

TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

AN INTRODUCTION



DAVID NUNAN

ROUTLEDGE

TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

“This volume, by a highly experienced and well-known author in the field of ELT, takes readers directly into classroom contexts around the world, and asks them to reflect on the teaching practices and the theoretical principles underpinning them, and to engage in questions and discussions that occupy many teachers in their own teaching contexts.”

—**Anne Burns**, UNSW, Australia

“. . . a fresh look at the craft of TESOL, ideally aimed at the novice teacher. In an interactive approach, Nunan shares theory and engages readers to reflect on both vignettes and their own experiences to better consolidate their understanding of the key concepts of the discipline.”

—**Ken Beatty**, Anaheim University, USA

David Nunan’s dynamic learner-centered teaching style has informed and inspired countless TESOL educators around the world. In this fresh, straightforward introduction to teaching English to speakers of other languages he presents teaching techniques and procedures along with the underlying theory and principles.

Complex theories and research studies are explained in a clear and comprehensible, yet non-trivial, manner. Practical examples of how to develop teaching materials and tasks from sound principles provide rich illustrations of theoretical constructs. The content is presented through a lively variety of different textual genres including classroom vignettes showing language teaching in action, question and answer sessions, and opportunities to ‘eavesdrop’ on small group discussions among teachers and teachers in preparation. Readers get involved through engaging, interactive pedagogical features, and opportunities for reflection and personal application. Key topics are covered in twelve concise chapters: Language Teaching Methodology, Learner-Centered Language Teaching, Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Grammar, Discourse, Learning Styles and Strategies, and Assessment. Each chapter follows the same format so that readers know what to expect as they work through the text. Key terms are defined in a Glossary at the end of the book. David Nunan’s own reflections and commentaries throughout enrich the direct, personal style of the text. This text is ideally suited for teacher preparation courses and for practicing teachers in a wide range of language teaching contexts around the world.

David Nunan is President Emeritus at Anaheim University in California and Professor Emeritus in Applied Linguistics at the University of Hong Kong. He has published over thirty academic books on second language curriculum design, development and evaluation, teacher education, and research and presented many refereed talks and workshops in North America, the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, and Latin America. As a language teacher, teacher educator, researcher, and consultant he has worked in the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, North America, and the Middle East.

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INTRODUCTION

This book is an introduction to TESOL – Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. I have written it to be accessible to readers who are new to the field, but also hope that it will provide insights for those who have had some experience as TESOL students and teachers.

Before embarking on our journey, I want to discuss briefly what TESOL means and what it includes. TESOL stands for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. TESOL encompasses many other acronyms. For instance, if you are teaching or plan to teach English in an English speaking country, this is an ESL (English as a Second Language) context. If you are teaching in a country whose first language is not English, then you are teaching in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. Sometimes you will also hear the acronym TEAL, which means Teaching English as an Additional Language. Within both ESL and EFL contexts, there are specialized areas, such as ESP (English for Specific Purposes), EAP (English for Academic Purposes), EOP (English for Occupational Purposes), and so on. Some of these terms, and the concepts buried within them such as ‘other’ and ‘foreign,’ have become controversial, as I briefly touch on below. I have glossed them here because, if you are new to the field, you will inevitably come across them, and you need to know what they mean.

This textbook is designed to be applicable to a wide range of language teaching contexts. Whether you are currently teaching or preparing to teach, I encourage you to think about these different contexts and the many different purposes that students may have for learning the language.

The TESOL Association was formed fifty years ago. Over these fifty years, massive changes in our understanding of the nature of language and the nature of learning have taken place. There have also been enormous changes in the place of English in the world, and how it is taught and used around the world. In the 1960s,

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the native speaker of English was the ‘norm,’ and it was to this ‘norm’ that second and foreign language learners aspired. (Whose norm, and which norms, were rarely questioned.) Ownership of English was often attributed to England. These days, there are more second language speakers than first language speakers (Gradol, 1996, 2006). Following its emergence as the preeminent global language, first language speakers of English are no longer in a position to claim ownership. There has been a radical transformation in who uses the language, in what contexts, and for what purposes, and the language itself is in a constant state of change.

The spread of a natural human language across the countries and regions of the planet has resulted in variation as a consequence of nativization and acculturation of the language in various communities . . . These processes have affected the grammatical structure and the use of language according to local needs and conventions . . . Use of English in various contexts manifests in various genres . . . all the resources of multilingual and multicultural contexts are now part of the heritage of world Englishes.

(Kachru and Smith, 2008: 177)

With the emergence of English as a global language, traditional TESOL concepts and practices have been challenged. I will go into these concepts and practices in the body of the book. In an illuminating article, Lin *et al.* (2002) tell their own stories of learning, using and teaching English in a range of language contexts. They use their stories to challenge the notion that English is created in London (or New York) and exported to the world. They question the ‘other’ in TESOL, and propose an alternative acronym – TEGCOM: Teaching English for Global Communication. Many other books and articles as well challenge the ‘native’ versus ‘other’ speaker dichotomy, and argue that we need to rethink TESOL and acknowledge a diversity of voices and practices (see, for example, Shin, 2006). These perspectives inform the book in a number of ways. For example, a key principle in the first chapter is the notion that teachers should ‘evolve’ their own methodology that is sensitive to and consistent with their own teaching style and in tune with their own local context. Also, the central thread of learner-centeredness running through the book places learner diversity at the center of the language curriculum.

How This Book Is Structured

Each chapter follows a similar structure:

- Each chapter begins with a list of chapter *Goals* and an *Introduction* to the topic at hand.
- Next is a classroom *Vignette*. Vignettes are portraits or snapshots. The vignettes in this book are classroom narratives showing part of a lesson in action. Each

is intended to illustrate a key aspect of the theme of the chapter. At the end of the vignette, you will find some of my own observations on the classroom narrative that I found interesting.

