TEACHING TECHNIQUES IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

SERIES EDITORS
Russell N. Campbell
William E. Rutherford

# Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching

Diane Larsen-Freeman

OXFORD

SECOND EDITION

# Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching

DIANE LARSEN-FREEMAN



*Second Edition*

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogotá Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai Dar es Salaam Delhi Florence Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai Nairobi Paris São Paulo Shanghai Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto Warsaw

with associated companies in Berlin Ibadan

Oxford and Oxford English are registered trade marks of Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries



First published 2000
Fourth impression 2001



ISBN 0 19 435574 8

Printed in China

# Series Editors' Preface

It is always a feeling of great pride for general editors of a pedagogical series when the resounding success of one of its books leads to the demand for publication of a second, expanded edition. We are therefore extremely pleased that Diane Larsen-Freeman has undertaken to contribute to the field of language-teaching professionals a newly revised, updated, and enlarged version of her original and immensely valuable *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. The ways in which the second edition differs from the first—from the addition of new methods, through more attention to the learning process, to a little self-indulgence in methodological choice—are amply documented in Diane's own message 'To the Teacher Educator', and these are departures that are both appropriate and illuminating. What has *not* changed, however—and modesty would prevent her from saying so—are the intangible qualities that made the first edition so special: enlightenment without condescension, comprehensiveness without tedium, engagement without oversimplification. Still evident as before is Diane's gift for being able gently to lead one to examine one's own professional behavior for possible incongruities between one's view of language and the way one teaches it. And still there, even intensified, is evidence of her serious and deeply personal thought devoted to complex pedagogical issues and her incomparable ability to make these matters come alive with great clarity for the widest professional readership. It is no mean accomplishment.

Russell N. Campbell
William E. Rutherford

To my parents, Elaine and Randolph Larsen,
with heartfelt gratitude for their love and
encouragement

# Acknowledgments

I must begin by thanking the readers of the first edition of this book. Your receptiveness has enabled me to publish this updated second edition. In addition, it has been a joy to interact with you.

The approach I have used in this book is based on my experience in teaching the methods/approaches course at the School for International Training. This book would not have been written in the first place if it were not for the influence of my colleagues and students there. I am very grateful to them all. In particular, for this second edition, I must single out Carolyn Nims, who went out of her way to give me comments based upon her experience in using the book in a teacher education program. Debra Blake and Bill Conley were also kind enough to read portions of this manuscript and offer comments.

This book has also benefitted from the fact that leading methodologists have generously responded to my request for feedback on portions of this manuscript. I am indebted to Earl Stevick (To the Teacher Educator), Shakti Gattegno of Educational Solutions Inc. (Silent Way), Georgi Lozanov, Alison Miller, and Tetsuo Nishizawa (Desuggestopedia), Jennybelle Rardin and Pat Tirone of Counseling-Learning Institutes (Community Language Learning), James Asher (Total Physical Response), Marjorie Wesche (content-based instruction), and Elsa Auerbach (participatory approach). Their comments made me feel more confident that I have interpreted the methodologists' intent. I am also grateful for the comments of Ruth Wajnryb of LARA Consultancy in Australia, and Joann Crandall. Any remaining errors of interpretation are, of course, fully my responsibility.

For the initial faith they showed and for their continued encouragement and helpful suggestions, I acknowledge with gratitude the editors of this series, Russell Campbell and William Rutherford.

It has also been a pleasure working with the editors at Oxford University Press, first Anne Conybeare and then Julia Sallabank.

Finally, I must express my deep appreciation to my spouse, Elliott, who has, as always, given me his support throughout this project.

Diane Larsen-Freeman

# To the Teacher Educator

## ON LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS AND THEIR USE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

A study of methods is invaluable in teacher education in at least five ways:

1 Methods serve as a foil for reflection that can aid teachers in bringing to conscious awareness the thinking that underlies their actions. We know that teachers come to teacher training with ideas about the teaching/learning process formed from the years they have spent as students themselves (Lortie 1975). A major purpose of teacher education is to help teachers make the tacit explicit (Shulman 1987; Freeman 1991). When teachers are exposed to methods and asked to reflect on their principles and actively engage with their techniques, they can become clearer about why they do what they do. They become aware of their own fundamental assumptions, values, and beliefs.

