the front of the class. Try out seating arrangements that allow the whole class to be the focus (e.g. teacher takes one seat in the circle)
- Encourage interaction between students rather than only between student and teacher and teacher and student. Get students to ask questions, give explanations, etc to each other rather than always to you. Use gestures and facial expressions to encourage them to speak and listen to each other.
- Encourage co-operation rather than competition. In many activities (probably not in a test or exam) you may want to encourage students to copy ideas from others, or ‘cheat’. Although much of our own educational experience may suggest that this kind of co-operation is to be discouraged, it seems to me to be useful and positive - we learn from others and from working through our own mistakes. If this is true, then it means that the teacher can concentrate more on the process of learning than simply on a plunge towards the ‘right answers’. The result of a learning exercise becomes less important than the getting there.
- Allow students to become more responsible for their own progress. Put them in situations were they need to make decisions for themselves.
- If a student is speaking too quietly for you to hear, walk further away, rather than closer to them! (This sounds illogical- but if you can’t hear them, then it’s likely that the other students can’t either. Encourage the quiet speaker to speak louder so that the others can hear).
Potential problems
This section lists some common ways in which teachers unintentionally hinder or prevent learning.

**TTT (Teacher Talking Time)**

TEACHER: *When nothing else is happening in the classroom – I open my mouth, I've no idea what I say most of time. But it stops those horrible silences. It's probably useful for them to listen to me speaking English. After all, I...*

The more a teacher talks - the less opportunity there is for the learners. They need time to think, to prepare what they are going to say and how they are going to say it. Allow them the time and the quiet they need. Don’t feel the need to fill every gap in a lesson. Explore the possibilities of silence.

**Echo**

STUDENT: *I went to the cinema.*

TEACHER: *You went to the cinema. Good. You went to the cinema.*

Who gets more language practice here - the student or the teacher? If you become aware of your echoing - and then start to control it - you will find that learners get more talking time and that they start to listen to each other more. When you echo they soon learn that they don’t need to listen to anyone except the teacher - because they know that you’ll repeat everything! That has a dramatically negative effect on interaction patterns within the classroom.

**Helpful sentence completion**

STUDENT: *I think that smoking is ...*

TEACHER: *... a bad thing. Yes I agree. When I went into the pub ...*

Often a teacher is so desperate for a student to say what she wants them to say (so that the lesson can move on to the next stage) that she is already predicting the words the student will produce and eagerly wishing for them to be said - so much so that teachers often find themselves adding ‘tails’ to sentence after sentence. But this kind of ‘doing the hard work for them’ is often counter-productive. People need to finish their own sentences. If students can’t complete the sentence themselves they need help - but help to
produce their own sentence, using their own words and their own ideas. By letting students finish what they are saying, the teacher also allows herself more time to really listen to the student and what he is saying.

**Complicated and unclear instructions**

TEACHER: *Well, what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna ask you to get into pairs, but before that there are some things we've gotta work out. So just jot down if you've got a pen, could you write this, then when we've finished that we're going to do the next thing which involves more ...*

Unplanned, unstructured instructions are extremely confusing to students. They probably understand only a small percentage of what you say- and guess what you want them to do from one or two key words they did catch. Work out what is essential for them to know -and tell them that- without wrapping it up in babble.

**Not checking understanding of instructions**

TEACHER: *My instructions were so clear- but all the students did different things -and none of them did what I asked them to do.*

Even the clearest instructions can be hard to grasp -so, after you've given them, it's well worth checking that they have been understood. A simple way is to ask a student or two to repeat them back to you: *So, José, what are you going to do?* In this way you satisfy yourself that the task has been understood.

**Asking Do you understand?**

TEACHER: *Do you understand?*

STUDENT: *Yes ...*

When you want to check learners’ understanding, questions such as Do you understand? are often useless. If you get a Yes reply it could mean *I'm nervous about seeming stupid or I don't want to waste class time any more or I think I understand, but...* Teachers often need to get clear information about what students have taken in. The best way to do this is to get students to demonstrate their understanding, for example by
using a language item in a sentence, or by repeating an instruction, or by explaining their interpretation of an idea. This provides real evidence, rather than vague, possibly untrue information. A better question to ask might be: *Am I (being) clear? or Do I make any sense?*

**Fear of genuine feedback**

TEACHER: *Did you like my lesson?*

STUDENTS: Yes.

In an active, forward-moving class the learners will constantly be giving their teacher feedback on what they have understood, what they think, what they need, how they feel, etc. Many teachers believe in the importance of open, honest feedback, but find that in practice it can be hard to get. This is partly to do with the classroom atmosphere, partly to do with the questions asked, and mainly to do with the teacher’s attitude and response to feedback received. The more you see feedback as a threat to you and to your position and your confidence then the more you will attempt to avoid feedback, or to defend yourself against perceived an act when you do get feedback. If you can open yourself up to the possibilities of really listening to what students have to say with a view to simply hearing them -without self-defence, justifications or arguments -then you may find that you can start to find out what they are really thinking, and that you can work on responding appropriately to that.

**In sufficient authority / over-politeness**

TEACHER: *So if you don’t mind, it would be very nice if you could just stop the activity if you feel that’s OK.*

This kind of pussyfooting is a common way in which teachers undermine themselves. Be clear. Say what you need to say without hiding it inside wrappings. If you want to stop an activity say: *Stop now, please.* Feel your own natural authority and let it speak clearly.

**The running commentary**

TEACHER: *So now what I’m gonna do is I’m gonna move my chair over here and sit down and just get comfortable and now I’m gonna tear up these pieces of paper, and I had to use these because I couldn’t get*
any card, so I found these at the back of the teacher’s room, and I’m gonna tear them up now and when I’ve done that what I’m gonna ask you to do is if you don’t mind ...

Don’t give a running commentary about the mechanics of past, present and future activities. Boring, hard to follow, unnecessary. Tell students what they need to know - and stop.

Lack of confidence in self, learners, material, activity/making it too easy

TEACHER: I wonder why they look so bored?

A common cause of boredom in classrooms is when material used is too difficult or too easy. The former isn’t hard to recognize - the learners can’t do the work. A more difficult problem is when work is simply not challenging enough. Teachers often have rather limited expectations about what people can do - and keep their classes on a rather predictable straight line through activities that are safe and routine. Try to keep the level of challenge high. Be demanding. Believe that they can do more than they are aware of being able to do - and then help them to do it.

Over-helping/over-organizing

TEACHER: Yes now you can ask her your question. Mmm that’s a good question. What do you think? What’s your answer going to be, Silvia? Yes. Go on- tell her what it is ...

When you give students a task to do in a group, it’s often best to let them get on with it. A lot of ‘teacher help’, although well-intentioned, is actually ‘teacher interference’ and gets in the way of students working on their own. As long as you are around they will look to you for guidance, control and help. Go away - and they are forced to do the work themselves. That is when learning might happen. For teachers it can be a difficult lesson to learn - but sometimes our students will do much better without us, if only we have the courage to trust them.
Flying with the fastest

TEACHER: So- what's the answer?
STUDENT A: Only on Tuesdays unless it's raining.
TEACHER: Yes very good -so everyone got that. And why did he buy the elastic band? STUDENT A: So he wouldn't lose his letters.
TEACHER: Good. Everyone understands then!

If you only listen to the first people who speak, it’s very easy to get a false impression of how difficult or easy something is. You may find that the strongest and fastest students dominate and you get little idea of how the majority of the class finds the work. This can lead you to fly at the speed of the top two or three students and to lose the rest completely. Make sure you get constant answers and feedback from many students. Try directing questions at individuals (e.g. What do you think, Pedro?) and sometimes actively ‘shh!’ the loud ones -or simply ‘don’t hear’ them.

Not really listening (hearing language problems but not the message)

STUDENT: I am feeling bad. My grandfather he die last week and I am. ..
TEACHER: No- not die- say died because it’s in the past.

Because we are dealing in language as the subject matter of our courses it’s very easy to become over concerned about the accuracy of what is said and to fail to hear the person behind the words. The example above is an extreme one, but on a minute-by- minute basis in class, teachers frequently fail to hear what learners say. The only point in learning language is to be able to communicate or receive communication- it is vital that work on the mechanical production of correct English does not blind us to the messages conveyed. Check yourself occasionally -are you really listening to your students -or only to their words?
Weak rapport - creation of a poor working environment

TEACHER: I try to be nice- but my classes always seem so dull.

If rapport seems to be a problem - then plan work specifically designed to focus on improving the relationships and interaction within the class (rather than activities with a mainly language aim). Until the relationships are good within a class the learning is likely to be of a lower quality -so it’s worth spending time on this. Bear in mind the three teacher qualities that help to enable a good working environment – authenticity, respect and empathy.

Don’t be too worried by this terrible list! These are the kind of problems we all have. You’ll find yourself doing these things -so notice yourself doing them and note the ways in which they do or don’t seem to ‘prevent’ learning. But also accept that this is a part of the natural process of your own learning and development. As your awareness and confidence grow you’ll find that you not only become more able to recognize such problems in your own teaching, but that you can also start to find effective alternative options that enable rather than hinder learning.
ACTIVITIES AND LESSONS

This section offers some basic information and ideas about running lessons and activities. As a starting point we look at the mechanics of a single classroom activity. The aim is to start small and then gradually widen the focus. This chapter comes before ‘planning’ because this reflects the way that I myself learned to teach: I found it hard to worry about the ‘bigger’ questions until I had gained at least some initial confidence in the basic mechanics of running activities and working with students.

1 Classroom activities

A basic skill in teaching English as a foreign language is to be able to prepare, set up and run a single classroom activity, for example a game or a communication task or a discussion. This section looks at some typical activities, and considers one in detail. There is also guidance on planning similar activities.

Here is a short random list of some other activities often used in EFL classrooms (out of thousands of possible activities):

- learners do a grammar exercise individually then compare answers with each other;
- learners listen to a conversation in order to answer some questions;
- learners write a formal letter;
- learners discuss and write some questions in order to make a questionnaire;
- learners read a newspaper article to prepare for a discussion;
- learners play a vocabulary game;
- learners repeat sentences their teacher is saying;
- learners role play a shop scene.

The following plan describes one possible route-map for running a simple activity:

➤ Before the lesson

1 Familiarize yourself with the material and the activity. Try the activity yourself. Imagine how it will look in class. Decide how many organizational steps are involved. How long will it probably take? Do the learners know enough language to be able to make a useful attempt at the activity? What help might
they need? What questions might they have? What errors are they likely to make? What will the teacher’s role be at each stage? What instructions are needed? How will they be given? (Explained? Read? Demonstrated?) Prepare any aids or additional material.

You also need to think through any potential problems or hiccups in the procedures. For example, what will happen if you plan student work in pairs but there is an uneven number of students? Will this student work alone or will you join in or will you make one of the pairs into a group of three?

➢ In the Lesson

1 Pre-activity: introduction and lead-in to activity. This may be to help raise motivation or interest (e.g. discussion of a picture related to the topic), or perhaps to focus on language items (e.g. items of vocabulary) that might be useful in the activity.

3 Set up the activity (or if it is complex, set up the first step of the activity). Organize the students so that they can do the activity. (This may involve making pairs or groups, moving the seating, etc). Give clear instructions for the activity. A demonstration or example is usually much more effective than a long explanation. You may wish to check back that the instructions have been understood (e.g. So, Antonio, what are you going to do first?). In some activities it may be useful to allow some individual work (e.g. thinking through a problem, listing answers, etc) before the students get together with others.

4 Run the activity (or the first step). If the material was well-prepared and the instructions clear, then the activity can now largely run itself. Allow the students to work on the task without too much interference. The teacher’s role now is much more low-key, taking a back seat and monitoring what is happening without getting in the way. Beware of encumbering the students with unnecessary help. This is their chance to work. If it’s difficult, give them the chance to rise to that challenge, without leaning on you.

5 Close the activity (or the first step). Allow it to close properly. Rather than suddenly stopping the activity at a random point, try to sense when the students are ready to move on. If different groups are finishing at different times, make a judgment about when coming together as a whole class would be useful to most people. If you want to close the activity while many students are still working, give a time warning (e.g. Finish the item you are working on or Two minutes).

6 If the activity is complex and involves more than one step, repeat points 3, 4 and 5 for subsequent steps.
7 Post-activity. It may be useful to have some kind of feedback session on the activity. This could involve comparing opinions from different groups, checking answers, looking at problems arising, discussing the purpose of the activity and reactions to it, continuing interesting discussions, etc. It can be rather dull simply to go over things that have already been done thoroughly in small groups. Aim to get as many students as possible involved in speaking and participating. For example, when checking answers it may be more interesting for groups to exchange and compare their answers themselves, than for the teacher to be up at the front asking for and checking them.