- The vignette is followed by an *Issue in Focus* section. Here I select and comment on an issue that is particularly pertinent to the topic of the chapter. For example, in Chapter 1, which introduces the topic of language teaching methodology, I focus on the ‘methods debate’ which preoccupied language teaching methodologists for many years.
- Next I identify and discuss a number of *Key Principles* underpinning the topic of the chapter.
- The two sections that follow – *What Teachers Want to Know* and *Small Group Discussion* – also focus on key issues relating to the topic of the chapter. *What Teachers Want to Know* takes the form of an FAQ between teachers and teachers in preparation and a teacher educator. The *Small Group Discussion* section takes the form of an online discussion group with teachers taking part in a TESOL program, where a thread is initiated by the instructor, and participants then provide interactive posts to the discussion site.
- Each chapter includes *Reflect* and *Task* textboxes.
- At the end of each chapter is a *Summary*, suggestions for *Further Reading*, and *References*.
- Throughout the textbook, you will be introduced to key terms and concepts. Brief definitions and descriptions of the terms are provided in the *Glossary* at the end of this book.

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1

LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Goals

At the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- define the following key terms – curriculum, syllabus, methodology, evaluation, audiolingualism, communicative language teaching, task-based language teaching, grammar-translation, structural linguistics
- describe the ‘eclectic’ method in which a teacher combines elements of two or more teaching methods or approaches
- set out the essential issues underpinning the methods debate
- articulate three key principles that guide your own approach to language teaching methodology
- say how communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching are related
- describe the three-part instructional cycle of pre-task, task, and follow-up

Introduction

The main topic of this chapter is language teaching methodology, which has to do with methods, techniques, and procedures for teaching and learning in the classroom. This will provide a framework for chapters to come on teaching listening, speaking, reading, writing, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

Methodology fits into the larger picture of curriculum development. There are three subcomponents to curriculum development: syllabus design, methodology, and evaluation. All of these components should be in harmony with one another: methodology should be tailored to the syllabus, and evaluation/assessment should

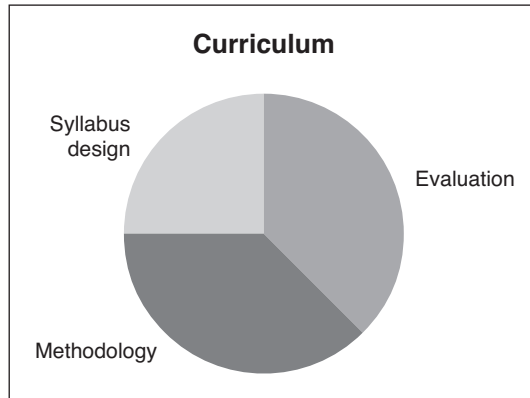


FIGURE 1.1 The three components of the curriculum ‘pie’

be focused on what has been taught. (In too many educational systems, what is taught is determined by what is to be assessed.)

Syllabus design focuses on content, which deals not only with what we should teach, but also the order in which the content is taught and the reasons for teaching this content to our learners.

According to Richards *et al.* (1987), methodology is “The study of the practices and procedures used in teaching, and the principles and beliefs that underlie them.” Unlike syllabus design, which focuses on content, methodology focuses on classroom techniques and procedures and principles for sequencing these.

Assessment is concerned with how well our learners have done, while evaluation is much broader and is concerned with how well our program or course has served the learners. The relationship between evaluation and assessment is discussed, in some detail, in Chapter 12.

Vignette

As you read the following vignette, try to picture the classroom in your imagination.

The teacher stands in front of the class. She is a young Canadian woman who has been in Tokyo for almost a year. Although she is relatively inexperienced, she has an air of confidence. There are twelve students in the class. They are all young adults who are taking an evening EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class. This is the third class of the semester, and the students and the teacher are beginning to get used to each other. Her students have a pretty good idea of what to expect as the teacher signals that the class is about to begin.

“All right, class, time to get started” she says. “Last class we learned the questions and answers for talking about things we own. ‘Is this your pen? Yes, it is. No it isn’t. Are these your books? Yes, they are. No, they aren’t.’ OK? So, let’s see if you remember how to do this. *Is this your pen?* Repeat.”

The class intones, “Is this your pen?”

“Pencil,” says the teacher.

“Is this your pencil?”

“Books.”

Most students say, “Are these your books?” However, the teacher hears several of them say, “Is this your books?”

She claps her hands and says loudly “Are these your books? Are these your books? Are these your books? Again! . . . *books.*”

“Are these your books?” the students say in unison.

“Good! Great! . . . *those.*”

“Are those your books?” say the students.

“Excellent! . . . *her.*”

“Are those her book?”

“Book?” queries the teacher.

“Books, books,” say several of the students emphasizing the ‘s’ on the end of the verb.

“*Your*”

“Are those your books?”

The teacher beams. “Perfect!” she says. The students smile shyly.

“Now,” says the teacher, “Now we’ll see how well you can *really* use this language.” She passes around a brown velvet bag and instructs the students to put a small, personal object into the bag – a pen, a ring, a pair of earrings. Then, she instructs the students to stand up. She passes the bag around a second time, and tells the students to remove an object. “Make sure it isn’t the one that you put in!” she says, and laughs.

When each student has an object or objects that is not his or her own, she makes them stand up and find the owner of the object by asking “Is this your . . . ?” or “Are these your . . . ?” She repeats the procedure several times, circulating with the students, correcting pronunciation and grammar, until she is satisfied that they are fluent and confident in using the structure.

REFLECT

A. What 3 things did you notice in the vignette? Write them down in note form.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. Write down 3–5 questions you would like to ask the teacher about the lesson.

