Programme 1: Planning Your Lessons – teacher support worksheet

If you are a teacher of English, especially if you are working with large classes in difficult conditions, this series of twelve programmes is definitely for you. Our first topic is Planning Your Lessons. The teachers in the programme agree that lesson planning is definitely necessary. But where should you start? This is what two teachers we talked to from Afghanistan said:

‘Without a lesson plan, we should not be entering the class.’ (Khatereha)

‘Teaching is like an art. A teacher should be an artist. A teacher should always try her or his best to have a lesson plan.’ (Zalmina)

Usually teachers are given a syllabus, and often a set textbook to follow. This provides a framework and helps us to map out what areas of language we need to introduce, practise and revise. Sometimes teachers are asked to write a scheme of work for the year or term, based on the syllabus or textbook. Textbooks tell us what to cover but often don’t allow us to practise all the four skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. In their lesson plans, many teachers find ways to introduce more ‘communicative’ activities to develop speaking and listening too.

Daya, from Nepal, thinks it’s a good idea to focus not just on what you are teaching, but on what the learners are learning, and how they are reacting.

There are various ingredients which combine together to make a good lesson. Agnieska, who comes from Poland, believes organisation is important, as well as interesting materials, good relationships, a good atmosphere and good preparation.

Over to you!
In your opinion, what makes a good lesson?

Ask a colleague!
Sometimes the best ideas and solutions come from colleagues. What are the vital ingredients of an effective lesson plan? Discuss this with another teacher and make a list below:

Teachers often use the beginnings and ends of lessons to engage their students in a friendly and personal way, using English naturally. A short ‘warm up’ activity can start the lesson in the right mood and get everyone focussed before we move on to harder things. This Afghan teacher began with greetings and asking about the weather:

‘Good afternoon guys. How are you? (Fine) Everybody’s good? (Yes) What about the weather? The weather is good today. Is it cloudy? (No) No, it’s sunny, yeah? (Yes) So everybody is ready to have a new lesson today? Nobody’s tired? . . .’

Agnieska adds that we should set goals, or lesson objectives.

‘To set goals before starting the lesson, what you want to teach, it is really important, because sometimes you can’t predict what children can do during the lesson.’

We need to include in our plan what we want our students to be able to do by the end of the lesson. For example, “by the end of the lesson students will be able to use three ways to ask permission: Can I?, Could I? and May I...?”
We need to be able to introduce the lesson in an interesting way, without just copying the material from the textbook and without translating.

Sahar from Egypt is teaching the expression “used to”. She explains:

‘I get two pictures of a rich man who has a very expensive car and cigarettes and so on . . . and a very poor person. And I start elicit that it’s the same person. So what happened to him? Now he’s very poor, he lives in a very rural area. So I elicit the language from the students. And from this context I start introducing “used to”. ‘He used to have a car, but now he doesn’t have any.’

She then moves from her example of the poor man who used to be rich to ‘personalise’ the language, first talking about herself and then letting the students talk about themselves but in a controlled way.

You can follow your text book or school syllabus but introduce language in a way that brings it to life and involves the students. In Sahar’s example she only needs to create two pictures, the rest of the information comes from the teacher and the students.

An exercise in the text book can of course be useful for a follow up - we don’t have to start with it! Remember that ‘resources’ can involve many things - your students and their world, you, your sense of humour and imagination, your story-telling or diagrams and pictures drawn on the board!

We need to match our teaching to students’ abilities. Every class is different and so are the abilities of our students. When we plan our teaching we need to be ready to deal with slower students as well as the more advanced. This needs to be built into your plan.

We should also vary the class ‘interaction’. This means sometimes you are at the front working with the whole class, and they are listening to you and following the teacher’s lead. But in other parts of our lessons, there are periods when we get our students to work together in pairs and in groups. When you plan the lesson, you should decide how the students will interact with you, the teacher, and with each other, at each stage of the lesson.

Planning how you will motivate students and retain their interest is also important. Oscar, from Colombia, says:

‘I think something really important and motivating for our students is that we teach the language in context. The teacher can prepare a story, or the topic the teacher wants them to learn, through content, through stories, through poems, songs - through something the students are motivated to know.’

Most of the teachers who talked to us for this series agreed that keeping our learners’ interests in mind was very important. And also being flexible with our teaching plan, so that we can make sure that we respond if the students don’t appear to be learning, and adapt the lesson to the students’ needs.

Programme Summary: Teachers agree that planning lessons is important. We need to encourage learning with a good atmosphere. We need clear aims for each lesson – what will the students know and be able to do by the end of the class? We need to think about the different stages – a warm up, teaching new language, time for students to practise, time for revision, consolidation and then follow up homework. We don’t need to limit activities to the exercises in our text book, and we should not forget about listening and speaking practice. English is about communication!

Try to include a balance of working as a whole class and working in pairs and groups. Be ready to deal with those who are more advanced as well as those who need more help!

Most important is to think about what our students are learning, and try to keep them interested.

Ask a colleague!
Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
Programme 2: Teachers supporting each other – teacher support worksheet

Many teachers of English around the world face big challenges in the classroom such as very large classes, a shortage of books and materials, and a lack of training opportunities. TeachingEnglish Radio aims to promote the sharing of ideas among teachers to improve teaching and learning.

Teachers can sometimes feel isolated. Often teachers don’t get the chance to discuss professional issues with other teachers. Long hours and large classes can lead to a lack of motivation. The focus of this programme is ‘teachers supporting each other’ and we look at ways to create opportunities to reflect more on your teaching.

Once again, we talk to teachers from all over the world and get their opinions on the topic of teacher support.

First, we asked Nery from Mexico about her approach to sharing. She said that by sharing a game with another teacher, she has increased her bank of material because her colleague will adapt the game in some way while they’re using it with their students.

Sharing and creating materials is a good start but we do need to think about where the materials are kept. Here are some comments from the teachers we spoke to:

‘Sometimes we may have an “English co-ordination” with an office, where the material can be gathered. If this is the case, we can keep materials such as flash-cards, wall charts, pictures that can be re-used. Otherwise, I think the best solution is each teacher keeps his or her own material.’ (Rafael)

‘Yes, it’s good to have your own portfolio or folder with material, if you can exchange ideas to increase your ideas with other teachers to increase this, at the same time that you learn, you are passing your knowledge to another teacher.’ (Nery)

In this programme we talked to Moya from Myanmar. Moya suggests that teachers can help each other with friendly, informal observation:

‘I think that this area is really important for the situation that we are focussing on, where there we don’t have resources, but to have each other as a resource to learn about teaching. So maybe a simple thing, even though it will take teachers extra time to observe each other, but I think that way they can help each other to improve their teaching by observing.’

Nery made another important point about informal classroom observation:

‘If someone goes into your classroom it’s not because they are going to be just observing all of your bad points or mistakes, but learning from it.’

Nery makes it clear that this kind of observation needs to be a positive experience; it can help our professional development as teachers. Before you invite another teacher to observe your class, think about what aspects of your teaching you want your colleague to focus on.
Moya has some useful suggestions on how to arrange an informal lesson observation:

‘The teacher to be observed can say “please watch the way I deal with problems in the classroom” or “the way I answer students’ questions” or “the way I introduce a new topic”, whatever area that is the desire of the teacher to be observed can be agreed beforehand. And the other teacher is sitting somewhere in the classroom making some notes and then after the class they get together at some point and share what happened and try to make use of it.’

Raphael describes the National Teachers’ Association in Angola. He mentions how teachers associations can bring teachers together for conferences, seminars, workshops and training sessions. It’s clear that a very wide range of topics which concern teachers can be explored when teachers and education experts are able to get together at training sessions and conferences. Conferences can be large and formal, and sometimes impossible to attend. Another mechanism that is used to bring teachers together at a more local level is called ‘Clusters’. Mrs Singh, a teacher attending a conference in Durban explains how ‘Clusters’ work:

‘At the moment what we do now is that we form clusters. Whereby we take schools in close proximity – about 4 or 5 schools – and we nominate a cluster co-ordinator, whereby the cluster co-ordinator will call up meetings. At those meetings they have discussions about what challenges they are experiencing.’

