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## Classroom management

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- Individual attention

Tisa Rétfalvi-Schär
Annabella Wolloshin
Ehsan Gorji
Kerstin Sandstrom
Gemma Archer
George Murdoch
James Heal
Jamie Clayton
Thomas Ziegelwagner
John Slade
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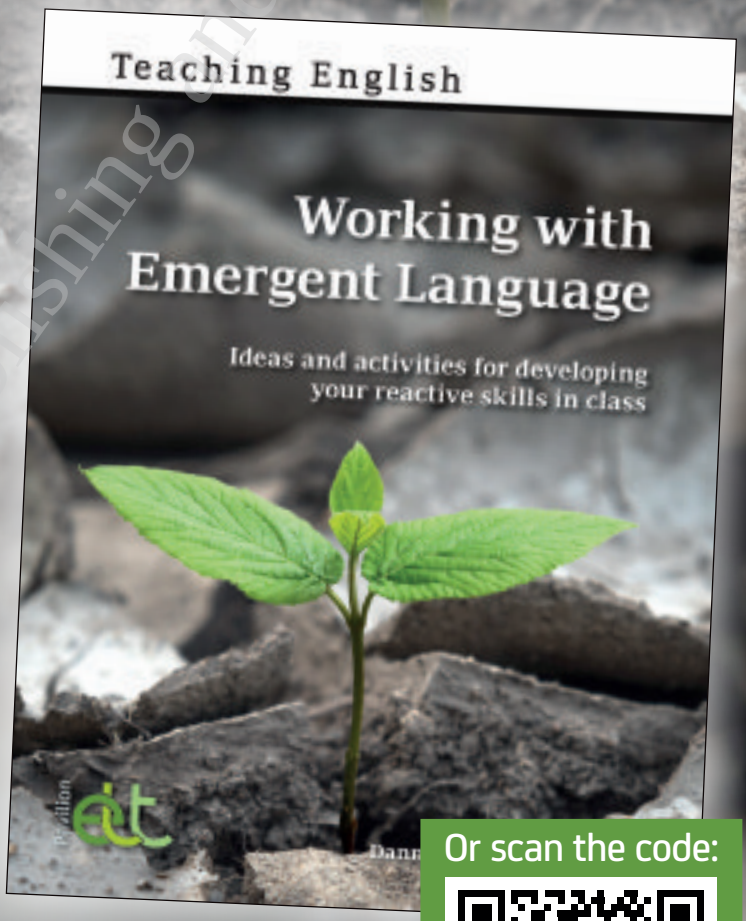
Teaching English

# Working with Emergent Language

## Ideas and activities for developing your reactive skills in class

**Richard Chinn and Danny Norrington-Davies**




This practical addition to the Teaching English series raises awareness of what emergent language (EL) is, highlights its importance and makes the case that focusing on EL is an essential part of learning a language and therefore a skill that every language teacher should possess or work to develop. It offers useful definitions and explains the pedagogy, alongside practical suggestions and opportunities for reflection, to help all teachers work with EL effectively and confidently.

Through reading this book you will understand the benefits and the whats, whys and hows of working with EL, you will gain practical EL insights, tips and ideas, and you will develop the tools to be able to monitor and evaluate your skills in this underexplored but vital aspect of teaching and learning a language. Put simply, your teaching could change for the better!

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# Editorial

## A note from the editor

I'm writing this editorial from a small house in Brazil with exotic birds flying around and monkeys playing in the trees outside. This time last week, I was running professional development (PD) sessions at Oxford University for teachers of English from over thirty different countries. I'm truly struck by this global profession.

The courses were themed and, depending on the tutor, covered: grammar; wellbeing; assessment; materials development; pronunciation; and international communication. Running the sessions required huge amounts of concentration because each participant had things to say and stories to tell. There was a teacher from Afghanistan who had been in hiding there until a few months ago when she was finally allowed to leave and is now living in London. Last year, *MET* featured an article raising awareness of over 100 teachers like her; it was very moving to see her in Oxford. A really happy ending. Also on the PD course, there was a teacher from Ukraine whose country is in the middle of a terrible war, yet she continues to do her job, teach her classes and produce brilliant teaching resources. Doing my own job so close to home – and without any challenging external issues – made me realise how fortunate I am. More of the participants will be featuring in this and future issues.

It was interesting to note that two of the major preoccupations of teachers are wellbeing and artificial intelligence, both subjects we have featured in issues already this year. The expectations of teachers from colleagues, learners, parents, institutions and other stakeholders continues to grow, yet this is rarely reflected in salary. It is already a demanding role, being watched as you work by whole classes, and sometimes by extra observers. On top of that, the administration linked to teaching grows each year, as does the pressure to achieve results. It is not surprising that some teachers can keep it up for only a short time. We need to find ways of keeping teachers in their jobs, as well as recruiting new ones, but, unfortunately, a little like nursing, there is an assumption that there will always be enough. It's quite a gamble to treat the future of health and education in this way!

