

GSTESOL YL Listening & Speaking.

Reading homework due March 29.

A Child-centered Lesson (Part 2): Techniques

Read the attached text and choose three of the included ideas that you would like to try in your classroom. You may also have similar ideas that you would like to share. Be ready in next class to explain and share your ideas.

Bring a copy of the reading text with sections and ideas highlighted. You do not need to submit this on Edmodo.

TECHNIQUES

The techniques in a child-centered lesson are no more difficult to learn and use than those in a teacher-centered lesson, and they are a lot more fun.

■ **Repetition**

Traditional teachers regard repetition drills as an essential part of a lesson. They say children need to repeat the same words and patterns over and over again, and in most cases this is true. Asian EFL learners with little natural exposure to English outside the classroom certainly do need to repeat patterns many times. However, in the traditional classroom important dimensions are often missing. These dimensions include thought, emotion, and meaning. Let us accept that repetition is essential. How can we add other dimensions to the traditional drill?

Traditional style

The teacher holds up picture flash cards, and the children make simple sentences about the pictures such as, *It's a dog*, and, *It's a horse*.

Progressive traditional style

The teacher holds up the flash cards. Half the children say, *What is it?* and the other half say, *It's a horse*. The two halves take turns to ask and answer questions. This is considered to be a communicative drill.

Adding emotion

The children do the same activity, asking and answering the same kinds of questions, but now the two halves of the class are in teams. When one team answers a question successfully, one member of the team throws a soft or sticky ball, or shoots an arrow from a toy crossbow at a target on the board and gets points. The children are now more excited and having a lot of fun.

Adding thought and meaning

The children do the same activity as above with the ball or crossbow added, but only the team that is asking the questions can see the card. One of the children (or possibly the teacher) puts the card behind a book and shows it little by little to the other team. The other team tries to guess what it is, saying, *Is it a cow?* or, *Is it a mouse?* When they guess correctly or see the whole cards, they throw the

ball or shoot with the crossbow. The children are now thinking, anticipating, and guessing as well as having fun. Their questions have also become more meaningful.

Discovering new words

If some of the words are new, even after the team that is guessing can see the whole picture, they may not know how to say the word in English. They will need to ask, *What is it?* (now, at last, with meaning). If the card has the written word on the back, and it is phonically regular, the other team will be able to answer, *It's a hippopotamus.*

In the traditional style, the children are only focusing on the form of the language. In the progressive traditional style, they are still doing this. Both halves of the class can see the picture, so why are they asking and answering the question? There is no meaning. It is only in a classroom that this kind of discourse takes place, and so, for most children, what they learn will remain in the classroom. They may be able to produce it in tests, but not for meaningful communication in their daily lives away from the classroom.

Which is quicker?

Traditional teachers often say there is little time to play games. But which is really quicker? In the activity above, there is little difference in the physical time taken between the various methods. Adding the game certainly slows down the practice a little, but not very much. The game is very simple.

Even though the game slows down the practice to some extent, which of the above methods is making more efficient use of time? How efficiently will the children repeating, *It's a dog*, commit this knowledge to long-term memory and deeply internalize the pattern? If we look at it from this point of view, the children who are having fun and using the language more meaningfully will learn much more in the same amount of time. So, yes, the children do need to repeat patterns many times, but not in dry classroom drills. They can play all kinds of games where they are repeating words and patterns many times, and thinking and expressing themselves in ways that feel meaningful.

■ Introducing new words

Imagine a group of children playing a race game with flash cards. The flash cards are on the table arranged in a race track. Each of the children has a toy car, and the track has a banner across it saying *START*, and there might be a few toy figures or trees near the track. The children are looking forward to the race.

The race starts, and they take turns to throw the dice and race their cars around the track. When a car lands on a flash card, the child who owns the car says, *It's a banana*, or, *It's a cat*. There are some special rules as well. When a child throws a 3 she crashes and misses a turn, and when she lands on another car, she overtakes and gets another turn. When the children are having a lot of fun, we

change two or three of the flash cards with new ones, walk away innocently, and wait to see what happens. The new flash cards are new words. What happens when one of the children's cars lands on a new word?

The children may look for us, and say something like, *Teacher teacher! What is it?* We look innocent, say something like, *What's the matter?* or if they are speaking very quietly, we say with a smile, *I can't hear*, and the children say more loudly, *What is it?* We then answer naturally, *It's a peach*, and they go back and play the game. When the next car lands on the peach, they may remember the word, or may need to ask us again, but the word will soon get absorbed in the game and absorbed in their memory. We then make sure the peach flash card turns up from time to time in the games they play from then on.