So in summary: Teachers from four or five schools that are near to each other meet up from time to time. There are workshops and discussions - usually held on a Saturday - exploring different educational areas and how to improve and refresh teachers’ skills. Perhaps something similar could be organised by teachers themselves where you live and work.

Kai talks about the national teacher association in Kazakhstan. It organises conferences and workshops, and Kai believes that this is especially helpful for new or novice teachers. He also says teachers should not be embarrassed to ask for support:

‘The best idea is to find friends around the professional community you are working in and don’t be shy or embarrassed to ask for help from your senior teachers.’

Raul, from Cuba, agrees and believes that more experienced teachers should be ready to help and talks about the importance of trust:

‘There are many situations that happen in classrooms, that other teachers might have had in their experience. So they ask, ‘I’ve had this situation, what would you do? Have you had the same experience?’ If there is an atmosphere of trust in which novice teachers can ask for help this will undoubtedly reflect in better practice.’

So sharing problems and seeking advice from more experienced teachers to improve your teaching practice involves asking questions – this works better when there’s a friendly atmosphere, encouragement and trust.

Lyutfiya, from Tajikistan, talks to us about teacher mentorship schemes. This is when you arrange for another teacher to act as your mentor – your supporter and guide:

‘Usually a mentor is an experienced teacher who helps novice teachers, but nowadays mentorship is used also in in-service programmes. Whenever [teachers] need support, mentors can provide it.’

Programme Summary: Teachers can get together to plan lessons and make materials – and then share these resources. Teachers can help each other by observing classes, with a particular purpose in mind. Teacher associations can provide opportunities for professional development; the chance to discuss issues in teaching and to hear from others, including international experts. Teachers working in schools close to each other could form ‘clusters’ and meet up every month. You could start by getting together with fellow teachers in your own school.

Ask a colleague!
Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
Programme 3: Finding and Creating Resources – teacher support worksheet

Many teachers of English around the world face big challenges in the classroom such as very large classes, a shortage of books and materials, and a lack of training opportunities. This programme focuses on finding and creating resources. We talk to teachers from all over the world and also hear a lively class in action.

This is what Geoffrey said:

‘In terms of materials, most of the teachers in Malawi have to do with very minimal resources, sometimes with no resources at all.’

‘In a class of forty-plus students, the teacher’s the only one who has a textbook and that makes it difficult for the teacher to use the activities which he or she might have used if most of the students in the class had a textbook.’

Dario, a teacher from Argentina, was planning to use material from the internet, some photocopies and flash cards when he first started teaching... but he had to think again!

‘When I got my first post as a teacher, I think there must have been 40 students there. They didn’t have any resources, no notebooks, no photocopies. So I think you really need to resort to your own imagination, ‘well this is the situation I have and I have to make the most of it’ and probably everything – like the success of the lesson - will come out as long as you are creative and you involve your students.’

Kuheli, who trains teachers in schools in India where resources are very limited. She recommends that teachers make their own materials:

‘Suppose I’m teaching verbs, like smiling, crying, running, and I need some pictures to go with those expressions. I tell my teachers they can cut pictures from magazines, which they can use as resources in the classroom – Suppose I’m teaching ‘how to greet each other’ and I get a picture in a newspaper or a magazine – of someone shaking hands.’

Kuheli gives us some examples of how simple images can be used. If you are teaching basic verbs of action – walking, running, cycling – then ‘stick figure’ drawings on the board will make your meaning clear. You can point to each of the pictures to get your students to make sentences. Simple drawings can be used to make ‘flash cards’ which have many uses in teaching.

Vuvu, a South African teacher who works with young learners, suggests using students themselves as resources. She talks about using a song or chant and then moves on to pictures and charts showing images that are familiar to the children.

Over to you!
Write about a problem you have experienced related to a shortage of classroom resources.

Ask a colleague!
Sometimes the best ideas and solutions are just around the corner. Talk to some of your colleagues about the problem you mentioned above and try to come up with a creative solution. Write about your discussion below:
We hear Mrs Singh, building up to a story to present some new vocabulary. The only resources she uses in the first stage - to present the language - are her own skills and the young students' knowledge and voices, plus a mirror!

Here's the chant Mrs Singh uses. Notice the humour and repetition which make it really memorable:

- **I look in the mirror / What do I see? / I see myself / Looking back at me.**
- **I see two eyes - /big and round / A mouth that can eat and make a sound.**
- **But the funniest thing I see - is my nose /Stuck right in the middle/**
  **Where it grows...**

Mrs Singh, makes flashcards with pictures of all the key words she has taught, and the students match them to a poster of a little girl.

What have we learnt? Mrs Singh shows us how using herself and her students as the learning aids for teaching new language can be very effective. The follow up used cards with simple pictures – these could easily be made by the teacher. She moves from these activities to introduce a story and promote reading.

Some teachers make great use of everyday objects – things we find around us. Objects are invaluable - sometimes called 'realia'. They provide a stimulus for many activities.

Nery, a teacher from Mexico talks about 'realia'.

- **In my case what I have used and worked for me is using all the resources that I have in the classroom and outside the classroom for the students to identify very basic vocabulary, like 'armchair', 'blackboard' or very, very simple things for basic levels.'**

Nery describes a vocabulary team game – she divides the class into teams and writes up a list of items they need to identify. She includes objects that she knows they can find both inside and outside the classroom – e.g. a marker pen, a backpack, stones, leaves, a shoe....the teams have to find them quickly!

Newspapers are one of the most versatile and freely available materials. Many teachers have used newspapers for a wide variety of purposes. Georgina from South Africa talks about using newspapers:

- **Newspapers are a great resource that we forget about. A teacher from a country where they didn't have a lot of paper decided to start using newspaper. They used this newspaper very cleverly, not only to write on, but to make things with, like art and craft activities, where the students made things that they learned about, like vocabulary items.'**

Raphael - a teacher from Angola - talked about working with students at a more advanced level, and like teachers Vuvu and Mrs Singh, he often uses the students themselves as a rich resource and they also help Raphael find more materials!

- **[Asking students to provide resources] keeps the students more motivated because they feel part of the class, as contributors for their own learning process.'**

Miramy, from Madagascar, gets students to bring pictures from home and talk about them in the class.

**Programme Summary.** Using real-life materials is motivating for students. It provides a very real context for practising English. Our students are also a rich resource as we found out in this programme.

Teachers can use songs, humour, real objects and simple drawings and if we need to find colourful images for posters or flash cards we can cut them out of magazines. Newspapers are a very cheap resource and provide material for craft, as well as a variety of written texts. We hope you've heard some ideas to adapt for your teaching situation.

**Ask a colleague!**

Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
Programme 4: Using Group Work in Large Classes – teacher support worksheet

In this programme we look at a reality many teachers face: very large classes – and using group work as a technique to get everyone working actively. We hear from teachers on how they use group work and look at techniques for managing large classes. How do you feel about teaching large classes? Is it a problem or a pleasure?

Georgina, a teacher from South Africa describes how she felt the first time she walked into a class of eighty students:

‘My first experience was walking into the classroom that had very small windows, lots of desks; the students were seated from the very front of the classroom right to the back – students’ backs even touching the back of the classroom. I didn’t really know how I was going to teach them.’