In your early lessons as an English teacher you may find that ‘survival’ is your main priority. You would like to teach well and for your students to learn and enjoy what happens, but above even that you want something that you can prepare easily, something that is guaranteed (or nearly guaranteed) to work; something that will let you go into the classroom, do some useful work with the learners and get out alive. If you have a course book then you have an instant source of material. Many teachers also use ideas books, known as ‘recipe books’, which do exactly what that nickname suggests - give you everything you need to know to be able to walk into class with the right ingredients to ‘cook up’ a good activity.

As a starting point, a ‘survival lesson’ could be simply a series of activities following on from each other, one after the other. For one or two lessons this is probably workable. Clearly, though, it is soon going to be unsatisfactory as the basis of a whole course: where is the direction, the growth, the progress? What about the students’ needs, their personalities, their likes? Activities such as we have been looking at are the building blocks, but we now need to consider much more carefully how we connect them together.

2 Four kinds of lesson

A complete lesson may consist of a single long activity, or it may have a number of shorter activities within it. These activities may have different aims; they may also, when viewed together, give the entire lesson an
overall objective. This section of the book looks at some ways in which activities can relate to each other and combine to make a complete lesson.

Here is a description of four basic lesson types:

1 Logical line

A → B → C

In this lesson there is a clear attempt to follow a ‘logical’ path from one activity to the next. Activity A leads to activity B leads to activity C. Activity C builds on what has been done in activity B, which itself builds on what has been done in activity A.

In work on grammar, for example, the sequence of activities might be: A -first we understand an item of language; B -we practice it orally in drills; C -we get practice using it in more unrestricted, integrated speaking work; D -we do some written exercises to consolidate our understanding.

In work on language skills, the sequence of activities often moves from an overview towards work on specific details. For example, the learners move gradually from a general understanding of a reading text to detail comprehension and study of items within it. There is probably one clear overall objective to the whole lesson. The teacher has predicted possible problems and difficulties and has prepared ways to deal with them when they come up in class. The teacher is hoping to lead the learners step by step through a clearly programmed sequence of activities in the hope of them all reaching a specific, pre-determined end point. I imagine the class going down a long, straight road, led by the teacher, who takes care that any stragglers catch up and that any wanderers find the right path again.

Many teacher training courses (like the Especializacion) encourage you to prepare lessons of this kind. This is partly because it is possible for trainers and trainees to sort out a lot of potential problems at the planning stage and partly because the lessons are easier for an observer to evaluate, though there is no particular evidence to suggest that this type of lesson is any more successful than others in enabling effective learning.
The following description of a ‘logical line’ lesson is subdivided into four distinct stages, four separate activities, but it is also clear that it all adds up to a total lesson.

1. The teacher asks the students which makes of cars they have heard of. Which ones do they like? Which don’t they like? Why?

2. The teacher says some comparative sentences about cars. For example: A Mustang is faster than a Mini. A Tsuru is cheaper than a Mini, etc. The students get a number of opportunities to repeat the teacher’s sentences and to make some new ones of their own.

3. Students are given a number of car advertisements and a blank grid to fill out using information from the ads: price, maximum speed, etc. The students work in pairs to find the answers.

4. Students then use this information to discuss which car they would like to have and giving reasons (i.e. using comparatives). The teacher encourages and helps them to use comparative sentences accurately.

**Task** Make a simple plan (similar to the description above) for a ‘logical line’ lesson where the aim is to practice writing the past simple tense using a picture story.

**Topic umbrella**

In this kind of lesson, a topic (e.g. rainforests or education or weather or good management) provides the main focal point for student work. The teacher might include a variety of separate activities (e.g. on vocabulary, speaking, listening, grammar, etc) linked only by the fact that the umbrella topic remains the same.

The activities can often be done in a variety of orders without changing the overall access of the lesson. In some cases activities may be linked; for example, when the discussion in one activity uses vocabulary
studied in a preceding activity. There may be a number of related or disparate aims in this lesson, rather than a single main objective.

3 Jungle path

The ‘logical line’ and ‘topic umbrella’ lessons both involve the teacher pre-planning a sequence of activities; the teacher usually feels able to predict what language areas will be worked on, what problems are likely to arise and what the students are likely to achieve in the lesson.

An alternative approach would be not to predict and prepare so much but to create the lesson moment by moment in class, the teacher and learners working with whatever is happening in the room, responding to questions, problems and options as they come up and finding new activities, materials and tasks in response to particular situations. The starting point might be an activity or a piece of material, but what comes out of it will remain unknown until it happens. The essential difference between this lesson and the previous lesson types is that the teacher is working more with the people in the room than with her material or her plan.

I imagine a group of people hacking their way throughout the jungle towards new experiences, new learnings. Sometimes the teacher may lead, sometimes the students. Everyone should be encouraged to think, make connections, ask questions and draw conclusions for themselves.

The main pre-planning for a lesson of this kind would involve the teacher using her knowledge of the learners and of the available resources to choose some activities and materials that are likely to prove challenging and raise important questions and issues. She would have an intuitive sense of various potential links between activities, based partly on previous experiences of the outcomes of lessons using similar activities. In class some of these activities and materials may be used, some not. The teacher may also feel the need to find other materials as the lesson proceeds, some from a course book, some from her
head, some from her staff room library, etc. Although she may be clear about a number of possible
directions the lesson might take, it will be possible for her to state the lesson's objectives until after it has
finished.

Here is an example lesson description:

**Lesson a**
The teacher takes a communication game (concerning different attitudes to smoking) into class. The
students do this in pairs. When they have finished, some students ask about a number of language
problems they had. The students discuss and work out some answers to the problems. The teacher invents
a quick practice exercise that will focus on one of the language points. When that has finished, a student
asks about the pronunciation of some words in the exercise. The teacher works through some examples on
the board and then tells them to turn to a page in their course book where there is a game to help raise
students' awareness of word stress. The class decides that they don't want to do this now, but will do it for
homework. Some students remind the teacher that they haven't yet discussed smoking as a whole class
and they'd like to hear what some of the rest of the class thought ...etc.

-Here are two common examples of a 'jungle path’ lesson where the teacher starts without any materials:

**Lesson b**
The teacher asks *How was the weekend?* (or a similar question), and after listening to a number of
answers, leads this into a discussion based on something a student said. At some point she selects
particular items of language that a student has used, focuses on these (perhaps considering grammar or
pronunciation), invents a simple exercise that will help students work on this, etc.

**Lesson c**
A student asks a question at the start of the lesson. This leads into some work on the board (perhaps the
teacher sets the class a problem to solve that will help to clarify the language difficulty). While the students
are working on the puzzle, the teacher goes to the staff room and collects a further exercise on the same
language area. He returns and offers the students the new exercise, but they say they feel clear now about
the language item. However, there is another question which has arisen...
A fourth example lesson demonstrates how a competent and confident teacher might hand over responsibility and decision making entirely to the class:

**Lesson d**

The teacher starts the lesson by asking *What shall we work on today?* She then waits while the class decides, taking care not to manipulate them into deciding something that she wants them to do. Once the decisions are made, she does whatever she has been asked to do.

The ‘jungle path’ lesson can look artless to an observer, yet to do it successfully requires experience. It is not simply a ‘chat’ or an abdication of responsibility, though in inexperienced hands it might well be simply a muddle and a ‘lazy’ alternative to careful planning. In fact, a competent teacher is working minute by minute with her class, actively planning and re-planning as she goes, constantly basing the work around the students and their needs, statements, problems, questions, etc.

A teacher doing this needs to be aware both of the people in the room and of the wide variety of options open to her. She needs to be able to make decisions, moment by moment, about which route is the best one to follow. She needs to be familiar with all the resources of material and information available to her. The need for teaching experience and awareness of resources available suggests that lessons of this type are more appropriate for teachers who are already fairly competent in planning; and executing lessons of the ‘logical line’ or ‘topic umbrella’ variety. For this reason it is the lesson you don’t normally learn to do on teacher-training courses!

4 **R a g - b a g**

This lesson is made up of a number of unconnected activities. For example: a chat at the start of the lesson, followed by a vocabulary game, a pair work speaking activity and a song. The variety in a lesson of this kind
may often be appealing to students and teacher. There can, however, be a ‘bittiness’ about this approach that makes it unsatisfactory for long-term usage. There will be no overall language objective for the lesson (though there might be a ‘group-building’ aim). Each separate activity might have its own aims.

The following table summarises the types of lessons described above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LESSON TYPE</th>
<th>NATURE OF LINK BETWEEN ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>SOME OUTCOMES OF EFFECTIVE USE</th>
<th>SOME OUTCOMES OF INEPT OR LAZY USE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logical line</td>
<td>Straight line</td>
<td>Clearly visible progress</td>
<td>Limited response to individual needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programmed growth</td>
<td>Focuses towards an aim</td>
<td>Atomistic; hard to see the overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic umbrella</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>Tenuous links to boring topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Framework for learning</td>
<td>Easily becomes rag-bag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jungle path</td>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
<td>Person-centred</td>
<td>Muddled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responsive to immediate needs</td>
<td>Aimless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Powerful personal insights</td>
<td>An escape from planning and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Easily becomes rag-bag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rag-bag</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>Going nowhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>Students wait for teacher’s next</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>surprise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 4.5: Four types of lesson
Planning and managing classes

Introduction

In this section, we’ll look first at long-term planning of classes. This usually follows some kind of syllabus divided into units. The syllabus is the basis of a course, though it may need adapting, for example, to a specific teaching situation. Short-term organization is then discussed, and one possible format for lesson planning will be presented. Effective class management is essential for actual teaching, and we offer suggestions. Finally, we’ll consider approaches to two specific teaching situations—children’s courses and large groups.

Long-term planning

Courses are normally based on a syllabus. This may be a document prepared by your school or educational authority, or it may be the contents section of your course book. The syllabus constitutes your essential guide for the course. It sets your objectives and tells you what to teach, in what order, in what period of time, and—to some extent—how.

The course syllabus

At first sight, a syllabus can seem distant from the daily task of preparing and giving individual lessons. It usually contains a long list of items and activities for up to a year’s work. There may also be general methodological indications, and these may not necessarily suit your teaching style or your specific teaching situation very well. However, the syllabus is the starting point for all your more detailed planning of lessons. Your lesson planning and what you actually do in the classroom must take into account the major goals, the unit divisions, and the general methodological indications of your syllabus. Table 8.1 shows the different levels of planning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Time Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course syllabus</td>
<td>Level and goals</td>
<td>Year/semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabus unit</td>
<td>Block of work</td>
<td>Month/set number of weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work plan</td>
<td>Teaching cycle</td>
<td>Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson plan</td>
<td>Specific actions</td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.1: Levels of planning in a syllabus

Before you can begin to make any detailed plan you need to be familiar with the main goals, general objectives, and content of the syllabus. That includes understanding:
• what the learners are expected to know and be able to do in English at the beginning of the course, and at the end of the course.

• what the roles of grammar, functions, topics, and skills are. Some syllabuses may give more emphasis to language knowledge and others to communication skills.

If your syllabus is not clear about levels of learner performance and major goals, you need to take steps to clarify these. For example, you may need to consult a coordinator or senior teacher, examine the course book in detail, and look at any course tests that exist. You may sometimes even need to take your own decisions.

An important consideration is whether the syllabus and the course material allows for constant reactivation and integration of previously introduced items and skills. To achieve this, many modern syllabuses are not linear, but spiral. A linear syllabus may mean, for example, a week of *There is/are* and only *There is/are*, then a week of *Possessives* and only *Possessives*, then a week of *Likes/Dislikes* and only *Likes/Dislikes*, and then a Review of *There is/are, Possessives, and Likes/Dislikes*. The Review may well reveal that the learners have half-forgotten *There is/are* during the two weeks they have not practised it, and are already beginning to forget *Possessives*. In contrast, a spiral syllabus constantly tries to reactivate previously introduced language and skills, and to integrate new items into a growing repertoire of English.

As we all know, learners quickly forget items they do not use. Also, isolated language items such as *There is/are* are not much use in dynamic communication situations. To be able to communicate, learners need to develop a growing repertoire of language which is available whenever required. If your syllabus appears to be strongly linear, it is a good idea to include some regular reactivation and integration sessions in your lessons. You can give a little time to such work every lesson, and perhaps also spend longer on it once a week, for example, every Friday.

**Syllabus units**

The unit divisions of a syllabus usually indicate how the content can be grouped together, and how fast the course should move. A unit may have a single theme, for example, *Talking about the future* or *Space travel*. A theme, or some other association between the language elements, can help the learners
remember what they have been working on better. The move from unit to unit can also give both you and the learners a sense of progress over the many weeks or months of the course.

Units are also usually related to periods of time. For example, you may have to cover a unit every month, or every ten teaching hours. This should help you relate the syllabus to your specific teaching conditions and learners. If you are lucky, you may find you have plenty of time for the relaxed use of materials and activities that are particularly interesting and useful for your group. If you are less fortunate, you may find that you need to be extremely organized, disciplined, and creative to cover just the most essential objectives and content of the syllabus without driving the learners to despair.

