


## Reading Homework due Week 4 (22nd March)

### Task:

1. Read the attached text
2. Choose two sections from the text (a section can be as short as a paragraph or as long as several pages) and write one page about how the information could influence your teaching in the future.

### Submission guidelines:

- Create a new text document for your answers
- Include your name and student number
- Use 12 point Arial font, single spaced
- Try to keep your answers to about one A4 page
- Save the file as a .doc or .pdf file before you submit - don't submit Hangul .hwp files
- **Submit your file using Edmodo.** Log in and go to our class page. Click 'Turn in' on the correct assignment post, click the small square file button (  ), upload your file, finally click the blue 'Turn in Assignment' button.

# A child-centered lesson

*A child-centered lesson can take various forms, and we need to establish what style is appropriate for Asian EFL learners, and how a lesson can work in practice. How do we plan the lesson? How do we introduce new words and patterns? What techniques work well? Do the children run around doing what they want, or should we have a clear syllabus?*

## POINTS TO CONSIDER

*In an effective child-centered lesson, we use time efficiently and actively help children reach their full potential.*

### Teacher-centered or child-centered

When considering how to teach effectively, teachers often look at teacher-centered and child-centered lessons and see good points in both. Some of the good points often mentioned are as follows:

#### Teacher-centered

We can plan a lesson carefully.  
We can use time efficiently.  
We can teach clearly and logically.  
The children behave well and do not chat so much.

#### Child-centered

The children enjoy themselves.  
They learn naturally and actively.  
They are spontaneous.  
Their eyes shine brightly.

Many teachers feel that child-centered lessons are wonderful in many ways, but, in reality, we need to use teacher-centered methods. This is particularly true when the children have a restricted amount of time to learn English, or we need to get through a syllabus within a fixed time period. This image is based on a common misperception of what effective child-centered EFL classes are really like. Try this short quiz, circling **A**, **B**, or **C** for each question. There can be more than one correct answer to each question.

**A** is in a teacher-centered lesson.

**B** is in a child-centered lesson where the teacher steps back as much as possible.

**C** is in a child-centered lesson where the teacher plays an active role.

- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Which two can most easily be carefully planned?             | A | B | C |
| 2. Which one uses time most efficiently?                       | A | B | C |
| 3. In which two do the children enjoy themselves most?         | A | B | C |
| 4. In which two do the children learn most actively?           | A | B | C |
| 5. In which two are the children's eyes shining most brightly? | A | B | C |
| 6. In which one do children learn most deeply?                 | A | B | C |

The issue of behavior has been left out because this will be dealt with extensively in Chapter 8.

**Answers:** 1. **AC** 2. **C** 3. **BC** 4. **BC** 5. **BC** 6. **C**

**Notice question 1**

If we actively involve ourselves in the process of learning, helping the children reach their full potential, we can plan a child-centered lesson just as carefully as a teacher-centered one.

**Notice question 2**

If we use activities that give children many chances to practice English, it is easier to use time much more efficiently in a child-centered lesson than in a teacher-centered one. This is because the children are more motivated and more emotionally involved in learning, and so remember more of the words and patterns they come across than they would in the same amount of time in a teacher-centered lesson.

**Notice questions 3 to 5**

Regardless of whether we are actively involved or not, the children enjoy themselves more, learn more naturally, produce language more spontaneously, and have more brightly shining eyes in a child-centered lesson. This is because the children have more freedom to be themselves, express themselves, and learn for themselves than in a teacher-centered lesson.

**Notice question 6**

In a teacher-centered lesson, a teacher teaches clearly, so the children do not have enough chances to think for themselves and learn through their own experience. In a carefully planned child-centered lesson, the children first struggle with new words and patterns in an achievable sequence, and this struggle helps them internalize these words and patterns more deeply.

■ **Learning and fun in parallel**

Teachers who feel there are advantages and disadvantages in both teacher-centered and child-centered methods very often divide lessons into sections, where some sections are more teacher-centered and other sections are more child-centered. For example, a teacher may introduce a new language target through teacher-centered explanation or demonstration, and then get the children to play child-centered games where they practice the language target.