Artificial intelligence, or AI as it is known, is seen by many as the perfect solution to recruitment issues in many sectors. Although it is not really a threat to teachers, it is a new area we are going to have to be well informed about. Our learners can really benefit from it if they use it wisely. I am sure it will feature in most issues over the next couple of years.

For this issue, we took the theme of classroom management and, as I had just finished compiling the magazine for copyediting and design when I started my course, it was inevitable that I should observe my own ways of handling the class, the room and the equipment. In terms of rooms, it was a typical Oxford college with a wide range of teaching spaces. None of them was huge so most classes had to remain seated once installed around the table. This meant that monitoring was trickier and it was not that easy to listen in on pairs and groups as they worked together. It did mean, however, we could escape to the quad occasionally for larger, mingling activities. One warmer led by a teacher from Chile involved writing a short sentence about yourself on a paper airplane and then we all flew them; on picking them up we tried to work out whose airplane was whose! It was a great activity and a good example of where sometimes an activity starts to take more time than expected and the lesson goes off in a new direction. It was a valid change of plan to go outside and let this activity take up more time. If a senior academic had been passing, I might have struggled to justify it but we definitely never stepped on the grass so no college rules were broken.

In terms of the class itself, I am always conscious of not letting any students dominate but also aware that not everyone has something they want to say. Because all the courses are delivered in English, there is inevitably a range of confidence and accents – this means you have to be very careful not to emphasise the form over the content. Because of my role, I am more experienced in understanding this variety of Englishes than most of the participants – but it is equally important that everyone's English is seen as being of equal importance. This is a delicate balancing trick for the trainer.

As far as the technology was concerned, I tried to avoid PowerPoint-induced boredom, but at the same time there has to be a record of the session for the participants to take away. I used Padlet as a repository for my resources and contributions from the class and this worked well. With a mix of theory and practice – probably 20–80% in favour of practice – we manged to find a good balance. Having two classes doing the same session each day meant I had immediate feedback from the first class as to how to amend the second! Always handy.

Now in Brazil, I switch from teacher to learner. I have a chance to practise my very basic Portuguese and acquire some new expressions and vocabulary. Thus far it is limited to fruit, vegetables and birds; but I have two more weeks to build on my beginner-level oral skills. Life-long learning is not a theory, it really does happen! Wherever you are, I hope you have enjoyed or are enjoying a break from teaching and come back with lots of new ides and the energy to try them out. When I leave Brazil I will remember the proverb I heard in Oxford last week: 'I'm smiling with one eye and crying with the other.' I'm leaving new friends I've made but happy to be back with my old friends and colleagues. I hope you feel the same about the end of the holidays. Have a great September and October!

**Robert McLarty**

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MET modern English teacher

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# *A warm welcome!*

Welcome to the latest issue of *MET!* We hope you enjoy the issue, and go away with lots to think about and plenty of ideas to try in your own teaching, whatever your context.

At the end of every issue we feature a reviews section, and this time we are really excited to celebrate some of our own titles so we wanted to mention them here! If you teach young learners and are looking for even more practical ideas, don't miss two reviews of books from Pavilion ELT at the very end...

If you have dreamed of publishing your own teaching or methodology book or have got an idea you think would support and benefit teachers, then we would love to hear from you. Our Teaching English series is ever growing, plus other ideas are also very welcome. You can find out more about publishing with Pavilion ELT by contacting ellie.thackway@pavpub.com, or you can find out more about the general Pavilion Publishing process at www.pavpub.com/an-authors-guide-to-writing-for-pavilion.

Enjoy this issue, and do let us know on social media about any articles that have particularly resonated with you!

Best wishes,

The Pavilion ELT team

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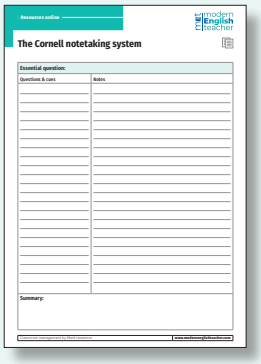


## The Cornell notetaking system

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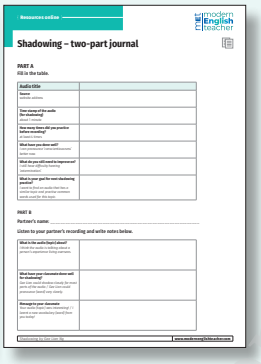


## Shadowing – two-part journal

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## Helpful prompts for features