2 By becoming clear on where they stand, teachers can choose to teach differently from the way they were taught. They are able to see why they are attracted to certain methods and repelled by others. They are able to make choices that are informed, not conditioned. They may be able to resist, or at least argue against, the imposition of a particular method by authorities. In other situations, where a method is not imposed, methods offer teachers alternatives to what they currently think and do. It does not necessarily follow that teachers will choose to modify their current practice. The point is that they will have the understanding to do so, if they are able to and want to.

3 A knowledge of methods is part of the knowledge base of teaching. With it, teachers join a community of practice (Freeman 1992). Being a community member entails learning the professional discourse that community members use so that professional dialog can take place. Being part of a discourse community confers a professional identity and connects teachers with others so they are not so isolated in their practice.

4 A professional discourse community may also challenge teachers' conceptions of how teaching leads to learning. Interacting with others'

conceptions of practice helps keep teachers' teaching alive—helps prevent it from becoming stale and overly routinized (Prabhu 1990).

5 A knowledge of methods helps expand a teacher's repertoire of techniques. This in itself provides an additional avenue for professional growth, as some teachers find their way to new philosophical positions, not by first entertaining new principles, but rather by trying out new techniques. Moreover, effective teachers who are more experienced and expert have a large, diverse repertoire of best practices (Arends 1998), which presumably helps them deal more effectively with the unique qualities and idiosyncrasies of their students.

Despite these potential gains from a study of methods, it is important to acknowledge that since the publication of the first edition of this book in 1986, a number of writers in our field have criticized the concept of language teaching methods. Some say that methods are prescriptions for classroom behavior, and that teachers are encouraged by textbook publishers and academics to implement them whether or not the methods are appropriate for a particular context (Pennycook 1989; Richards 1990; Holliday 1994). Others have noted that the search for the best method is ill-advised (Prabhu 1990; Bartolome 1994), that teachers do not think about methods when planning their lessons (Long 1991), and that methodological labels tell us little about what really occurs in classrooms (Allwright 1988; Katz 1996).

These criticisms have made me stop and think. I suppose it is true, I thought, that a particular method can be imposed on teachers by others. However, these others are likely to be disappointed if they hope that mandating a particular method will lead to standardization. For we know that teaching is more than following a recipe. Any method is going to be shaped by a teacher's own understanding, beliefs, style, and level of experience. Teachers are not mere conveyor belts delivering language through inflexible prescribed and proscribed behaviors (Larsen-Freeman 1991); they are professionals who can, in the best of all worlds, make their own decisions. They are informed by their own experience, the findings from research, and the wisdom of practice accumulated by the profession (see, for example, Kumaravadivelu 1994).

Furthermore, a method is decontextualized. How a method is implemented in the classroom is going to be affected not only by who the teacher is, but also by who the students are, their and the teacher's expectations of appropriate social roles, the institutional constraints and demands, and factors connected to the wider sociocultural context in which the instruction takes place. Even the 'right' method will not com-

pensate for inadequate conditions of learning or overcome sociopolitical inequities. In addition, decisions that teachers make are often affected by exigencies in the classroom rather than by methodological considerations. Saying that a particular method is practiced certainly does not give us the whole picture of what is happening in the classroom. Then, too, since a method is more abstract than a teaching activity, it is not surprising that teachers think in terms of activities rather than methodological choices when they plan their lessons.

Thus, while I understand the criticisms, I do not believe that a study of language teaching methods should be excluded from language teacher education. It is not methods, but how they are used that is at issue. A study of methods need not lead to the de-skilling of teachers but rather can serve a variety of useful functions when used appropriately in teacher education. It can help teachers articulate, and perhaps transform, their understanding of the teaching/learning process. Methods can serve as models of the integration of theory (the principles) and practice (the techniques). Their study can encourage continuing education in the lifelong process of learning to teach (Larsen-Freeman 1998). Teachers and teacher educators should not be blinded by the criticisms of methods and thus fail to see their invaluable contribution to teacher education and continuing development. Key to doing so, though, is moving beyond ideology to inquiry, a movement to which I hope this book will contribute.