With very motivated children, this approach may work reasonably well, but less motivated children often compare the teacher-centered sections and the child-centered games, prefer the games a lot more, and come to see the teacher-centered sections as what they “have to” go through in order to play the games. These children will probably begin to separate learning from having fun. Over time, they may become restless or just go through the classroom ritual of following the teacher during the teacher-centered sections while waiting for the games. The teacher may even have to use the games as bribes, saying things like, *Keep quiet or no bingo!*

Teaching in sections causes many children to become less interested in learning English for its own sake. They may enjoy the games, but come to treat learning English as a kind of school ritual that is unrelated to their more meaningful world outside school. If the children are in an ESL learning environment, the situation is quite different. The children are much more likely to have sufficient motivation and focus on English in their every day lives to learn well in a lesson that is divided into fun sections and serious sections. But children learning EFL in Asia do not have an obvious need for English in their daily lives, and their focus easily goes away from learning English to playing games for their own sake.

What we really want is for all the children to become excited about getting better at English, rather than only playing games. We want them to see learning English and having fun as one and the same thing. In order to achieve this, instead of dividing a lesson into sections, some of which are teacher-centered and serious, and some of which are fun, our lessons can be a series of activities, all of which are child-centered and which the children enjoy – all of which focus on learning. Fun and learning are then in parallel, not in sections.

To make this work well, we need to find a basket of activities that a particular class likes, and the language targets can get more and more difficult inside these activities. The activities in the basket should evolve and be changed gradually over time. The Games bank provides many ideas from which to choose an appropriate basket of activities for each class. So every activity needs to have two faces. One face is fun – the lesson feels like one big game. The other face has purpose – the activity is being used to learn or practice language targets that we feel are necessary at that point in time.

### ■ Step-by-step or topic-based?

Some teachers insist a course should have a clear step-by-step syllabus, which, traditionally, is grammar based. Others insist on a topic-based syllabus where a course is based on topics rather than a systematic language sequence. Some of the main arguments that are commonly put forward are as follows:

**In favor of a step-by-step syllabus**

- Topic-based learning takes too long. Step-by-step courses use time more efficiently.
- Children need to build their understanding of English step-by-step otherwise they lose confidence and lack a sense of direction.
- Children need to see the connections between the various items of language they come across so they will be able to make active guesses about new words and patterns they encounter. Topic-based courses do not focus children's attention enough on patterns and connections.
- Topic-based learning requires a lot of classroom space and is difficult to manage.

**In favor of a topic-based syllabus**

- Children need to see how what they are learning fits into their experience outside the English class. They should actively relate English to themes such as their family, pets, sports, and hobbies.
- Children should connect one school subject with another subject to make each subject feel more relevant to life in general, and to maximize the creative potential from linking skills and information learned in one subject to those in another.
- Step-by-step courses are convenient for the teacher but their validity is doubtful if we consider the wide range of abilities and interests that may exist in a class.
- Children learn best in situations where their attention is focused on the meaning rather than the form of the language.

**Which do we choose?**

There is no clear right or wrong way that applies in every teaching situation. If the children are learning in an immersion course or at an international school, where the conditions are closer to those in an ESL situation, it may be most appropriate for the core approach to be topic-based. However, with most Asian children learning in an EFL environment, the most effective approach is for the core syllabus to be in a step-by-step sequence, especially in the early stages.

It is important to remember that we are trying to help children who generally see English as an alien language that feels far removed from their native language. They are also used to a different writing script in their native language, have little exposure to English between lessons, and few, if any, chances to communicate in English in their daily lives. These children are active learners by nature, and so are ready to try actively at first, but their mental models of how English fits together have a tendency to become misty and fragile.

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If the language they come across is not arranged in a sequence that fits together well, they may fail to see the clear connections between one item of language and another, and so fail to internalize patterns deeply enough to use them actively. Under these circumstances, they easily come to treat the learning of English as a ritual, a time to just have fun, or a time to learn academically, but without much sense or feeling for the language.

If we want the children to learn more deeply and actively, we need to help them build mental models of English that fit together clearly and give them a platform from which to make active guesses. These step-by-step models can be very simple at first, and gradually become more complex until the children are ready to handle language less systematically.