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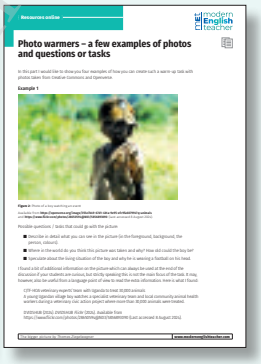
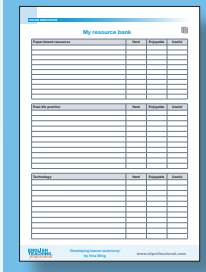



## Photo warmers

Accompanies 'The bigger picture' by Thomas Ziegelwagner, page 81 https://www.modernenglishteacher.com/media/43288/met_335_onlineresources_thebiggerpicture_ziegelwagner.pdf

## Spotlight on past resources

In this issue, our *English Teaching professional* throwback resource is:




## My resource bank

Accompanies 'Developing learner autonomy' by Irina Wing, *ETp* 127 https://www.modernenglishteacher.com/developing-learner-autonomy

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# First thoughts

**Robert McLarty**

takes us through the articles on Classroom managment

I think we all have an image in our minds of certain teachers and how they run a class – it could be a memory from schooldays or a lecturer from university. It might be a teacher trainer or a presenter you have seen, but, whoever it is, you will have noticed the way they manage the class. With English language teaching there is always the dividing line between getting our learners to practise and getting them to learn. Unless we are teaching meaning, explaining a rule or raising awareness of an aspect of pronunciation, we are often to be found setting up an activity, letting it run, monitoring it and feeding back. Whichever of the two roles we are fulfilling, managing the learning is vital. Ensuring you are actively listening, encouraging, helping and responding to questions is part and parcel of a typical lesson.

Class size will always influence how you can teach, we have readers who teach groups of eighty and others who teach only one-to-one. Teaching face-to-face or online will also have an impact, so any suggestions about classroom management always comes with the caveat that your local circumstances will have a large say in how you go about things. The type of learner, young, teenage or adult, is another factor at work and **Ehsan Gorji** looks at the latest generation in his article on the needs of Generation Alpha. He offers a lot of insights into how different they are from previous generations and reflects on the fact that we are the first people to work with them since they were all born in the last fourteen years.

Whatever the age of the learner, they will want to feel at home in their classroom. Well lit, comfortable, uncluttered are some of the conditions we all want in a learning environment; **Steve Tulk** tells us how to go about achieving this, even in a busy school. The importance of the space surrounding us as we learn and teach is critical and should not be overlooked. Relaxed students will be more motivated and engaged and this will often manifest itself in oral communication. Although much of our teaching these days is of a communicative nature and therefore requires teachers to set up activities, encourage discussion and provide feedback, there are many occasions when a quieter teacher is needed. **George Murdoch** looks at this aspect of classroom management and offers some valuable guidance.

However well you set up your classroom and plan your activities, things out of your control can still come into play. Students arriving late, one person not wanting to engage in pairwork, a clash of opinions in the middle of a speaking activity or learners falling out can all impact on the learning environment. When these things happen, order needs to be restored and restorative practice might be of use. **Jamie Emerson** explains this practice in his article and describes how helpful it can be.

During my last teaching stint in New Zealand, a regular aspect of our timetable was a weekly co-teaching slot. This immediately calls for a clear approach to planning and classroom management, two different teaching styles and backgrounds offer variety and complementarity to the learners but can also offer pitfalls. **Tisa Rétfalvi-Schär** has been teaching partnership classes for a few years in Switzerland and shares her experiences with us. If co-teaching means that the class size doubles, then you might well want to consider ways of ensuring each student feels they are getting enough individual time. **James Heal** looks at this important aspect of teaching and recommends some useful strategies for making sure learners feel they are getting enough attention.

As we mentioned above, approaches to teaching have changed over time and learner-centredness has become an important part of our approach. If students are expected to have more say in content and take on more responsibility for their own learning, then the natural consequence of this is that they also have a role to play in managing the classroom as **Adrian Tennant** discusses.

One important difference between online and face-to-face teaching could be the visual aspects of teaching. **Daniel Costa**, who regularly teaches online these days, provides some interesting observations on how to add visual impact to this set-up. To complete a wide range of teaching situations and backgrounds, **Mark Lawrence** provides thoughts on how EAP courses have to be managed.

What began as a general theme for contributors to write about has turned into quite an intriguing one where everybody has observed their own teaching contexts and created readable and engaging articles. I am sure you will get a lot from reading them.

**Robert McLarty** is based in the UK where he writes, teaches and is the editor of *MET*.

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# Classroom management for Generation Alpha language learners

**Ehsan Gorji**

describes how different the next generation of younger learners are.