Georgina, had been trained to teach communicatively, but how could she teach so many students effectively? Daya explains how large classes are common in his country. Teachers are expected to teach communicatively, but they find this a challenge:

‘In Nepal teachers face a lot of challenges: large class sizes, small classrooms, fixed furniture - the curriculum suggests that the teachers should use group work. Communicative competence is the most important thing, therefore they have to get their students into groups and work together, which is very challenging for the teachers.’

Group work is useful for almost all areas of classroom practice – for grammar and writing tasks, for reading and taking notes while listening. Group work is excellent for speaking and listening – because in groups students can practise simultaneously – so instead of only one or two people practising the language and everyone else just listening, with group work everyone gets a chance to be active. So why is it that so many teachers are worried about letting their students work in groups?

Dario, a teacher from the south of Argentina, explains:

‘I think that one of the fears you might experience is the fear of losing control of the class and behaviour – but especially control because the moment you step in and you find 40 students there, then you might think you won’t be able to cope with the class, that you will lose control of it and then you’re afraid of not being responsive to every student inside the classroom.’

Our reporter Yacob observed Tamarat teaching a large class in Addis Ababa. Tamarat told him the focus of the lesson was on agreement and the main objective was to introduce how to agree and disagree in English using appropriate expressions. The students decided which topic they wanted to discuss. After five or six minutes of lively discussion the teacher then asked the students to sort themselves into small groups according to their view on the issue.

‘So now, let’s have a small group, in each group you need to select one or two spokespersons and then try to present. While the discussion comes, you need to have a secretary writer, he needs to jot down every ideas of the group, then he presents the idea of the group, not the idea of his own – do you understand? (yes) OK? So let’s begin.’

The students were divided into 11 different small groups. Each group consisted of six students with different skills and language abilities. Tamarat told our reporter that after this he considered the class to be made of only 11 students. While they were doing this, he was walking around the classroom giving instructions and assistance as necessary, either for language difficulty or clarification.
The students in the recording compare the lives of boys and girls in Ethiopia. They had a lot to say and used the ‘target language’ – expressions for agreeing and disagreeing - as they discussed the topic in groups. Once the groups were ready, the teacher asked one member of each group to present their views.

Finally, the teacher congratulated the students and summed up the important points of the lesson once again. So what ideas can we take from Mr Tamarat’s lesson? Let’s reflect on how he organised that speaking class.

First, Mr Tamarat provided a choice of discussion topics which he knew his students would be interested in discussing. He was highly organised and his students were experienced in this kind of activity. The class was divided into those in favour and those against – and then created groups making sure that each group had a mixture of opinions. They chose a secretary to make notes and a presenter to report back to the class.

During the discussion phase the teacher’s role changed – instead of standing at the front he moved around, listening to the group discussions, but only intervening if help were needed.

With the discussion over, the presenters reported back from the groups – with the teacher managing the feedback. The benefit of using groups meant that instead of dealing with 60 students Mr Tamarat heard from only 11 representatives.

If you plan to try out a speaking activity like this it is important to make sure classes taking place next door are not disturbed – and it’s important to remember; successful group work needs careful management and planning.

Several teachers mention the good things about large classes. As Georgina points out:

‘You have many students that come from different backgrounds, they have different experiences, and as a teacher you can really draw on those experiences and get students doing activities that enable them to practice their English and learn from each other.’

According to Mirany:

‘The positive thing about large classes is that you’ve got more life and more dynamism from the students... And even the less motivated ones can become more motivated because of the dynamism which springs out from the group.’

Programme Summary: Large classes are a reality for many teachers around the world – especially in the state sector. If we want to develop our students’ fluency and ability to communicate in English then using group work will help. If set up carefully, it will give all the students a chance to participate and practise.

The teacher’s role changes during group work. While the students work in groups the teacher moves away from the front of the class and quietly monitors. During this part of the lesson, you are giving more responsibility to your students and there are many rewards. Group work can be highly motivating for students. They participate and are active and we can draw on our students’ own knowledge and experience. As Mirany says, ‘Dynamism springs from the group’.

Ask a colleague!
What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in groups?
Working with a colleague, make a list of advantages and issues.

a) For the advantages, try and rank them in order of importance.

b) For the issues, discuss ways of overcoming these points – think back to the ideas mentioned in this programme.

Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
Programme 5: Pair and Group Work in Practice – teacher support worksheet

In the previous programme we heard how getting our students to work together in groups can provide lots of simultaneous practice, which is very helpful when we have a large class. Pair work and group work can be used for many different activities in the classroom. Today we consider different ways to put our students into pairs or groups, and then we'll follow the stages of a lesson which uses 'whole class', 'pair work' and 'group work'. While you listen to the teachers from many countries who contribute to our series, think about your own classes and what would work best for their learning and practice.

First, at what stage should we start to introduce pair work and group work? Kazimierz, a teacher who has worked in many countries including Poland and Malaysia, says:

‘The thing about pair work and group work is to get students used to doing it from ‘day one.’

To introduce a dialogue or a role play, you can first demonstrate yourself, and then ask two confident and able students to try it out while the whole class watch and listen. Then it is their turn. The simplest way to set up pair work is to ask students to pair up with the person who happens to be sitting next to them – this is often a friend!

Kazimierz says:

‘Students working with their favourite student has all sorts of advantages: they gain confidence, everyone likes to talk to somebody they know, they get used to that person’s voice, their partner’s voice, and it’s comfortable to be with them.’

Setting up pairs or small groups with the students immediately in front, behind or to the side is the simplest and quickest arrangement – no-one has to move, which is helpful in a crowded classroom. But students have different abilities and you’ll often have a good reason to combine better students with weaker ones.

Dario, a teacher from Argentina, says:

‘When it comes to group work, sometimes I let them choose their own group members, but most of the time I try to arrange the groups in such a way that you’ve got mixed ability within the group...so that they help each other.’

He sees organising pairs or small groups as an opportunity to mix up your students' levels.

‘That gives them the chance to participate and to learn more, but sometimes I tell the strong ones that they need to give the other members of the group the chance to participate. That they could be sort of ‘facilitators’, and help them develop their own skills rather than taking the lead within the group.’

Georgina, a teacher from South Africa, suggests a different way to organise the pairs or groups:

‘Sometimes there are activities where it would benefit students to be with somebody of their own level, where you pair up the weaker students together and the stronger students together. That way the stronger students may work more quickly and may finish before the other students, but you can give them other activities to keep them busy.’

So there are three options – pairs or small groups of students who are sitting close together - which is less threatening for them - then new combinations of weaker and stronger students where the stronger help the weaker ones, or separating weaker and stronger students so they can all work at their own pace. Variety in these arrangements keeps your students on their toes but it means clever planning and organisation from you, the teacher!

Over to you!

How do you organise pair and group work in your classes? Do you always organise it the same way?

Make some notes on the methods you use.
Sahar, from Egypt, is going to introduce ‘verbs and nouns that are used together’ – also called collocations – such as ‘book a flight’, ‘rent a car’, ... she has designed a lesson using something called a ‘running dictation’! The lesson starts with Sahar addressing the whole class, and as she talks Sahar writes up the key words on the board...

**Teacher:**

“What noun can we use with the verb ‘listen’? We listen to what? (students: music.. radio.) OK.. Listen to music, listen to radio.. (starts to write on blackboard).... Can I say I watch music? .(No!) . . No, we say we watch....(TV) or we listen to.......? (music).. Great!”

Once the teacher has established the concept of combining the right verbs with nouns she moves onto the main activity. This is about making arrangements for guests who are going to attend a wedding – where and how to travel, where to stay and how to get to the event. She is going to first use pair and later group work. She puts the class into pairs and gives each pair a set of questions. They look at their questions, then each student ‘A’ asks ‘B’ to go and find the answers in ‘emails’ that she has posted on the classroom walls. B rushes off to read an email which has the answers in it, remembers the answers, and then comes back to tell A, who writes down the answer. Finally, the students get together in groups of four. Now they share and compare the information they have collected.

