

TEACHING BEGINNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Annotation: This article focuses on the importance of language assessment, testing, and the importance of English language assessment and control, which are used in effective lessons using modern methods for assessing productive learning processes and their effectiveness have been selected

Key words: Contemporary, relatively, Initially, fluency, skimming, scanning, deducing, challenging, threatening, spontaneous

Most of the major publishers now produce series of graded readers. They are very varied and include contemporary fiction, as well as classics and books of films. The wide range of titles means that it is relatively easy for a student to choose a book that fits their interests, or for a teacher to choose a class reader that will appeal to a given class. The activities in this section fall into two parts: activities which can be used when the whole class is using a single reader; and activities to be used when students are able to select their own reader from the school library, a bookshop or a school supported mail order scheme.

These activities aim to motivate students to read, and to develop as independent learners. Initially, students will need to be supported through the reading process. This can be accomplished by dealing with problems of comprehension and vocabulary, setting realistic reading targets and providing appropriately challenging tasks. This will help to give students the confidence they need to read independently in their own time. Activities in this section allow students to practice the skills of skimming, scanning, and deducing from

context, as well as creating an opportunity for fluency practice. Students will also be able to extend their vocabulary and develop their writing skills.

The word ‘icebreaker’ has been part of English teaching terminology for a long time, which is probably a fair indication of the necessity for activities which can be used at the beginning of a course. For adults, going into a classroom, a place capable of stimulating some possibly unpleasant memories, is hard enough, without the expectation that one will have to communicate to strangers, and in a foreign language. For schoolchildren, the playful nature of language learning needs to be communicated when a group and a teacher are first brought together, if there is to be a positive working relationship. Many private language schools bring students from a variety of cultures and backgrounds together, students who may have little in common, apart from a desire to learn English.

It is necessary to ‘start out on the right foot’ if a group is to work purposefully together. The activities in this section aim to get students working together in English, with tasks that are challenging but not threatening. Many of them help students to get to know each other, to get used to one another’s English, and to relax in an uncritical atmosphere. Some activities also allow the teacher to stand back, observe group dynamics, and assess student needs. These activities may be used when a new group comes together, or when a teacher takes over an existing group. Some may be used in a school which operates a rolling intake, where new students need to be welcomed into a class which has already assumed an identity.

Scripted dialogues have always been a part of language teaching, whether contrived and wooden, or authentic and fresh. They can be found in coursebooks, may be written by teachers themselves, or can be taken from radio, films or TV programmes. In this section we are concerned with the use of short recorded dialogues and their transcripts, not primarily for developing listening skills, but as the basis for more intensive language work. Dialogues can be used

to teach new vocabulary in a clear context, to present functional language, and to introduce new structures; as well as to present and practise stress, rhythm and intonation. Before using a dialogue, it's always best to make sure that you are fully aware of the phonological features it contains. Marking the transcript for pronunciation, in the way that has been shown opposite, helps to remind you of these features – in addition to the target language. It can also serve as the basis for the students' written record. In this section the activities are divided into two parts: Presentations and Practice Activities. These are cross-referenced so that it is clear which activities may most easily be combined within a single lesson.

Everybody needs warmers and fillers. Warmers come at the beginning of a lesson; fillers in the middle or at the end. When an activity is used as a warmer, the teacher's aim may be to get the students talking and thinking in English, motivating them and getting them to think about the topic to come. The aim may also be to get the students working as a group. Or again it may be to avoid a predictable beginning to each lesson. When an activity is used as a filler, the teacher's aim may be to provide a change of pace, fill an awkward gap or finish off the lesson on a positive and purposeful note.

On a linguistic level, warmers and fillers can be used to recycle previously taught language, as well as diagnose problems before an input stage or test after new language has been introduced. They can be used to practise the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. It's worth trying a range of activities with your students, so that you find which ones work best. These can then become regular sessions, giving your students something to look forward to, and providing continuity within the class syllabus.

Circle activities are a way of providing a structure which enables and encourages students to interact in small groups. They take students out from behind their desks and away from their textbooks. The activities which follow share a format. They give a variety of structures or frameworks for student interaction (for example, round the circle, across the circle, within the circle,

circles within circles, students outside and students inside the circle). These frameworks give less confident students a space within which they can practice their English, as well as giving more confident students a more defined role. They can also be used for classes with poor dynamics. Circle activities can be used for the presentation, practice, testing and recycling of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, as well as for fluency practice and needs analysis. When a circle is used for presentation, it will normally include the whole class. However, a large class may be divided into smaller circles for practice. Circles require minimal preparation and are extremely flexible. They are excellent lessons to 'have up your sleeve' for occasions when you are asked to teach with little or no warning.

Producing their own questionnaires can help students in a variety of ways. Firstly, it allows them the time to formulate questions before they use them in a communicative context. Secondly, students gain in confidence when they are able to use language that they have produced themselves, and know to be correct. This then provides a solid foundation for more spontaneous interaction. Questionnaires are particularly useful for recycling language, both within a semi-controlled framework, and subsequently in a freer context. In native-speaking countries questionnaires can help students to prepare themselves for confident interaction with native speakers, as well as providing the context in which students may approach members of the public.