## CHANGES IN THE SECOND EDITION

In addition to some modest updating of all the methods presented in the first edition, Chapter 6 has undergone a substantial revision to reflect the evolution of Suggestopedia (first edition) to Desuggestopedia in this edition. Further, the Introduction (Chapter 1) has been expanded. Contrary to those who fear that a method will be imposed on practitioners, my experience as a teacher educator is that the challenge lies in getting teachers to leave behind teaching as they were taught and become aware of, and open to, alternatives. I therefore welcome the opportunity that the expanded chapter has given me to elaborate on one way that openness can be encouraged.

Another change is the inclusion of methods that have come into prominence since the first edition of this book. In order to keep this book from becoming too long, I have grouped a number of methods in two chapters. In addition to considerations of length, I have justified this decision because it seems these methods have in common the views that first,

language can best be learned when it is taught through communication, rather than for it (Chapter 10, on content-based, task-based, and participatory approaches), and second, that language acquisition can be enhanced by working not only on language, but also on the process of learning (Chapter 11, on learning strategies, cooperative learning, and multiple intelligences).

A further substantial modification is that the epilogue of the first edition has grown into a full chapter of its own (Chapter 12) in this second edition. Readers of the first edition have told me that they wished that I had concluded with a more explicit evaluation and comparison of the methods. I chose not to do so in the first edition of this book, as I am not of the opinion that the purpose of learning about methods is so one can adopt the right one, or that I could choose for others which one that would be. However, in this second edition, I have responded to readers' requests by providing a summary chart of the methods discussed in this book, and by so doing, highlighting their major differences. I have also used the opportunity that a full final chapter presents to indulge myself in sharing with readers my views on making informed methodological choices.

A word about nomenclature is also in order. I am using the term 'method' here not to mean a formulaic prescription, but rather a coherent set of links between principles and certain techniques and procedures. Anthony (1963) has made the case for a tripartite hierarchy. As he put it: '... techniques carry out a method which is consistent with an approach' (p. 64). Following Anthony, in certain of the chapters, I will introduce a particular method by showing how it is an example of a more general approach to language teaching. However, not all methods discussed in this book conveniently follow from a general approach. They all do, though, have both a conceptual and an operational component, fitting the definition in Richards *et al.* (1992): *Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics* (a method is 'a way of teaching a language which is based on systematic principles and procedures'), and justifying my use of the term. Admittedly, I sometimes have found it difficult to use the term 'method' with more recent innovations, such as content-based instruction and cooperative learning. At times, I have resorted to the term 'methodological innovations.'

Even so, some language educators might object to the inclusion of content-based, task-based, and participatory approaches in a methods book, for they might be more comfortable calling these syllabus types. Nevertheless, others feel that a method designation is very appropriate. Snow (1991), for instance, characterizes content-based instruction as a 'method

with many faces' both to make the case for content-based instruction as a method of language teaching, and to capture the great variety of forms and settings in which it takes place. Kumaravadivelu (1993) observes that the term 'task' is often used with reference to both content and methodology of language teaching. Indeed, within the strong version of a communicative approach (Howatt 1984), the traditional separation of syllabus design and methodology is blurred. If students learn to communicate by communicating (Breen 1984), then the destination and the route become one and the same (Nunan 1989). Finally, if we apply the definition of a method we are using in this book, 'A method is a coherent set of thought-in-action links,' then the three rightfully belong.

Some might also question whether the three are distinctive enough to be treated separately. For example, Skehan (1998) makes the point that one could regard much content-based instruction (as well as project work, which we will also briefly consider in Chapter 10) as particular examples of a task-based approach. And others have suggested that task-based and participatory approaches are a form of content-based instruction. In any case, although it should be acknowledged that these methods are unified by the assumption that students learn to communicate by communicating, their scope and their particular foci seem distinctive enough to warrant independent treatment.

Finally, although I have made every effort toward a faithful rendering of each method and methodological innovation, there will undoubtedly be those who would not totally accept my rendition. This is understandable and probably inevitable. My description is, as it must be, a product of my own experience.

It is my sincere hope that this book will both inform and stimulate its readers and that it will encourage them to reflect, inquire, and experiment. If it meets these goals, then it may help to restore faith in the appropriate use of teaching methods in language teacher education.

*Brattleboro, Vermont* Diane Larsen-Freeman

## REFERENCES

**Allwright, Dick.** 1988. *Observation in the Classroom.* London: Longman.

**Anthony, Edward.** 1963. 'Approach, method, and technique.' *English Language Teaching Journal* 17: 63–7 reprinted in Allen, H. and R. Campbell (eds.): *Teaching English as a Second Language.* (2nd edn.) 1972. New York: McGraw-Hill.

