

Skills and Practices of English Teaching as a Foreign Language

英语课堂教学技能与实践



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河北人民出版社

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Preface

The teaching of English has changed continually in the era with new theories, practices, and materials erupting all over the world. We are continually challenged by new research, new findings and new creations in the field. High students' expectations, professional demands outside the classroom, emotional connections with students' lives, pressure to keep up with a rapidly changing field and information overload keeps the language teaching a dynamic subject. The development and change in language teaching allows the professionals to inform us more about new ideas, new methods and new concepts on contemporary English language teaching in China. The situation is changing, so a book about language teaching skills has to keep up with the time. That is the reason why we decide to compile this book.

The increased learning and teaching of English throughout the world during recent years has produced a new cadre of professionals: teachers of EFL. *Skills and Practices to English Teaching as A Foreign Language* is a book that relates to English language teaching from practical perspectives. This book concerns the importance of the classroom teaching skills in English language teaching in Chinese context. So this book intends to offer the Chinese readers teaching kills or concrete teaching skills that inform the practical teaching practice. This book attempts to look the practical teaching skills that underlie the successful language teaching. Many EFL teachers have started teaching without specific training and others feel they need to rethink the basis of their teaching.

Skills and Practices to English Teaching as a Foreign Language aims

to introduce practical skills, yet very popular in language teaching nowadays, to its Chinese readers, such as how to be a good English teacher, skills and competence of English teachers or some strategies of writing, reading and listening and so on in this book.

Chapter1 concerns the character and personality of the teacher language and how the teachers talk and give instructions to the students.

Chapter2 showcases the skills and competence of English Teachers.

Chapter3 gives an analysis to the nature of Teaching Strategies.

Chapter4 offers a brief introduction to the roles, foundations, basic model and characteristics of experimental learning.

Chapter5 presents the skills of recognition and production.

Chapter6 and 8 explains the reading strategies on pre-reading, during reading, post-reading activities, how to work with a text and how to handle the vocabulary.

Chapter7 is about the listening and speaking. The visual and verbal signaling confirms to the speaker that listening and understanding has taken place. The receptive capacity for decoding the language and content of the message is a skill which can be trained and developed through teaching, no less than the productive skill of speaking

Chapter9 discusses writings in the language classroom. It lists the principles with some guidance your students can go from good sentences, to paragraphs, to texts with due attention knowing to style and formality that a teacher should follow in the process of motivating learners to do writing and how to help learners to grasp writing skills and strategies and effective ways of promoting writing.

Chapter10 gives a special attention to the teaching materials and instructional materials which play an important role in teaching learning process. Teachers should select teaching materials and instructional ones

according to the objectives decided by teachers so that skills of reading, understanding, writing and speaking and sub skills of skills could be developed in students.

Chapter11 covers managing the classroom, running your classes effectively, arrange the room and establishing classroom rules in language teaching.

Chapter12 presents ten ways to energize an English lesson including browsing the internet, letting the student teach, opening up your life, playing a game, getting musical and so on.

Skills and Practices to English Teaching as a Foreign Language is a practical book. We earnestly hope that this book will be beneficial in articulating a theoretical framework for the English language teaching, and helpful to those who want to continue to grow professionally and finally become a master teacher and an expert in language teaching. We also hope that this book will be a guidebook to the language students and teachers outside the classroom and to language teaching practitioners of all levels in language teaching.

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Chapter 1

What makes a good English teacher?

The character and personality of the teacher is a crucial issue in the classroom. If you want to have a good achievement, teacher must be a good teacher. Next I'll talk about some issues.

1. What makes a good teacher?

In an attempt to find out what we all think about teachers and teaching, I recently asked a variety of people the question "what makes a good teacher?" the following answers are representative of the many that were given.

They should make their lessons interesting so you don't fall asleep in class.

A teacher must love her job. If he really enjoys his job, that'll make the lessons more interesting. Teachers who look fed up, intolerant or unhappy with what they are doing tend to have a negative effect on their students. When you observe good teachers in class you will notice that, even if they are feeling terrible, they put on a good 'teacher's face' when they enter the classroom.