Our classrooms are welcoming new generations more and more. Generation Z (born 1995–2009) are giving their seats to Generation Alpha (born 2010–present) in Young Learners' classes. Learning experience design for Generation Alpha language learners is different, as their world is different. The good news is that we language teachers are among the few who are experiencing working with them first, and the challenge is that repeating what worked 10 years ago in our classes might simply not work in their classes. What is classroom management for Generation Alpha language learners like?

## How do Generation Alpha learn?

Generation Alpha like their language teacher to play the game, to join the discussion, to help discover what is unknown, and to let them take their learner agency to learn and own the language. They prefer to be given the responsibility of their learning so that they can plan for it, practise at their pace and produce meaningful outcomes. Generation Alpha language learners always seek real-life examples and they frequently ask this question within their learning journey: Why am I doing it?

## What is the teacher's role in Generation Alpha language classes?

Experienced teachers remember the big change in classroom management started with teachers redesigning their role in classes from a knower, a transferer and a facilitator to then an enabler. In fact, the major role a teacher was trying to play in classes was 'to create conditions in which learning took place' (Scrivener, 1994). A teacher was

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a good one if they recognised learning was a cycle, and learners were the ones who did, reflected and continued with learning. Teachers, on the other hand, were doing their best to scaffold the learning cycle with the techniques they had such as eliciting, monitoring and classroom management.

Newer generations entered our classes, and our role as a teacher, little by little, turned to be a collaborator. What did a collaborator do? The collaborator teacher, too, supported learning with putting the learning cycle in the centre of attention, applying techniques such as concept checking, rewarding and error treatment to make sure the language cycle was working well, and also employing approaches like flipped learning to invite more collaboration from learners. The new teacher role brought with it challenges and opportunities: classroom walls were extended and learning was also taking place at homes, on laptops, in subway trains and on early models of smart phones.

Generation Alpha language learners have never been less demanding! They have spoken out their likes, dislikes, preferences and vulnerability. The further we go, the more various the approaches and techniques of teaching become, but it does not mean primary techniques might come in less handy. New generations need teachers who know all the techniques and principles, but choose which one to call upon for a particular classroom need.

## What were your classes like last week?

I guess I can tell you what your last week's teaching was like! You probably had a Young Learners' class with students of 8–12 years old, you had a vibrant teenagers class in the afternoon and you finished one of your days with an adult English language class. The kids' class were supposed to do the flashcard interactive game online as homework, the teens were put into groups of four to compose collaborative writing tasks on Google Docs, and the adults watched the lesson you had provided on the relative clauses, did the following controlled practice afterwards and emailed you the answers.

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> "Generation Alpha like their language teacher to play the game, to join the discussion, to help discover what is unknown, and to let them take their learner agency to learn and own the language."

The latter, too, may have had some challenges with finding the lesson online, meeting deadlines and writing standard emails to you; nevertheless, your prior work on English for employability worked well here and they could have managed to deliver a thorough job. The teenagers might have had teamwork issues doing projects together online, but they are digital natives and the chat scripts they had on social media could have made things easier for them. However, maybe you had some of the most stimulating days of your teaching for the first group – Generation Alpha! These reflective questions might be very familiar to you.

### To what extent am I going to challenge my learners' digital skills?

In other words, am I making the best of their digital abilities in order to reinforce their learning experience?

### Which soft skills are they going to need to enjoy this lesson?

Is it clear to me (and them) which life skills I am employing as they are doing the lesson? For instance, critical thinking, time management, etc.

### What if my learners fail to do the online exercise?

I often provide some notification channels such as emails or tick boxes to make

sure nobody is left behind with the online practice out of the classroom. Next class is too late to be informed.

### How am I going to follow up on the homework they did?

A meaningful online homework assignment gives timely feedback to learners and wins their trust for next submissions.

### How am I going to build the new lesson on what they just did online?

An efficient lesson design *uses* previous online homework in favour of the delivery of homework during the next lesson.

### Have I already informed parents about the homework and how they could help?

You can always count on parents as your team to monitor if learners are on the right track with digital homework and projects at home.

### Have I left any space for my Young Learners' creativity throughout this lesson?

Make sure your homework design lets learners' creativity apply and correct their performance and is not overlooked.

### As part of the lesson is taking place on their or their parents' devices online, have I taken into account how to keep my learners motivated?

In other words, have I gamified my online homework far enough so that my Generation Alpha Young Learners have the motivation to continue with the practices?

### Have I considered a proper game design so that my learners are focused?

Have I gamified my online homework to the correct extent so that my Generation Alpha Young Learners keep focused on the exercises?

### Are my learners safe-guarded doing the lesson online?

Have I carefully checked the online practice delivery platform, and made sure there are no inappropriate ads and no potential for cyberbullying? Does it have some parental controls, and are parents aware of that?