**Arends, Richard.** 1998. *Learning to Teach.* (4th edn.) New York: McGraw-Hill.

**Bartolome, Lilia.** 1994. 'Beyond the methods fetish: Toward a humanizing pedagogy.' *Harvard Educational Review* 64/2: 173–94.

**Breen, Michael.** 1984. 'Process syllabuses for the language classroom' in Brumfit, C. (ed.): *General English Syllabus Design—Curriculum and Syllabus Design for the General English Classroom* (EFL Documents 118). Oxford: Pergamon Press for the British Council.

**Freeman, Donald.** 1991. 'To make the tacit explicit: Teacher education, emerging discourse and conceptions of teaching.' *Teaching and Teacher Education* 7: 439–54.

**Freeman, Donald.** 1992. 'Language teacher education, emerging discourse, and change in classroom practice' in Flowerdew, J., M. Brock, and S. Hsia (eds.): *Perspectives on Second Language Teacher Education.* Hong Kong: City Polytechnic of Hong Kong.

**Holliday, Adrian.** 1994. *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

**Howatt, A. P. R.** 1984. *A History of English Language Teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Katz, Anne.** 1996. 'Teaching style: a way to understand instruction in language classrooms' in Bailey, K. and D. Nunan (eds.): *Voices from the Language Classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Kumaravadivelu, B.** 1993. 'The name of the task and the task of naming: Methodological aspects of task-based pedagogy' in Crookes, G. and S. Gass (eds.): *Tasks in a Pedagogical Context.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

**Kumaravadivelu, B.** 1994. 'The postmethod condition: (E)merging strategies for second/foreign language teaching.' *TESOL Quarterly* 28/1: 27–48.

**Larsen-Freeman, Diane.** 1991. 'Research on language teaching methodologies: A review of the past and an agenda for the future' in de Bot, K., R. B. Ginsberg, and C. Kramsch (eds.): *Foreign Language Research in Cross-cultural Perspective.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing.

**Larsen-Freeman, Diane.** 1998. 'Learning teaching is a lifelong process.' *Perspectives* XXIV/2: 5–11.

**Long, Michael.** 1991. 'Focus on form: A design feature in language teaching methodology' in de Bot, K., R. B. Ginsberg, and C. Kramsch (eds.): *Foreign Language Research in Cross-cultural Perspective.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing.

**Lortie, Dan.** 1975. *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Nunan, David.** 1989. *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Pennycook, Alastair.** 1989. 'The concept of method, interested knowledge, and the politics of language teaching.' *TESOL Quarterly* 23/4: 591–615.

**Prabhu, N. S.** 1990. 'There is no best method—why?' *TESOL Quarterly* 24/2: 161–76.

**Richards, Jack.** 1990. *The Language Teaching Matrix.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Shulman, Lee.** 1987. 'Knowledge-base and teaching: Foundations of the new reform.' *Harvard Educational Review* 57/1: 1–22.

**Skehan, Peter.** 1998. 'Task-based instruction.' *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics: Foundations of Second Language Teaching.* Volume 18.

**Snow, Marguerite Ann.** 1991. 'Content-based instruction: A method with many faces' in Alatis, J. E. (ed.). *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

# Contents

# 1 Introduction

## GOALS OF THIS BOOK

One of the goals of this book is for you to learn about many different language teaching methods. I will use the term 'language teaching method' to mean a coherent set of links between actions and thoughts in language teaching. The actions are the techniques and the thoughts are the principles in the title of this book: *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*.

A second goal is to help you uncover the thoughts that guide your own actions as a teacher. They may not be ones of which you are aware. Seeking to determine which principles of the methods you read about here are most [dis]harmonious with your own thinking will help you to uncover some of your implicit thoughts and beliefs about teaching.

A third goal is to introduce you to a variety of techniques, some of which will be new. Although certain techniques may require further training, others can be immediately implemented. Feel free to experiment and adapt those techniques to your teaching context.