If the flash card has the word *peach* on the back, and if the children have learned phonics, they can turn the card over and try to read the word. When they have worked out how to read the word, they get on with the game again.

Setting a style

At first, we may need to encourage the children to ask us or look at the back of the card, but once the children realize these are normal strategies for dealing with new words, they will do it as a matter of course. We will then have established a child-centered method of introducing new words. Notice that we chose the flash cards. This meant we could have a very clear lesson plan and a very clear syllabus, but we used a child-centered technique. The children noticed the new card, wondered what it was, tried to find out, and were successful. They felt they had discovered new knowledge that they genuinely wanted to know.

No preteaching?

We did nothing before the game. We did not hold up the cards one by one, telling the children what they were, or getting them to repeat the words. We went straight into the game, and waited for the children to notice the new cards and wonder what they were.

Some teachers find this technique a little too much at first. There is an alternative version that is also effective, though not to the same extent. If there are about eight new words, we can introduce two or three of them before the game, and the rest during the course of the game. But, even in this version, we do not need to teach the words before the game. We can look at a card curiously as if we are wondering what it is, and when the children are wondering as well, we can say, *It's a rabbit*, just before, and almost at the same time as the children, as if we have discovered what it is, too.

■ Introducing new patterns

There are many different ways to introduce new patterns. The important thing is for the children to notice the pattern and see it as a kind of fun puzzle to solve. Here is an example. Ask questions quickly around the class in a fun way. These questions should be very familiar such as, *Where do you live? How old are you?* or

What color do you like? When the children are relaxed and not expecting it, slip in a new pattern such as, *What are you doing?* Ask a child innocently with a smile, and when she appears confused, ask another child. Do not wait. Just go back naturally and quickly to asking familiar questions, and then slip the new question in again.

The aim is to attract the children's curiosity towards the new question in a mischievous way, and to tease them a little until they are really wanting to know what this new question is all about. When you think you have their interest, say, *Ask me*, and help them say, *What are you doing?* Build up the interest and suspense a bit by saying things like, *I can't hear*. Do something like walk up and down the room and say, *I'm walking*, or sing a little song as you walk, *I'm walking. I'm walking*. Then change to another action like running or sleeping, each time getting the children to ask you the question.

When the children have got the idea, ask individual children the question again mixed up with other questions. They can then play all kinds of *-ing* games. In the same way as when learning new words, the children get used to regarding learning new patterns as fun puzzles to solve. After a while, they come to regard this way of learning as normal.

■ **Creating a need**

The children may enjoy our classes and like learning English a lot, but at the end of the day they do not feel the same need for English as many ESL learners who need English to communicate with their friends and to survive in their daily lives or in other lessons. If the children do not feel a deep enough need for English, we need to use techniques that deal with this problem. These techniques can be categorized in two different ways:

How do I say that?

Remember that child in the car race game? She was racing her car around the track and excited about the game. When her car landed on the picture of a peach, she thought, *Huh? How do I say that?* That was the feeling the activity was set up to create, and the more fun the activity is and the more immersed the child is in the activity, the more deeply she will feel, *How do I say that?* Because of the activity, she felt a need to learn.

What does that mean?

Remember those other children being asked questions they understood and then noticing a new question? They noticed it briefly, and then it went away, and then it came back again. We were playing with them until we were sure they were thinking, *What does that mean?* They wanted to understand, and we built up their curiosity even more by giving hints and having fun.

In a traditional lesson, what is being taught may feel important to the teacher and the “top” students, but the other children feel, to a greater or lesser extent, that there are more central and important things in their lives. Techniques that create a need help develop a consensus among all the children in the class before they learn something new that what they are going to learn is central and meaningful for them.

ORGANIZATION

Children respond positively to a well-organized lesson.

■ One-to-one, pairs and groups

Generally, if we are teaching more than one child, there is some pair work, some group work, some whole-class work where the teacher is more directly involved, and some times when children work individually. One style may be suitable for one purpose, and another style for another purpose. Having this variety also helps make the class more stimulating and allows us to cater to individual differences. A shy child may prefer to write quietly in a notebook while another child is happier taking part in a role-play. We need to find a way for both these children to immerse themselves in our class.

