

Trinity CertTESOL

Study Resource 3: Methods and Techniques for Teaching English for CertTESOL

You may be a novice to teaching, or an experienced teacher who would like to gain an international qualification and hone your teaching skills. Either way, this module will introduce you briefly to the Teaching Skills component of the CertTESOL course:

- teacher and learner roles
- the importance of grammar
- use of L1 in the classroom
- clarifying new words
- use of resources

*For each **Task**, take a moment to think and make notes mentally or in writing before you look at the suggestions.*

THE TEACHING SKILLS COMPONENT

Teaching practice, reflection and feedback are three of the most important elements of any effective course in teacher education. Teaching skills are complex, and no two teachers will go about it in exactly the same way but there are certain basics which your course providers will aim to pass on to you in order to help you to become not just a qualified teacher, but a good teacher.

Below are some of the questions you may be asking yourself:

- I can't really speak any other languages – does that matter?
- Do teachers work from grammar books? I learnt to conjugate verbs at school but I can't remember how to do it now. Will that be a problem?
- How will I know what to teach?
- I'm worried that I don't speak 'properly' – I have a regional accent, and I don't know if I can get rid of it

This resource aims to go some way towards answering those questions.

Task 1

Which of these statements do you think are true?

- A. We do not need to speak the same language as our learners.
- B. We expect our students to sit quietly and listen to what we have to say.
- C. It is necessary to give the learners a firm foundation in the grammar of the language before we can expect them to be able to operate effectively in English.
- D. New learners have to be taught in their own language until they have a good enough grasp of English to be able to understand our explanations.

A. What language do we use in the classroom?

Statement A. is true as we use English right from the start. Although there are some occasions when teachers may find it easier to use the learners' own language, research shows that learners achieve much more when taught primarily in the language they want to learn. Teachers need to think carefully about the language they use in the classroom. For lower level learners, they need to remember that actions speak louder than words! In TESOL we use a lot of signalling, miming, pictures etc. to help where words would not be understood. This is particularly true with lower level learners, although as they start to make progress, we need to rely on this less and less.

You'll be encouraged to use visual aids, computer images, real objects (realia), video and audio recordings to facilitate successful learning for your learners. As a teacher, you'll learn to give simple explanations and use examples. This means that you don't need to share a language with your learners. We often have learners of different nationalities sharing a classroom, so it is simply not an option in some cases. We hope this will reassure any of you who are remembering rather anxiously your own first foreign language lessons at school. Just to prove to you that it **can** be done, as part of your course you'll be given some lessons in a language unknown to you. You'll finish those lessons being able to do some simple tasks in that language, and the learning experience will have equipped you with some techniques for teaching complete beginners (see Resource 2).

B. Do we expect a quiet classroom?

Absolutely not! We teach language in use, so we expect learners to try out the language in class, and not just with the teacher but also with each other. You may worry that this gives them examples of errors in English but learner-learner

interaction offers so many more opportunities for them to communicate than purely through learner-teacher interaction.

On your course, you'll find yourself devising and organising activities where learners will work in groups in order to practise the new language you've taught them, as well as giving them the confidence to use the language in real life. We use what we call an 'information gap' as the basis of lots of our activities. This is speaking with a purpose. There's something we need to know, and we have to ask someone else in order to find out. When you think about it, this replicates quite a lot of the communication we have in our first language. If you consider the sort of language you use on a daily basis, you may find that much of what you say is aimed at getting or giving information. Learners enjoy this kind of work, which motivates them to learn. We can't expect students to learn an active language by just sitting passively and listening to a lectures on grammar.

C. What about the grammar?

Again, we're teaching language in use, so we want the learners to be able to operate in the language. We achieve this by teaching them functional language which they need to use in real-life situations. Examples include: asking or giving directions in a town, asking for help and offering a solution, greetings, making arrangements, giving an opinion etc. To successfully achieve the purpose of the function the learner will need to use certain grammar structures. For example, to ask for directions, they'll need to be able to ask questions in the present simple. However, we teach from the initial perspective of doing things with language rather than grammatical rules.

Think about in which situations your learners are most likely to need the language, and the sort of contexts which are the most useful. Your own experiences in a country where you didn't speak the language could help you.

Task 2

Where would you be likely to hear and use the following language?

1. Imperatives: *Do this, don't do that.*
2. 'It is...' and 'it's got....'
3. Present continuous tense: *I'm having dinner.*

Suggestions

1. Contexts may include giving directions to a lost tourist in your city, explaining how to cook your favourite dish, reading a manual, etc.
2. These structures are often used to describe things, especially if you've lost them! Other contexts may include telling a friend about something you've bought, writing a description in order to sell something on e-bay, etc.
3. A useful context in the classroom might be saying what you are doing when a friend calls you on the phone (*I'm doing my homework*), or explaining why someone in the office can't come to the phone (*Mrs Free is speaking to a customer at the moment*).