My Observations on the Vignette

1. The teacher begins the lesson with a classic audiolingual drill. This is the way that I was trained to teach languages back in the early 1970s. Despite her relative inexperience, the young teacher has confidence because the rigid set of procedures laid out in the audiolingual methodology gives her control of the classroom.
2. The teacher is active. She encourages the students with positive feedback, but also gives gentle correction when they make mistakes. She praises the students without being patronizing. This appears to create a positive classroom environment.
3. In the second phase of the lesson, the teacher uses a technique from communicative language teaching (CLT)/task-based language teaching (TBLT). In my 2004 book on task-based language teaching I called this kind of classroom procedure a “communicative activity” (Nunan, 2004). It is partly a traditional grammar exercise (the students are practicing the grammar structure for the lesson “Is this your/Are these your . . .?”), but it has an aspect of genuine communication. The student asking the question doesn’t know the answer prior to hearing the response from the person who is answering it.

Issue in Focus: The ‘Methods’ Debate

For much of its history, the language teaching profession has been obsessed with the search for the one ‘best’ method of teaching a second or foreign language. This search was based on the belief that, ultimately, there must be a method that would work better than any other for learners everywhere regardless of biographical characteristics such as age, the language they are learning, whether they are learning English as a second language or as a foreign language, and so on. If such a method could be found, it was argued, the language teaching ‘problem’ would be solved once and for all.

Grammar-Translation

At different historical periods, the profession has favored one particular method over competing methods. The method that held greatest sway is grammar–translation. In fact, this method is still popular in many parts of the world. Focusing on written rather than spoken language, the method, as the name suggests, focuses on the explicit teaching of grammar rules. Learners also spend much time translating from the first to the second language and vice versa. For obvious reasons, the method could only be used in classrooms where the learners shared a common language.

Grammar–translation came in for severe criticism during World War II. The criticism then intensified during the Cold War. The crux of the criticism was that students who had been taught a language through the grammar–translation method knew a great deal about the target language, but couldn’t actually use it to

communicate. This was particularly true of the spoken language, which is not surprising as learners often had virtually no exposure to the spoken language. This was profoundly unsatisfactory to government bodies that needed soldiers, diplomats, and others who could learn to speak the target language, and who could develop their skills rapidly rather than over the course of years. (I studied Latin in junior high school, and can recall spending hours in the classroom and at home, doing translation exercises with a grammar book and a bilingual dictionary at my elbow.)

Audiolingualism

In his introductory book on language curriculum development, Richards describes audiolingualism as the most popular of all the language teaching methods. In the following quote, he points out that methods such as audiolingualism are underpinned by a theory of language (in this case structural linguistics) and a theory of learning (behaviorism).

In the United States, in the 1960s, language teaching was under the sway of a powerful method – the *Audiolingual Method*. Stern (1974: 63) describes the period from 1958 to 1966 as the “Golden Age of Audiolingualism.” This drew on the work of American Structural Linguistics, which provided the basis for a grammatical syllabus and a teaching approach that drew heavily on the theory of behaviorism. Language learning was thought to depend on habits that could be established by repetition. The linguist Bloomfield (1942: 12) had earlier stated a principle that became a core tenet of audiolingualism: “Language learning is overlearning: anything less is of no use.” Teaching techniques made use of repetition of dialogues and pattern practice as a basis for automatization followed by exercises that involved transferring learned patterns to new situations.

(Richards, 2001: 25–26)

In this extract, Richards describes the origins of audiolingualism and summarizes its key principles. Although behaviorism, the psychological theory on which it is based, was largely discredited many years ago, some of the techniques spawned by the method such as various forms of drilling remain popular today. At the beginning stages of learning another language, and also when teaching beginners, I often use some form of drilling, although I always give the drill a communicative cast.

In the 1970s, audiolingualism came in for some severe criticism. Behaviorist psychology was under attack, as was structural linguistics because they did not adequately account for key aspects of language and language learning. This period also coincided with the emergence of ‘designer’ methods and the rise of communicative language teaching. I used the term ‘designer’ methods in my 1991 book on language teaching methodology (Nunan, 1991) to capture the essence of a range of methods, such as Suggestopedia and the Silent Way, that appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. These methods provided a clear set of procedures for what

teachers should do in the classroom and, like audiolingualism, were based on beliefs about the nature of language and the language learning process.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching was less a method than a broad philosophical approach to language, viewing it not so much as a system of rules but as a tool for communication. The methodological ‘realization’ of CLT is task-based language teaching (Nunan, 2004, 2014). You will hear a great deal more about CLT in this book, as it remains a key perspective on language teaching. Patsy Duff provides the following introduction to the approach:

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes learning a language first and foremost for the purpose of communicating with others. Communication includes finding out about what people did on the weekend . . . or on their last vacation and learning about classmates’ interests, activities, preferences and opinions and conveying one’s own. It may also involve explaining daily routines to others who want to know about them, discussing current events, writing an email message with some personal news, or telling others about an interesting book or article or Internet video clip.

(Duff, 2014: 15)

The search for the one best method has been soundly (and rightly) criticized by language teaching methodologists.

Foreign language [teaching] . . . has a basic orientation to methods of teaching. Unfortunately, the latest bandwagon “methodologies” come into prominence without much study or understanding, particularly those that are easiest to immediately apply in the classroom or those that are supported by a particular “guru”. Although the concern for method is certainly not a new issue, the current attraction to method stems from the late 1950s, when foreign language teachers were falsely led to believe that there was a method to remedy the “language learning and teaching problem.”

(Richards, 2001: 26)

While none of the methods from the past should be taken as a ‘package deal,’ to be rigidly applied to the exclusion of all others, none is entirely without merit, and we can often find techniques from a range of methods, blending these together to serve our purposes and those of our students.