How should teachers deal with the problem of noise? Most classrooms are close together and have thin walls...so it is important to make sure your neighbours are not badly disturbed.

Mirany, from Madagascar, found a time when the next room was empty. Some teachers take their students outside if the weather and conditions allow. Others fix a time when noise and even laughter will happen and be tolerated! After all this is a language class and some noise from discussion or even games, should be accepted.

Here for example is Kazimierz, talking about working in Malaysia:

‘I never had anyone come from a neighbouring classroom complaining, because usually they are saying that’s an English language classroom, and English language requires speaking and ‘wow’ there’s a lot of speaking and laughter and enjoyment going on.’

**Programme Summary:** Setting up pair work and group work with our classes can be done from the very start – and can give everyone lots of practice. You have lots of choice in how you organise your class. You can put students together with their usual classmates, you can match weaker and stronger students, or set up pairs and groups so that students are working with others of the same level. Be ready to help the weaker ones and give extra challenges to the stronger ones.

Fixed desks, noisy floors and thin walls all mean you have to consider the impact on other classes. Remember that some pair and group activities can be silent – or nearly so.

We heard how a teacher gave clear instructions to the whole class. She made sure everyone understood the language they were practising and then how the activity – a running dictation – was to be carried out. They did this in pairs and later groups and worked enthusiastically together.

**Ask a colleague!**
Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
Programme 6: Developing Teachers’ English – teacher support worksheet

In this programme teachers from around the world discuss ways to develop and improve their knowledge of English and confidence to speak in English. Teachers are often expected to teach the language when they don’t feel confident about their level of English. Kuheli, who trains teachers in India, explains the problem at primary level: the teachers she trains come from very remote places and are not very confident in their use of English, while Saba, from Pakistan describes how teachers in Urdu medium schools now have to teach English from Grade 1, but many teachers are not used to speaking in English.

Teachers from many other parts of the world talked to us about similar problems and not only at primary level. They face a double challenge –first, they need more ‘exposure’ to improve and develop their knowledge of English, and they also need more confidence to use English everyday in school.

Daya from Nepal believes that teachers should keep practising to improve all their skills, but on his training course he wants teachers to feel relaxed about speaking:

‘...we encourage teachers to speak. And we suggest they don’t worry about the mistakes. That is a very important part of our learning.’

Daya’s advice is that there are times to concentrate on accuracy and times to focus on fluency. It is not always easy to concentrate on both at the same time. The message is try to find and make opportunities to use your English and don’t always worry about making mistakes!

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Over to you!

How can you find and make more opportunities to keep in touch with English OR to use English while teaching?

Write down your ideas:

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Ask a colleague!

Sometimes the best ideas and solutions are just around the corner. Discuss how to improve your English with a colleague.

Write down any ideas which you didn’t think of yourself:

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Daya from Nepal and Moya, who works in Myanmar, both encourage teachers to find time to start reading! Daya suggests that teachers should read English books – novels especially - and newspapers which are easily available in the market. Moya thinks that reading is really important for learning English, for teachers:

‘When there is no other media, like TV, we can still pick up books. I think it is a skill that as teachers we can develop – sometimes we can be very conscious about words or phrases or sentences that we are reading...so that we are processing the text in English.’

The presenter agrees with Daya and Moya – reading is an excellent way to upgrade your English. Think about how to do this where you live. Many towns have a small selection of magazines and books in English, either to buy or to borrow from a library. Choose a wide range of articles and books – fiction and non fiction – and be prepared to make notes and to talk about what you have read. Through regular reading you will expand your vocabulary and become familiar with which words are usually found together in a text – as Moya says:

‘By reading you come to be more aware of what words go together, it is really, really important to understand and also to be able to use - and that can come from reading.’
Of course listening is also vital if you want to develop your English, so again think about what is possible for you. Do you have any opportunity to listen to the radio? To listen to recordings? Is there sometimes a chance for you to watch television or films in English? Daya and other teachers who talked to us all stress the value of lots of regular listening to real English:

‘...Sometimes we suggest that teachers listen to the BBC programmes, CNN or television programmes, which are easily available, so they can have access to this kind of media for learning English.’

Nery in Mexico suggests you have a notebook ready as well as a dictionary to keep yourself focussed and learning.

‘I used to keep a personal journal where I used to write some relevant things that happened to me during the day, and at the same time I also used to listen to a lot of music or the radio in English. There are some words that perhaps you won’t understand at the beginning so it is a good idea to keep a dictionary with you and to write them down.’

If you are able to get English from different parts of the world, that can also be helpful for you to train in the different accents as well, and the different vocabulary. It’s a good idea to make notes when you read and when you listen. A visit from a very fluent speaker of English from outside your school can also be useful to improve listening. They could be invited into your classroom, or spend some time talking with a group of teachers. If you have the chance, then try recording them as a model.

By getting together regularly with friends and colleagues you can practise English as well as discuss teaching matters. Here is Kuheli again:

‘It reminds me of something I tell my teachers...you just create a kind of club. A club doesn’t mean that it has to be 10 or 12 teachers, just maybe one or two neighbouring schools and the teachers come together at least once in a week and chat in English.’

Teachers can meet regularly to practise - aim to include some speaking, listening, reading and writing. You can discuss a wide range of topics. One idea is to read an article in advance, make some notes to use the vocabulary, and prepare to talk about it with your colleagues. Speaking English to each other can really help to build your confidence. With encouragement and practice, teachers will feel more confident about speaking English with their students. Hanan from Egypt proposes is that you use sources of English such as newspapers and the radio to build your vocabulary and inform yourself about current affairs and what is happening in the world. Geoffrey, a teacher from Malawi had to teach himself! He decided to immerse himself in everything that was available!

‘...my personal journey - I would call it - through learning English, has been made possible by exposing myself to English from a wide range of sources: listening to the radio – I have that curiosity - reading magazines, reading comics, reading international newspapers. They could even be local newspapers.’

Programme Summary: Think again about what is possible for you in your situation.

What books and magazines can you find to read? What opportunities have you got to do regular listening? Can you keep up with events in the English speaking world using newspapers, radio or television? Can you find good speakers of English to record or to practise with? Could you keep a notebook, and have a dictionary ready, to record and learn new words and expressions? Practise your English with friends and colleagues and do not be afraid of making mistakes. You’ll only get better at speaking if you keep on speaking.

Ask a colleague!
Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
Programme 7: Using English in the Classroom – teacher support worksheet

In a recent programme we heard about ways that teachers can develop their English skills and their confidence. This is important because teachers often don’t like to speak English in class.

Saba who trains teachers in Pakistan explains that teachers are afraid of making mistakes. Teachers who have not had the opportunity of much training fear that their English is of a low standard. They do not want to use it in class, except for reading and writing. Daya points out that for this reason many teachers will not use English in class for their instructions and explanations:

‘English is taught as a foreign language in our country …and when teachers are not fluent in English they have to resort to translation.’

Translation is not always a bad thing, but the best advice is to keep it short and return to English as soon as possible. Hanan works in Egypt, and she makes it clear that if the subject you are teaching is English, then you should always try to speak in English:

‘Using English in the classroom is an essential thing for a teacher to do because it is an enormous input into the students, they listen to you, they listen to the teacher speaking the language and this is another indirect way of teaching them … lots of stuff that they pick up even though that is not the main aim of the lesson.’

Hanan says that teachers should try to create an atmosphere where it is normal to use English to communicate. English is a language for communicating in, so if we do not speak it in class, students will think that English is just for reading, writing and practising grammar points!

To get started we need to make a list of useful expressions for both teacher and student and begin to introduce them. Kazimierz says:

‘Students learn so much just from everyday – what I would call ‘operational’ - language in the classroom - so everything from stand up, sit down, thank you, no thank you, please may I do this, I feel hot, I feel cold, can I go outside and have a drink of water? It should all be done in English from ‘day one.’