One-to-one

Teaching a child by herself has both advantages and disadvantages. We can pay much more attention to her individual needs, play her favorite games, and have a more meaningful role in her life. On the other hand, individual students can easily become overdependent on us, and they lack opportunities to interact and use English communicatively with other children.

It is a good idea to ask an individual student to bring her favorite games from home. She may have a board game, a card game, or a computer game that we can integrate into our lesson. For example, she could read a word or identify a flash card before she throws dice to move a piece around a board. We can play all kinds of games with her, especially ones that depend on luck, and we can pretend to be very absent-minded and forget English. She can become our teacher.

Pairs

When children work in pairs, they usually speak English much more than when they are in larger groups or working as a whole class. This is partly because a child taking turns to speak with one other child is probably going to have more chances to speak than when taking turns to speak with more children. It is also because groups larger than two are often dominated by a few children, and some children are excluded and hardly speak. Some teachers worry that children practicing in pairs will reinforce each other's mistakes and develop bad habits that will be difficult to remove. There is no evidence that supports this fear.

In pairs, the children have more chances to manipulate and experiment with the language targets than they would have when practicing as a whole class, and so are more likely to internalize them. The context is also likely to be more genuinely communicative when they are working by themselves than if the teacher is always with them.

Having said this, we should always bear in mind that the children will not reach their full potential as learners without an active dialog with us. We need to balance various considerations and give children opportunities to work away from us and with us. If we monitor the pair work without making it obvious that we are doing so, we can choose when to intervene and help stretch the children's English beyond the present level.

Groups

There are a lot of games that are best played in groups rather than pairs. If the class is small, there may be just one group of children playing the game, and if the class is large there may be a number of groups. Organizing a large class into groups can sometimes be difficult. It helps a lot if the seats are prearranged for groups. If we want all the groups to do the same activity, one useful technique is to start the activity with one group while the other children look from their seats or gather round. There can be one child from each group taking part in the sample group so there is at least one child in each group who knows how the game works.

Group activities encourage cooperative learning, and lead to social interaction to a much greater extent than pair activities. The English the children may need reflects this. They are much more likely to need peripheral expressions like, *It's your turn*, *Here you are*, or, *That's mine*.

The whole class

In a small class where the children generally play games as one group, the main distinction between a whole-class activity and a group activity may be that the teacher is more directly involved. In a larger class, the whole-class activities feel quite different than those in pairs or groups. During whole-class activities the teacher can ensure all the children have covered a particular language target. Another advantage of working together as a class is that it can help build up a positive class identity and a feeling of belonging.

In a very large class, choral activities, where many children speak together, generally put less pressure on individual children because each child does not need to speak out so much and is less conspicuous when others are speaking at the same time. This is often very comfortable for the children, can lead to more class-bonding, and a child who is very quiet in group work can often be seen speaking out more in choral activities.

A child-centered lesson

Speaking to the class

It is also important to give children opportunities to speak out in English to the rest of the class. One way is for the other children to ask individual children questions. There are many activities for this kind of practice, such as guessing games or class routines. Some children may get too much pressure from these activities, and we may need to help and encourage shy children, but it is important for the children to gain the confidence to speak to the class. This kind of activity can also be done as a chain (such as in the **Chains** game) where the children take turns to make sentences or ask and answer questions. There can be a fixed order, or the teacher or the previous child in the chain can decide who is next and throw a ball or soft toy animal to the next child.

Working individually

It is very important for the children to work individually. It is from the work the children produce by themselves that we can most easily assess how well they are internalizing language targets. This is particularly important for children who are weaker at English. When they are in pairs or groups, they may depend on other children to do their thinking for them, and so they may become even weaker at English. These children need many chances to work by themselves in order to keep up. For example, when a child who is sitting at her desk, and not interacting with other children, can write complete sentences about herself using a new language pattern, we can be reasonably confident she has internalized the pattern. When she uses this pattern in pair practice, group practice or during whole-class activities, we cannot be sure.