This is what happens in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. The teacher begins by using a pretty standard form of audiolingual drilling. I say ‘standard’ because there is no context for the drill, and the focus is purely on manipulating the

grammatical form. In the second phase of the lesson, however, she gives the drill a communicative cast as I describe it in my observations on the vignette. She thus blends together activities from two different methods and approaches. This melding of techniques and procedures from more than one method is sometimes described as the ‘eclectic method,’ which means that it is really no method at all.

Key Principles

In this section, I set out three general principles to guide you as you develop your own classroom approaches, methods, and techniques.

1. *Evolve Your Own Personal Methodology*

If you are new to teaching, many experienced teachers are likely to tell you, “Oh this is how it should be done.” While it would be unwise, even silly, to ignore the advice of the more experienced teacher, whose own insights and wisdom were probably hard-won, ultimately, you need to evolve your own way of teaching: one that suits your personality, is in harmony with your own preferred teaching style, and fits the context and the learners you are teaching. Many years ago, the profession was obsessed with finding the ‘one best method,’ the secret key that will unlock the door to teaching success. These days, we know that there is no one best method, no single key that will fit all locks. That doesn’t mean that you won’t occasionally come across teachers who believe that they have found ‘the way.’ Believe me, they haven’t. And your own best way will evolve and change over time as you learn more about the art and science of teaching, as your contexts change, and as the needs of your learners change.

2. *Focus on the Learner*

This to me is a major key to success, and you will notice me repeating it many times throughout the book. Despite all of our skills and our best intentions, the fact of the matter is that we can’t do the learning for our learners. If they are to succeed, then they have to do the hard work. Our job is to ‘eazify’ the learning for them. This is a word that I once heard a former colleague Chris Candlin use, and it captures the role of the teacher perfectly. The very first learner-centered teacher was the Greek philosopher and educator Socrates, who rejected the notion that the role of the teacher was to pour knowledge into the learner. “Education,” he said, “is the lighting of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.”

Learners can be involved in their own learning process through a graded sequence of metacognitive tasks that are integrated into the teaching/learning process.

- Make instructional goals clear to the learners.
- Help learners to create their own goals.

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- Encourage learners to use their second language outside of the classroom.
- Help learners become more aware of learning processes and strategies.
- Show learners how to identify their own preferred learning styles and strategies.
- Give learners opportunities to make choices between different options in the classroom.
- Teach learners how to create their own learning tasks.
- Provide learners with opportunities to master some aspect of their second language and then teach it to others.
- Create contexts in which learners investigate language and become their own researchers of language.

(I first spelled out how to incorporate these ideas in the classroom in *Second Language Teaching and Learning* [Nunan, 1999]. I will revisit them in subsequent chapters in this book.)

3. Build Instructional Sequences on a Cycle of Pre-Task, Task, and Follow-Up

A cycle may occupy an entire lesson, or the lesson may consist of several cycles. The aim of the pre-task is to set up the learners for the learning task proper. It may focus on developing some essential vocabulary that they will need, it may ask learners to revise a grammar structure, or require them to rehearse a conversation. The task itself may involve several linked tasks or task chains, each of which is interrelated. Finally, there is the follow-up, which may also take various shapes and forms: to get the student to reflect and self-evaluate, to give feedback, to correct errors, and so on. You will get further information and examples on the pre-task, task, follow-up cycle throughout the book.

What Teachers Want to Know

The following section focuses on questions that teachers have about communicative language teaching (CLT)/task-based language teaching (TBLT) and the role of the learner in the communicative classroom.

Question: I've read several articles on communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching. However, I'm not sure what the difference is. Is there a difference?

Response: Communicative language teaching (CLT) is a broad, general, philosophical orientation to language teaching. It developed in the 1970s, when it was realized that language is much more than a system of sounds, words, and grammar rules, and that language learning involves more than mastering these three systems

through memorization and habit formation. Teachers also realized that there is a difference between learning and regurgitating grammar rules and being able to use the rules to communicate effectively. This basic insight – that language is a tool for communication rather than sets of rules – led to major challenges to and changes in how teachers went about teaching.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is the practical realization of this philosophical shift. Unlike audiolingualism, there is not one single set of procedures that can be labeled TBLT. Rather, it encompasses a family of approaches that are united by two principles: First, meaning is primary, and second, there is a relationship between what learners do in the classroom, and the kinds of things that they will need to do outside the classroom. So the point of departure in designing learning tasks is not to draw up a list of vocabulary and grammar items, but to create an inventory of real-world communication tasks that ask learners to use language, not for its own sake, but to achieve goals that go beyond language, for example, to obtain food and drink, to ask for and give directions, to exchange personal information, and so on.

Question: The aim of communicative language teaching is to give learners the skills to communicate in the real world, outside of the classroom. But I teach in an EFL context. How can I encourage my learners to communicate outside the classroom?

Response: This can be a challenge, but there are many ways to encourage students to communicate outside the classroom. A school I visited recently has an English Only Zone – they call it the EOZ, and when students enter the zone they are only allowed to speak in English. Another idea is to encourage learners to create an EOT (English Only Time) at their home. They choose today's expressions and try to practice or use them during the English Only Time.

The reason why encouraging learners to use the language outside of the classroom is difficult to implement is because we tend to think 'using the second language' means 'speaking' the language. However, you can also practice listening, reading, and writing outside the classroom. When I was teaching in Japan, my students were reluctant to try to speak in English. They might try occasionally when meeting foreigners, but that was fairly rare. So one day, I gave them a chance to write letters to my foreign friends. I told them that my friends are English teachers from all different countries and that they do not know much about Japan. The students worked very hard to make good sentences and structures. They got letters back in English, and some of them still keep in touch with my friends through the Internet. Making a pen pal can be a solution to encourage learners to interact and communicate – it also increases their motivation to learn the language. Also, I suggest watching a lot of movies without subtitles, writing a diary every day, and extensive reading.