### Adding topic-based techniques

When there is sufficient time to learn English each week, and the children have the confidence to handle less controlled language, the core step-by-step syllabus can be supplemented by topic-based activities. This can be an excellent way to integrate both approaches. Here are two examples:

#### **The children are learning *-ing* in their core syllabus**

They can look for pictures of people playing sports or musical instruments, cut them out and stick them on a poster or in an album. They can write what each of the people is doing and talk about the pictures in the next lesson. They can take photographs of themselves, a member of their family or a pet at different times of the day, and again, make a poster or album to show the sequence of activities. They can also write what is happening in each picture, and introduce their project to the other children in their next lesson.

#### **The children are learning *want* in their core syllabus**

They can look for pictures of places they want to visit or things they want to do in the future. They can download pictures of places from the Internet, and write and talk about each place when they report to the rest of the class in the next lesson.

### ■ **At whose pace?**

One of the main criticisms of step-by-step courses is that they follow a predetermined syllabus, so all the children need to go at the same pace. Advocates of topic-based learning often argue that each child should learn at her own pace. This is one of the most effective criticisms of step-by-step courses. It is certainly true that children who are obliged to go through a syllabus faster than they can manage will fall behind and may come to have a negative view of English.

It is essential that we bring all of the children with us, especially in the early stages of learning before they have developed the resilience to handle failure. In our lessons, we need to introduce language targets at a pace that almost all the children can follow comfortably, and if possible, we should give extra help to the few children who cannot keep up.

Some teachers try to race through a lot of vocabulary and patterns in the early stages. It is more important to keep the language sequence simple and achievable to be sure that all the children have a confident and positive view of English and are clear about what they have learned so far. We can encourage the more able children to expand on the basic structures, for example, we can get them to write extra or more complex sentences during a writing activity.

### **Mixed level classes**

If we separate classes according to level, all of the children will learn more, and develop a more positive attitude to English. It is true that in some school environments children who are separated into lower level classes are made to feel like failures, and every effort needs to be made to avoid this, but this also happens within mixed level classes. Children tend to compare their ability with others in the same class, and can easily lose confidence and positivity if they feel they are not as good.

However, there is often no choice. If the levels in a class are very mixed, we sometimes need to teach two or more courses in parallel. Even when we are forced to do this, we can bring the class together for some activities. For example, when the children play a game with flash cards, different children can draw cards from different piles of cards, or we can cheat a bit and make sure the children who are weaker at English get easier cards. Other options include having more than one teacher in the lesson, with one teacher helping the minority group of slow or fast learners, or introducing a target in stages, with some children moving on to a more advanced stage, and others remaining at the basic stage. The more advanced stage might include more personalized writing and project work.

### ■ **Cooperative learning**

One of the overriding aims of any course for children must be to foster social skills, particularly cooperative social skills. This is best achieved when the children are working in groups or teams. Many Asian EFL learners do not have the language ability to work on complex projects in groups, and many classrooms do not have special areas where groups can work on tasks. But, even when it is not possible to do many of these kinds of activities, at least they are all able to do simpler activities where they are cooperating together. There are various ways in which we can encourage children to cooperate with each other in our lessons:

#### **Working on puzzles together**

Even with limited language skills, a group of children can solve simple language puzzles together. These puzzles can include matching words and pictures, or fishing for letters with fishing lines and then putting all the groups' letters together to make words (see Games bank).

### **Extending the group's achievement level**

A group of children could play a game like **Chains** (see Games bank) where they throw a soft ball from child to child and extend a category or sequence of words. For example, the category might be *vegetables*. Each child says the name of a vegetable in English as she throws the ball. If a child cannot think of a vegetable, the other children help her. The aim is to see how far they can go before the group cannot think of any more vegetables.

Near this point, the children who know fewer vegetables will be learning from those who know more, and when they reach their limit they will probably be interested in asking us the English names of more vegetables. It is generally sufficient to play these kinds of games without a clearly defined target, but they can also be played against a timer. The idea is to see how well a group can do within a certain time period.

### **Play class bonding or group bonding games**

The class could play **Please** (see Games bank) which is the same game as "Simon Says" but the children only do an action when the instruction has *Please* in front of it. The important thing is that if a child makes a mistake, she is not out. The class simply enjoys playing the game. The same principle applies to many games, played as a class or in groups. In these games there are no winners or losers.