■ Routines

Class routines are important to help children settle down and concentrate, and they can give children a sense of security and belonging which is often a necessary precondition for successful learning. However, when routines become automatic rituals, they can prevent much real learning from taking place. Here are some successful routines that encourage children to think:

- The children take turns to shake hands in a chain around the class, and say something like, *It's nice to see you again. How are you?* Make sure all the children give a different answer. Thinking of new answers becomes a challenging game.
- One child goes to the calendar and says the day and date. Depending on her level, she could also say the exact time and add something like, *It's time for English!* The children's birthdays can be marked on the calendar. If one of the children has had a birthday since the previous lesson, all the children can sing the "Happy Birthday song."
- The children look out the window, decide what the weather is like and say, *It's cloudy*, or, *It's sunny*. They can also sing a weather song.
- The children throw a soft ball or toy animal around and ask and answer questions like, *How are you?* or, *What can you do?* They each have to give a

different answer. Instead of practicing question/answer patterns, they could each make a sentence about themselves using a pattern they learned previously such as, *I like dogs*.

- All the children ask an individual child (or children in turns) questions from our prompts. For example, we may say, *live*, and the children ask, *Where do you live?* or we may say, *color*, and the children ask, *What's your favorite color?* They build up a whole range of questions they can ask and answer in any order. We need to be careful that the children do not ask the questions through us. We can stand to the side or at the back, say the prompts quietly, and encourage the children to look at the child who is answering the questions. Alternatively, one of the children can give the prompts. If we give the prompts, we can mix in new questions (see *Introducing new patterns*, page 39).

Signals

Some teachers clap their hands as a signal to get attention. Others do something very quiet like holding up a finger until the children notice it. These signals can work well, but ones that are more fun usually work even better. Examples include pressing or touching something that makes a funny noise, making funny noises ourselves, getting a toy animal to ring a bell, or using sounds made on TV shows the children are familiar with. Signals can be used to start the class and start or finish an activity. We may also need signals to draw the children's attention to a common mistake in a humorous way, or indicate that certain behavior is not acceptable. When this works well, we make the signal, and the children pause, reflect on what they have just done, and notice why we made the signal.

A pattern of learning

Children who are just starting to learn English have not yet formed an impression of what is normal procedure in an English lesson and what is a normal way to learn English. This gives us quite a free hand to create what will become normal for them. If the children have already started learning English in other classes with other teachers, they will already have expectations of what an English lesson is like, and may have established their own learning strategies which may or may not be flexible. They will not know what is normal in our lessons, which will give us some leeway to create a pattern of learning, but not as much as with a class learning English for the first time.

The first few lessons with a new class are crucial in many ways. The pattern of learning we establish at this point may stay with the children for a very long time. For example, if we want to establish rules like only speaking English at certain times, it is much easier in the long run if we have this rule from the beginning. Here are some more examples:

- Use child-centered methods from the beginning. In this way, children will never expect to receive knowledge passively from the teacher.

- Use games from the beginning.
- Have all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in lessons from the beginning.
- Give the children homework from the beginning. If homework is normal and regular from the beginning it is much more likely that the children will do it.
- Establish the rule that children only speak English in class from the first lesson.

■ Scoring systems

An effective way to tie a lesson together is to divide the class into teams and have a scoring system running through the lesson. This does not mean that every game is played for points. The scoring system is in the background, and a team gets points for doing well in some of the games, and loses points for breaking class or game rules and for bad behavior. This approach can work well with any number of children in a class. Even if we are teaching one child, we can be the other team, play luck games, and make careless mistakes for her to correct.

Each team can choose the name of an animal, a sports team, or any other team name the children like. The children can then write the team names on the board or a picture or soft toy can be used to represent the team. It is often enough just to have a running total of points written next to the team's name, but we can make the scoring system even more fun than this. Here are some ideas:

Ladders

Each team has a ladder on the board, and they climb this ladder as they do well in the lesson. A magnet or picture can be stuck to the board and moved up the ladder, or the children can make a mark or draw a picture to show their team's position on the ladder. There can be some special sections on the ladder, and if a team lands on one of these sections they might go back down to the beginning, move forward, or perform some language task.

Progressive scoring systems

A team moves from one section to another section along a scale on the board every time they win a game or get a certain number of points. Each section on the scale has a heading that fits into an overall theme, such as animals or fruits. The headings can be chosen by the children, and the aim is to reach the end section first.

Team	spiders	cats	gorillas	elephants	aliens
Mariners		●			
Yankees			●		
Dodgers			●		

Sports scoring systems

The scoring system on the board can be designed around one of the children's favorite sports such as soccer or baseball. With soccer, the ball can move towards one goal or another depending on which team is doing well. With baseball, each team can have a baseball diamond and team's counter or individual children's counters can be moved around their diamond as they do well (see **Baseball** and **Soccer** in the Games bank).