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Question: How can I encourage learners to be less dependent on the teacher and to take more control of their learning?

Response: The trick is to do this incrementally step-by-step. It is a matter, first of all, of sensitizing learners to the learning process. It's good to be systematic about this, having learning-how-to-learn goals as well as language goals. I do four key things with my learners. I get them thinking about the learning process in general, I encourage them to become more sensitive to the context and environment within which learning takes place, I teach them learning strategies for dealing with listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and I introduce them to strategies for dealing with pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. In other words, I get my learners to focus not just on content, but also on processes – strategies for learning. I get them thinking about questions such as, “What sort of learner am I?” “Am I a competitive learner or a co-operative learner?” “Do I like learning by having the teacher tell me everything, or do I like trying to figure things out for myself?”

Being aware of strategies for learning and reflecting on the learning process are keys to taking control of one's learning. Strategies are the mental and cognitive procedures learners use in order to acquire new knowledge and skills – not just language, but all learning. All learning tasks are underpinned by at least one strategy. Learners are usually not consciously aware of these strategies. If we can make them aware of the strategies and get them to apply the strategies to their learning, this can make them more effective and independent learners. Some strategies such as memorizing are common and probably familiar to learners, but others such as classifying, or looking for patterns and regularities in the language, are probably less familiar.

TASK

Brainstorm, if possible with 2–3 other students, and come up with a list of ideas for giving learners opportunities for using English out of class.

Small Group Discussion

In this section, I adapted part of an online discussion thread between a teacher and a group of students. In a previous thread, the students had been discussing the basic instructional sequence of pre-task, task, and follow-up.

In this thread, they are discussing ideas for the pre-task phase of the task cycle.

TEACHER: In this thread, I want you to share ideas for the pre-task phase of the task cycle. Tom, you had some interesting ideas about teaching vocabulary a couple of weeks ago. Do you have any ideas for the pre-task phase that involves vocabulary?

TOM: I put a lot of thought into preparing pre-tasks, I feel they set the tone of my lesson and prepare students for what the class is going to be about. They can motivate the students and get them engaged. One pre-task focused on vocabulary for a reading or listening lesson is the WORDLE website (<http://www.wordle.net/>). This is a website that generates *word clouds* giving prominence to words that appear more frequently in the text you type in. Students like the final word cloud that the site provides and they can print these out as well as look at them online. Word clouds can be used to get students brainstorming what the reading or listening passage is going to be about. I get my students to make predictions about the words and ask them how the words are connected. Word clouds are very adaptable to students of different ages and levels. Try out the website and let me know what you think.

ALICIA: Thanks for sharing this website with us, Tom. I just checked it out. I like the idea of introducing new vocabulary to students via word clouds as a pre-task. This is new to me and I will definitely use it during one of my upcoming classes.

MARCO: I'm interested in vocabulary and learning strategies. I like to use pre-tasks to set up my junior high school students for new vocabulary that they'll meet in their reading text. I've also checked out the WORDLE website and it looks like fun. I'm going to develop a pre-task for my students using the site. Thanks for suggesting it, Tom.

AUDREY: One book that I love working with provides simple pre-task exercises that you can use to engage students in a certain topic. One is a unit about families. The pre-task contains pictures of different families. Students have to decide which one shows the typical family of the future and discuss reasons for their choices. This prepares them for reading the text about families. In a different unit, before listening or reading about real-life stories of good luck and bad luck, students are asked to share personal examples or experiences with good and bad luck. In many cases, there is a picture with the pre-task, and students have to guess what is happening before doing a listening task. For instance, in a unit on celebrities, students look at pictures and decide what they think a celebrity might be famous for prior to reading about heroes and famous people of our times. Basically, most of the pre-tasks are questions, so students can give their input and brainstorm ideas, vocabulary, sometimes even grammar that will be used on a reading or listening passage. I hope you can use these ideas and try them out, they all work really well if you adjust to the books you are currently using.

JAMES: Here are a few pre-tasks which I've found to be very useful. If you try any of them out and find that they work, please give me feedback.

- The first chapter of the textbook I use talks about brands. I like to play the 'brand game' as an ice-breaker to introduce the whole theme. This can easily be found with a Google search. Students have to identify as

many brand logos as they can in a set period of time. The student or the group who guesses the most logos wins.

- An alternative to this, for the same chapter, is to look at a picture of a motorcycle with the Harley-Davidson logo, and ask students what is the first thing that pops into their head when I say “Harley-Davidson.” What does the name inspire?
- Following this is a listening text where students have to fill in the gaps. The title of the listening text is “Why brands matter.” First, ask students if brands matter to them. Afterwards, get them to try and predict what the recording might be about by predicting what the missing words might be.
- Students get an opportunity to role-play a situation where they are having a business meeting. Before pre-teaching the useful language that is presented in the rest of the chapter, I get students on their own to come up with the best ways to ask for and give opinions. We then compare the students’ language with that presented in the book.
- Before reading a text entitled “Road rage in the sky,” I got students to try and predict what the text might be about. I asked them what “road rage” is and, once they answered the question, I got them to compare incidences of “road rage” which may have happened to them or someone they know.
- Another chapter in this book is on the topic of leadership. With this chapter, I got students to tell me who they thought made an excellent/terrible leader in the last twenty years. In addition to identifying a person, I asked them to give reasons for their choice. I then got them to try and describe the characteristics of what made these leaders good or bad – making generalizations from their particular instances. Finally, I asked them to compare their lists to the list of adjectives presented in the book.

TEACHER: These are all great pre-tasks. There are so many more that you can use of course. You do, however, have to pay attention to the profile of your group and make adaptations and alterations where necessary.