To save time, some teachers omit the review units in their course book. This is not advisable unless you have managed to incorporate reactivation and integration sessions into your regular teaching. It is essential to keep alive the language and skills from earlier in the course, and from previous courses. An adequate syllabus allows for the fact that learners will be accumulating knowledge and skills, learning new things without forgetting old ones. The saying ‘More haste, less speed’ is relevant here. Teachers often think they are going faster and that learners are making more progress when they constantly move on to new language items and skills. It may seem that spending lessons on what the learners have ‘already studied’ is wasting time. But in reality, the only way learners make genuine progress in learning language, and being able to communicate with it, is by constantly using it.

**Short-term planning**

Short-term planning may involve work plans covering a week’s teaching as well as individual lesson plans.

**Work plans**

Work plans consist of the outlines of a sequence of lessons. They should provide your teaching with continuity and coherence. This is hard to achieve when looking at each lesson in isolation. Work plans can ensure that, over each week, there is variety in your teaching, something for every type of learner. They can also ensure that you are achieving the balance between old and new language items, accuracy and fluency practice, and language and skills work, and that you do not lose sight of your main goal, communication. If, out of three lessons per week, one consists largely of presentation and practice of new language items, at least one other lesson each week should consist largely of communicative work.
Lesson planning

For truly professional teachers, lesson planning is not optional, it is essential preparation for teaching. It is a matter of deciding exactly what you are going to teach, and how. Unless you establish your objectives and activities in this way, you may find yourself just going mechanically through the course book, or trying to improvise whole lessons. Such approaches usually produce poor results, although some improvisation and flexibility is good, even essential, in teaching. Learners can easily notice the difference between teachers who plan and those who do not. And if their teacher does not make an effort, why should they?

To begin your lesson plan, decide where the lesson fits into your week’s work plan or teaching cycle. Then establish specific objectives for the lesson. These will largely be determined by the phase in the teaching cycle. Here are some examples of lesson objectives:

- To present and achieve controlled production of a new grammatical-functional item.
- To achieve guided communicative use of a new item.
- To achieve the communicative use of a mixed range of language in writing.
- To promote the learners’ confidence in the conversational use of English.
- To develop comprehension of public announcements.

The activities and materials should be appropriate for your objectives, and also for your specific group of learners. When deciding on appropriate activities and materials, take into account the learners’ age, interests, and abilities. Calculate the approximate time for each activity so that you do not end up doing only half of what you planned, or having no plan for the last quarter of the lesson. And remember that there needs to be a variety of activity and interaction, for example, between lockstep, pair work, group work, and individual work.
Here is a typical lesson plan:

Group: 303  
Room: G16  
Unit: 8  
Time: 8-10.00 a.m.  
Date: 8th November

Objectives/teaching points: Fluency/consolidation practice of Present Perfect (presentation/accuracy practice last class) combined with Simple Past. Development of conversation and listening skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific objectives/ activities</th>
<th>Materials/ aids</th>
<th>Procedures/ interactions</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To warm up LL, establish topic, get conversation practice: Discussion of holiday activities</td>
<td>Photos of snorkelling, water-skiing, horse riding, etc.</td>
<td>TQ- LA Have you ever ____ed? Where/ When? --PRS</td>
<td>5’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. To establish holiday discussion situation, give listening practice, lead into main activity: Listening to friends discussing their holiday plans | CD 23.7 Table on board for lists of activities | Task 1: Who wants to go to Scotland? Why?  
Task 2. List things to do in Scotland and the Costa Brava | 10’ |
| 3 To get LL to use Pres. Perf. + Past in free conversation: GPS of three agree on holiday destination, give reasons. | Poster with choice of holiday resorts, things to do in each | T and L model conversation similar to CD –GPS of three, instructions to note reasons for decision: Maria has been to..., and she doesn’t want to go again. Ana has seen a bullfight and didn’t like it. Osmar has never... | 15’ |
| 4 To check use of Pres. Perf. and past: GP reports | Same poster | Representative of each GP reports to class: We decided to go to... because...; We decided not to go to... because... | 15’ |
| 5 To clarify use of Pres. Perf., wind down: Dialogue fill-in | Handout: dialogue fill-in | IND fill-in – Check in PRS—Check on board | 10’ |

Homework: Holiday composition

Key: T = teacher; TQ = teacher questions; L(L) = learner(s); LA = learner answers; PRS = pairs; GP(S) = group(s); IND = individual; - leads to/followed by

The main elements and considerations in the above plan are:

- Clear stages: warm-up (1); lead-in (2); main activity (3); follow-up (4); and wind-down (5)—and smooth transitions between them.
- A unifying theme, running through the conversation, listening, and writing activities.
Appropriate relationships between objectives, activities, materials, and procedures.

Attention to both the communicative use of English and formal correctness in the language, i.e. fluency and accuracy.

Consideration of the learners’ interests and the learning conditions, as well as the grammatical-functional items in the syllabus.

The stages and transitions give a comfortable flow to the lesson. Each stage requires different behaviour from the teacher, a different level of effort from the learners, and changes in pace. A spare activity—for example, a game or quiz could have been included at the end in case the lesson went faster than anticipated. The learners are provided with enough input—photos, a model conversation on CD, and a poster—to get them going, but they are also given the opportunity to use their personal experience in realistic tasks. The interest of the topic and tasks, the changes of activity and interaction, and the relatively relaxed pace, should help the learners through this class.

Obviously, lesson plans need to vary according to the age and level of the learners, the objectives, the time of day, and even the time of year. Young learners need more changes of activity and more physical activity. They have much shorter attention spans than older learners, and can get very restless. Older learners at higher levels can sometimes work enthusiastically at the same task for quite long periods of time. Lessons at the end of a long morning, the end of a long day, or just before a holiday period, need to be lighter than other lessons.

During or after a lesson you can make a few notes on the plan, and it will then act as the starting point for the following lesson plan. A book, folder, or file of such plans can be a permanent record of the progress achieved with a particular group, and may serve as the basis for even better plans next time you teach the course.
Classroom Dynamics

Class management

You cannot plan everything that will happen in a lesson. You need strategies to respond to actual events, including unexpected ones. But if the learners have become accustomed to certain patterns of behaviour, your classes will run more smoothly.

Getting attention and participation

It is unrealistic and undesirable to expect the learners to pay attention to you throughout a lesson. But you should be able to get their attention fairly quickly when you need it. If, for example, you cannot get everybody’s attention when giving instructions or explanations, serious problems may result. You may find yourself explaining something over and over again to individuals or groups of learners. At worst, the lesson may even disintegrate into chaos. Shouting louder and louder is seldom an effective solution. And it is bad for your relationship with the learners, your general mood, and of course, your voice. You need to train the learners to respond to a range of non-verbal signals, for example:

- Stand with your hand raised until you have total silence and everybody’s attention. You can train the learners to raise their hands too, and attend to you as soon as they see you with your hand raised.
- Signal that one or more learners should come to the front of the class. This tends to make the others curious.
- Point at your watch to indicate that you are about to end an activity.

Interest is usually the best way to attract and hold attention, and to get voluntary participation. Classroom atmosphere is also very important. You can compel participation in lockstep practice with your questions (for example, ‘what’s the capital of France ...Mario?’) and instructions (for example, ‘Question ...Sandra, answer ...Roberto’). But voluntary participation in lockstep work, and more especially in pair and group work, will usually be poor unless the topics interest the learners, and you encourage rather than criticize them.

Giving and checking instructions

Effective instructions are vital if activities are to go well especially activities involving changes of interaction, for example, from lockstep to pair work. A communicative approach to language teaching requires some
quite complicated activities and interactions, and this means you need to have all the learners’ attention when giving instructions. You need to train them to be quiet and listen very carefully. This is especially the case if you are giving instructions in English.

Think about both what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Instructions should be simple and clear and, as far as possible, standardized. Try always to use the same type of instructions and language for the same type of routine activities. However, especially with elementary learners, even simple, clear, familiar language is not always sufficient to get complex messages across. The learners may need a demonstration of the activity as well. There is one example at stage 3 of the lesson plan above: ‘T and L model conversation similar to CD’. The activity might actually be organized like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Teacher**: Now. I want you to discuss holiday plans in the same way as they did in the conversation on the CD. Work in groups of three. Discuss every choice, and note reasons for and against each one. First, copy this table from the board. OK? What are you going to do right now, Andrea?
| **Learner**: Copy the table from the board.
| **Teacher**: Right. Copy it. Everyone. [Pause while learners copy table.] OK. Have you finished?
| **Learners** Yes.
| **Teacher**: Good. Now listen to Ana, Pedro, and me. Come up here. Ana. Pedro. Right. Now, what about Acapulco? I’ve never been there. [1; whose name is Rafael, writes ‘Rafael never been’ in the ‘for’ column under Acapulco.]
| **Learner**: I’ve been there. It rained all the time. It was very sad. [T writes ‘Ana been-rain-sad’ in the ‘against’ column under Acapulco.]
| **Teacher**: What about you, Pedro? [Pedro gives a reason for or against] What about Veracruz? [Reasons for and against going to Veracruz are added to the table.] OK? You get the idea? In groups of three, discuss holiday plans. Discuss every option. Note reasons for and against each option in the table. You’ll have 15 minutes. What do you have to do, Nicolas?
| **Learner**: In groups of three we discuss holiday plans …
| **Teacher**: Right. And …, Martina?
| **Learner**: We discuss every option …
| **Teacher**: Right. And …, Vladimir?
| **Learner**: We note the reasons for and against each option in the table.
| **Teacher**: Right. How long do you have, Natalia?
| **Learner**: 15 minutes.
| **Teacher**: Very good! Right, you can start … groups of three. |

Never assume that the learners have understood what you want them to do just from the instructions. You need to make sure your message is perfectly clear. To check comprehension, you may ask selected learners to demonstrate the activity briefly, or paraphrase the instructions you have given. If necessary, you can even get learners to translate the instructions into Spanish. They will soon get used to the idea that you
will call on them to participate actively when you are setting up an activity. There may be occasions when it is best to explain something complicated or very new for the learners in Spanish. Although the general recommendation is to avoid the use of L1 as much as possible, you should not feel that it is never to be used at all.

Managing pair and group work

There are, it is true, difficulties and risks associated with pair and group work, for example:

- the learners may be confused about the task and not do it properly
- the noise level may rise (though seldom more than in choral repetition)
- the learners may start talking about whatever they like in Spanish
- the learners may make and repeat many errors
- you may not be able to get the learners’ attention again and lose control of the class.

However, you can usually avoid these potential problems by careful preparation and organization, and by progressively training the learners to participate fully and effectively. If these things are done, the advantages of pair and group work far outweigh the drawbacks. For example, they provide:

- variety and dynamism
- an enormous increase in individual practice
- low-stress private practice
- opportunities to develop learner autonomy
- interaction with peers.

Introduce learners to pair and group work with very simple, clear, and brief tasks. By ‘brief’ I mean tasks that take only one or two minutes. For example, you can get learners to ask and answer in pairs the questions that they have just been practising in lockstep. Once they have done this kind of simple task successfully, they can move on to progressively longer, more complex, and freer tasks.
Other techniques and strategies that can make pair and group work as trouble-free and profitable as possible are:

- Set up the task in as in extract above, i.e. give clear instructions followed by a demonstration and a comprehension check.
- Monitor the activity, move among the pairs or groups as quickly as possible, listening for major problems and helping the learners when necessary. Your ‘ubiquitous presence’ will deter the learners from using Spanish.
- Train the learners to stop talking when you give a certain signal, for example, a raised hand.
- Check on the task after the pairs or groups have completed it, getting selected learners to give examples of what they said, or report on what they did.
- After the pair or group work, deal with major errors you noted: give spoken examples or write examples on the board for the learners to correct.
- Tell particularly noisy, uncooperative classes you will do pair and group work with them only if they keep their voices down and follow your instructions. The prospect of lessons with nothing but lockstep work is usually enough to get their co-operation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pre-task</th>
<th>task</th>
<th>post-task</th>
<th>follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T outlines situation and gives instructions, followed by a comprehension check and a demonstration</td>
<td>LL work in pairs or groups. T monitors, notes problems, and helps where necessary</td>
<td>T signals to end the task and does a post-task check</td>
<td>T deals with error-correction if necessary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8.1: Stages in the management of pair or group work

As the learners acquire experience in working in pairs and groups, and achieve success, they usually begin to work better and enjoy the work more. They may soon find a lesson without pair or group work strange – even unsatisfactory. Pair and group work then becomes much easier for you to handle. But you should never forget the care needed to make a task work well.
Teacher and learner roles

Both teachers and learners need to play varying roles. You should be consciously aware of this. At different times, you need to:

- Present new information, control accuracy practice from the front, and make sure that as many learners as possible participate in the class and that most errors are corrected.
- Organize and facilitate lockstep fluency and skills activities from the front, encouraging voluntary participation and ignoring most errors.
- Monitor individual, pair, or group activities, moving around among the learners and helping and encouraging them.
- Inform the learners about their progress, trying to combine encouragement with honest evaluation and useful feedback.