Hanan agrees that teachers can teach the language used in the classroom and start giving instructions in English. To really get the message home you can put up a big sign saying ‘Only English Spoken Here!’

If you feel nervous about using English, write down and practise simple instructions, greetings and stories. Build up a list of useful expressions and if this is new for your class, then you can use just a little English in each lesson, and gradually increase it. If students wish to use English but are having problems, help them by writing the phrase they need to say on the board.

Over to you!
Do you think teachers and students should use only English in English lessons, or should they sometimes use translation? Why?

Start preparing a list of useful expressions for you and your students to use during the lesson to encourage everyone to keep using English. Compare with a colleague and write down your ideas:
In this programme we listen to some teachers in action from around the world - from Afghanistan to Africa - and they are all using English! In our round-the-world clips we do not hear any translation, but of course this can be helpful sometimes.

**Kuheli** is a teacher trainer from India:

> ‘Sometimes I use the mother tongue but I don’t start speaking in the mother tongue for the entire class. If I need to use it a little bit to make my students less afraid of me, to get them familiar with me and then introduce my language points gradually, I do that...I wouldn’t say ‘never use the mother tongue.’

Translation can be useful to help explain the meaning of something or compare how language is used, or to make sure students feel comfortable.

**Kazimierz** says:

> ‘We can use English in the classroom when we greet students. When we talk to students at the beginning of a lesson, at the end of a lesson, when we talk about what day it is, what they have been doing; it’s a great way of personalising our lessons. We can use English when we explain and model new language, when we give instructions for an activity, so ‘turn to such and such a page’, or ‘do this exercise’ or ‘talk to the person sitting behind you’ or ‘next to you’, and of course when we change activities during the lesson or when we correct mistakes.’

In other words, English is useful throughout our lessons!

With younger learners, English classroom language can be introduced as a game or lively activity. In the programme we hear a greetings song from Zambia. Poems, rhymes and songs are very popular with children, and these can include useful classroom language. ‘Good morning teacher, good morning class, how are you?’ What a happy way to start each lesson!

**Teacher Georgina** established a routine at the start of each day when her young learners in Taiwan could spend time chatting in English:

> ‘We would have different times of the day when we did different things and as a result the children knew that when they got to school, we would have ‘good morning time’. We would sit in a circle, we would talk about the weather, they would describe their feelings - how they felt that day.’

Kuheli suggests that using stories is a very good way of getting your students used to hearing the language, and Nery in Mexico suggests we personalise new language we are teaching, by talking about real life experiences.

When you plan future lessons, build up your confidence by aiming to be a step ahead of your students. If you are following a textbook or a syllabus and you know what is coming up, then look at future units - check the key language in a dictionary and think about what instructions and conversations you will need in English to introduce and practise the language. Then write it down! If we prepare it isn’t so difficult to use a lot more English in our classrooms!

**Programme Summary**: Using English in the Classroom demonstrates that it is a language for communicating and can be a really rich resource for your students. Many teachers are not confident but it is important to start using English rather than your mother tongue.

Get started by making a list of simple and useful expressions for the students to use, as well as for you, the teacher. We can aim to use English in all stages of our lessons. You might wish to translate to make something clear, but go back to English as soon as possible and encourage your students to do the same. When you give instructions, demonstrate with humour and gestures and use the blackboard to make sure your message is clear. Try to move from very basic instructions to opportunities for stories and conversations. Try to personalise your lessons, and think about what your students enjoy. The beginnings and ends of lessons are a good opportunity to chat more informally with your students. You can talk about your day, or what they are going to do at the weekend… even the weather!

**Ask a colleague!**

Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
Programme 8: Teaching New Language – teacher support worksheet

Today’s topic is ‘introducing new language’ - introducing a grammar structure, a new tense or some vocabulary that the students haven’t been taught before. When we teach, we do it in three stages: first we present, then we get our students to practise, and then to use the new language confidently and accurately.

This is of course just one approach to introducing new language, but it’s one that many teachers find is a useful framework. In this programme we visit a classroom in Afghanistan and follow the stages of a lesson as a model. Let’s meet the teacher, Mr Shakir Ahmed:

‘In this lesson I use the ‘present, practice and use’ method to teach the use of ‘should’ and ‘shouldn’t’ for giving advice. I find this to be a very useful way to teach grammar because it presents the target language in a situation or context and this gives the students the meaning of the language.’

We follow Shakir’s lesson in Afghanistan to see how this can work. Here is the first stage. Our teacher is going to present ‘should’ and ‘shouldn’t’ and he starts by making the students think about job interviews and what advice they would give to candidates on how to prepare.

He makes it both personal and relevant by talking about the problems of finding work in Afghanistan, and introducing the example of his ‘friend’ who wants a job.

Teacher: ‘I have a very close friend . . . very, very close friend. We have very close contact. Yeah? And he is going for an interview tomorrow and he wants to get a job . . . and I am eager for him to get this job. How should he appear when he goes to interview?’

Mr Ahmed holds up a big picture showing someone looking very scruffy and wearing old jeans. Clearly he is not suitably dressed for a job interview!

Teacher: ‘Now this is a picture of Ahmad. He is my best friend. How does he typically appear? Would this be a proper appearance for his interview? (no!)

So what is your advice for him? You should talk with him, you should tell him, ‘you should do this…. you should not do this’.

The target language – in this case ‘should’ and ‘shouldn’t’ – has been introduced naturally with the meaning made clear. Now different students offer suggestions:

‘He should have a new suit. He should comb his hair. He should polish his shoes…’

The teacher writes the language form on the board, points out the grammar as necessary, and checks students’ understanding. At the presentation stage, teachers normally ‘model’ the words: which means we say the word or sentence clearly several times. We emphasise the sounds, stress and intonation. Most teachers then get their students to repeat the phrases they’ve heard several times. Typically, the teacher models, then the whole class does ‘choral repetition’, and then the teacher asks individual students to repeat to check pronunciation. The order of these steps can vary, but by this point teachers should have covered these basic steps: teaching meaning, pronunciation, form and spelling ....and checking that students have really understood!

Over to you!
Can you think of different ways to present the meaning of new language without having to use translation? To get you started: (1) objects - sometimes called ‘realia’, (2) actions, (3)....
We hear from two other teachers, Nery from Mexico, and Rafael who works in Angola. We asked them how they would introduce the ‘simple past’ to a class of students. Nery explains that she tells a personal story:

‘You can talk to your students, telling your students what you did yesterday, like for example, ‘Oh, I had a very, very bad evening yesterday because I went to this restaurant and the food was awful’ . . . and then when you’re finished with your awful experience, then you ask your students if they have ever experienced anything like this and then you can get them to discuss in pairs, and then just pick some of the ideas from your same students.’

Rafael describes the next steps. He would write the structure or grammar on the board and then move to modelling and choral repetition. Like Shakir Ahmed, Rafael makes good use of pictures. He uses them to prompt examples of sentences using the simple past. The pictures can be flash cards or drawings on the blackboard.

The next phase in the lesson is the practice stage. To begin this, we need give our students a lot of guidance and correction to make sure they get it right. Shakir Ahmed’s students have been practising in pairs. Now the teacher gives them a new situation. They must make their own sentences again, using ‘should’ and ‘shouldn’t’, but this time they have to think a bit more for themselves:

Teacher: “Suppose that you are advising your younger brother or sister to prepare for an exam. Work in pairs and make sentences: ‘You should do this and you should not do this...’ For example, ‘You should study hard and you should not go to the party...’”

The teacher monitors – moving around the class if there is room and helping out if there is a problem. The basic structure is now being used confidently along with new examples.

