TEACHING BEGINNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Annotation : *Language is the best means of communication. In the modern globalization era it is not enough to be able to speak one language to communicate with the outside world. It is strongly supported that children should begin learning a foreign language as soon as they start school. They faster become familiar with a strange language, improve their hearing ability to understand new words as time goes by and learn new words.*

Key words: *Contemprory fiction, scheme, challenging, skimming, scanning, icebreaker, questionnaires, gestures, flashcards, brosheres.*

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.

Question Types

Encourage your students to use a variety of question types in their questionnaires, for example:

- open-ended questions

- yes/no questions

- wh- questions

- true/false statements

- multiple choice

- ranking four items in order of importance,

preference etc.

- 'finish the sentence' or gap-fill sentences

- 'what would you do if … ?' questions

Make **_a word box_** for each class at the beginning of the course. This box will fill up with new lexical items that occur in the class and provide you with a valuable

resource. Explain to your students that the box is a bank of all the words they will learn and practise. Use these activities frequently for lexical practice. Choose a cardboard box with a lid and cover it with colourful paper. It should be quite big as it will fill up very quickly! Cut up pieces of durable card in advance. Cards can all be the same colour, or different. A new colour can be used to show when new students have come into the class, or a different colour can be used for each week. This will help you to decide how recent the vocabulary to be recycled should be. Colourcoding can provide a helpful topic guide if the course is topic-based. Alternatively, colour-code the cards according to verbs, nouns, phrasal verbs, adverbs, etc.

What can be put in the box? Not only individual words but also collocations, set expressions, idioms, phrasal verbs etc. Additional useful information that may be marked on the cards can include phonemic script, small drawings, opposites, (partial) synonyms, definitions, example phrases, and indication of register or connotation. Students should not be encouraged to put all of these on the cards, but it is useful to make them aware of some of the possibilities. At lower levels it can be useful to mark the stress patterns on the other side, using bubbles. This helps the student reading the word to pronounce it in recycling activities, and creates opportunities for pronunciation games. Students enjoy being responsible for putting new words in the box. A class rota (daily/weekly) generally works well. Pair students up for this so that choosing the words for the box becomes a communicative activity in itself.

This section is concerned with the use of monolingual, or 'English-English,' _dictionaries_. Most of the major publishers offer a wide range. Monolingual dictionaries come in different sizes and vary in the features they offer. These features may include phonemic transcriptions showing word stress, definitions pitched at different levels, and information on how the word is used to 'do things'. They may also offer information on grammar, collocation, connotation, as well as denotation, partial synonyms and antonyms. A number of dictionaries also provide guidance on

register and social acceptability. The activities in this section show the dictionary as an everyday tool in the language classroom, and also equip students with strategies needed for their own independent study. Activities cover familiarization with monolingual dictionaries, the use of dictionaries to diagnose student errors and expand errors, and the development of specific dictionary skills.

In this section, the activities assume the availability of a class set of dictionaries. The first part (Familiarization) helps students to get to know their way around a dictionary, and what it is capable of. The second part (Problem Diagnosis) shows them how to use a dictionary to help them with their individual language difficulties. The third part (Practice Activities) presents a variety of other dictionary activities.

Many English language teachers now have access to ***TV and video recorders.*** Many schools keep recordings of programmes taken directly off-air, as well as commercial videos designed for language learners. In this section we are chiefly concerned with using off-air recordings, including news programmes, documentaries, dramas, pop programmes and chat shows. Students and teachers alike have mixed feelings about the role of video in language-learning. Some students might see a video lesson as a 'soft option' whereas others may see it as a bewildering or even threatening listening exercise. Some teachers feel a degree of professional guilt about using the video in class and tend to overburden students with lengthy 'as you listen' comprehension questions and checklists. On the other hand, most students enjoy using what is probably the primary means of communication in the modern world – television. This gives the teacher a classroom tool that comes from the real world, and towards which most students feel a great deal of goodwill. The visual aspect of video can be used to support learners by providing a context, as well as a guide to meaning. If this relationship is exploited positively, students can be supported in their exposure to a valuable authentic source, and given a great deal of confidence as English language users. This section is divided into two parts: Techniques and Resources and Activities. In the first part we look at a variety of basic techniques that can be used with almost any video. We

also offer a number of ideas for using less conventional resources, such as subtitled films. The second part comprises group activities which can be used with a variety of students and types of off-air recording. They involve intensive and extensive listening activities and use the techniques listed in the first part.