These different roles require skill, confidence, and sensitivity. At different times, the learners need to:

- Attend to information you give them
- Imitate your models, and try to do exactly as you indicate.
- Volunteer original ideas and ask relevant questions.
- Work with other learners, solving problems co-operatively.
- Work independently in class or at home, taking full responsibility for their own performance and learning.

It is, of course, your responsibility to make sure that you behave in the right way at the right time. It is also your responsibility to encourage the learners to behave appropriately, according to the activity and interaction they are involved in. If you are successful, the teaching-learning process will progress well and both the learners and you will feel confident working together.

Discipline

Discipline is the main preoccupation of some teachers, especially teachers of groups of children and teenagers. Other teachers hardly have to worry about it at all. Good order, co-operation, and respect in the
classroom are seldom accidental. They are usually the direct result of the way you teach and the way you relate to the learners.

It is wise to begin some courses in a fairly formal or even strict way, and relax little by little as you gain the co-operation of the group. But you may soon start having problems if you do not follow these basic recommendations:

- Plan lessons, and include varied activities and interactions that keep the learners busy.
- Use topics and activities that you think will be interesting and enjoyable for the learners.
- Motivate the learners by focusing on what they do satisfactorily or well more than on what they do badly.
- Try to create a sense of community in the group.
- Be fair to all the learners, never favouring some over others.
- Show that you respect and are interested in all the learners as people, irrespective of how good they are at English.

In spite of every precaution and effort on your part, there is occasionally a learner or a group of learners in a class who seem determined to make trouble. If you have most of the learners on your side, it is much easier to handle such situations. Nevertheless, you may need to use some kind of punishment or report a troublemaker to the school principal. If so, it is important that the teacher-learner relationship does not break down completely. Never give a punishment that is humiliating or unreasonable, and always reintegrate learners into the group after they have received a reprimand or punishment. This is important not just for the learner involved, but also for your standing with the group. Groups almost always evaluate disciplinary action taken against one of their members. If the group feels that the punishment was unfair, or that you were unable to cope, the problem will only grow. It is also useful to develop your sense of humour. This is usually appreciated by others, and can help you face small and sometimes large problems.

**Different teaching situations**

There are some aspects of teaching that are specific to certain situations, and that have implications for planning and class management. Two of these situations are children’s courses and large groups.
Children’s courses

Young children, say up to the age of seven, find it difficult or impossible to see language as an abstract system, independent of communication or enjoyable sound sequences such as songs and rhymes. The highlighting of key grammatical features or elicitation of parallel sentences is wasted on them. They also find it difficult or impossible to think in terms of learning goals, although they respond to more immediate objectives such as drawing a picture or making a kite. They also find it difficult or impossible to work at one task for a long time. Their attention span is usually short, and they need frequent changes of activity. Finally, young children respond much better to affection than to discipline. They see most adults as potential ‘aunts’ and ‘uncles’ -or as ‘ogres’ they distrust and fear.

This tendency to see the world in concrete and subjective terms, and to work at tasks for only short periods of time, begins to change significantly from about the age of about seven. By the age of ten, most children have begun to understand abstract systems, can establish learning goals to some extent, can complete fairly long tasks, and are beginning to make objective judgments of people.

There are important implications for teaching children. The younger the children, the more your lesson plans should consist of games, vocabulary linked to pictures and realia, manual activities such as drawing and colouring, songs and rhymes, and stories. Your lesson plans should also contain frequent changes of activity. Finally, it is important to maintain a good rapport with children, and to foster an affectionate and co-operative atmosphere.

Large groups

The basic principles of teaching English are the same for groups of fourteen, forty, fifty, or sixty learners. But it is obviously much more difficult to achieve good results in very large groups. Some of the main problems are:

Communication

The learners may not all be able to see or hear you well, and you may not be able to see or hear all the learners well.
Numbers
There are several problems here:

- It is very hard to get to know all the learners and their names.
- The learners get much less individual practice.
- There are too many pairs or groups for you to monitor.
- You cannot often give learners individual feedback on written work.

Co-operation

Large groups are most common in captive learner situations-schools and universities where the students are obliged to attend the English courses. This means you are always likely to have a fair number of people who simply do not want to be there, or to co-operate with you and the other more motivated learners.

There are no magic, guaranteed solutions. The best starting point is probably obtaining the learners’ co-operation. If the learners are adolescents or adults, you can discuss the challenges and options they face in Spanish. The basic options are everybody co-operating and achieving some worthwhile objectives, or everybody wasting their time. If a majority chooses the first option, which they probably will if you present it attractively, there is pressure on the minority at least not to disrupt the lessons.

You then need to face the problem of numbers. One way of tackling this problem is to form teams of eight to ten learners who agree to help one another, if possible with one or two learners who know a bit more English than the others in each team. You can use these teams for group work and pair work, the stronger learners helping the weaker ones - in fact monitoring for you. You can also get regular written work from teams instead of every learner. In that case, make sure different members of the teams write out the work on different occasions, and that all members check and sign each piece of work.

You may need to organize practice on military lines at first, with clear, highly structured activities. This means accuracy work and simple reading and writing rather than free oral fluency work. If you can get the learners and the teams to attend and respond like a well-trained orchestra, even lockstep, team, and...
individual repetition can be quite satisfying for everybody. You can then get teams to prepare more complex fluency activities, for example, dialogues, role-plays, talks, and present them at the front of the class.

Summary

In this section we have considered the following points:

**Long-term planning.** The course syllabus may be a document or the contents section of a course book. It should be the basis for all planning, and establish the goals, content, and time-scale of the course. If it is not a ‘spiral’ syllabus, constantly reactivating previously introduced items and integrating new items into a growing repertoire of English, try to introduce some of this yourself. Syllabus units should indicate how elements of the syllabus can be grouped and how fast the course should move. You may have to be very organized, disciplined, and creative to cover just the essential content of the syllabus in the time available.

**Short-term planning.** Work plans usually cover a week. They should keep you ion course towards the main goals of the syllabus, and help maintain a balance of activities over several lessons. Lesson planning is essential preparation for teaching. Even good experienced teachers plan and make a few notes. It avoids going mechanically through the book or improvising whole lessons. Decide where a specific lesson fits into a week’s work plan, and establish specific objectives. Activities and materials should be appropriate for your specific group of learners as well as the course objectives. Most lessons should include a warm-up, a main activity or activities, and a wind-down. A spare activity is also useful in case the lesson goes faster than anticipated.

**Class management.** You must be able to get the learners’ attention quickly when you need it, for example, when giving instructions or explanations. There are non-verbal ways of doing this which avoid ineffectual and irritating shouting. For activities to work well, instructions should be clear, but also check comprehension and demonstrate the activity if necessary. Pair and group work require careful monitoring too. Learner participation, especially voluntary participation, depends largely on interest, involvement, and encouragement. Both teachers and learners need to play varying roles.


**Discipline.** The main preoccupation of some teachers of children and adolescents, is largely achieved through planning, interesting topics and activities, motivation, fairness, and respect. If discipline problems do occur, maintain fairness and respect even when giving a punishment.

**Different teaching situations.** Two common teaching situations are working with children and working with large groups. Young children require lessons with a variety of concrete tasks (for example, moving around, doing things, repeating their favourite songs), frequent changes of activity, and an affectionate atmosphere. There are no magic, guaranteed solutions to the problems of large groups. However, it is vital to get cooperation from the majority of the group. It is also useful to form teams, with the stronger learners functioning as monitors. You need to adjust the course objectives to the reality of the situation but it is usually possible to achieve worthwhile results.
The Teacher's Questions

Teachers ask a lot of questions. For example, in a study of the frequency of questions asked by elementary school teachers in the United States, Nash and Shiman discovered teachers ask between 45 and 150 questions every half hour. My own observations show that EFL/ESL teachers also ask a lot of questions. For example, I recently observed six teachers who were all teaching in different contexts in Japan and found they averaged 52 questions every thirty minutes during teacher-initiated activities. It stands to reason that knowledge about questioning behaviours can benefit teachers who want to provide chances for students to interact in English in meaningful ways.

One way to focus on our questioning behaviours is to consider the purposes of questions (see Purposes of Teacher's Questions). For many teachers, one purpose is to ask students to "display" their knowledge. For example, when a teacher holds up a large paper clock and asks the students, "What time is it?", the teacher is asking students to show they know how to tell time in English. Likewise, when the teacher asks, "What is the past tense of 'to do'?" the teacher wants to see if they know this grammatical point. For some teachers, another purpose for asking questions is to learn about the students, to discover things about them and their knowledge through referential questions. For example, if the teacher forgot his or her watch and wants to know what time it is, he or she would use a referential question: "What time is it?" The same is true if the teacher asks, "Who has been to a museum?" simply to know who has and who has not been to one.

Many of those who advocate an interactive approach to EFL/ESL teaching favour the use of referential questions over display questions. My own belief is that both have a place in the language classroom. Referential questions provide a means through which to bring "real questions" into the classroom. They can also be engaging for students because the questions are aimed at communicating with them, not testing their knowledge. However, display questions offer a way to practice language or drill students, something most students both like and need, and when students find display questions to be engaging, I see this as being meaningful to them.

Another purpose of teachers' questions is to check students' comprehension, and to do this, teachers often ask, "Do you understand?" Such "comprehension checks" are not as common outside classrooms as they are inside classrooms, and I wonder what real value they sometimes have. Much of the time, if asked, "Do
you understand?" students will reply that they do, even when they do not. Perhaps such a question as "Who can tell me what I just said?" is more valuable as the question because it not only shows if the student has comprehended what was just said but also gives the student practice in paraphrasing.

Two other purposes of asking questions are to confirm and clarify understanding. For example, "We'll meet at 6:00. Right?" asks the listener to confirm something that the asker believes is true, while "Did you say you like strawberry or chocolate ice cream?" and "I'm a little confused. What time are we going to meet?" aim at clarification. Confirmation and clarification questions are used outside classrooms more often than inside, and because of this, I encourage teachers and students to confirm and clarify often, if for no other reason than to have more natural, and hopefully meaningful, conversations inside classrooms.

In addition to focusing on the purpose of questions, we can consider the content of our questions (see The Content of Teachers' Questions). Questions can include three possible content areas: study, procedure, and life. I have observed that many of the questions in EFL/ESL classrooms are about study, often on the study of language, such as on some aspect of grammar or vocabulary. Less often, teachers ask questions about content other than language, such as movies, trees, food, anything that is not about language itself. Questions can also have procedural content, such as questions used to take roll, give back papers, and ask about schedules. Besides study and procedure, content of questions can be about life. As Fanselow points out, questions can be general to a group of people (life-general content), or specific to one person (life-personal content). Two examples of life-general questions are "How do people greet each other in Vietnam?" and "What is the most popular music among teenagers in France?" Examples of life personal questions are "What is your favourite kind of music?" and "What did you do at the picnic?"

Some teachers believe that when we include study-other, life general, and life-personal questions in our classroom interaction, we can provide greater opportunities for meaningful interaction than when our questions focus exclusively on the study of language and procedures. Study-other questions can involve students in using language to learn about a topic, rather than simply studying about the language itself. Likewise, life-general and life-personal questions can involve students in talking about their culture and themselves.
Finally, as teachers, we can consider "wait time" in relation to creating chances for students to engage in meaningful interaction. On average, teachers wait less than one second for a student to answer a question before calling on this student again or another student. In addition, teachers tend not to wait after a student gives a response, reacting very quickly with "Very good!" and the like. As a result, a usual pattern of classroom interaction emerges: the teacher ends up asking many questions, only students who can respond quickly do so, and the teacher ends up reacting to the students' responses. However, if teachers wait a little longer (three to five seconds) and offer polite encouragement through nonverbal behaviours, this pattern can change. For some teachers, when they extend their wait time after asking a question, student participation increases in the following ways:

- The average length of students' responses increases.
- Students ask more questions.
- Students react to each others' comments.
- The number of correct responses goes up.
- More inferences are made by students.