### **Playing in teams**

Wherever possible, when the children play games that involve winning and losing, they should play in teams. The children cooperate as a team when they play. We make sure children who are weaker at English are valuable to their teams, and we also make sure that every team wins. There are many other things we can do to minimize the danger that the children take winning too seriously and are not focusing on the language tasks in the game (see Chapter 8, page 121).

### **Puzzle projects**

Each child in a group collects different information away from the class, and then the group puts the information together in class. For example, the project might be to find out more about a particular country. One child might collect pictures of families in that country, another collects pictures of famous places, while another collects pictures of famous people. They can then bring the pictures to class, make an album about the country, talk about what they have collected in English, and label the pictures in the album. If the children's level is higher, they could gather information as well as pictures, and bring letters from pen pals in that country.

The kinds of puzzle projects that are possible will depend very much on the level of the children and the information they have access to. If the children do not have access to the Internet or a library, it is best to assign simple projects. Other

topics for puzzle projects include getting information or pictures about a building in the area, a particular neighborhood, a pop singer or group, a cartoon character, or animals at the local zoo.

## PLANNING A LESSON

*Careful preparation is essential. It can give us the confidence to relax, enjoy the lesson, and treat the children as valuable individual people.*

### ■ Preparation

There is seldom enough time for teachers to think during an effective lesson, so thorough preparation is essential if we want to keep the initiative and keep the children focused on learning English. This does not mean we need a precise plan stating we are going to play one game for five minutes and another game for seven minutes. This kind of plan is usually too rigid. When making a plan for a lesson where the language targets are part of a sequence that is being built from one lesson to the next, we need a clear idea of the following:

- The core targets for the lesson.
- How these targets connect with previous and future targets.
- The equipment and lesson materials we will need.
- The activities we are going to use.

We should also prepare back-up activities. There is nothing worse than having to think of an activity while a class is in progress. If we are clear about these things in our minds and have all the equipment and teaching materials ready, we will be able to use our energy to enjoy the lesson and relate to the children instead of thinking and worrying about what to do next.

### ■ From familiar to unfamiliar

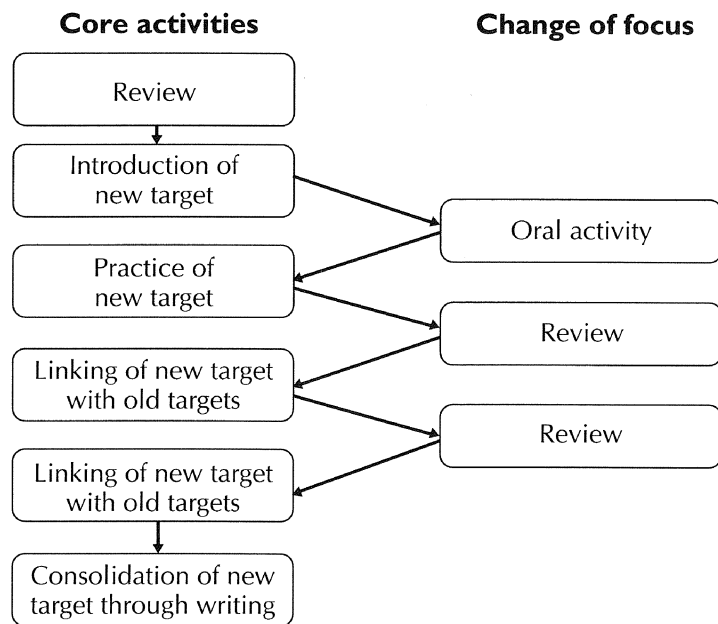
One concept to bear in mind when planning this kind of lesson is that children learn best if we start with something familiar and move toward something unfamiliar. This applies to the lesson as a whole and within each activity. For example, if our new target for the lesson is comparatives such as *bigger than* or *longer than*, we need to consider how to lead into the new target. In the case of comparatives, we would probably first review adjectives such as *big* and *long*. We should not automatically review material from the previous lesson. It is important to review previous patterns that naturally precede the new patterns since they act as mental hooks to link the new patterns on to. Here is an example:

Target:	Review:
Adjectives	Vocabulary the children can easily use with the adjectives
Comparatives	Adjectives
Superlatives	Comparatives

We might even find when reviewing adjectives that the children need more practice with the adjectives before moving on to comparatives, and we need to build this possibility into our lesson plan. This is an example of where a lesson plan with precise timing for each activity breaks down. It is better to think of a plan as a sequence of activities that move from the familiar to the unfamiliar. We may have to adjust the pace to bring all the children with us, and we need to build this flexibility into the plan by having back up review activities and being flexible about the amount of new language items we put into an activity.