Commentary

As we can see from the discussions above, there really is no limit to the sort of pre-task activities that learners can carry out in relation to vocabulary, or, indeed, any other aspect of language. It is important to keep in mind that the pre-tasks need to closely connect to, and lead in to, the main task. The pre-tasks can help in connecting learners’ background knowledge and experiences to the lesson at hand; they can help in arousing interest in the topic; they can help in revising grammatical structures before doing the main task; and, as we have seen above, they can help in pre-teaching vocabulary used or needed for the main task. Another note about pre-tasks is that they provide learners with time to shift their attention to the topic at hand and the lesson to come.

TASK

Review the pre-task suggestions in the small group discussion, and select one for further development. Describe the steps in the pre-task, create appropriate materials, and briefly describe the task proper for which the pre-task serves as preparation.

Summary

Content focus	Language teaching methodology
Vignette	From audiolingual drill to communicative task
Issue in focus	The 'methods' debate
Key principles	1. Evolve your own personal methodology. 2. Focus on the learner. 3. Build instructional sequences on a cycle of pre-task, task, and follow-up.
What teachers want to know	English outside the classroom; learner autonomy; CLT versus TBLT
Small group discussion	Preparing pre-tasks

Further Reading

Richards, J. and T. Rodgers (2014) *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. 3rd Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This book is a classic in the field of language teaching. Jack Richards and his co-author, Ted Rodgers, give a chapter-by-chapter account of the most popular methods of the day so that the reader gets a clear picture of the ways in which methods have evolved and morphed as TESOL evolved.

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2

LEARNER-CENTERED LANGUAGE TEACHING

Goals

At the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- define the following key terms and say how they are related: learner-centeredness, autonomy, self-direction
- describe four key principles underpinning a learner-centered approach to instruction
- describe the relationship between in-class instruction and out-of-class language learning and use
- say why learning goals are as important as language goals in the learner-centered classroom

Introduction

One concept that has dominated my teaching, almost from the first moment that I stepped into the classroom, is learner-centeredness. Because the concept permeates this book, I thought that I should give it a chapter all to itself, and that the chapter should appear at the beginning of the book. (For a comprehensive treatment of my approach to the concept, see Nunan, 2013.) The concept acknowledges and incorporates into pedagogy the difference and diversity that characterize learners and learning contexts so clearly articulated by Lin *et al.* (2002) and others. (See also Benson and Nunan, 2005.)

The concept of learner-centeredness is not difficult to understand. However, it can be difficult to implement in the classroom. In the following paragraphs, I will

paint some verbal pictures of what I understand by learner-centeredness. When I came across the concept early in my own teaching career, it made intuitive sense, and so it was only natural that I sought to weave it into the fabric of my own teaching. As you read on, you will find that the points articulated in the paragraphs are interrelated. Each describes one face of a multifaceted prism.

In a learner-centered classroom, learning experiences are related to learners' own out-of-class experiences.

The American psychologist David Pearson said that learning is a process of building bridges between what we already know and what we need to learn. This is the basis of the experiential approach to education. We begin with the learners' own experiences, with what they already know, and we find ways to 'hook' new learning onto this pre-existing knowledge.

In a learner-centered classroom, learners take responsibility for their own learning.

We tend to think that this is fine for adults, but is not feasible for children. This is not true. The educator Gene Bedley once said that whenever we do something for children that they could do for themselves we are taking away from them an opportunity to learn self-responsibility and independence (Bedley, 1985). In my own work, I have found that children as young as eleven can begin to take control of their own learning.

In a learner-centered classroom, learners are engaged in their own learning.

If they are not engaged, it is unlikely that they will learn. If you spend time in pre-school classrooms (and I strongly recommend that you do, regardless of the age level you teach or plan to teach) it will be easy to see when a child is disengaged. He or she will simply get up and wander away.

In a learner-centered classroom, learners are involved in making decisions about what to learn, how to learn, and how to be assessed.

Teaching and learning are in harmony, and the educational enterprise is a collaborative process between the teacher and the learner. Learners are active participants in their own learning, rather than passive objects to be manipulated.

In a learner-centered classroom, there are two sets of goals: language goals and learning goals.

In a language classroom, of course, we have language goals. Why have learning goals? The answer is that most learners do not come into the classroom with skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about what to learn, how to learn, and how to be assessed. They need to learn these skills, and to be sensitized to their own preferred ways of learning.

In a learner-centered classroom, the strategies underlying the pedagogical tasks in which learners are engaged will be made transparent.

All tasks are underpinned by one or more strategies. Learners are more likely to incorporate these into their language learning if they know what they are and how they can be used.

The ultimate goal of a learner-centered teacher is to make him- or herself redundant. As my colleague Geoff Brindley wrote over thirty years ago:

One of the fundamental principles underlying the notion of permanent education is that education should develop in individuals the capacity to control their own destiny and that, therefore, the learner should be seen as being at the centre of the educational process. For the teaching institution and the teacher, this means that instructional programmes should be centred around the learners' needs and that learners themselves should exercise their own responsibility in the choice of learning objectives, content and methods as well as in determining the means used to assess their performance.

(Brindley, 1984: 15)

Brindley was thinking of adult learners when he made this statement. However, I believe that it is relevant to *all* learners. As I write this book, I am working with a group of ten–eleven–year–olds in Korea. With appropriate guidance and support, these children are able to articulate how they learn best, which kinds of activities they like to engage in, and which they don't. They can also tell you how they go about learning and using language, not just inside the classroom, but outside as well.

Vignette

In this vignette, a group of high-intermediate young adults in an EFL setting are attending the first day of class with a new teacher. The teacher introduces herself and then says, "In the lesson today, I want to find out your ideas about what you want to learn, how you like to learn, and how you want to be assessed. I also want to learn about what you *don't* like. So, I'm going to give you a little survey to do, OK?" She hands a sheaf of papers to the student sitting nearest to her and asks the student to distribute the surveys to the class. "I want you to complete the survey individually. Then, when you have finished, I'll tell you what comes next."