I encourage you to increase your wait time. But I also caution that simply increasing wait time will not necessarily create changes in classroom interaction. The teacher needs to be sincere in waiting, genuinely wanting to hear the student's answer and what other students think about this answer.
### Purposes of Teachers’ Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Display Question</td>
<td>A question in which the teacher already knows the answer and wants the student to display knowledge. (“What colour is your shirt?”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential Question</td>
<td>A question in which the teacher does not know the answer (“What is your favourite colour?”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension Check</td>
<td>A question to find out if a student understands (“Do you understand?”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation Question</td>
<td>A question to verify what was said (“You said you got up at 6:00?”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification Check</td>
<td>A question to further define or clarify (“Did you say you got up at 6:00 or 7:00?”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Content of Teachers’ Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Questions that ask students about procedural matters (“Did you do your homework?”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of Language</td>
<td>Questions that ask students about aspects of language (“What is the past tense of ‘eat’?” “What does the word acculturation mean?”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of Subjects</td>
<td>Questions that ask students about content other than the study of language (“How big is the Little Prince?” “How many countries are there in the world?”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life-General</td>
<td>Questions about the lives of groups of people (“Do Japanese women like hot tea in the summer?” “How do Nigerians celebrate birthdays?”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life-Personal</td>
<td>Questions about the lives of individuals (“Do you like to drink hot tea in the summer?” “How do you celebrate your birthday?”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Giving feedback to students

Giving feedback is one of the most important responsibilities of a teacher. By providing ongoing feedback you can help your students evaluate their success and progress. Feedback can take a number of forms: giving praise and encouragement; correcting; setting regular tests; having discussions about how the group as a whole is doing; giving individual tutorials; etc. Some of these types of feedback are easier to incorporate into the TP situation than others.

The type and extent of feedback and its timing depends on a variety of factors:

- individual students. Different students respond to different types of feedback. Unconfident students may need more coaxing and encouragement, whereas students who are more self-confident and perhaps have an external exam to pass usually appreciate more direct correction from the teacher - advanced students usually feel they don’t get enough correction;
- the culture you are teaching in and the expected roles of the teacher;
- the stage of the lesson and the type of activity. For example, structured or controlled activities require a different type of feedback from guided or freer activities. Written activities require a different type of feedback from oral activities;
- the stage in the course.

In this chapter we look at the role of feedback (including correction) in TP, and practical correction techniques are described. We also examine ways of evaluating and testing student performance and progress.

1 Giving positive feedback

The aim of feedback is to bring about self-awareness and improvement. Everyone thrives on genuine praise and encouragement. When giving feedback on oral or written work, always be on the lookout for positive points to comment upon. For example:

- successful communication -where students have expressed themselves clearly (and been understood by others);
- accurate use of grammar points recently learned;
- use of new vocabulary, appropriate expressions;
- good pronunciation -expressive intonation;
- language in the appropriate style -good use of colloquial expressions in conversation;
• good use of fluency strategies in conversation;
• handwriting, spelling and punctuation in written work.

Try to find areas of improvement in individual students' work and also comment on progress made by the class as a whole - work successfully completed and achievements made. The ways you give positive feedback can include the informal Well done; praising individual achievement privately or in front of the class; 'publishing' good work by displaying it, including it in a class magazine or using it as a model; operating a more formal grading/system as part of a system of keeping track of student progress. You may even consider giving merit marks or small rewards or prizes for good work - though this is more appropriate with a group of children.

2 Correction techniques

How do you decide whether the student has made an error or made a mistake?

In teaching EFL it is common practice to distinguish between mistakes and errors. A mistake can be thought of as a slip of the tongue or the pen. The student is able to correct it himself or herself, either completely unprompted or with the guidance of the teacher or other students. Native speakers make mistakes all the time, even though the correct form is usually known.

An error is much more deeply ingrained. The student might:
• believe what he or she is saying or writing is correct;
• not know what the correct form should be;
• know what the correct form should be, but not be able to get it right.

Errors are usually produced regularly and systematically, so be on the lookout for frequent errors. Asking the student to try again is often the best way of helping you decide whether the incorrect form is an error or a mistake.

Error correction is usually thought of as relating to the form of the language but obviously students can say something incorrectly if they choose an inappropriate thing to say on a particular occasion, or because they have misunderstood the meaning of something when they listen to or read a text. Generally, you should consider an error that shows the student doesn't understand the meaning of the language as more serious than one where the student is not able to produce the correct form.
Are errors always bad?

Obviously both you and the students would rather they didn't commit errors. However, there are positive aspects to be considered:

- At least the students are trying-this is preferable to being so unsure of themselves that they don't want to take part at all-
- By making errors learners are testing out their ideas about the language -they are experimenting. Making errors is part of the learning process: by receiving appropriate feedback students gradually get to know the difference between correct and incorrect language.
- By noting the errors that the students make you can see what needs focusing on in future lessons. Errors that reveal misapprehensions about meaning can help you assess the students' understanding. The extent to which students make errors in 'freer' practice activities can tell us how much new language has been absorbed and how much more practice is needed.

How can you anticipate and avoid errors?

Obviously students are less likely to make errors of meaning if the language has been presented well- with adequate highlighting, clarifying and checking of understanding. And they are less likely to make mistakes with the form if they have been given sufficient controlled practice in saying and writing the language.

One way of helping yourself cope with errors that occur in the classroom is to try to anticipate any that might come up. If you know what might come up you are likely to be more alert to the errors that do come up. Familiarize yourself with all aspects of an item of language you are focusing on. For example, likely pronunciation problems can often be worked out by writing out the item in phonemic script in your lesson plan beforehand: so should have when spoken might be transcribed /həʊ/ , revealing a contraction, a weak vowel for have and an absent /h/. The more you know about the language you are teaching the less likely you are to mislead students and cause 'teacher-induced' errors.

Familiarize yourself, too, with the typical grammatical, lexical and pronunciation problems associated with the nationality of the students in your group. This is obviously easier in monolingual classes than multilingual classes. If you have a chance to observe the group you teach, spend time noting the errors made by the different students.
How do you correct?
The ability to correct -sensitively, efficiently and effectively -is a skill that takes time to perfect. You should aim to maintain a co-operative working atmosphere. Don't let students think they are being picked on - correction can seem threatening if done badly. Try not to 'echo' the errors, even in a mocking, astonished way. Some teachers find this an easy way of indicating an error, but although the humour can be beneficial it tends to reinforce the teacher's superior relationship and inhibit the students' ability to work things out for themselves. The basic principle is that students learn more effectively if they are guided in such a way that they eventually correct themselves rather than if they are given the correct version of something straight away. The struggle to get it right also helps them understand why they were wrong.

The main stages in the process are as follows:

1 The student must know something is not accurate
But first let him or her finish the utterance. Students find it disconcerting to be interrupted mid-stream. Make a gesture, like a wave of the finger, or give some not-too-discouraging word like nearly. Black looks or shouts of No! will only serve to reduce the students' desire to try out the language.

2 The student must know where the error is
So you need to isolate for the student the part of the utterance that is wrong. If the student says My wife come yesterday but meant My wife came yesterday, then telling him to try again might be of no use. He has put the word yesterday in to indicate past time so he may think he has made a correct utterance. What he needs to know is that the word come is incorrect. There are a number of things you can say: the second word; not 'come' but …? You can use your fingers, Cuisenaire rods (see p70), or even a row of students to represent each word. When you get to the word that is wrong, indicate that that is where the problem is and see if he or she can get it right.

3 The student must know what kind of error it is
The student will need to know whether the problem is (as above) grammatical, syntactical (for example, a missing word), or phonological (for example, a wrongly stressed word). You can say, for example, Verb? Tense? Word stress? Wrong word. You can also use appropriate gestures. Finger correction is particularly useful and can be used to indicate a an unnecessary word, b a missing word, or c contraction (see diagrams a, b, c below).
You can no doubt think of other useful gestures. However, it is important that the students understand them and that you use the same gestures each time to represent the same thing. If you share a group of students you may want to get together with the other trainees and agree on a repertoire of gestures to use.

You can also use the board. So if a student says *She buy some apples*, you can write the word *buy* on the board, cross it out and/or write up the word *past* and elicit the correct form.
Who corrects?

Self-correction

Always give the students the chance to correct themselves. If they are going to become more accurate they must learn to monitor themselves. They may have just made a slip and will welcome the opportunity to put it right. Sometimes they need some assistance from you in knowing where the mistake is and what kind of mistake it is, before they can self-correct. (See above.)

Student-student correction

If the student still can't get it right, it's probably because she doesn't know how to. So with a gesture, hold her attention and get another student to help out. This has the advantage of:

- involving all the students in the correction process;
- making the learning more co-operative generally;
- reducing student dependence on the teacher;
- increasing the amount the students listen to each other;
- giving the better students something to do.

Student-student correction must be done carefully. Not Oh, no! Wrong again, Juan. Go on Sami, tell him. but Not quite, Juan. Do you know, Sami? Even better, do the whole thing by gesture. Indicate not quite with your face or hands and gesture to another student to help. Try to choose a student who looks eager to help and don't always resort to the class know-all! Always return to the first student and let him or her say the correct version.

Teacher correction

If neither self-correction nor student-student correction is effective you must assume that either the student hasn’t understood what you’re getting at or doesn’t know what the correct version should be. If it’s an important point and the others don’t know it either, you may have to stop and teach it to the whole class. If not, and the meaning of the item is clear, your simply saying it and getting the students to say it should be enough.

No matter how you have done the correction, get the student who made the error to say the correct version, if possible in its original context. This is a vital part of any correction process. You can do this by gesture or saying something like OK, again. The whole thing.
How much do you correct?

Errors are usually made only by individual students, so correction often has to be on an individual basis too. Even more problematically, in multilingual classes, the types of error can vary according to the students’ different mother tongues. The problem for you is how to spend enough time on anyone error with anyone student without slowing down the pace of the lesson and boring the other students.

To reduce that likelihood, involve the whole class as much as possible in the correction process; also spend less time correcting what is only a problem for one student and more time on problems common to the whole group.

There is such a thing as over-correction. That is, the more you try to correct something, the worse the student gets. So often it’s worth spending a short time correcting some items only and not trying to get everything perfect in one go, and coming back to others on another day. Correction of major errors is perhaps best considered as something that should be done as quickly as possible, but it is likely to be a long-term process over a series of lessons.

When do you correct?

In general it depends on the aim of the activity. If the focus is on accuracy, the teacher’s control and the correction will be tight; if the focus is more on fluency, the teacher’s direct control and the correction will be less. It is a good idea to think about how much correction you want to do and what form it will take and include a note in your lesson plan. In addition, you can tell students the purpose of the activity whether the emphasis is on accuracy or fluency, to what extent you are going to correct them, how you are going to provide feedback, whether you are going to give marks or grades for written work, etc.

So, looking at different types of activities, the following guidelines are suggested:

Presentation of new language and controlled practice

For example, repetition practice (drilling). Insist on accurate production from your students. You must judge what you consider to be an acceptable standard of pronunciation. Aim for a high standard at this stage as the standard will inevitably drop during less controlled and freer production.
Structured speaking practice in pairs or groups

Monitor by moving round the class and listening to the students. Either correct errors as you hear them, remembering to include the other students in the group, or make a note of errors, then give feedback on the errors with the class after the activity.

Guided or freer speaking activities

For example, a role-play or an exchange of personal views on a topic. Don't interrupt the activity and don't expect complete accuracy. Monitor and give feedback after the activity. During feedback do not comment only on grammatical accuracy; discuss whether the students managed to achieve their communicative aim. Did they express what they wanted to say and did they understand each other?

Feedback given after an activity can be done in a number of ways:

- Make a note of errors and focus on common ones, or ones of general interest, after the activity. You don't need to say which student made which error.
- Record the activity (either on audio or video cassette) and
  a. go through the cassette with the group (though this can be very time-consuming and boring if done too meticulously and too often);
  b. select parts of the cassette to examine (in this way common errors can be dealt with or particularly good instances of language use highlighted);
  c. transcribe all or part of a cassette and indicate the errors made. The students -usually in groups -play the cassette and, referring to the transcript, discuss the errors. This is very time-consuming for you, but it is usually appreciated by the students. If you choose to focus on particular errors -tense or word stress, for example -you can focus the students' attention and cut down on your workload.
- Give individual students notes of errors they have made with instructions on how to correct them.
- Provide the class with remedial sessions based on errors common to the majority. Make it clear that the lesson was planned as a direct result of the activity done earlier. This is particularly useful for monolingual groups.
Correcting written work

Controlled written exercises
For example, copying, dictations, or exercises where there is only one right answer. The correct answers must be given and the students made aware of any errors they have made. Whenever possible, ask the students to compare their answers before you elicit the answers; you can ask them to write their answers on the board or on an OHT to be checked by the class.

Guided and freer writing
To some extent the way you approach giving feedback on written work depends on the purpose of the writing. For example, if the students are preparing for a written exam they will probably appreciate detailed correction. However, as correcting every error in a piece of ‘free’ writing can be very time-consuming for the teacher and discouraging for the students, you may want to focus the feedback you give. In general, aim to encourage improvement rather than dwell on mistakes by awarding marks out of ten, etc.