■ **Varying the focus**

The framework of a lesson where new targets are introduced might look something like this:



**Core activities**

There is a logic that ties the core activities together to make it easier for the children to notice patterns and give the lesson a sense of direction. A lesson will often start with a Review activity that provides a platform that prepares the children for the new target. The next activity might be where the target is introduced.

In the core activities that follow, the new target pattern is mixed in with previous target patterns. This helps the children link the new target with the other patterns they know. These patterns could be combined in a dialog, in a game where new and old flash cards are mixed together, or in a freer activity that requires the new target language to some extent but also gives the children scope to use the other English they know.

Whenever possible, the core activities in a lesson should cover the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. If one of these skills falls behind, we may need to spend extra time on that skill in some lessons. The skill the children usually find most difficult is writing, so it may be necessary to have lessons where the children do a lot of writing (see Chapter 6, page 96). However, children usually do better at writing if they do a little frequently, rather than doing a lot at one time and then nothing for a while.

If the children are having quite a few lessons each week, it may allow us to focus on certain skills more in some of the lessons, but even in this case, it is important for the children to switch from practicing one skill to another. Practicing the same skills over and over again is not the most effective way to internalize the targets. The children need to approach the targets from as wide a variety of directions as possible.

### Change of focus

Activities for changing the focus away from the core activities should contain words and patterns that are as different as possible from those in the core activities. Early in a course, all the activities for changing the focus will probably be oral activities, but as the course progresses, general review activities will become more normal because, as time goes by, there will be an increasing number of old targets to review that are completely different from the targets in the current core activities. These review activities may be oral, or they may involve more listening, reading, or writing.

It is important that the Change of focus activities are not more fun than the Core activities. If a teacher uses an exciting activity such as a song to change the focus, saying something like, *Now children. Let's sing a wonderful song!* What happens when we go back to the core activities again? The children look at the song and look at the core activities, which do they like better?

In an ESL environment, this usually does not matter. If the song is good, the children will feel more positive about learning. But with Asian EFL learners this kind of approach can do so much harm because they can easily be distracted. From a long-term point of view, what really matters is that the children feel as positive as possible about the core activities and are keen to see their English improve through these activities. It is very important that the games and songs the children like best are used as core activities, not for changing the focus.

### Why change the focus?

The children need a core step-by-step language sequence, but if this is the only language the children practice, the learning environment can easily become sterile, and it is less likely that the children will internalize the core language sequence. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Children have a limited concentration span. By varying the focus of a lesson, we can keep the children more positively involved in the lesson as a whole.
- If children repeat the same patterns over and over again such as, *I like ... I like ...*, the way they produce the language can become automatic. By going away from the core targets and returning to them, the children’s attitude to learning the core targets can remain fresh.
- Each time the children are distracted away from a core language target, and then come back to it, they will need to recall what they have learned. This repeated process of “practicing-going away-recalling” will help them internalize the core targets more deeply.