## What are some classroom management tips in teaching Generation Alpha?

Classroom management for Generation Alpha language learners is a wide range of careful and thoughtful practices, which will help us provide a fun, safe, motivational and efficient land for every learner to co-create their learning. This co-creation is a delicate design which could turn into a chaotic mismatch if not given sufficient care. First, I would like to highlight the very fact that Generation Alpha English learners are not aliens getting off their Nolan-film UFOs. New generations are different since they live their time, but this does not mean they are people we cannot communicate with, whose company we are not able to enjoy and who we could not be learning a lot from.

Second, we had better respect the role we are granting them. We cannot showcase something and act something else. If we have agreed to let them co-create their own learning, and if we are another co-creator for the learner – and not the whole provider of their learning – we should keep our promise. Co-creation has noise, excitement for what is being created, love, dislike, agreement, variance, success and failure! Be prepared to experience moments of order and disorder in the classroom, and in the projects and homework beyond the classroom; plan thoroughly, anticipate problems, devise solutions and, of course, expect the unplanned.

Third, use the classroom events and how you and all the learners try to manage them as some golden moments to be familiar with; practise, reflect on and reinforce soft skills. Soft skills are those transferrable future skills our learners need to present in the coming challenges at college and work; therefore, where better and more realistically can they practise such life skills? You can also use the 12-step delivery and monitoring model I introduced in the article 'Teaching soft skills in Young Learners' language classes' (Gorji, 2024), to take care of life skills for Generation Alpha language learners.

Teaching languages is a dynamic industry thanks to numerous factors, more importantly the new generations who enter classrooms. They live their own world, which is the best thing they can bring to classes. Their points of view, hopes, fears, worries and motivation should be respected and recognised, and employed wisely in the design of learning experiences and management of the class. Are you ready to redesign your classroom management approaches and skills?

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**Ehsan Gorji** is an Iranian teacher and teacher educator with 18 years' experience in the field of English language education. He collaborates on various ELT projects with different language schools around the globe. Ehsan currently owns and manages THink™ Languages, and also works as a TED-Ed Student Talks Leader.

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# Classroom management or managing classrooms?

**Steve Tulk**

looks at an important aspect of the learning environment.

An edition all about classroom management? What a great idea. As principal of one of London's busiest schools of English, I literally manage classrooms every day.

I manage classroom quality; the lighting; the decoration; the noticeboards; the seating; the spillages and the overflowing bins; the forgotten bags and phone chargers; the window cleaning; and the supply of classrooms when we are bursting at the seams.

Yes, I do know that's not what classroom management means to most ELT teachers. But classroom 'environment' management is incredibly important.

## Important for our students

The classroom environment plays a key role in shaping the student's experience of our schools – and their learning experience. When we create spaces that are comfortable, engaging and supportive, we are making it easier for our students to learn more and succeed in reaching their language goals.

To start, let's consider the 'this is our space' philosophy that sets out to create a sense of belonging and community.

My school, like many of yours, operates on a continuous enrolment model, with students joining on any Monday through the year, and leaving on any Friday. This is the ultimate in flexibility, giving students the course dates and length that suits their needs. However, as class sizes flex, as student numbers rise and fall, the temptation is to move the students to larger or smaller classrooms.

As students move from one room to another, the sense of 'this is our space' is lost – along with any sense of belonging they might have and any sense of community building that they may have developed. Keeping students in the same room for a lengthy period – say a 12-week book turnaround – has the benefit of allowing the students to make the room their own. They can put their work on the boards and take a regular seat. They know that this is the 'B1+ room' and are ready welcome newcomers to the tribe. They feel at home.

And feeling at home helps them to relax, engage and learn. It helps them to feel more confident, to feel safe to express themselves and to get down to the business of goal achievement. So my advice is this: for happy students, stop moving rooms.

It's not always possible, so there are things we can do that help us when we do need to move students around the building.

Make sure all rooms are equally well lit, well ventilated, and all have the same level of comfort in seating and decoration. Why? Well, nobody likes to feel they got 'the dud', do they? Nobody wants to feel consigned to the broom cupboard.

Teachers can also help the transition from one room to another by simply taking some work from the students and putting it up on the board in the new room before they arrive for their first class. If your school is one that does need to move students from

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room to room quite frequently, consider building community and belonging in other ways – through class routines, team songs and other rituals.

'This is my space' is important. Students who feel more at home will achieve more.

## Important for our teachers

As teachers (and in my case, as a former teacher) we all have a tendency to feel territorial – it comes with the territory, doesn't it? We prepare our lessons in one place, we teach in another (maybe two or three others) and we can never find our favourite book when we need it – and someone is always sitting in 'our seat' in the teachers' room.

As much as students like to stay in one room, so do teachers. I'm a firm believer in committing teachers to rooms, levels and classes for full terms. There are so many benefits to doing this that it would be another article altogether. Beyond staying in one room, the environment that we teach is central to the quality of teaching and the experience of the teacher.