- You should try to react to the writing as communication as an interested reader: for example, This was very interesting. I didn’t know you’d worked in Africa.
- You will probably want to comment on how well the writing communicates, how well the meaning has been got across: This was clearly expressed and well-argued.
- You can focus on particular aspects such as spelling, punctuation, use of tenses, use of linkers, etc.
- Self- or peer-correction is often appropriate here.
- You can comment separately on different things within the same piece of written work. For example, for a formal letter you could make the following remarks: Layout-excellent, no mistakes; Style-good, but don’t forget that contractions are not used in a formal letter; Grammar- good, just a couple of tense problems; Use a vocabulary -very good, only one collocation mistake.

As giving feedback on freer written work is part of ‘process writing’.
As with correction of oral work, it is worth thinking about who corrects:

Self-correction
You can aid self-correction by underlining errors and putting symbols in the appropriate place in the margin and/or giving appropriate page references in grammar books.
The students correct as many errors as they can and submit the work for re-marking. Before submitting the work they can show it to another student for comments. (See below.)
Student-student correction
You can give the students the opportunity to read and comment on each other's work either before you see it or after you have indicated the errors.

Teacher correction
You must judge when students can't correct their work by themselves and give them the correct version - with an explanation if necessary. You can also note errors that are common to the group and prepare a remedial lesson for them.

When is correction not appropriate?
Although students usually like being corrected, there are times when it can be impractical or inappropriate to correct. This is especially true of spoken language:

- when you are trying to build a student's confidence and encouragement is more productive than correction;
- when you are communicating with a student as a friend rather than as teacher to student -when chatting before or after the class, for example. It is better to respond to I went in Wembley last night to see Italy play England with Oh.. was it a good match? rather than Not in Wembley ...;
- when you are eliciting from the students -perhaps to establish the context before introducing a new language structure or to set the scene and arouse interest before reading or listening to a text. Getting too bogged down in correction at this stage is time-consuming and detracts from the main aims of the lesson. It is better to respond positively to suggestions as communication, and ignore mistakes of form. Alternatively, this is an occasion when 'echoing' -I but with the correct form can be useful. For example, if the teacher is eliciting experiences of unusual holidays from students before reading an article:

  Student: I have been to Iceland last year.
  Teacher: You went to Iceland last year? That's unusual. Did you like it?

- when your main aim is to focus on the comprehension of a text. If students show that they understand but at the same time make, say, grammar mistakes, you may not want to interrupt the flow of the lesson to stop and correct individuals.

Try to remember that students are trying to focus on many things at once; so, when a student is struggling with the form and meaning of a particular structure but makes a vocabulary or pronunciation error:

  Student: So can I say If I had known about the test, I would have made my homework?
  Teacher: Yes -except we say I would have done my homework.
Explanation

Explanation takes up a very significant part of teacher talk, and given that the role of the teacher is to make knowledge accessible to students, it is surprising how little research has been done on explanation. In the classroom one can make a rough distinction between procedural explanation and content explanation. The former refers to explanation regarding the organizational aspect of the lesson, for example when the teacher explains how an activity should be conducted or gives instructions about homework. The latter refers to the explanation of the subject content of the lesson.

In the language classroom, content explanation refers to the explanation of vocabulary, texts, grammar rules, and so on. In this section we shall focus on content explanation, especially vocabulary and grammar explanation, since they are most frequently found in language classrooms.

Effective explanations

Brown and Armstrong provide a working definition of 'explaining' as 'an attempt to provide understanding of a problem to others' (1984: 122). In other words, it is important to consider how the problem is explained in relation to the audience. As Martin (1970) points out, 'If the teacher really has explained something to his class, they will understand it, and if they do not understand it, despite his efforts, what purported to be an explanation was not an explanation after all.' Hence, in determining whether an explanation is effective, one needs to take into consideration the explainer, the problem to be explained and the person(s) to whom the problem is explained.

Brown and Armstrong (1984) studied the explanations of twenty-seven student teachers teaching two sessions of ten minutes on a biology topic. Students were asked to complete a content multiple-choice test and a rating form of the student teacher. The results show that better explanations have the following characteristics:
- higher levels of cognitive demand;
- more linked statements (referred to as 'keys') leading to a solution of the problem, each of which is understood by the students;
- more framing statements outlining the sections of the explanation;
- more focusing statements highlighting the essential features;
- more frequent use of examples, audiovisual aids;
- more rhetorical questions as attention-getters.
They also found that the differences between high-scoring and low-scoring lessons lie in the selection of materials, that is, determining how much needs to be explained, and the presentation of the materials. In the high-scoring lesson the teacher went from known to unknown, whereas in the low-scoring lesson the teacher went from unknown to unknown. From the findings of Brown and Armstrong’s study we can see that the following are important aspects of effective explanation:

- Effective explanation is not a one-way process, involving only to be the teacher imparting knowledge to students; it requires the active involvement of the students in processing the information and in relating new information to old information.
- It requires that the teacher have a good grasp of the nature of the problem to be explained, so that a set of linked statements (or ‘keys’) can be presented or elicited from students and the essential features highlighted.
- In order to determine the appropriate amount of new information and the appropriate presentation of the information, the teacher needs to gauge the existing knowledge of the students so that the problem is not over-explained or under-explained (Chaudron 1982).
- The teacher needs to be able to organize the explanation in a clear sequence and to signpost the sequence.

Below we shall examine some data on vocabulary and grammar explanation in the light of the characteristics of effective explanation outlined above.

**Grammar explanation**

**ACTIVITY**

Examine the following piece of classroom conversation in which the teacher explains the grammatical mistakes in a sentence. Would you consider this an effective explanation? Does it contain the characteristics of effective explanation?

(This is an Grade 11 ESL class. The teacher is going over the grammatical mistakes that students made in their writing assignment. Immediately preceding this excerpt he was discussing the error in the sentence ‘So I think all students should be learn how to use computers.’ He pointed out to the students that an infinitive should be used after a modal verb, so that 'should be learn' ought to be corrected as 'should learn'. He then moved on to the next error.)
You can write programmes, play a game, doing calculations.

drawing: a picture, etc. I like the idea very much, you’ve got some concrete examples, but it’s not quite balanced so far as grammar goes. OK, what is the modal in that sentence?

Can

OK, and we see here the modal (points at the previous sentence on the board), now what's the infinitive after should?

(pause) What's the infinitive after should in this sentence?

Can

Learn

this is the infinitive. Should learn. If you've got one modal in a sentence, all the verbs which follow must be infinitives. So pick up your pencils and correct this sentence. First of all, let's find the verbs. Which are the verbs?

Write, play, doing, drawing.

OK, what did you change? (pause) What have you changed there? (pause) Do I change play?

No.

Do I change doing?

Yes.

Cross out -?

What about drawing?

ing.

Yes, same thing. OK, that's good. You can see now how it works. You can have many different verbs following just one modal, but they must all be infinitives. Now there's something else that needs fixing up. Can anyone suggest what's wrong?

The problem to be explained to the students is the use of the infinitive after the modal verb even when there are many different verbs following just one modal verb. We can identify the following characteristics of effective explanation in the excerpt: Firstly, the teacher tries to relate this grammar rule to students’ existing knowledge, which is the use of the infinitive after a modal verb and he actively involves students in doing so. Secondly, the questions that he puts to the students are 'keys', in that they are linked questions that elicit responses leading to the solution of the problem. He first establishes that the students know what a modal verb is by asking what is the modal in that (the sentence under discussion) sentence? This followed by What's the infinitive after should in this (the previous sentence discussed) sentence? He
then states the rule and tries to get the students to apply it. In applying the rule, he gets the students to identify what the verbs are in the sentence under discussion by asking *Which are the verbs?* Then he goes over each verb and asks them to produce the infinitive form of the verb (lines 17-25). Thirdly, by asking students these key questions, the teacher is actively involving them in processing the new information. Fourthly, the explanation is clearly structured with framing moves like *First of all, let's find the verb,* with a summarizing statement reiterating the rule before he moves on to the next point, thus clearly signposting the end of one teaching sequence and the beginning of another (lines 25-28).

**ACTIVITY**
Examine the following piece of data and try to answer the following questions:

- Does the teacher try to relate new information to student's existing knowledge?
- Is there active involvement of students?
- Has the teacher used linked statements or questions?
- What other means has the teacher used to help her to explain?
- Has the teacher structured her explanation clearly?

(The teacher is teaching the difference between 'after' and 'while' as linkers for joining two actions. She puts a picture on the board. She deals with two points when joining two actions in a sentence: firstly, the duration of the action, and secondly, the tense used.)

1. *T:* Now step back and look at it again. Go back to think about things which happened in the morning. ...Vow here you've got two interesting points. First of all, he turned on the tap and then the telephone rang. Now, do you think you can join them together?
2. *S:* While the telephone rang. When he was -
4. *S1:* After he turned on the bath, he heard the telephone ring.
5. *S2:* While.
6. *T:* Now here we've got two people, Sam and Wilfred, using two different words to join them together. One is the word *while*
Sam used \textit{while} to join them together. Wilfred used the other word and that is \textit{after}. Is there any difference between these words? \textit{While}?

Ss: \textit{While}, happening at the same time.

T: \textit{While}, happening -?

Ss: At the same time.

T: OK. You used \textit{while} when the two things are supposed to be happening at the same time. What about \textit{after}?

S: One follow the other.

T: OK, one follow another. So two events, one following the other.

Now look at the picture again. Which is true?

S: \textit{After} (pause)

T: The second one is right. Do you agree?

S: Yes.

T: Now why?

S: Because in fact the telephone rang after he turned on.

T: Yes.

T: Then Henry was working, walking, to the phone.

S: Yes. Right. Do you agree, Sam? Because the action of turning on the tap is a very short one. Think about the action itself. It's again.

a very short one. You turned on the tap, the telephone rang.

Now, but suppose if I don't use the verb turned on the tap, I use another verb. If I say \textit{run a bath}, what would you use?

S: The first one.

T: The first one? OK. Give me the complete sentence.

S: While Henry was running a bath, the telephone rang.

T: So you would say \textit{While Henry was running a bath, the telephone rang}. Do you agree, the rest of you? Think about that. What's the difference?

S: The action.

T: What about the action?

S: \textit{Running a bath would take a long time}.

T: Yeah. Do you agree? \textit{Running a bath would take a very long time}…

(Author's data)

In lines 10 and 11 there are two competing answers to the teachers' questions of how to join the two events. In response to that, the Lee teacher activates students' knowledge of the words 'while' and 'after' (lines 12-23). She then refers to the picture and asks students to decide which one is correct; there is active cognitive involvement taught of students. Apart from asking questions the teacher also asks the...
students to give reasons for or explain their answers (lines 28, 41-42, 44). In trying to explain that, when joining two events together, we need to look at the duration of the event, she asks the following questions: *Is there any difference between these words* (that is, ‘while’ and ‘after’)? *While? What about after?*, *Now look at the picture again*. *Which is true*, *Why?*, *If I say run a bath, what would you use?*, *what’s the difference?*, *and What about the action?* Apart from verbal presentation, she uses pictures to help her. At various points in the explanation she draws students’ attention to the picture to help them come up with the correct answers to her questions (lines 8, 24). Finally, the teacher signposts the explanation. She uses focusing moves such as *Now step back and look at it again. Go back to think about things which happened in the morning. Look at the picture again, and Now look at the picture again*, and framing moves such as *Now here you’ve got two interesting points.*

**Vocabulary explanation**

Vocabulary explanation is found in all language classrooms, whether L1 or L2. While there is no lack of study on vocabulary learning not many have focused on vocabulary explanation.

Similar to grammar explanation, effective vocabulary explanation requires that the teacher be able to gauge accurately students’ competence level, in order to decide how elaborate the explanation needs to be, as well as the existing knowledge of the students, in order to relate new and old information, to highlight the essential features of the item to be explained and to actively involve students in processing the meaning of words. In the ensuing discussion we shall examine some classroom data according to these aspects.

Lee (1993b) studied vocabulary explanation of ESL teachers. In the first part of her study she identified the explanation strategies used by teachers by examining four reading comprehension lessons taught by four ESL teachers at S3 and S4 (Grades 14 and 15). In the second part of the study she tested out the effectiveness of these strategies by teaching ten vocabulary items to four groups of ESL students at S3 (Grade 9) in the same school, using different strategies, and comparing their pre-test and post-test scores. She observed that decisions regarding which vocabulary item to explain and how best to explain it necessarily involves the teacher’s judgement of the competence of the students. For example, one of the teachers used exemplification to explain eight out of eleven vocabulary items; and for seven of these eight items she used one example. But for the eighth item, which is the most difficult item - ‘sophistication’ - she used two examples:
2m T: When we say sophisticated, we mean something which is highly developed, for example, these two tape recorders, I think they are quite sophisticated. They've got a lot of functions, all right? And also, sometimes we can use this word to describe a person. A person who is sophisticated, that means a person who has a lot of knowledge, very experienced with things, right? A sophisticated machine, very well done, OK? Now can you do this together? Sophisticated.

(Lee 1993b: 45)

However, Lee also found that an inaccurate estimation of students' competence may lead to under-teaching or over-teaching. In the explanation of one of the vocabulary items -'initiative' -she found that while nine students in Group Two got the meaning correct, only one student in Group One got it correct.