Students check their examples in pairs and Shakir asks for some examples to share with the whole class. The students consolidate what they have learnt by writing their own sentences as a homework activity.

The third stage is the production, or using language stage. The students have had lots of controlled practice – now they are ready to really use that language. Teacher trainer Joanna describes this process of moving from controlled practice to much freer use of the language:

‘When you’ve done lots of practice with your students, you can move to the production phase. In this stage the students are much more in control, you are the organiser, only correct things if communication gets lost. So you have to set up things very carefully so that students know exactly what they’re doing and they talk in pairs or groups to do an activity. Don’t interrupt them; just let them get on with it.’

In the last stage of a longer lesson, or in a later class, you can introduce much freer activities. This could involve discussion, problem solving, role plays or even a project. It might be writing a story, interviewing other students or acting a short dialogue.

Programme Summary: We can introduce new language in three stages: ‘presenting’ then ‘practising’ and finally ‘producing’, or ‘using’ the language more freely. To introduce new language you can use a text, an object, mime, a picture, or a personal story. Using a realistic context we can make the meaning clear and memorable. Helping our students along, we ‘elicit’ examples of the new language from the students, and use the board to show them the correct form. The teacher carefully models the language and the students repeat. Remember they’ll need to know the pronunciation, the spelling and the form as well as how it is used. Make sure that you check understanding. In Afghanistan, the class practised in pairs, first in a very controlled way, and then a bit more freely with a new situation. The teacher monitored and pointed out mistakes to the class at the end of the practice.

In a later lesson they can do freer activities to use the new language for their own purposes. As we’ve heard, you can use and adapt these basic steps to teach your students new grammar, a tense or new vocabulary. It’s a very flexible framework!

Ask a colleague! Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
‘Teaching reading’ is a subject at the very heart of learning. What steps can we take to make students more confident readers? And how can we find a variety of materials - or ‘texts’ - for our students to read?

What should we do first? Kazimierz, a teacher who’s worked in Poland and Malaysia says that we can set up ‘pre-reading activities’ to help our students to develop the skill of predicting and to provide some useful vocabulary before they start reading. ‘Brainstorming’ is to encourage predicting:

‘You look at the title or any pictures or subtitles to do with the text, and then the students have to suggest what words and ideas come up... I say to the students: ‘what words and phrases do you think you’ll find in this story?’ I write down their ideas on the board...later we can compare their ideas with the actual text.’

‘Brainstorming’ can be used with many kinds of reading texts. You could also have a discussion about the text before they read, or get your students to think some questions in advance that they want answered, and let them read quickly to find the answers.

After ‘pre-reading’, we can help our students with some ‘while reading’ activities, by setting tasks that will help them to develop other reading skills. Kazimierz says:

‘With students at intermediate level, I divide reading into skills and the main sub skills of reading are first of all predicting what the text is going to be about, reading for the main idea, and reading for specific details.’

As well as ‘predicting’, students need to practise ‘reading for the main idea’ and ‘reading for details’. What kind of tasks can we set? Here’s a teacher from the British Council Ethiopia. She explains a ‘reading for the main idea’, activity:

‘The teacher sets one or two general questions; questions which require an understanding about the general purpose of the text and can be answered without knowing all the details.’

We encourage our students to read quickly and silently - you can time them to increase their reading speed! When they have finished, they can compare their answers with others before you check and discuss in class.

To practise the skill of ‘reading for details’ you need to set questions which require specific answers. The teacher from Ethiopia explains:

‘This can be identifying some specific facts, such as dates, the time of an event, places, names etc. . . . the teacher can set more detailed questions or tasks such as drawing a picture or completing a form.’

Students enjoy having a purpose when they read. These ‘while reading’ activities will help students to practise for reading for the ‘main idea’ and ‘reading for details’. You can give them questions to answer, true/false sentences to check, a chart to complete – there are many possibilities.

We’ve heard about ‘pre-reading’ and ‘while reading’ tasks. So what is next? ‘Post reading’ involves doing something with the information the students have been reading. There are many ways to follow up a text. Madame Alexander’s class in Tanzania have been reading a story about tough social problems with topics like HIV / AIDS. There’s a wide range of characters, both good...and bad! To be sure that her students can recall the many characters from their book and feed in some key vocabulary, the teacher asks several quick ‘who am I?’ questions. She then divides her class into groups and gives out a sheet with some words and phrases about one important character – they have just two or three minutes to discuss and note down his role in the story and his personal characteristics.

When the students understand how to describe and analyse one character from the story, Madame Alexander gives each group a new and different character to discuss – with another piece of paper per group and some more key words to help them. While the students discuss, Madame Alexander goes around the room checking that everyone is participating and helping out where needed. After five minutes she stops the discussion and one student from each group tells the teacher and the rest of the class their views about the character they discussed. The last phase of the lesson is to relate the story to real life. The teacher asks if the students have ever come across people like these characters and to think about how the
story relates to their society. This time the language of the group discussion is more open, and when they report back they give their own opinions. To consolidate what they have read and discussed, the teacher gives them homework – to write about the characters they discussed. She also checks if the students enjoyed the lesson!

**Over to you!**

Do you have a shortage of materials for your students to read? Which of these ideas could you use? Discuss with another teacher.

- Write out short passages on the blackboard or on old cement sacks before the lesson.
- Cut up short articles into several pieces, then get students in groups to re-arrange them in the correct order. (This is sometimes called jigsaw reading).
- Get students to match pictures and texts from magazines.
- Get students to suggest titles for newspaper articles.
- Leave out some words from a reading passage. Students in groups have to fill in the missing words.

Can you think of other sources of reading material for your students? Make a list.

Often we are short of reading materials, and we cannot find texts that are so close to our students’ interests. In Peru, Daya did a ‘post-reading’ project using an international set book. Unfortunately his grade nine students did not seem very interested. So he gave them a project that really got them going! He divided them into groups of six or seven, and over a period of time they were given the task of preparing one chapter each to present to the rest of the class. They could use pictures, acting and storytelling. It turned out well - they were very creative!

To create more texts to read, some teachers take an existing story – perhaps directly from the text book or a reader - and then adapt it just a little, changing names and places, to make it more relevant. Of course this means you’ll need to find a way to make some copies for your students. Raul from Cuba finds out what his students enjoy and increases his reading materials by asking them to bring materials that they can find in books or articles into the class so they can use it for the rest of the group. Moya from Myanmar encourages his students to read both in class and outside his lessons. He even got the principal to bring in his own magazines, which he gave to the library of the school.

**Programme Summary:** We need to expose our students to different types of texts and teach them not to worry about having to understand every word. We can help our students to become better readers by giving them activities before they read, while they are reading and after they have read a text. The reading skills our students need to develop include ‘predicting’, ‘reading to get the main idea’ and ‘reading for specific details’.

To help ‘predicting’ we can discuss what might be in a text, guess some vocabulary or write some questions we hope the text will answer. We can set a few general questions to help the students with the skill of ‘understanding the main idea’. To help with ‘reading for details’ we can ask students to find dates, names or other information to answer questions, complete a chart or do a drawing. We heard a ‘post reading’ activity aimed at analysing the characters in a story, moving from discussing the story itself to the students’ real lives.

**Ask a colleague!**

Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
Programme 10: Teaching Listening – teacher support worksheet

Listening is an important skill in English - in fact, if our students cannot listen effectively, then they won’t be able to communicate. In this programme, teachers share their ideas for listening materials and activities. Later we hear a teacher from Argentina set up a listening exercise in class, and get practical tips on using the radio.

Kazimierz, a teacher who’s worked in Malaysia and many other countries, says many teachers think that listening comes naturally. But in fact, it’s something that can be learnt - we can teach our students how to listen.