A good classroom environment means better teacher-student relationships, leading to more meaningful and enjoyable interactions. It means better work-life balance, as well-equipped classrooms cut down on prep and setup time. It also leads to better job satisfaction and, ultimately, improved teacher retention.

So how? How do we do this?

Here are my three top tips for making the classroom environment better for teachers:

- **Give teachers space.** Whether it is mobile storage that moves from room to room with them, or actual fixed storage in the classroom, a tidy environment (and the ability to keep it tidy easily) contributes to a clear mind and reduces teacher stress levels.
- **Keep it comfortable.** And I don't mean over-stuffed armchairs with foot stools. I mean chairs that are up to the job; lighting that works and that doesn't strain the eye; rooms with clear sightlines, so all students are visible without neck-straining; temperature control that the teacher can easily access; natural lighting; and opening windows. Keep classrooms looking fresh and get repairs taken care of quickly.
- **Remove the tech-stress.** A no-brainer, right? Make sure new teachers get tech inductions; make sure long-term teachers get regular tech training; and above all, make sure the technology works and that there is someone to help out – quickly and efficiently – in a tech emergency. We all have them!

## Important for business

I worked in a school for a while where the most visible classroom was always the least tidy. For anybody visiting – parents, agents, prospective students – that was the room they saw, and that was how they imagined our teaching environment. Needless to say, when I got the job of being 'the boss' that room was tidied PDQ.

Keeping rooms tidy is, obviously, as important for our own peace of mind as it is for when our agents visit. But it goes beyond tidiness.

Students who enjoy their learning environment will tell their agents and their friends. They will give positive reviews on social media such as Google, TrustPilot and Feefo. They will extend their stays. Classrooms that are designed to encourage learning will lead to more and more student success stories – and we all know that student success stories lead to more and more students joining us.

When we feel at home, we want to share our experiences with the world – but equally, when our classroom is uncomfortable, when we move every week, when two out of three chairs have stains on them, when the teacher's desk is cluttered, students *will* share this. They *will* tell their agents. They *will* put this in their three-star reviews of the school. Let's aim for five stars.

## Get started

Managing our classroom environment is an essential part of our school routine. It's crucial for our students, our teaching colleagues and for our business success.

I suggest taking a two-pronged approach to getting started.

Firstly, work with your academic team to see how you can keep students and teachers in the same room for as many weeks as possible.

- Identify 'flex rooms' which are able to adapt to smaller or larger groups.
- Look at your recent numbers in all of your classes and levels and identify those which are regularly small, large or variable.
- Identify trends in your future bookings.
- Build your classroom schedules around this data, rather than a gut feel.

Secondly, carry out a classroom audit. Don't do it yourself. Get the teachers to do it. But don't get them to do their own rooms. What? Why?

Well, the longer we spend in a room, the more 'blind' we become to its faults and glitches. By going into another teacher's room with a checklist of things to look for, a teacher will be a far more efficient 'auditor'. Then take the audit results and build a logical, priority-based worklist. And then get cracking!

Providing a good classroom environment is one of the cornerstones of a successful language school. With a few tweaks and some adjustments, we can make a big difference all round. It's time to block some space in your diary and make the time to get your classrooms really working for you.

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# When teachers go quiet

**George Murdoch**

suggests when we need to hold back on teacher talk.

ELT classrooms are not normally quiet places. Teachers nowadays are encouraged to create a stimulating, supportive classroom environment where learners are actively engaged in interesting, interactive activities. Setting up and running such activities requires plenty of classroom talk – both between the teacher and class, and among students themselves as they complete pair and group work activities. The classroom 'buzz' that results can almost be viewed as a hallmark of learner-centred, communicative language teaching – in contrast to previous eras when lessons were more teacher-controlled, and student oral involvement was closely tied to reinforcement of target language forms.

Observers supervising classroom teaching today expect to see lessons where students communicate with one another, as well as with the teacher, at different stages of a lesson. They will not be impressed if they find students spending large parts of the lesson simply working silently on completing a grammar worksheet, or writing an essay on a subject that has been given to them without any brainstorming or preparatory group work. The kind of collaborative learning that we value inevitably involves a lot of talking; teachers need to: explain language points; set up activities; ask questions; give instructions; and provide feedback and emotional support. Students need to: ask and answer questions; brainstorm ideas; take part in information gap activities; perform role plays; take part in discussions; and report back after completing group tasks.

> "There is perhaps a danger that modern English teachers may feel a pressure to ensure that students are almost always communicating orally."