**ACTIVITY**

Examine the two texts below, in which the teacher explains the word 'initiative'. Which do you think occurred in Group One and which in Group Two?

2n

T: Now, initiative comes from the word initiate. To initiate means to start something. If you start something, then you initiate something. So if you show initiative in something, that means you don't have to wait for people to tell you what to do. You can start doing something on your own. That is to shower initiative in your work, OK? Now, for example, if you if you are a good student you should show initiative in learning. You don't have to wait for the teacher to tell you what to do and what to read. You can do things on your own, O K? You know when you should finish your homework, when you start your revision, you know when to go to the library and borrow books and learn more about a subject, all right? To show initiative, all right? You can do things on your own. You can start working on your own without waiting, without having to wait to be told what to do.

(Lee 1993b)

2n

T: Er, initiative means if that means if you have if you take the initiative to do something, that means you don't have to wait for people to tell you what to do. You can do things on your own without waiting for people
to tell you what to do, O K? You don't have to wait for people to tell you, you can do that before people tell you what to do.
(Lee 1993b)

In text 2n the teacher (who was Lee herself) paraphrased the meaning of 'initiative' and gave an example to help students come to grips with the meaning, in the first paragraph. Lee pointed out that she was afraid the example was not sufficient, and so she carried on a few more lines and gave a list of what a good student with initiative would do, like finishing homework, starting revision, and going to the library to find out more about a subject. This, however, caused confusion rather than helping to clarify the meaning, as only one student got the meaning correct. By contrast, in text 2o the teacher (who was also Lee herself) paraphrased the meaning of 'initiative', and then repeated the paraphrase without even giving an example - yet nine students got the meaning correct. In other words, over-elaborate explanation may cause confusion.

Lee also observed that effective explanations were those where the teacher was able to relate what the students were familiar with to the item being explained. For example, in the following excerpt the teacher explains the word 'convenient'. She relates the word to 7-Eleven stores, which were referred to as 'convenience stores' in television commercials.

2p
T: OK, convenient transportation, transportation system. 7-Eleven, You're finished? If you're finished, please put down your pen. 7-. Eleven, you know 7-Eleven? Is a convenience store, is a convenience store. Why?
Because it opens
Ss: Yes.
T: how many hours a day? 24 hours.
Ss: 24 hours.
T: In other words, you can go to the store any time you want. So it's very convenient for the neighbourhood, O K? So you can say um 7-Eleven is a convenience store. Convenient, all right? Understand convenient?
(Lee 1993b)

Other commonly used ways of relating the unfamiliar to the familiar (and unknown to known are using examples, putting the word in a familiar context, providing the parts of speech of the same word 1 that students already know, or analysing the morphological structure of the word so that students can go from the familiar t part(s) of the word to the unfamiliar part(s).
ACTIVITY

The following are two explanations of the word ‘ambitions’ given to two groups of students in Lee's study. Which do you think is more effective?

2q

T: Now ambitions are things you want to be or you want to do. Well, like for example, when I was a small girl, my ambition was to be –what? No, not a teacher, was to be an animal doctor, OK? Have you got any ambitions? (to a student) What is your ambition?

S: Nurse.

T: You want to be a nurse (to another student) Yours? Yes, you. Yes, have you got any ambitions? (Ss laugh) Nothing? (to another student) You.

S: A teacher.

T: To be a teacher. OK. Ambitions, repeat, ambitions.

Ss: Ambitions.

T: All right.

(Lee 1993b)

2r

T: You know what ambitions are? Em ambitions are things you r- want to be or things you want to do. O K? Ambitions.

Ss: Ambitions.

T: Ambitions.

Ss: Ambitions.

(Lee 1993b)

In both texts the teacher gives a definition of the word ‘ambitions’; and gets the students to repeat the word after her. However, in 2q the teacher not only gives an example to illustrate what ‘ambition’ means but also involves the students in getting them to state what their ambitions are. By contrast, in 2r the teacher merely presents a definition of ‘ambitions’. And in comparing the pre-test and post-test scores, Lee found that ten students in 2q were able to give the correct meaning in the post-test whereas in 2r only one student got the correct meaning in the post-test. Active involvement of students in processing new information, as in 2q, is very important in effective vocabulary explanation. This is supported by studies in vocabulary learning (Nation 1990).
Exploration of Teaching

As we explore, rather than seeking prescriptions and judgments from others, rules (can be) broken that say we teachers must seek alternatives from those in charge, rather than ourselves or our peers, and that we must work alone within our autonomous but isolated and lonely classrooms, rather than with colleagues.

Franselow 1987, 7

How can teachers explore teaching through self-observation?
How can teachers explore their own teaching through the observation of other teachers?
How can teachers use talking and writing as a part of the exploration process?
How does this book provide opportunities for EFL teachers to explore teaching?
How can teachers explore their own teaching?

As teachers, we can explore our own teaching through a cyclic process of reflecting and then acting on knowledge gained through reflection. Here is how I see the process: The first step in the cycle is to collect descriptive samples of our teaching. This is followed by an analysis and appraisal of these samples. The next step is to consider how the same lesson could be taught differently and to draw up a teaching plan. Then, by implementing the new plan, the cycle returns to the collection of samples of teaching. Let’s take a closer look at each stage in the cycle.

Collecting Samples of Teaching

The reason to collect samples of teaching is to have descriptions of what actually goes on in the classroom that focus attention on some aspect of our teaching. To give you an idea of areas of teaching that can be described, see the chart on page 23 listing some of the exploratory questions teachers have asked. On the left are initial descriptive questions. On the right are questions aimed at understanding what happens when a change in teaching behaviour is initiated.

To collect samples of teaching that address an area of classroom behaviour, as illustrated in the chart on exploratory questions, it is to our advantage to audio – or videotape classroom interaction. To do this, I suggest you use a small Walkman-type audio recorder or camcorder. The advantage of an audio recorder is that it is easy to use. However, some teachers prefer to videotape because of the visual aspect. It is easy to recognize who is talking and possible to study nonverbal behaviours.
At first the audio recorder or camcorder may seem a novelty, and some students will change their behaviour because they are being taped. But it really does not take long before students accept it and act normally. I have audio—and videotaped many classes, and it is amazing how fast students accept the recorder, especially if it is treated as a natural part of the classroom setting.

How taping is done often depends on the goals of exploration. For example, if you are interested in the students’ reactions to instructions or explanations, the audio recorder or video camera can be focused on the students. If you are interested in what happens during group work, it is logical to focus the audio recorder or camcord on a group of students. For instance, if your explanatory aim is to learn about the types of questions you ask, you might carry the audio recorder with you as you teach or set it nearby, or when using a camera, it can be focused on you, perhaps scanning the students from time to time. The idea is to think about the objective of your exploration and to consider how the best tape the class to obtain useful samples for later analysis. Although more complex, there is also value in using two cameras, one focused on the teacher and the other on the students. This provides a way to see what the teacher is doing in relation to the students and the reverse.

Analyzing the Samples of Teaching

The second stage is to analyze the collected samples of teaching, and analysis also depends on the objective of your exploration. The first step is to review your audiotape or videotape, and while listening, you can perform certain tasks that focus attention on the aspect of teaching you are interested in learning more about. For example, if you are interested in knowing about the number of questions you ask, you can listen to or view the tape and tally each question you ask, as well as jot down examples of actual questions. You can do the same thing for the number of errors you treat, the number of times students speak English or their native language, and the seconds you wait for students to answer a question.

A second way to analyze the collection of teaching samples is to make short transcriptions from the audio or videotapes. Again, what you decide to transcribe depends mainly on the focus of your exploration. For example, if you are interested in learning about how you treat language errors, you might make and study short transcriptions of the times errors are treated. If the interest is on learning about the accuracy of the students’ language during group work, you can transcribe and study short sections of interaction among
students during group work activities. A further step you can take in analyzing interaction is to code a transcript with a category system.

**Appraising Teaching Based on the Analysis**

The next step in the exploration process is to appraise teaching based on the analysis. Some teachers like to appraise their teaching as being good or bad. I prefer not to do this because we simply do not yet know enough about the relationship between teaching and learning to determine what good or bad teaching is in all settings.

To me, a more important reason not to judge teaching as good or bad is that judgements get in the way of exploring. Judgements like “Oh! I’m not a very good teacher! I can’t get these students to speak!” and “Wow! I’m really hot today. The students sounded like busy bees!” can get in the way of seeing our teaching clearly. We get so involved in the good feelings from our positive judgements and in the bad feelings from our negative judgements that we miss out on capturing descriptions that could be quite useful.

Rather than appraise teaching as good or bad, I recommend we ask interpretative questions, such as “How are opportunities possibly provided for students in my class to learn the language?” and “How are opportunities possibly hampered?” In relation to specific areas of exploration, these questions can be adjusted. For example, it is possible to ask, “Does my treatment of student’s errors provide them with opportunities for feedback on their English?” or “Are my instructions clear enough for the students to know what to do?” I emphasize that we ask such questions because they allow us to stand back and consider our teaching behaviour in relation to the kinds of opportunities we give to students to learn the language.

In addition, we can consider our reasoning behind our practices. For example, if your attention is focused on the way you treat student’s language errors, you might ask, “Why do I treat errors the way I do? What do I believe is the relationship between the way I treat errors and student learning?”

In relation to considering the reasoning that motivates our teaching practices, it is also possible to reflect on our own past learning experiences as they relate to our teaching. As teaching is often guided by past learning experiences, which frequently affect our teaching without our awareness, reflecting on those experiences can free us to explore beyond preconceived notions of teaching. For example, while reflecting
on my error treatment practices, I realized that I behaved as a teacher in much the same way as the teachers who taught me. After realizing this I was able to go beyond my usual ways when treating errors, as well as to consider my own beliefs about error treatment and language learning.

**Deciding on changes in Teaching Behaviour**

The next stage in the exploration cycle is to decide on changes we want to make in our teaching through such questions as “What do I want to continue to do?” and “What small changes do I want to make in my teaching behaviour?”

One reason to change the way we teach is because there is a problem to be solved: students do not talk; instructions are not clear; students speak their native language too much. However, it is also possible to explore teaching simply to explore, to see what happens. This could include doing the opposite of what we usually do or trying out something we have never tried before. For example, if you always give instructions orally, you could write them down and let students read them. If you always teach from the front of the room, you could teach from the back.

Based on the changes you decide to make, you can design the next lesson. The cycle continues as these changes are implemented, while you again collect samples of teaching through audio or video recordings.

**What Teachers Have Done: Examples of the Reflective Process**

Here are how some teachers have worked through the cyclic reflective process. The first example illustrates what an ESL teacher did to explore the way she gave instruction. The teacher video-taped her teaching and made short transcripts focusing on how she gave instructions and on what the students did afterward. She discovered that her oral instructions took about two minutes and that many of the students did not understand her instructions. During the start of a group activity, for example, some students asked each other—some in their native language—what they were supposed to be doing. Two students finally asked her to explain the task instructions, and it took five additional minutes before the students were all working on the task.

She reflected on her way of giving instructions and decided that she was not giving the students ample opportunity to comprehend her instructions and was taking up too much class time to make the instructions
clear. However, she also saw some value in giving vague instructions; students were given chances to negotiate meaning with her, and to do this, they had to express their ideas in English. To explore different ways to give instructions, after talking with another teacher to gain ideas, she decided to try a few different things, each on different days, and she taped and analyzed what happened when she used these alternative techniques. One day she wrote the instructions on the board and presented them orally. On another day she gave the instructions as a dictation, and on the third day she had students paraphrase the instructions back to her. Through her analysis, she discovered that all three ways worked for this particular class. Although it took longer to give the instructions, students displayed less confusion and began the task soon after the instructions were given. In addition, she discovered that it was possible to turn instructions into a language-learning activity.

Another example is an EFL teacher who explored her praise behaviours with preteen age children. After audiotaping, she listened to the tape while tallying the number of times she praised students and jotting down samples of language she used to praise them. She discovered that she verbalized “very good” quite often, and she identified her frequent use of “very good” as being ambiguous to the students. Because she praised them so often and sometimes when they gave wrong responses, she wondered if students knew she was praising them or were accepting the praise as empty gestures. She also considered why she praised students and decided that praise was important for these children. She stated that praise, when genuine, can be a motivating factor. But if children cannot distinguish when and why she is praising them, it is useless. As such, she decided to implement small changes in her praising techniques. For example, she monitored her use of praise and verbally expressed it only when she was genuinely impressed. When students submitted written work, she put happy-face stickers on their work, but only when their work was considered outstanding.

After taping and analyzing her praise behaviours again, she knew that she used praise far less frequently and usually at times when students met her high expectations. She also analyzed the quality of the students written work, and she concluded, after two months, that their work was genuinely improving. Some students even told her that they try harder because they want to see a happy face on their written work.