Beginners have had so little exposure to the English language, they have absolutely nothing to build on. Naturally, you`ll start with the basics, but consider what they will need to know first. Does it make sense to start with a list of foods in English? Or colors or numbers? Probably not. What they need to know first is how to introduce themselves and greet others. The natural progression from there is the use of the verb *"to be"*. For example, *I am from…, He is from…,* etc.

Then you will progress on to possessives. For example, *my country, your name, his family* and so on. Give priority to the language they will need first and foremost.

Don`t make assumptions about what your students know. Assume they know nothing. For example, to practice the verb *to be,* you ask them what nationalities they are only to find out they don't know how to say nationalities in English. Countries and nationalities should be taught first, and then practiced with the verb "to be". And this goes for a multitude of vocabulary and expressions. Don`t assume a student will be able to answer you if you ask, "How are you?". Absolute beginners won`t know how to reply, unless you`ve specifically taught them.

Beginners will tell you they don`t speak English – till the very end of the course. What they are thinking is that they don`t speak English fluently, or like you, for example. But make sure they are aware of what they can do. If on the first day of class they have learned to greet each English, end your lesson by celebrating this, "Congratulations! you can now introduce yourself and greet each other in English". Take the focus away from what they can`t do and focus on what they can do instead. This proves to be tremendously encouraging!

Beginners may not have enough knowledge to understand explanations, synonyms, definitions, and others you describe with words. Instead, use their senses to maximize learning. The easiest to use with beginners are *visual aids* like **flashcards**, but don`t forget to include plenty of **gestures**, as well as real life objects.

The use of realia will allow you to utilize several senses at the same time, and it is often more engaging than two – dimensional pictures. Don`t forget to use things they can smell and taste too !

Next one is they haven`t been exposed to the English language enough, try to minimize their reading of dialogues and conversations, and act out the situations, instead. Consider this: when you teach students to reply to a "How are you?" do you have them read this short exchange first or just act it out directly? Of course, it`s a lot better to simply show them how to reply. This goes for most of the expressions and functions they will have to learn.

It is essential for absolute beginners to review what they have previously learned, and it`s a great idea to start each lesson with a brief review. But you can also re-use previously taught language points and introduce them into a new context. Say you are now teaching your students how to **ask for directions**. Student A is walking down the street with a friend, student B, when they run into Student C. A introduces B to C (they review how to introduce someone), and then C asks A for directions.

Just because students are beginners, it doesn`t mean they can`t handle real life situations. You should still teach in context, and provide as many examples of real life situations and real props as you can. Even though real maps, **brochures** or catalogues are filled with vocabulary they won`t understand, it is important to help your beginners deal with, precisely, these types of things. Show them how to pinpoint the information they may need like a phone number, address or website. Make sure they understand that the entire brochure the important thing is that they learn to obtain what they need from it.

By the time your beginners finish their course, they will probably still not feel confident enough to say they "speak" English. Try providing them with some specific examples of what they can do now: go shopping by themselves, ask for assistance, order food in a restaurant, ask etc… Ask them to remember what it was like when they knew none of this. Tell them they are your heroes for learning so much and overcoming their language barriers. They will feel like heroes, too!

ESL beginners may not be able to say a whole a lot, after all their vocabulary and grammar are rather limited. But in order to start speaking, they have to start listening. And not just listening to the correct pronunciation, intonation and stress. I mean really listening. For example: a) Listening for meaning. b) Listening for context. c) Listening for real comprehension. You may think there is not a whole lot beginners can comprehend, but you will be surprised. Try playing these simple listening games. They may be easy, but for students who are just starting listening games. They may be easy, but for students who are just starting out in their English learning journey, they can be highly effective ways to train in the basic skills they will use on a daily basis in the near future.

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