

ELT Methods and Approaches*

Materials for use in teacher preparation courses

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STAGE I. YOUR APPROACH TO TEACHING

1. Imagine you are the teacher in the following situation:

T: "Why are you so late?"

L: "I'm sorry, my mother she is take to hospital."

[Example adapted from Edge, J. 1989. *Mistakes and Correction*. Longman.]

➤ What would your response be? Would you correct? If yes, what and how?

2. You are going to teach a class of beginners.

➤ Briefly outline your teaching focus during the first 50 hours.

STAGE II. PRINCIPLES & PRACTICES

1. Following is a brief description of some imaginary theories about language and language learning, as well as teaching procedures and materials.

➤ Link each set of procedures and materials with one or more of the theories.

'THEORIES' OF LANGUAGE

- a. Languages are like algebra: logical systems with a clear & fixed structure. Nevertheless the structure of each one is unique.*
- b. All languages share the same basic structure. Their differences lie in vocabulary and pronunciation.*
- c. Languages are different in most respects. Nevertheless they share one central characteristic: communication of meaning requires appropriate combination of verbal and non-verbal elements.*

* I designed and developed these materials for the component 'ELT Methods and Approaches' of the RSA/Cambridge Diploma and Certificate courses, the BA course 'Introduction to ELT' (University of Indianapolis, Athens), as well as various seminars, lectures and presentations, between October 1994 and July 2001.

'THEORIES' OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

- d. Learning comes about through negative experiences.*
- e. Learning takes place through individual mental reflection.*
- f. Learning is achieved when both body and mind are involved.*

TEACHING PROCEDURES & MATERIALS

- i. As the teacher is explaining a rule he/she slaps learners on the face. The teacher takes care that all learners are equally slapped.*
- ii. As learners are writing the answers to an exercise they occasionally move about on their chairs, stand up and hop for a while, do physical exercises etc. The teacher goes around and urges the less energetic ones to join the others.*
- iii. There is complete silence in the classroom. Learners are involved in writing an exercise, occasionally looking at the rules on the blackboard.*
- iv. All learners have bilingual dictionaries which they use to understand reading/listening texts and translate what they write/say.*
- v. Instruction consists mainly of memorisation of rules and their accurate application in exercises.*
- vi. While learners are speaking the teacher not only corrects their speech, but also their posture, facial expression and gestures.*

- Is there a one-to-one correspondence between the imaginary theories and procedures/materials?
- Is each set of procedures & materials linked to both a 'theory' of language and language learning?

STAGE III. COMPONENTS OF METHODS

1. So far we have looked at the relationship between theories of language and language learning on the one hand, and teaching procedures and materials on the other.
 - What other elements should a comprehensive method include?
2. You will be given a jumbled list of elements which constitute two different methods.
 - Identify the nature of the elements (e.g. theory of language, learner roles, materials etc.).
 - Try to group them according to the method they belong to. What difficulties did you encounter?
 - Are you familiar with any of the two methods, or any of their elements?

STAGE IV. THEORIES OF LANGUAGE & LANGUAGE LEARNING

1. Read the brief outlines of major theories of language and language learning.
 - Are any of these theories or their elements reflected in your teaching practice?
 - Is this the result of a conscious decision on your part?
 - If not, do you think that awareness of these theories can influence your teaching? Why (not)? How?

STAGE V. COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

1. A Quiz on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).
 - In your groups discuss the following statements and decide if they are ‘true’ or ‘false’.
 - Reformulate the ‘false’ statements in a way that they reflect the nature of CLT.
 - a. *CLT is one of the most comprehensive methods.*
 - b. *CLT is based on a detailed theory of language learning.*
 - c. *There are distinct CLT materials.*
 - d. *There are distinct CLT procedures & techniques.*
 - e. *CLT lessons are almost identical.*
 - f. *CLT ideas about learning/teaching foreign languages are new and radical.*
2. The notion of ‘communication’ is central in CLT.
 - Drawing on your experience fill in the following table regarding communication in everyday life:

PURPOSE	
MODE	
ACCURACY	
EXPLICITNESS	

3. CLT advocates learning through communication.

- How can classroom teaching incorporate features of communication?

4. The following table lists a variety of teaching activities.

- Decide on the degree of communication involved (*10* = genuine communication, *0* = no communication).
- Is communication ‘inherent’ in activities, or is it (also) dependent on their treatment by the teacher?
- Be ready to justify your opinions.

<i>Memorising and acting out a dialogue</i>	
<i>Drill</i>	
<i>Answers to comprehension questions</i>	
<i>Information-gap</i>	
<i>Grammatical transformation</i>	
<i>Class survey</i>	
<i>Writing a ‘composition’ / letter</i>	
<i>Class discussion</i>	
<i>Creating a class magazine</i>	
<i>Dictation</i>	

5. Read the following extract from an article.

- Have you experienced similar teaching/learning situations?
- Do you agree with the author's views?
- What solutions can you see?