The designated student distributes the following survey to her classmates.

LEARNING PREFERENCES SURVEY

Complete the survey by circling the number that corresponds to your own beliefs about how you like to learn.

Key

1. I don't like this at all
2. I don't like this very much

3. This is OK
4. I quite like this
5. I like this very much

I. Topics

In my English class, I would like to study topics . . .

1. about me: my feelings, attitudes, beliefs, etc. (1 2 3 4 5)
2. from my academic subjects: psychology, history, etc. (1 2 3 4 5)
3. from popular culture: music, films, etc. (1 2 3 4 5)
4. about current affairs and issues (1 2 3 4 5)
5. that are controversial: underage drinking, etc. (1 2 3 4 5)

II. Methods

In my English class, I would like to learn by . . .

6. small group discussions and problem-solving (1 2 3 4 5)
7. formal language study, e.g. studying from a textbook (1 2 3 4 5)
8. listening to the teacher (1 2 3 4 5)
9. watching videos (1 2 3 4 5)
10. doing individual work (1 2 3 4 5)

III. Language Areas

This semester, I most want to improve my . . .

11. listening (1 2 3 4 5)
12. speaking (1 2 3 4 5)
13. reading (1 2 3 4 5)
14. writing (1 2 3 4 5)
15. grammar (1 2 3 4 5)
16. pronunciation (1 2 3 4 5)

IV. Out of Class

Out of class, I like to . . .

17. practice in the independent learning center (1 2 3 4 5)
18. have conversations with native speakers of English (1 2 3 4 5)
19. practice English online through social media (1 2 3 4 5)
20. collect examples of interesting/puzzling English (1 2 3 4 5)
21. watch TV/read newspapers in English (1 2 3 4 5)

V. Assessment

I like to find out how my English is improving by . . .

22. having the teacher assess my written work (1 2 3 4 5)
23. having the teacher correct my mistakes in class (1 2 3 4 5)
24. checking my own progress/correcting my own mistakes (1 2 3 4 5)
25. being corrected by my fellow students (1 2 3 4 5)
26. seeing if I can use the language in real-life situations (1 2 3 4 5)

As they work, the teacher monitors the students. When she sees that they have finished, she calls them to attention and says, “OK. Now I want you to get into groups of three to four, and I want you to compare your answers. See where you agree and where you disagree. And then what I want you to do is to come up with a group survey – I’ll give each group a clean survey sheet. You won’t all agree on everything, so, what you have to do is to discuss and compromise. Everyone has different ideas to a certain extent, so compromise is important. You understand compromise? Yes? OK, off you go. If you don’t know each other, introduce yourselves, and then do the joint survey. And remember, you have to give reasons for your choices.”

While the students work, the teacher circulates and intervenes in one group where there seems to be disagreement. When everyone appears to be finished, she gets their attention and carries out a debriefing. Each group has to report their top choice for each of the subcategories on the survey and their least preferred options.

When they get to the last subcategory, on assessment, one student reports that their most preferred option is having the teacher assess their written work. The other students nod in agreement.

“And your least preferred option?” asks the teacher.

“Being corrected by my fellow students,” says the student. Again, there is general agreement around the room.

“Why is that?” asks the teacher.

“Because we are all the same. We, are, we all have equal footing. How can my fellow student correct me? We all have the same ability in the language. If I make a mistake, she will make the same mistake. He will make the same mistake.”

“But maybe by working together, you can help each other. Four heads are better than one.”

The student looks doubtful.

“In this class, I want you all to work together co-operatively. You have seen that there are some things you agree on, and some things you don’t agree on, so there are times that we have to compromise. Say I give you an assignment and say that you have to hand it in on Friday. Perhaps you have an assignment from another teacher that is also due on Friday. You can come to me and negotiate. ‘Jane, can we have until Monday to hand in your assignment?’ And, if it’s possible, then I’ll

say ‘Yes.’ But you know, there are times when it’s good to try out ways of learning that maybe you don’t like. Maybe you don’t like having conversations out of class with native speakers because you feel shy. But if you try it from time to time, you might see that it has real benefits. So, it’s good to expand, to extend the ways that you go about learning. We’ll be doing another survey in a couple of weeks to see whether your ideas about language and learning have changed as a result of the learning experiences in class.”

REFLECT

A. What 3 things did you notice in the vignette? Write them down in note form.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. Write down 3–5 questions you would like to ask the teacher about the lesson.

My Observations on the Vignette

1. The teacher sets the agenda clearly in the very first lesson. The students learn that they will be actively involved in making decisions about what they will learn, how they will learn, and how they will be assessed. There is a clear expectation that they should look for opportunities to practice their English outside of the classroom. Class time will be used for active, collaborative learning rather than listening to the teacher. The two key interpretations of ‘learner-centeredness’ are evident in the vignette. First, learners’ attitudes, ideas, and preferences will be taken into account in making curricular decisions. Second, learners will be actively involved in learning through doing.
2. Learners won’t necessarily get everything they want. The pedagogical agenda will be negotiated, and there will be times when compromise will be necessary. Teachers have their agendas, and there are many situations in which the teacher knows best, and brings his/her professional skills and knowledge to bear in the learning situation.
3. In the final statement to the class, the teacher makes it clear that during the semester, there will be opportunities for learners to reflect on their learning preferences, and that their ideas are likely to evolve as they think about their own learning processes. Andragogy, the study of adult learning, has had a significant influence on learner-centered language teaching. A study that influenced my own thinking back in the early 1980s was Brundage and MacKeracher (1980).