So how can we help our students become good at listening? As we’ve heard in other programmes, it is important to use English as much as possible during lessons so your students get used to following instructions and communicating in English. Besides trying to speak English, as Zalmina, a teacher from Afghanistan, recommends, we also need to provide plenty of opportunities for listening during our lessons. Most teachers are given a course book to follow. Sometimes it comes with some listening ‘texts’ and exercises. However, although we can see the tape script or dialogues in the book, we don’t always have a chance to play a recording to our students!

Mirany, from Madagascar is not put off by this problem. She finds a way to present listening dialogues without playing the audio:

“What I often do is I become the cassette player. I choose a text which has only two characters. And when I read the text, I stand in front of the classroom. I write the names of the characters on the board – left and right. So when one character – A - speaks I wave my left hand and one character – B - speaks I wave my right hand.”

Mirany adapts the exercises provided in the course book. Usually these involve questions before, during and after listening. But that requires repeating the audio - so Mirany repeats again for the second time, and again for the last time.

‘By the end the cassette player gets tired and the voice gets lower (she laughs), but it’s better than nothing.’

In fact, it is not only ‘better than nothing’ - because as the narrator, you are in complete control of the listening ‘text’. You can change the one in your book to make it more interesting for your students!

Kazimierz explains:

‘You can take a text from a text book and you can change it slightly. Write it out for yourself and then you can be the voice, you can be the narrator, and your students listen to the activity.’

If your school can provide a recorder and a way to play back the audio in your classroom, then you indeed have a rich resource. Recording or creating your own listening materials can be very stimulating for students.

The dialogues and listening texts in course books can sometimes become quite monotonous. Raul’s teacher in Cuba found ways to provide more variety:

‘At some point, we got fed up and we were asking the teacher constantly to bring a variety of listening activities into the classroom - not only those from the course book – and she did. She was bringing something which was related to the context and the syllabus she was supposed to teach.’

The skills of listening are similar to those for reading. So usually we encourage ‘predicting’ before the students listen. Then some general questions to practise ‘listening for the main idea’ and activities to help them listen out for ‘specific details’. Your students are not just listening but doing something with listening.

Georgina is from South Africa, and she’s made good use of radio for practising listening skills:

‘I’ve used the radio to play the weather; we do activities with the news. They have to listen to the news and they have to write the topics that they hear and then work with a partner and …try and piece together what they heard.’

We hear a small part of an international weather forecast recorded from the radio:

‘Hello there, there’s a good deal of quieter weather over northern and central China. The snow has eased away. Moving into Vietnam and Northern Cambodia, there is certainly drier weather here, and more sunshine than the last few days…’
How would you use that? Well, before listening, students could predict some possible weather conditions - so useful vocabulary goes up on the board. The first time they listen, you can set a question to help with 'understanding the main idea'. For example, 'which region of the world is mentioned?' They won't understand all the details, but they should be able to work out the region. You can also tick off any words about weather conditions that they remember hearing. Now, you can ask them to listen again – this time for specific details. So - for example - put them into pairs, one student listens out for names of places and the other one for temperatures. The students then compare notes and see how much information they have collected between them. You can play it one more time to check and discuss! If you’re playing a short news bulletin or the weather live, you can’t repeat it, but you can still try out one of these exercises.

Using an authentic source like the radio means the level may be quite advanced. However, as with reading texts, to a certain extent, we can use a difficult ‘text’ but give our students a easy ‘task’ to suit their level.

A feature of real-life listening is that people talk to us face to face, and we are able to respond. Teacher Dario from Argentina demonstrates how he sets up a fun listening activity, which involves speaking and listening in pairs. You may have tried it - it works very well with younger learners. Dario’s class has been practising the vocabulary of animals in the zoo. He now asks one person in each pair to draw an animal and then describe it in English to the other. They listen, ask questions too, and try to draw the same animal without seeing the picture. First, Dario demonstrates with one student. Then everyone works in pairs, and after a time limit compares the results. This activity provides a real reason to listen very carefully and to ask extra questions. The results are usually very amusing - and creative!

If the opportunity is there you could invite a native speaker into your class and prompt your class to interview them. This can be very stimulating. Oscar, from Colombia, thinks teachers could also work among themselves. One teacher could invite another to his or her classroom and role play or simply have interviews with that teacher. Students would have the chance to ask questions or explore the language a little bit more.

Programme Summary: We need to find a variety of materials for listening. If you don’t have audio with your course book, the teacher can bring tape scripts to life by acting them out. We can adapt and create new listening texts. If we can record and play audio in class, there are many possibilities – including recording native speakers or playing clips from radio programmes. Give students a purpose for listening – they need activities for before, during and after listening.

As with reading, there are sub skills we can practise, for example ‘predicting’, ‘listening for the main idea’, and ‘listening for specific details’. We heard how this could work using a clip from a weather forecast. The text was authentic, but the task was at the students’ level. We could also use the radio in class. Dario from Argentina demonstrated an activity where students do all the speaking and listening in pairs – it is called Describe and Draw. And students could interview a visitor in English.

Ask a colleague!
Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
Programme 11: Flexible Activities – teacher support worksheet

In this programme we look at three ‘flexible activities’. Our first is ‘story telling’, the second a dictation technique called ‘dictogloss’, and the third, ‘using poems or songs’ in the lesson.

Telling stories starts with speaking and listening. We can tell stories but so can our students! This allows them to be a little inventive with English, building on what they know already. We hear a demonstration from Moya, a teacher from Myanmar. He explains how we can set up a ‘chain story’ in groups.

We invite some teachers to give an example of what students could do in a group. They are - three teachers from different continents; Moya, Nery, and Rafael. The idea is to practise the past tense - so ‘was’ or ‘went’ or ‘bought’...and they have to do it quickly. They start with the words ‘Yesterday I went shopping’ ... and after that they take turns and create their own story.

The teachers demonstrate how a chain story might work as a quick activity. To make sure students take turns and stick to English in their groups, you can ask one person from each group to act as a referee. In our example, the aim was to use the simple past tense in a new context, but remember, it is a fluency activity so you can accept that some of what students say will be a bit experimental! A time limit helps to stop the groups from rambling on, and in a large class you can ask a few sample groups to report back on the general idea of their story. For lower levels, you can set a scene for your story, or give out prompts, in the form of small cards with pictures or words. In this case, each student picks up one of those cards and must continue the story using the prompt. Storytelling can also lead on to writing – either in class or for homework. It’s very flexible!

The second activity is a kind of dictation known as ‘Dictogloss’. Daphne Pawelec, a British Council teacher, explains how it works:

‘I look at the next story text in the book, or find a story, or even make one up which is at the correct vocabulary, grammar and interest level of the students. Then I introduce a title, and invite the learners to call out all the vocabulary they can think of around this. This will help them later. I divide the class into groups of three if possible, pairs if not, then, if the learners are young I tell them we are going to play a game. I read out the story to them at normal speed and ask them to listen carefully to understand it.’

The first reading allows students to get the general idea of the text. Then Daphne reads it again but gives them a task:

‘Then I say that this time when I read it they can write down important words or phrases. Then I ask the groups to see how much of the story they can reconstruct together. I give a time limit to this and monitor to see where there are problems.’

At this point Daphne says that she usually asks her students to specially check a grammar item - for example the present tense or articles – something they are working on. If you have taken or adapted the text from your book it will feature a new aspect of grammar or vocabulary that has recently been introduced. If there is room and time, she joins two groups together to make six, if not they stay in their groups of three. Now she asks the groups to tell her, sentence by sentence, what the original text was.

‘Following this I reconstruct the text on the board by getting each group to provide a sentence or phrase. The rest of the groups usually call out their differences and we all look at meaning and form and if it is correct, we accept it as an alternative.’