The 'fluent-but-fossilized' intermediate student

We have all come across them at one time or another. Easily recognizable by their inability to move in any direction except sideways and by the glazing of their eyes when you mention the present perfect tense, I am, of course, referring to students suffering from chronic 'intermediate-itis', students whose fluent and extensive output consists almost entirely of communication strategies and very little grammar -the 'fluent-but-fossilized'. Encouraged to follow the communicative path, these students have become hapless victims of their own success and achieving the goals we set up for them. Every method has its Frankenstein's monsters, grotesque parodies of whatever it is the teaching has emphasized, and these tediously inaccurate chatterers are the unfortunate creations of the communicative approach. In despair, at the end of another seemingly pointless lesson when much was said and all of it wrong, we may even question the whole wisdom of allowing communication in the classroom if we are to get students to improve.

...communicative interaction does hold great potential as an aid to learning, but that standard methodological procedures adopt a rather naïve, hope-for-the-best view of the communicating/learning relationship and may need re-thinking, if we are really to put pressure on students to move on.

[From Johnson, H. 1992. 'Defossilizing'. ELT Journal, 46/2.]

STAGE VI. ECLECTICISM

1. Drawing on your background reading on different methods comment on the following statement:

Teachers need to investigate existing methods, select one that suits their beliefs, teaching style and personality, and develop their skills in using it.

2. The following table contains a brief description of different aspects of eclecticism together with common misconceptions about its nature.
 - Discuss your views on each aspect
 - Assess the importance of each aspect
 - Identify potential practical problems

Eclecticism: Aspects & Misconceptions

<i>INTEREST</i>	<i>Teachers need to use different techniques to hold the learners' attention.</i>
<i>SAFETY</i>	<i>The use of a variety of ideas/procedures from different existing methods will increase the chances of learning taking place.</i>
<i>DIVERSITY</i>	<i>Different learning/teaching contexts require different 'methods'.</i>
<i>FLEXIBILITY</i>	<i>Awareness of a range of available techniques will help teachers exploit materials better and manage unexpected situations.</i>
<i>INEVITABILITY</i>	<i>Informed / principled teaching is bound to be eclectic.</i>

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3. What element(s) do you think can 'make or break' an eclectic method?

STAGE VII. VIEWS ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: NEW vs. OLD

1. List any aspects that you think differentiate modern ideas (i.e. in the last 30 years) from older ones regarding the practice of foreign language teaching.
2. Quiz: Read the extracts outlining views on foreign language teaching.
 - Identify the period they date from.
 - Be ready to indicate and discuss the clues that helped you.

Extract 1. Methods

“... but none of these methods retain their popularity long - the interest in them soon dies out. There is a constant succession of them ... They have all failed to keep a permanent hold of the public mind because they have all failed to perform what they promised: after promising impossibilities they have all turned out to be on the whole no better than the older methods. The methods I have just mentioned are failures because they are based on an insufficient knowledge of the science of language, and because they are one-sided. ... A good method must, before all, be comprehensive and eclectic. It must be based on a thorough knowledge of the science of language ... In utilizing this knowledge it must be constantly guided by the psychological laws on which memory and the association of ideas depend.”

Extract 2. Grammar

“When it comes to foreign language teaching, the generally accepted view is that the same mistaken approach based on the written language, the same kind of school grammars, will be able to work miracles and teach a new language. They never have, and they never will. And even if you actually succeeded in stuffing the pupils' heads with the best grammars ... they still would not know the language! ... Language, moreover, is formed and moulded by the unconscious action of the community as a whole, and like the life of the community is in a constant state of change and development. Consequently, we cannot compress the grammar of a language into a series of rigid rules, which, once laid down by the grammarians, are as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. On the contrary, grammar is what the community makes it; what was in vogue yesterday is forgotten today, what is right today will be wrong tomorrow. ... Even if we further know all the rules of the grammarians, we shall find ourselves unable in actual practice to get very far in stringing our words together or in understanding what is said to us in return.”

Extract 3. The role of learners

“Every individual [has an] ability to instruct himself. The function of a teacher [is] to respond to the learner, not to direct and control him by explaining things in advance. ... Students should look for similarities and differences, generalize their observations, form and test hypotheses, and discover how the language work[s].”

KEY

Extract 1

From Sweet (**1899**, reprinted 1964).

Extract 2

From Wilhelm Vietor (**1886**) ‘Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren’
(‘Language teaching must start afresh’).

Translated by A.P.R. Howatt and David Abercrombie, with Beat Buchmann.
(In Howatt (1984: 340-363). Excerpt from p. 347.)

Extract 3

Excerpts from the discussion of the method developed by
J. J. Jacotot between **1815-1830**.
(Reprinted in Howatt (1984: 150-152).)