Luck of the draw

When a team wins a game, one or more of the team members can throw a sticky ball at a target on the board, roll a big dice, throw a soft ball into a basket, or draw a number from a bag, and get points. An alternative is for all teams to do this after a game, but the winning team gets an extra turn.

Gradual pictures

After a game, one of the members of each team can add a line or a section to a picture. The winning team can add two lines or sections. For example, the teams could race to draw a dog; they first draw the body, then the head, then the legs, then the tail, then the ears, and then the eyes. An alternative is for parts of the animal to correspond to numbers on a dice. After a game, the team rolls a dice, and if they get a 1 they can draw a body, a 2 a head, and so on. If they have already drawn that part of the animal they cannot draw anything. They can be awarded more throws for games later in the lesson than those at the beginning of the lesson.

Other whole-lesson games

A whole-lesson game is one that all the other games contribute to. For example, there could be a race track on the board and after each game the teams can throw a die to move each of their cars around the track, with the team that won the game having an extra throw. The whole-lesson game could be one of many of the games in the Games bank.

■ Homework

Whether or not the children do regular homework, and the way they do it, can make all the difference to the children's ability to learn successfully. It is particularly important for the children to do regular homework if they have few English lessons each week. The children can be assigned homework that follows up what they have been doing in class, and they can be given more general tasks that will widen their English ability.

Follow-up homework

There are a variety of things children can do for homework, such as writing sentences from picture prompts, doing crosswords or other puzzles, and doing computer-based activities. They can also write paragraphs or journals, do listening activities from tapes or read words, sentences, paragraphs, or stories that contain the words and patterns they have been learning.

General tasks

The children can listen to tapes at home or in the car, watch videos, use computer software, or work through a reading scheme. They should be assigned tasks that are achievable, and that extend and widen the language targets the children are learning in class.

How can the parents help?

In general, it is best to encourage the parents to make sure the children do their homework, but not actually help them with it. If the parents help, the children will have fewer chances to think things through for themselves, and we will not know whether the children really understand their homework. Of course, it is sometimes possible to train the parents to give hints rather than direct assistance when their children find homework difficult.

Correcting homework

Having a time set aside for homework during a lesson can damage the pace of the lesson, and reduce the involvement of the children. If the homework needs to be corrected in class, it is often best to set all the children a task, often a writing task, and to walk around checking students' homework one by one while all the other children are involved in the task. When correcting, it is best to give hints, and underline places where the children have made mistakes. The aim is to see if the children can reflect on what they have done wrong and work out the correct answers for themselves. This also gives us an opportunity to notice what the children are finding difficult. We can think about what activities will best deal with these problems, and use these activities in our lessons.

If the children are having a number of lessons each week, or have more than one homework book, it is possible to correct the homework between lessons and hand it back during the next lesson. Even in these cases, there is still the question of how to give the homework back and comment or help. If possible, this should be done through written hints in the book, and, again, not by interrupting the flow of the lesson.

A PAUSE TO REFLECT

■ **Each situation is different**

Each teaching situation is different, and we need to find a style of child-centered lesson that is appropriate when teaching Asian EFL learners. It has been suggested that unless the core approach is systematic, many Asian EFL learners will develop cloudy mental models of how English fits together, and so tend to go through the motions of learning English without deeply internalizing it or being able to use it actively.

If this is so, we need to develop child-centered techniques that are appropriate for a step-by-step syllabus. These techniques need to ensure that the children feel they are learning the syllabus in a way that has personal meaning. We need

to set up activities where children encounter new words and patterns and feel a genuine desire to learn them. In other words, we should “create a need” for new language targets before the children learn them.

Whether or not we can use topic-based activities depends to a large extent on where our classes are positioned on the EFL–ESL spectrum. In a pure EFL situation, the core syllabus should be systematic and it may be difficult to supplement it very much with topic-based activities. If the situation is definitely EFL, but the children have more lessons each week, then it becomes easier to introduce more topic-based activities. If the children are learning in more of an ESL situation, it may be best for the core syllabus to be topic-based.

Some questions to reflect on or discuss:

- 1 How is the situation of most children learning EFL in Asia different from most children learning EFL in Europe or ESL in North America?
- 2 Can child-centered lessons use time efficiently? If so, what factors do we need to focus on to ensure this happens?
- 3 Is a step-by-step approach or a topic-based approach more appropriate for the situation you are teaching in?
- 4 What factors do you feel are most important when planning a lesson?