By accepting a variety of versions you demonstrate that there are different ways to express the same idea in English. In Egypt, teacher Jack is doing a ‘dictogloss’ activity with his learners. He talks about cities in different countries. He is using this example of ‘dictogloss’ to focus on an area of grammar, in this case comparisons. The students are making notes as he speaks:

(Teacher to whole class) ‘I think Cairo is slightly bigger than Djakarta and in the summer it’s much hotter.... (continues)
Jack now reads his text once more and the students get a second chance to add to their notes. He wants to use this activity to help students reproduce quite accurate writing, so he helps them at the end by giving out sheets of paper with a ‘skeleton’ of the original text. It has gaps with words missing:

(Teacher) ‘OK. Now from your notes I want you to fill in the gaps of this skeleton of the text I’ve just read to you . . . Pass them around please...’ (students now talk in background, putting together what they’ve heard)

The activity is really useful because the learners practise listening to a text, then to each other in pairs or groups. They are speaking - with a purpose - and finally writing and checking. Dictogloss requires almost no resources. It can be used with any age group at any level and with any size group.

Our last flexible activity is using poems or songs in the classroom. This is very popular in some countries but used mainly with younger students in others. We asked teachers to give us some ideas about how they approach using songs. There are many different possibilities, including learning and singing along, completing the words, discussing the theme and writing down the story in your own words! Some teachers find out which songs their students know and like. In Kazakhstan, Kai likes using songs by the Beatles. He prepares some handouts with ‘fill in the gap’ activities. Then he sings the song once. The students try to tune into the song. The second time he asks students to fill in the gaps with some words of the song. You can also extend this activity with a focus on grammatical structures or vocabulary, like Yellow Submarine with sea vocabulary, or Let It Be with modal verbs. Kai says this could also be done with a poem. If you can’t make handouts, put the words on the board, with gaps for students to complete once they’ve discussed it. Songs or poems can be very memorable and help to focus on sounds as well as particular grammatical structures.

All these three activities – story telling, dictogloss and using songs are excellent for listening, and speaking, focusing on structures, and then moving on – if you wish – to writing activities.

They also encourage students to work together and agree the correct form, in other words ‘peer correction’.

**Over to you!**

How could you adapt these three activities with the classes you are teaching at present?

Try to think of some songs or poems you could use with your class.

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**Programme Summary:**

- Storytelling is a good way to encourage your students to develop fluency in English and to use their imagination. A ‘chain’ story involves your students working in small groups. Each student tells a bit more of a story, and it grows in new directions. A time limit helps to control the activity.

- ‘Dictogloss’ is a very flexible dictation-based technique which needs no special resources. You can find a suitable text to read. It encourages students to listen and make notes and reconstruct the text, partly in their own words.

- Songs can be used with older students as well as children, though you may need to find out what they like. They are really useful for listening for specific words, although they can also be used to focus on grammar. Songs or poems are usually very memorable and students enjoy this kind of activity.

**Ask a colleague!**

Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.
Our final topic in this series is ‘making lessons motivating’. How can we arouse the interest and enthusiasm of our students? As ever, we have lots of ideas from teachers from around the world. Nery from Mexico thinks it is the job of the teacher to keep students motivated while Agar, from Ethiopia says:

‘The primary thing is interest. It is those people who have an interest in teaching that should be teachers. And also, on the side of the students, you have to motivate and create interest in students…’

He believes that teachers need to make sure their students are aware of the future benefits of learning English. The reasons include educational purposes, work and future travel.

Students may recognise that English could be useful to them in future, but how do we grab their attention from day to day in our lessons? Throughout this series, teachers have said how important it is to concentrate on what the students are actually learning, rather than what we intended - but perhaps failed - to teach them! And part of this focus on our students’ experience of lessons is to find ways to respond to what interests them.

Saba, from Pakistan, and Moya, who works in Myanmar, gave some examples of how to capture our students’ interests. First, Saba told us about how other teachers and parents brought unwanted toys to school to use as fun resources for young primary learners. In Moya’s class the students were older. He also found motivating resources for teaching but this time the students themselves brought them to class!

‘I think a student can be asked to bring their hero’s picture. If possible with some information about them. To get them involved, to discuss or write about their favourite person using their favourite person’s picture will be a creative way of getting them to do their own work.’

Over to you!
Can you think of some ways to motivate students and interest them? Make a list

Ask a colleague!
How do your colleagues motivate their students? Discuss this with another teacher and make a list of ideas you hadn’t thought of yourself.

How easy is it to get to know what interests our students? Raul gives his students in Cuba a questionnaire at the start of the course!

‘I carry out a questionnaire on the topics they are most interested in, what they would like to learn in English or about the language as such. Every year at the beginning of the course I do this, so that I have a plan that I can bring to the classroom that is relevant to the students.’

Clearly, it is a great help to get regular feedback from our students, this will help us with our teaching plans. Agar gets feedback from students and adjusts his plans, while Nery, in Mexico, finds that younger learners like songs and action! You may remember in an earlier programme we visited a South African primary class, playing a kind of guessing and responding game with their teacher. Learning can be fun when you are very young!

Whatever age our students, the key word to avoiding boredom is variety. A variety of activities really seems to help with motivation. Students respond to a break from ‘chalk and talk’ – that’s when the teacher is doing all the talking and the students are passive – so try to break your lesson into different activities. If you introduce some pair and group work in each lesson it means they get to spend time actually using the language.
Let’s listen to some group work in action! We hear some Egyptian students doing an ‘information gap’ activity – each student knows only part of the information so they must ask and answer questions to work out all the details.... they have a real reason to communicate!

There’s lots of participation, respect for students’ ideas, a chance to share experiences – these things all make lessons motivating. When you set up group activities you can give people different roles to suit their abilities and personalities.

Dario, a teacher from Argentina suggests that the more extrovert students can lead the others. He also talks about how students can make word puzzles to be solved by others!

‘If I teach them ‘vegetables’, for example, I let them work in pairs and they have to come up with their own puzzle or their own word soup.’

A ‘word soup’ is when you put different letters into a grid, and if you read it backwards, forwards, up or down you can find a few real words hidden in the grid. Dario involves the learners:

‘...with short stories that they need to complete or with dialogues followed by a questionnaire, by some reading comprehension questions, I usually resort to the learners because it will be always much more creative and more natural because it comes from their own world, from their own experience.’

In Malawi, teacher Geoffrey gets more advanced students to take part in writing activities by bringing in letters from home.

‘I told my students they should bring as many different types of letters from whatever source they could find. I was amazed at the volume of resources that they brought to class.’

Why is involving students in this way so popular with many teachers? Well, basically, because it helps to make students more responsible and aware of what they need to do, to learn and to improve their English. This is also why homework is so important. Moya – a teacher from Myanmar – believes that students need to do extra study outside the classroom. Motivated students must understand that learning cannot only take place in the classroom. And teachers can help students to develop more responsibility. Here’s Nery again:

‘An important thing that students need to be aware of is that they are responsible for their own learning and so the teacher gives them extra material for them to complete at home.’

She has introduced some new vocabulary to her class. Then she asks them to create flashcards to reinforce their vocabulary. Her class help to make flashcards to assist in their own learning. Finally, we hear from an advanced student who has really taken responsibility for her own learning! She’s been studying writing and says she is keen to improve her word power by self study!

**Programme Summary:** Motivated students want to learn English as it will help them in the future – in education, in work or just for interest – so it’s a teacher’s job to explain the benefits! Students can get more involved, they can supply ideas and even materials for classes – but we teachers need to get their feedback, to find out what they respond to and to improve our professional practice.

When students are serious about learning they will also need to do homework and become better at self-study. Lessons don’t need to be boring. Think about the word ‘variety’ – in materials, in activities, in the chance to do pair or group work, in the different roles we give our students – this will help us plan more interesting lessons! If you are a teacher of English, you will surely have plenty to add to this short list of motivating ideas!

**Ask a colleague!**
Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas that will work in your situation