While in no way wishing to challenge the need for our classrooms to provide a lively learning environment that features plenty of talk and oral interaction, there is perhaps a danger that modern English teachers may feel a pressure to ensure that students are almost always communicating orally. Teachers may mistakenly assume that communicative methods require them to keep students involved in speaking

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activities during class time, while also demonstrating their own engagement orally in different ways: presenting and clarifying language points; providing instructions for classroom activities and tasks; intervening to make sure students are carrying out activities correctly; correcting language errors; and giving feedback on presentations. They may well equate good teaching with showing active engagement through teacher talk at all phases of a lesson, forgetting that there are moments during a lesson when quiet or silences is needed, for the sake of both teacher and students (though not necessarily at the same time).

In this article, I want to raise awareness of those key stages of a lesson when a positive learning environment is facilitated by the teacher consciously and strategically disengaging from talking to the class or individual students. It is important to emphasise that when a teacher refrains from talking at these moments, this does not indicate any weakness in management of the classroom learning environment or lack of concern for learners' progress and welfare – quite the opposite, in fact.

## Extending wait time

One key phase of a lesson when teachers need to keep silent for a sufficiently lengthy time is after directing a question to an individual student in the class. Often there is a pause before the student answers. The wait time required for an answer or reaction from the student concerned makes many teachers feel uncomfortable. They may think this creates an awkward atmosphere and interrupts the smooth flow of the lesson. As a result, they are eager to fill the space with a comment or quickly seek a response from another student in the class. However, this strategy will naturally damage the original student interlocutor's confidence. Extending the wait time for a student response is actually a good idea if it gives the nominated student a chance to formulate an answer. Allwright & Bailey (1991:107–108) reviewed several studies on the effects of increasing teacher wait time. They found that this strategy not only increased significantly the *quantity* of students' responses but also their quality. Another advantage is that the extra time enables other students in the class to come up with an answer to the teacher's question. Tennant (2024) highlights the importance of longer wait time for students who need time to translate the teacher's question into their first language, and then perhaps compose the answer in their own language before answering in English.

> "Extending the wait time for a student response is actually a good idea if it gives the nominated student a chance to formulate an answer."

Allwright and Bailey (1991) also point out that it can often be beneficial for teachers to hold back from immediate correction of errors since excessive teacher correction can discourage students from trying to communicate in the classroom. Refraining from teacher correction of spoken errors also means that other students have the chance to offer corrections themselves. Another benefit is that peer correction may be better tolerated by the nominated student, who sees the correction as a form of peer support. Encouraging peer correction also helps to establish a more participatory, less teacher-centred

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classroom environment. Exercising the option to keep silent is always a good idea for teachers if it results in more learner involvement and boosts oral confidence.

## Letting students talk

There are times when the teacher is best advised to relax over-zealous management of class activities, even remain silent for periods of time, to allow students more freedom and opportunity to develop their fluency. An example of this would be when a teacher is teaching a unit of an intermediate level coursebook focused on the topic of education, and the language focus in the unit is phrases used for agreeing and disagreeing. A discussion task at the end of the unit might get students to work in groups to consider the case of an academically gifted teenage boy who wants to drop out of school to pursue a career in pop music. However, his parents and teachers are very opposed to this idea. The group task involves students meeting to discuss the situation, adopting specific roles: gifted student; class teacher; headmaster; counsellor; and classmate. The role cards given to each student in their groups outline their suggested personalities and attitudes, along with reminders of the argumentative phrases they could use during the discussion. Students are given task instructions to conduct the meeting for a set length of time and arrive at a decision about the teenager's future.

Once the task has been explained and groups have been set up, many teachers will feel it is their responsibility to closely monitor the way the role play is carried out, intervening and interacting with students to ensure that the task is completed in 'the correct way' according to the instructions given, and to prompt students constantly to use the recommended agreement and disagreement phrases. However, allowing students to carry out the task in whichever way they want, using whatever language they themselves come up with, may be much more effective in terms of developing their independence, fluency and overall engagement with the task. If teachers can restrain their instinct to intervene to make sure the activity is run exactly according to the instructions, it will help students to become more resourceful and confident. It can also produce more interesting and creative outcomes, even though they may be rather different from those anticipated by the teacher!

It should not, however, be assumed that the task-management strategy described above will result in the teacher sitting by idly during the discussion stage of the task. Instead, the teacher will be quietly monitoring how the groups are performing. After the groups have reported back on their discussions and decision about what should happen to the high school student, the teacher can then give valuable feedback on the different groups' performances and address any important language issues that have arisen across the groups. Giving such feedback after the completion of the task will almost certainly be more impactful from students' perspective than interrupting the flow of the actual task discussions. Allowing students fuller control of a productive phase will produce a different dynamic in a lesson, which can considerably improve their oral participation, output and motivation.