## THOUGHT-IN-ACTION LINKS

It is important to recognize that methods link thoughts and actions because teaching is not entirely about one or the other. Of course this is as true about your own teaching as it is about any method you will read about in this book. As a teacher of language, you have thoughts[1] about your subject matter—what language is, what culture is—and about your students—who they are as learners and how it is they learn. You also have thoughts about yourself as a teacher and what you can do to help your students learn. It is very important for you to become aware of the thoughts that guide your actions in the classroom. With this awareness, you will be able to examine why you do what you do and perhaps choose to think about or do things differently.

[1] I will use the term *thoughts* for the sake of simplicity; however, I mean for *thoughts* to include beliefs, attitudes, values, and awareness as well.

As an example, let me relate an anecdote about a teacher with whom I was working a few years ago. I will call her Heather, although that is not her real name. From her study of methods in Stevick (1980), Heather became very interested in how to work with teacher control and student initiative in her teaching. Heather determined that during her student teaching internship she would exercise less control of the lesson in order to encourage her students to take more initiative. She decided to narrow the goal down to having students take initiative in posing the questions in the classroom, recognizing that so often it is the teacher who asks all the questions, not the students.

I was Heather's teaching supervisor. When I came to observe her, she was very discouraged. She felt that the students were not taking the initiative that she was trying to get them to take, but she did not know what was wrong.

When I visited her class, I observed the following:

| | |
|---|---|
| HEATHER | Juan, ask Anna what she is wearing. |
| JUAN | What are you wearing? |
| ANNA | I am wearing a dress. |
| HEATHER | Anna, ask Muriel what she is writing. |
| ANNA | What are you writing? |
| MURIEL | I am writing a letter. |

This pattern continued for some time. It was clear to see that Heather had successfully avoided the common problem of the teacher asking all the questions in the class. The teacher did not ask the questions—the students did. However, Heather had not realized her aspiration of encouraging student initiative since it was she who took the initiative by prompting the students to ask the questions. Heather and I discussed the matter in the post-observation conference.

Heather came to see that if she truly wanted students to take more initiative, then she would have to set up the situation in a way that her participation in an activity was not essential. We talked about several ways of her doing this. During this discussion, Heather came to another important awareness. She realized that since she was a fairly inexperienced teacher, she felt insecure about having the students make the decisions about who says what to whom when. What if the students were to ask her many questions that she could not answer? While having students take initiative in the classroom was consonant with her values, Heather realized that she should think further about the level of student initiative with which she could be comfortable at this point in her career as a teacher. We talked about other options she could pursue as well. The point was that it

was not necessarily simply a matter of Heather improving her technique; she could see that that was one possibility. Another was to rethink the way in which she thought about her teaching (Larsen-Freeman 1993).

The links between thought and action were very important in Heather's teaching. She came to realize that when something was not going as she had intended, she could change one or she could change the other. Heather had an idea of what she wanted to accomplish—but the action she chose to carry out her idea did not accomplish her purpose. When she examined her intentions more clearly, she saw that she was not yet ready to have her students' take complete initiative in the lesson.

## A COHERENT SET

Returning to the methods in this book, we will see that it is the link between thoughts and actions that is common to them all. But there is another way in which links are made in methods, and that is the connection between one thought-in-action link and another. A method is a coherent set of such links in the sense that there should be some theoretical or philosophical compatibility among the links. If a teacher believes that language is made up of a set of fixed patterns, it makes little sense for him or her to use techniques which help learners discover the abstract rules underlying a language to enable them to create novel patterns.

To say there is a coherence among the links does not mean, however, that the techniques of one method cannot be used with another. The techniques may look very different in practice though, if the thoughts behind them differ. For example, Stevick (1993) has shown that the simple technique of teaching students a dialog using a picture to provide a context can lead to very different conclusions about teaching and learning depending on how the technique is managed. If the students first look at the picture, close their eyes while the teacher reads the dialog, and then repeat the dialog bit by bit after the teacher, repeating until they have learned it fluently and flawlessly, the students could infer that it is the teacher who is the provider of all language and its meaning in the classroom. They could further infer that they should use that 'part of their brains that copies but not the part that creates' (1993: 432).

If, on the other hand, before they listen to or read the dialog, they look at the picture and describe it using words and phrases they can supply, and then they guess what the people in the picture might be saying to each other before they hear the dialog, they might infer that their initiative is welcomed, and that it is all right to be wrong. If they then practice the dialog in pairs without striving for perfect recall, they might also infer that