A good teacher is an entertainer and I mean that in a positive sense, not a negative sense. Students enjoy being entertained and amused. However, a balance has to be struck between entertainment and teaching. Sometimes, the former can overwhelm the latter.

A good teacher should be informed and has lots of knowledge, not only

of his subject. The preoccupation with the teacher's personality is reflected here too: teachers should not be afraid to bring their own interests and lives into the classroom.

Although, as we can see, the character and personality of the teacher is a crucial issue in the classroom, by far the greatest number of responses to the question 'What makes a good teacher?' was not so much about teachers themselves, but rather about the relationship between the teacher and the students. This is borne out in the following responses.

A good teacher is somebody who has an affinity with the students that they're teaching. Successful teachers are those people who can identify with the hopes, aspirations and difficulties of their students while they are teaching them.

A good teacher should try and draw out the quiet ones control the more talkative ones. Experienced teachers can tell you of classes which are dominated by bright, witty, loud, extrovert students. As this EFL teacher implies, it's easy to be captivated by such students. It takes more effort to ensure that the quiet, shyer students also get a chance. One of the secondary students I questioned said, 'A good teacher is ...someone who asks the people who don't always put their hands up.'

He should be able to correct people without offending them. Explaining to students that they have made a mistake is one of the most perilous encounters in the classroom. It has to be done with tact. The teacher has to measure what is appropriate for a particular student in a particular situation.

A good teacher is someone who helps rather than shouts. This was one of the many comments about discipline said by a secondary school student. The people who resent bad behavior most are not teachers, but other students who feel their time is being wasted. Learning how to manage

students and how to control boisterous classes is one of the fundamental skills of teaching.

A good teacher is someone who knows our names. Class management — the ability to control and inspire a class, is one of the fundamental skills of teaching. Teachers find it much easier if their students believe that they are genuinely interested in them and available for them.

The most obvious common feature of the different teacher's accounts was that in response to our question about their teaching they almost always talked about what their pupils were doing.

A simple answer to the question “what makes a good teacher” therefore, is that good teacher care more about their student's learning than they do about their own teaching.

2. How should teachers talk to students?

The way that teachers talk to students, the manner in which they interact with them is one of the crucial teacher skills, but it does not demand technical expertise. It does, however, require teachers to put emphasis on the people they are talking to.

One group of people who seem to find it fairly natural to adapt their language to their audience are parents when they talk to their young children. Studies show that they use more exaggerated tones of voice, and speak with less complex grammatical structures than they would if they were talking to adults. Their vocabulary is generally more restricted and the attempt to make eye contact is greater. They generally do these things unconsciously.

Though teachers and students are not the same as parents and children, this subconscious ability to ‘rough-tune’ the language is a skill they have in common. Rough-tuning is that unconscious simplification which both

parents and teachers make. Neither group sets out to get the level of language exactly correct for their audience. They rely, instead, on a general perception of what is being understood by the people listening to them. Their empathy allows them to almost feel whether the level of language they are using is appropriate for the audience they are addressing.

Experienced teachers rough-tune the way they speak to students as a matter of course. Newer teachers need to concentrate their focus on their students' comprehension as the yardstick by which to measure their own speaking style in the classroom.

Apart from adapting their language, experienced teachers also use physical movement: gestures, expressions and mime. It becomes almost second nature to show happiness and sadness movement and time sequences, concepts using these techniques. They become part of the use of language teachers, especially with students at lower levels.

3. How should teachers give instructions?

This issue of how to talk to students becomes crucial when teachers are giving their students instructions. The best activity in the world is a waste of time if the students don't understand what it is they are supposed to do.

There are two general rules for giving instructions, they must be kept as simple as possible, and they must be logical. Before giving instructions, therefore, teachers must ask themselves the following questions: What is the important information I am trying to convey? What must the students know if they are to complete this activity successfully? Which information do they need first? Which should come next?