D. Listen to what you say

No, you don't have to speak with perfect accent-less English. Varieties of English including regional accent (both urban and rural) are a fact of life, and there are many different varieties of English worldwide. Students cope astonishingly well with a wide range of accents (including listening to one another). However, dialect (a variation of grammar and vocabulary as well as accent) is a different matter. If you're a teacher of English, you do need to speak and write in the classroom within the recognized conventions of a standard variety of spoken and written English. Most learners will want to learn what they understand as the standard variety of English used in an English-speaking country such as the UK, the USA, and Australia.

You need to grade your language for your level of learners while still keeping it accurate and natural. You do this by avoiding using overly complicated words, speaking slower than normal, and trying not to say too much. It is important to use natural English, such as contractions (we'll instead of we will) as this is the English they will encounter outside of the classroom. It is a feature of standard spoken English to run certain words together and compress some syllables. However, you may need to speak a little more clearly than usual in class and project your voice so you can be heard.

Task 3

How clearly can you explain things to others?

1. Record yourself explaining to someone with limited English how to send a text message, or to use the TV remote.
2. Listen to your recording and analyse your instructions.
 - a. How easily would a learner be able to follow what you say?
 - b. How complex have you made the instruction?
 - c. Do you regularly use five words where one would do?
 - d. How clearly do you speak?
3. Think about how you can improve your instruction and record yourself again.

There are a lot of videos on how to give clear, simple and checked instructions.

- Trinity TESOL's [Youtube channel](http://www.trinitycollege.com/tesolvideo): (www.trinitycollege.com/tesolvideo)
- Macmillan: [Giving instructions](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjcI3J65Nao) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjcI3J65Nao)
- OREA Trainer Blog: [Giving Clear Classroom Instructions](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ig3G2NFZBqw) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ig3G2NFZBqw)

Clarifying New Words

Task 4

There are lots of methods or techniques which don't rely on words. Think about how you might explain the following vocabulary items to a group of students who have limited English.

1. startled
2. bunch (of flowers)
3. boots (footwear)
4. huge
5. sometimes

Suggestions

1. Demonstrate the meaning of the words by doing something to startle the students, or miming. If you know the word is going to come up and might cause problems, you might think ahead and find a picture on the internet. Be clear on whether you are clarifying the word as an adjective or as a verb as this could be either.
2. A simple drawing on the board is effective. Make the point that it refers to more than one flower by asking: *Is it just one flower?*
3. Find someone wearing boots and point to them. If no one is, draw a boot, and point to other types of footwear being worn in the class and ask *Are those boots?*. Other useful question is *When do we usually wear boots?*
4. Huge: hands and arms, voice and body language. So you can indicate with finger and thumb 'tiny', working your way up to arms stretched wide in all directions and 'huge'.
5. A simple way is by drawing a quick and easy chart, showing the days of the week and three actions, e.g. clean teeth: a tick on every day (elicit: I always clean my teeth); drive to work: no ticks (elicit *I never drive to work*); meet a friend: a few ticks (elicit *I sometimes see a friend*).

Note that we are not suggesting that the teacher **explains** the meaning of a word for several reasons. Firstly, the words above are quite simple words. If your learners don't know them, they are unlikely to understand your definition. Definitions can often be more complicated than the lexis they are defining – just look in a dictionary! Even with higher levels, we're more likely to put the word into a context which makes the meaning clear than to give a complex definition. Secondly, it is much more memorable for the learners if they get to figure out the meaning of the word themselves. We tend to involve the learners actively by eliciting rather than telling. Visuals can really help but don't worry if you can't draw very well – you can usually find a good picture online if you plan ahead.

Teaching Resources

Although teachers do make their own materials and devise their own lessons, there are a lot of published resources available. These help teachers decide what is appropriate to teach at a particular level, and provide ideas and materials as well as study resources for the students. You'll discover course books (for students and teachers to follow), recordings, video, reading texts, practice books, and teachers' resource books of games, communicative activities, pronunciation and language practice. While you're training, your tutors will be guiding you to suitable resources.

If you're already committed to a course, you could start a collection of images and objects which might trigger communication amongst your learners. Pictures of people doing things are particularly useful. Remember that your visuals need to be large enough for a group of people to be able to see them.

Task 5

1. You have a set of Russian dolls. How might they be useful in your classroom?
2. You're going to focus on the function of ordering food. What sort of pictures might be useful?

Suggestions

1. The most obvious use is for comparative and superlative adjectives (*bigger than, smaller than, the biggest* etc.). The dolls can also be used for descriptions and order of adjectives: *heavy, light, wooden, colourful, bright, round, tall, Russian* etc.
2. It would be useful to have pictures of different stages in the ordering process – for example, ordering drinks, asking about the menu, pointing out a problem with the food etc. These would be a useful way of introducing the meaning of some of the functional phrases such as *'I'd like a...'* *'Does it contain...?'* etc.

We hope you have enjoyed this introduction to some methods and techniques for the Teaching Skills component of the Trinity CertTESOL course and found it useful.