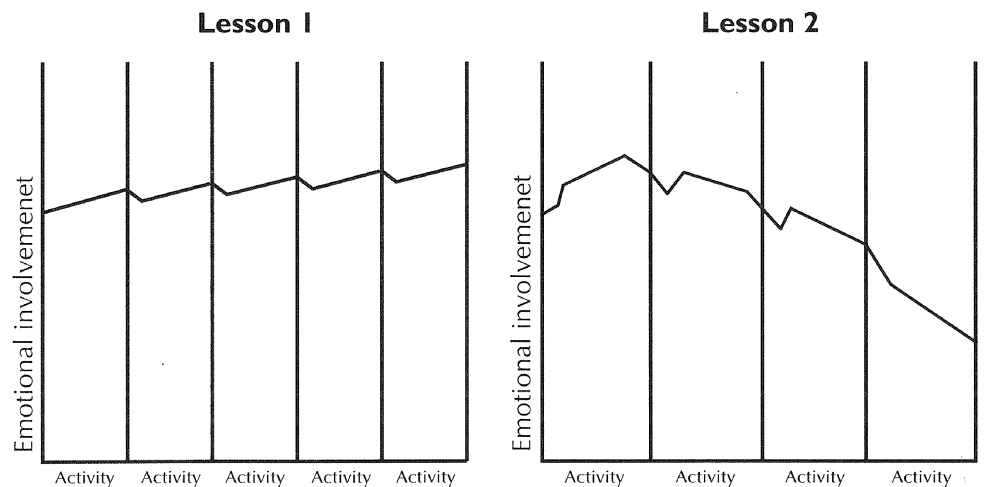
■ **Varying the style**

Some teachers say children should always be physically active. Others say that when the children are running around actively, they are not learning much English. When making a lesson plan, we need to at least recognize that there are various opinions about this, not only among teachers, but also among the children.

Some children feel they learn better when they are more active, and some prefer to be quiet. If a class is very small, we can adapt our lesson plans to suit the individual children in our class, but if a class is bigger, we may have to vary the type of activities more. Varying the style of activities also makes our classes a lot more stimulating. If the children are sometimes standing up, sometimes sitting down, sometimes going to the board, or sometimes writing at their desks, our lessons are more likely to keep the children focused and involved.

**Switching activities**

Compare the following two diagrams:



In lesson 2, the children’s emotional involvement in the lesson deteriorated because activities went on too long, and this may have a serious negative effect on the children’s motivation, behavior, and focus on learning.

If we use a basket of games the children really like, and if the English inside the games gets increasingly difficult over time, we can keep the children's focus on learning rather than on playing games for their own sake. However, if we play a game for too long, the children may be less interested in it the next time they play it, and after using the game in a few lessons, we may have to replace it with a different game. This can easily lead to a situation where we are keeping the class stimulated by introducing new games rather than new English.

If we stop a game while the children still want to play, the children will probably be even more interested in playing it the next time. At the very least, their interest in the game is likely to deteriorate more slowly. The best way to stop a game is simply to replace it with another attractive game.

This does not mean we should only use games for very short lengths of time. Some children have very short concentration spans, but others, particularly older children, can get really involved in long games such as board games, and when we only play the games for very short periods of time, they may not immerse themselves deeply enough in the activity. The important thing is for us to judge how long particular children will stay involved in an activity, and to anticipate any decline in the children's involvement. The length of time individual children or whole classes will stay involved will vary a great deal.

### ■ Moving on to the next target

The main reason for having a sequence of target patterns is that we would like each of the children to link these patterns together and construct a model of how they think English fits together. The key factor in deciding when to move on to the next target is whether we think each child will be able to link the new target into her model successfully. We don't have to wait until the children can use the present target fluently and with total flexibility. This may not happen until they have built new targets onto the present target. But we do need to feel that the children are comfortable with the target and can manipulate it to some extent.

One of the best ways to assess this is through writing. If the children have practiced the pattern orally, have practiced reading it, and can use the pattern flexibly in written sentences to express genuine thoughts and feelings, there is a good chance they will be able to internalize it. Writing does not mean copying. It means sitting down with a blank sheet of paper and being able to make a sentence from beginning to end. Not a perfect sentence, but enough of a sentence to show that the children are comfortable with the pattern. For example, if the pattern is *like*, the children should be able to write sentences about themselves such as, *I like baseball*, and if the pattern is *likes*, they should be able to write sentences about pictures such as, *The gorilla likes bananas*.

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**Phonic targets** If the children are working through stages of phonics, the best test of whether they are ready to move to the next stage is if they can listen to phonics sounds and write them down. This kind of dictation should focus on the pattern, not on specific knowledge. For example, it is not enough if they can just write *big* if they have come across the word a number of times before. If they can listen to sounds like 'tig' and 'lig' and write them down successfully, even though they have not come across these letter combinations before, then we can be reasonably sure they are comfortable with the pattern.