When teachers give instructions, it is important for them to check that the students have understood what they are being asked to do. This can be

achieved either by asking a student to explain the activity after the teacher has given the instructions or by getting someone to show the other people in the class how the exercise works. Where students all share the same mother tongue, a member of the class can be asked to translate the instructions as a check that they have understood them.

4. Who should talk in class?

There is a continuing debate about the amount of time teachers should spend talking in class. Trainees' classes are sometimes criticized because there is too much TTT. (Teacher Talking Time) and not enough STT (Student Talking Time).

Students' speaking, using the language they are learning, is a vital part of a teacher's job. Students are the people who need the practice; in other words, not the teacher. In general a good teacher maximizes STT and minimizes TTT.

Good TTT may have beneficial qualities, however, if teachers knows how to talk to students, if they know how to rough-tune her language to the students' level, as we have discussed above then the students get a chance to hear language which is certainly above their own productive level, but which they can more or less understand. Such 'comprehensible input' where students receive rough-tuned input in a relaxed and unthreatening way is an important feature in language acquisition. TTT works.

A classroom where the teacher's voice droned on and on day after day and where you hardly ever hear the students say anything is not one that most teachers and students would approve of, however. TTT can be terribly over- used. Conversely, a class where the teacher seems reluctant to speak is not very attractive either.

The best lessons are the ones where STT is maximized, but where at

appropriate moments during the lesson, the teacher is not afraid to summarize what is happening, tell a story, enter into discussion etc. Good teachers use their common sense and experience to get the balance right.

5. What are the best kinds of lesson?

One of the greatest enemies of successful teaching is student boredom. This is often caused by the deadening predictability of much classroom time. Students frequently know what is going to happen in class and they know this because it will be the same as what happened in the last class and a whole string of classes before that. Something has to be done to break the chain.

Breaking Rules, John Fanselow suggests that, both for the teacher's sanity and the student's continuing involvement, teachers need to violate their own behavior patterns. If a teacher normally teaches in casual clothes, he should turn up one day wearing a suit. If a teacher normally sits down, she should stand up. If he or she is normally noisy and energetic as a teacher, he or she should spend a class behaving calmly and slowly. Each time teachers break one of their own rules, in other words, they send a ripple through the class. That ripple is a mixture of surprise and curiosity and it is a perfect starting point for student involvement.

The need for surprise and variety within a forty-minute lesson is also overwhelming. If, for example, students spend all of that time writing sentences, they will probably get bored. But if, in the forty minutes, there are a number of different tasks with a selection of different topics, the students are much more likely to remain interested.

However, variety is not the same as anarchy. Despite what we have said, students tend to like a certain amount of predictability: they appreciate a safe structure which they can rely on. And too much chopping and

changing, too much variety in a forty-minute lesson is destabilishing. Good teachers find a balance between predictable safety and unexpected variety.

6. How important is it to follow a pre-arranged plan?

It is one thing to be able to plan lessons which will have variety. Once again, a balance has to be struck between teachers attempting to achieve what they set out to achieve on the one hand and responding to what students are saying or doing on the other.

Suppose that the teacher has planned that the students should prepare a dialogue and then act it out, after which there is reading text and some exercises for them to get through. The teacher has allowed twenty minutes for dialogue preparation and acting out. But when the students start working on this activity, it is obvious that they need more time. The teacher then discovers that they would like to spend at least half the lesson on just the acting out phase which they are finding helpful and enjoyable. At that moment, he or she has to decide whether to abandon the original plan and go along with the students' wishes or whether it is better to press ahead regardless of them.

Another scenario is also possible: all the students are still working on a dialogue preparation except for two pairs who have already finished. The teacher then has to decide whether to tell them to wait for the others to catch up or whether to stop the rest of class to prevent this. Then the other students might end up feeling frustrated because they didn't have a chance to finish.

There are other crises too: the tape recorder suddenly doesn't work; the teacher has forgotten to bring the material they were relying on; the students look at the planned reading text and say 'We've done that before'.

Good teachers are flexible enough to cope with these situations. Because they are focusing on the students and what they need, they are able