The next example is from my own teaching. While teaching an American literature course in Hungary, I wondered about the way I used questions in class. To better understand my questioning behaviours, I
designed a tally sheet. I audiotaped my class, and using the tally sheet, I kept track of the targets of my questions (e.g., to an individual student or the whole class) and the content of each questions (e.g., about people and places in general, about language, or about the content of the reading selection). The following tally sheet records what I found.

Tally Sheet: Content and Target of Teacher questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content of Questions</th>
<th>To individual</th>
<th>To Whole Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions: Student lives</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>//</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions: People &amp; places</td>
<td></td>
<td>/////</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions language</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/////</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions: Material content</td>
<td></td>
<td>/////</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During my analysis, I discovered that I asked twenty-eight questions during a twenty-five-minute time period, that most of my questions were addressed to the whole class, and that twelve of my questions were about general places and people, eight about language, and six directly about the content of the reading.

Upon reflection, I was not surprised that I asked mostly whole class questions, as I often did this intentionally. However, I was surprised that I averaged over a question per minute. This discovery was very useful. First, it gave me the chance to reflect on my questioning behaviour. As a part of my reflection, I thought about how discussions go on outside classrooms, how all the participants not only answer questions but also ask them and react to each others’ responses. Second, I was able to see that my questioning techniques dominated class discussion and prevented students from raising their own questions and reacting to responses. Third, I was able to systematically modify my questioning behaviour.

In the next seminar, while audiotaping, I consciously asked less questions and attempted to achieve more discussion based on a single question. Also, after a student responded to one of my questions, I remained other students. If no one reacted or asked a question, I paraphrased what was just said.

After audiotaping and analyzing this second seminar, I discovered that I asked less questions (twenty-six), that students asked each other questions (nine), and that students reacted to the responses of others many
times. In short, I was able to achieve my objective, to have students discuss a reading selection in their foreign language.

The preceding examples illustrate how teachers have worked through problem areas in their teaching. A final example shows how a teacher explored her teaching simply to explore. The teacher, a native Japanese speaker, was teaching an introductory class in Japanese as a foreign language to American university students. She was interested in exploring her teaching simply to discover patterns in her teaching behaviour. So she audiotaped her class, transcribed short segments of the class, and studied them for recurring patterns of interaction.

She discovered certain patterns of interaction in her classes. She found that most of her teaching consisted of drills and that she followed a lockstep way of teaching. She asked all the questions, the students responded, and she reacted to these responses. She also reflected on the fact that she asked display questions (e.g., questions for which she already knew the answers) and that the content of the lessons mostly concerned the study of language (e.g., learning about language rather than using language for a communicative purpose).

Based on her knowledge about patterns of interaction reflected in her classroom, the teacher decided that students did not have ample opportunities to communicate in their foreign language in class. As such, she decided to make a small change in her teaching by doing the opposite of what she usually did. Instead of drilling students on language points, she planned to ask the students questions about their lives. She knew that some students were going on a trip to a nearby city, and she decided to ask them about their trip in the foreign language. As an afterthought, she decided to bring a map of the city to class. She audiotaped her teaching while posing these "life-personal"! questions in Japanese, and then she transcribed parts of the class.

Classroom interaction changed dramatically. Students asked each other questions and reacted to each others’ comments. The teacher and students asked questions that they did not know the answers to before asking them. Such query was not evident in the interaction in the earlier class.
What brought about this change in the interaction? The teacher’s purpose was to do the opposite of what she normally did, to ask personal questions to see if the interaction would change in her class, and she did begin her lesson by asking personal questions about where a student went on spring break. According to the teacher’s analysis, this change was most likely a part of the reason why student interactions changed. However, the teacher also had students show her exactly where they went by using the map. This map also had the apparent consequence (which the teacher was surprised to discover) of allowing the interaction to shift from asking and answering personal questions to studying the map itself. In short, the teacher interpreted the reason for the emergence of student questions and reactions to be the combination of asking personal questions and using the map. It is interesting that the teacher had no predicted that the map itself would contribute to this change in the pattern. This discovery was quite incidental, and such discoveries are one reason to explore teaching.

My purpose in giving these examples of self-observation has been to demonstrate how teachers can explore their own teaching. However, exploration does not have to be limited to looking at what goes on in one’s own classroom. It is also possible to explore teaching by observing other teachers’ classrooms, the topic of the next section.

**How Can Teachers Explore their Own Teaching through the Observation of Other Teachers?**

At first the idea that we can explore our own teaching by observing other teachers may seem contradictory. However, as John Fanselow point out, as teachers, we can see our own teaching in the teaching of others. When we observe others to gain knowledge of self, we have the chance to construct and reconstruct our own knowledge. Fanselow articulates this in another way: “I came to your class not only with a magnifying glass to look carefully at what was being done, but with a mirror so that I could see that what you were doing is a reflection of mucho of what I do.”

While observing other teachers, it is possible to collect samples of teaching in a variety of ways. We can take fast notes, draw sketches, tally behaviours, and jot down short transcript-like samples of interaction. As with collecting samples in our own classes, it is possible to audio- or videotape other teachers’ classes and photograph interaction. These tapes can be used later to analyze classroom behaviours. I want to point out that I encourage observers and the observed teacher to get together to look at photos, listen to tapes, view videos, study short transcripts, and talk about the class. By doing so, exploration will be enhanced for all.
The examples I give next and my later discussion on the value of talking about teaching should make this clear.

**Observing Others to Explore One’s Own Teaching: Some Examples**

This first example of the value of exploring one’s own teaching by observing that of others involves collaboration between myself and my teaching partner. My partner showed consistent interest in error treatment and wanted to gain more awareness of how she treated students’ errors. As such, I audiotaped her class and transcribed short segment that centred on how she treated students’ language errors. Here is one of these short transcripts:

*Student:*  I have only two sister.
*Teacher:* Uh-huh.
*Student:* I have no brother.
*Teacher:* Two sisters?
*Student:* Because my mother she dead when I was three years old.
*Teacher:* She died when you were three?
*Student:* Yes. She dead when I was tree years old.

My partner and I later met to talk, and she was delighted (and a little surprised) to see the way she treated errors. She used rising intonation (e.g., when she said, “Two sisters?”) or asked questions while emphasizing the word she was correcting (as in “She died when you were three?”). After appraising her treatment techniques, she decided that the students most likely did not know she was even treating their errors. Instead, they focused on meaning. As a part of our discussion, she also raised a concern over whether or not treating errors was useful. She had been reading Steven Krashen’s ideas about how error treatment does not necessarily contribute to gains in the acquisition of the students’ second language, and she expressed her confusion over the need to correct errors at all. However, at the same time, students were asking her to treat their language errors, and she wanted to comply. As such, she decided that if she did treat the errors, she could at least do so in a way in which the students were aware of being corrected. She read about and discussed error treatment and subsequently designed and implemented alternative ways to treat errors.
My partner obviously gained awareness from more clearly seeing her way of treating errors, and through the process of observing (and talking) with my partner, I also had the chance to reflect on my own beliefs and techniques for treating errors. I was able to see my teaching in hers, and I realized that I often treated errors similarly, and that, most likely, students were not especially aware that I was treating specific language errors. By audiotaping and analyzing my teaching, I was able to reconfirm this reflection and develop new ways to treat students’ errors.

A second example of the value of observing others teach involves a teacher in Japan who wanted to explore the use of photography as a way to observe teaching. He was invited to observe a class at a private language school for young children, and he decided to take his camera. He was able to move freely around the classroom while the students and teacher went about their lesson, and as a second observer, I was impressed by the way he was able to fit into the natural flow of the classroom interaction in an unobtrusive way. Surprisingly, after the first few snapshots, the children hardly paid any attention to him.

Later, he created a photographic essay of the classroom interaction, and while looking at the photos with the teacher, he was able to reflect on his own teaching. For example, he noticed how spontaneously the children spoke up in English and wondered how he could get students in his high school EFL class to do this. As a second observer, I was also able to see my teaching in the teaching of the photographed teacher, and as I studied the photos, I was impressed by the great number of activities the teacher did with the students, each leading naturally into the next, and I wondered how I could design lessons to do this in my own classes.
An observation report

Teacher: American, twenty-six years old
Class: fourteen advanced-level students

Observation: the lesson began by the teacher telling the students she would be right back. She left the classroom, coming back dressed in a full-length back dress with a black veil. She sat sown and held up a series of signs that read: “how does my presence make you feel?” “What do you notice and what are you thinking about?” “What do you think I am?” and “take one minute to freewrite”. During the entire time, the teacher and students were silent.

The teacher then took off her veil and asked, “How did my presence make you feel?” As students responded, she listed their ideas on the board: scary, startled, uncomfortable, grim reaper, anticipation, trembling, silence. The teacher then related all their words to one concept - death - and she explained that the lesson would be on their perceptions of death.

From this point on the teacher took the class through a series of quick-paced activities that centered their attention on the topic of death. She passed out blank paper and a basket of crayons and asked the class to draw a picture that represents death. Then she had them discuss their pictures in pairs and write down that came to mind concerning death. After this, she elicited from the class words that they used to describe death (change, god, scary, nature, forgiveness, vague, strength, empty, confusing), and she wrote them on the board.

The teacher followed this activity by handing out newspaper chippings (death notices) to half the class and sympathy cards to the other half. She had students work in pairs, discussing the meaning of the short verse in the cards and the meaning of the newspaper death notices. She then had volunteers read the greeting card verses, and she answered their questions about the meaning of specific words. She also asked students a series of questions, such as “when do you think Americans send these cards?” and “do people in your country use such cards?” she then did the same thing for newspaper death notices, having students read a few notices aloud, as well as discussing cultural differences between American culture and some of the students’ cultures.
At the end of the lesson, the teacher instructed the class to write about the experience in their journals. The purpose was for the students to reflect on the activity, writing about what they learned. The teacher joined the students by also writing in her journal. As they wrote, the teacher played an audiotape of Rachmaninoff’s classical death march.

The teacher asked me to pay particular attention to the structure and pace of the lesson. Here is an account of the lesson and the time it took for each.

- Starting the lesson: four minutes
- Holding up signs/ silence: six minutes
- Eliciting feelings/ words: seven minutes
- Drawing pictures that represent death: seven minutes
- Pairs discussing their pictures and listing death words: eleven minutes
- Pairs discussing cards and newspaper death notices: twelve minutes
- Groups reading greeting cards and class discussion: fourteen minutes
- Reading newspaper death notices and class discussion: eight minutes
- Journal writing about the experience: seventeen minutes
- Teacher distributing homework (song verse): two minutes

My analysis of the lesson shows that the teacher included ten different activities (if starting the lesson is included), each taking anywhere from four to seventeen minutes. The activities varied in the skill required of the students, including reading, writing, and speaking. The combined time that the students spent doing these activities was eighty-eight minutes out of the ninety-minute class period.

As for my interpretation of the lesson, I believe that both the varied activity types and the quick pace kept students interested and alert. At no time did I see students yawn or look bored. They focused their attention on the task at hand and seemed to enjoy each step of the lesson. The only time some students looked puzzled was at the end of the lesson, when the teacher gave out the homework. Perhaps some students did not know what to do. I also believe that the quick pace and varied activities of this class offered opportunities for students to learn English used to talk about death, as well as something about how American society responds to death as a social phenomenon.
However, there are other possible interpretations. One is that the students were confused by so much information given to them so quickly. The only way the teacher checked their comprehension was by eliciting single words and phrases about her behavior and by viewing the students’ pictures. In short, to please the teacher, the students simply went from one activity to another looking as if they were following and enjoying the lesson. The varied activities and pace made this easier. Students could easily fool the teacher into thinking that they understood, as there was not enough time for the teacher to fully check the students’ comprehension, and she was quite happy with the fact that they were talking, especially in groups.

Exploratory Questions

Initial descriptive questions

- What kinds of questions do I ask?
  - Yes–no? Either–or? Wh–? Tag?
- What are the content of my questions? About study of language? People’s lives in general? Student’s personal lives? Procedures? Other?
- How long do I wait after asking a question to get a response?
- How much time do students stay on task? What do they do when off task? What triggers going off task?
- How do I give instructions? How much time does it take? Do students know what to do after given instructions?
- What are usual seat arrangements in my class?
- How often do students speak their native language in class? When? What do I do when they use it?

Further exploration questions

- What happens when I ask only yes–no questions?
- What happens when I increase the number of questions I ask about students’ personal lives?
- What happens when I add a time limit? Decrease time given to finish a task? Give no time limit?
- What happens when I change the way I give instructions, such as give them as a dictation? Role play them? Have students paraphrase them? Project them on an overhead? Use a combination of these things?
- What happens when students sit in different seating arrangements?
- What happens when I require students to only speak English? When they cannot speak any English for ten minutes?
- What happens I do not praise students? When I only praise specific accomplishments?
References