## Stepping back during presentations

During many productive activities there is a need for teachers to relax tight control of students' linguistic output and avoid giving too much feedback on performance. This point is particularly relevant to the handling of student presentations. Naturally the teacher must give much plenty of input at initial stages by: explaining how the presentations are to be organised; explaining the topic and sub-topics; the number of students involved; the different parts of the presentations; as well as the time limits for each one. There will normally be a certain amount of teaching, too, of the formulaic language associated with presentations like:

'*The topic of my presentation today is*'
'*Now let's look at*'
'*The first slide shows*'
'*Does anyone have any questions?*'

The teacher may also have a video of a presentation that can be shown to students, asking them to analyse its positive and negative features. At this stage the teacher is likely to be interacting with students a lot to ensure they get a clear idea of the elements of a good presentation like paying attention to clarity of speech and body language.

However, once the preparatory stages of the task have been completed, it is important for a teacher to step back and let each student complete their practice performance without providing oral correction or advice, even if there are serious flaws. The reasons for this are both psychological and practical. Students need to benefit from the satisfaction of completing a presentation which they have created themselves. Any interruption by the teacher to criticise or correct spoken language weaknesses, spelling mistakes

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on the slides, poor body language, and so on, will affect confidence levels and make it difficult to complete the performance. In any case, it is far better if initial feedback comes from the other students in the class, who can be asked to identify some good points about the presentation and give one or two suggestions for improvement. Prioritising student feedback also signals to students that their own thoughts are valued and gives them an excellent opportunity to develop their fluency. If there are important points about the presentations that have not been touched on during the student feedback phase, then the teacher can point these out in a final round-up at the end of the task.

## Facilitating reading in class

Stepping back from being the centre of attention is often a wise strategy for a teacher to facilitate learning. In fact, a teacher's effectiveness depends crucially on the ability to recognise the moments when it is better to switch from taking centre stage to adopting a quieter, supportive role while students work more independently in the classroom. If we think about the teaching of reading, the pedagogic approach will be influenced by our knowledge that reading is not only a text-driven process but one that is cognitive and interactive (Carrell *et al.*, 1988). As a result, there is a need for students to activate the background knowledge and experience relevant to the topic of any reading text. Pre-reading questions are therefore important to elicit information and personal experience relevant to the text topic. The teacher can also prime students by getting them to brainstorm ideas in small groups or discuss a set of topic-related statements. Such warm-up activities are very learner centred and produce lots of student talk.

At a later stage of the lesson, the teacher may want students to read a section of the text more closely and intensely to fully understand the author's ideas and respond personally to them. Clearly, it will be beneficial for students to become accustomed to carrying out such deeper reading and thinking activities in a quiet classroom. The teacher can facilitate such a quiet reading phase by resisting the temptation to take the opportunity to offer words of advice or support to individual students. If there is a need to give individual support, this can be done later when students are engaged in post-reading activities.

## Keeping quiet during peer observations

The need for teachers to closely monitor their speech extends beyond basic teaching situations to aspects of the professional development programme in a language teaching institution. Many in-house professional development activities will involve some kind of short presentation, followed by an open-floor discussion of the chosen topics, for example, managing the classroom effectively or ways of improving students' motivation. During such sessions, it is clearly important that teachers should be willing to speak up and express their ideas freely.

However, during peer observations, teachers need to restrain their impulse to talk spontaneously and give their immediate reactions to lesson events. Being in the unfamiliar situation of an observer in a colleague's classroom can lead some teachers to start talking to individual students in that class before the lesson begins, or possibly afterwards. However, such exchanges might be unsettling if the observe feels nervous or has had class management issues with these learners. Certainly, the observer should not at any stage seek to draw out students' views about the teacher's performance or their reactions to lesson activities. Such enquiries could be seen as undermining the teacher's authority and affect the value of the whole peer observation process, which is intended to support a colleague's professional development.

It is also not a good idea to give detailed feedback to the teacher immediately after the lesson. The observed teacher might well be feeling tired or stressed at the end of the lesson, so not in the right frame of mind to receive any critical comments. The teacher observer also needs to review the notes taken during the lesson, reflect on the success of the lesson, identify the positive features and consider what suggestions could be made to improve the teacher's performance in the future. Beforehand there may have been a discussion between the teacher and observer about what aspects of the lesson would be useful to focus on during the peer observation, for example, the clarity of instructions or use of different error correction strategies. In this case, the observer needs to review data collected from the lesson before giving helpful feedback on the agreed topic.

## Conclusion

The goal of teaching is surely to build students' confidence and ability to communicate effectively inside and outside the English language classroom. To be successful in this endeavour, teachers need to modulate their own involvement and degree of teacher talk in line with the requirements of varied classroom activities. Interacting orally with students is essential at certain stages of a lesson; keeping quiet at other stages to give learners the opportunity to work independently and develop fluency is equally important. Making strategic decisions about the right time to talk is also relevant to professional development situations – sometimes holding back is essential!

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