Issue in Focus: Negotiated Learning

The idea that learners can and should contribute to their own learning by making decisions about what they should learn, how they should learn, and how they should be assessed is controversial. Some teachers feel that the notion calls into question their professional expertise. At a seminar in which I spoke about the virtues of negotiated learning, a teacher asserted that asking learners for advice on what and how to learn was like a doctor asking a patient for advice on what medication to prescribe. This analogy is misguided. As teachers, we are not setting out to cure our learners of the malady of monolingualism. While it is true that we have professional knowledge and expertise on language teaching and learning, ultimately, if learning is to occur, it is the learners themselves who have to do the work. Some learners have clear ideas about what they want to learn and how they want to learn; however, many do not. It's for this reason that we need to begin helping them to take control of their own learning. I will give some ideas on how this can be done in this section.

Resistance to negotiation can also come from learners who feel that it is the teacher's responsibility to make decisions about the what and how of learning. Personally, I've never encountered this problem. In fact, negotiation is a normal part of the teaching learning process. When students ask for an extension on an assignment, they are negotiating. When, in a lesson involving both reading and listening, you ask whether they would like to do the reading or the listening task first, you are negotiating.

I make a modest beginning to the process of sensitizing my students to the central role they must play in their own learning process. How I go about this depends on the age and proficiency level of the students. If I'm dealing with adults, I make the instructional goals of the course clear to the learners in the first lesson. Then, each time I teach a lesson, I make the goals of that lesson clear to the learners. At the end of the lesson, I do a brief review, getting the learners to self-evaluate, on a checklist, the extent to which they have achieved the goals of the lesson. As the course progresses, I get the students to select their own goals from a 'menu' of goal statements. Ultimately, I work toward the point of getting learners to create their own learning goals.

Parallel to this goal-setting exercise, I work on raising students' awareness of learning processes. I make them aware of the strategies underlying the tasks and exercises that we work on in the classroom, and I give them exercises to help them identify their own preferred learning styles and strategies. (This is an important topic, which Chapter 11 is devoted to.) As I've already stated, I have found that children as young as ten and eleven can describe how, for example, they go about learning new vocabulary. This does not mean that they know intuitively the most effective way of learning vocabulary, but raising awareness of how they go about learning new words is a first step toward exploring a range of alternative ways of increasing their vocabulary.

From the very first lesson, I get learners making choices. “Do you want to work in pairs or groups?” “Do you want to do the listening task or the reading task?” Even young learners can make these choices. At the end of a unit of work, I get them to tell me which task they liked best, which they liked least, and why.

At a more advanced level, I get learners to master a skill, technique, or piece of language and then teach this to the other students. For example, students in groups can each have their own reading passage. They master the passage and create reading comprehension questions. They then exchange the passage and the questions with another group. One of my graduate students used a similar technique as part of her dissertation work. Her learners each created a video project which they used to teach the other students in the class.

She reported that:

The goal of “teaching each other” was a factor of paramount importance. Being asked to present something to another group gave a clear reason for the work, called for greater responsibility to one’s own group, and led to increased motivation and greatly improved accuracy. The success of each group’s presentation was motivated by the response and feedback of the other group; thus there was a measure of in-built evaluation and a test of how much had been learned. Being an “expert” on a topic noticeably increased self-esteem and getting more confident week-by-week gave [the learners] a feeling of genuine progress.

(Assinder, 1991: 228)

Another technique that I have found to be useful is to encourage learners to become researchers of their own language. Learners, regardless of their level of proficiency, can bring samples of language that they encounter out of class into the classroom. These can be new words and phrases, samples of environmental print that they can capture on their cell phones, snippets of conversation, etc. More advanced learners can become communities of ethnographers, “collecting, interpreting, and building a data bank of information about language in their worlds” (Heath, 1992: 53). Although this can be challenging, it is also rewarding. By becoming ethnographers, students come to appreciate that communication, as well as learning, is negotiated.

Key Principles

1. Provide Opportunities for Learners to Reflect on Their Learning Processes

Reflective learning is fundamental to the whole concept of learner-centeredness. It is also a key component of experiential learning. In experiential learning, the learners’ immediate experiences form the point of departure for the learning

process. They act and then reflect on their learning, and through the act of reflecting, their learning is transformed. Being reflective is not something that comes naturally to all learners, and they therefore need systematic opportunities to think critically about their learning.

On a related point, Benson (2003: 296) notes that learners' choices and decisions ultimately become meaningful through their consequences. He notes that:

Many teachers feel that direction (by the teacher) is justified because it makes learning more efficient. If students decide things for themselves, they will make mistakes and precious time that could otherwise be spent on learning will be wasted. The argument against this is that mistakes are an opportunity for learning. We know, for example, that linguistic errors in speaking and writing may be a form of hypothesis testing that is important to language acquisition.

2. Give Learners Opportunities to Contribute to Content, Learning Procedures, and Assessment

The teacher can plan in advance opportunities to make choices and decisions, or they can arise spontaneously in the course of a lesson. The choices and decisions can be made at different levels involving not just what and how to learn, but also who to work with.

3. Be Guided by Adult Learning Principles When Working with More Mature Learners

Andragogy, or the study of adult learning, had an important influence on proponents of learner-centered instruction. A study by Brundage and MacKeracher (1980), which sets out principles of adult learning, had a significant influence on my own thinking about learner-centeredness in the early 1980s. Their principles include the notion that adults learn best when they are involved in developing learning objectives for themselves that are congruent with their current and idealized self-concept. They also learn best when the content is personally relevant to past experience or present concerns and the learning process is relevant to life experiences.

4. Incorporate Learner Training into the Curriculum

This is an important point: so important that an entire chapter (Chapter 11) is devoted to it later in the book. I have already mentioned the importance of having twin sets of goals in your curriculum, one set devoted to language and the other set devoted to the learning process and learning how to learn. There are two ways of interpreting the concept of learner-centeredness. On the one hand,