

# BOOK REVIEW

## **Tricia Hedge. Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom**

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*Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* deals with the most basic question: 'How are languages learned?' There are 11 units in the book which have been grouped into four parts. Each unit begins with reflective questions which set the tone about the issues that are discussed in detail. It also offers readers the scope to critically examine these as the unit unfolds. Reflective questions are followed by a case study or a classroom situation that provides further insight into the theme of the chapter. The beauty of the book is that it does begin with theories. Concepts are introduced with practical examples and through real-life situations that teachers face. The text then explores and puts together the insights based on research studies. These research studies are action researches and classroom observations. Each unit concludes with topics and projects for discussion as well as activities that can be taken up with the students. A list of books with synopses is also given for further reading. The book has a complete glossary and bibliography at the end for further reference.

Part I of the book titled 'A Framework for Teaching and Learning', comprises three units. Unit 1 titled 'Learners and Learning, Classroom and Contexts', raises issues that are basic to language teaching and learning, for example – the tasks/activities should reflect the real world outside the classroom. It also enlists interactive methodologies and appropriate materials. Quoting Krashen, Chomsky, Capser et al Hedge asserts that for second language acquisition also meaningful learning situations are important like in first language learning. This implies a need for a range of authentic materials for classrooms and encourages interaction in the classroom. Errors, that are bound to take place because language learning is a creative classroom process, are seen as steps to learning.

In this process a positive attitude, aptitude and motivation are a must both on the part of the learners and the teacher. The authoritarian role of the teachers needs to undergo a change into that of a facilitator and a friend. The role of the learner and the design of the materials need to change accordingly.

This calls for teacher and learner autonomy. Good teachers have always taken a positive critical approach to appraising and developing their work based on their experiences.

Unit 2 presents a brief review of the syllabi and course books to demonstrate the extent to which communicative practice should become a part of every classroom procedure. The importance of communication in case of language learning cannot be denied. Hedge quotes Chomsky and Hymes to elaborate the point. As the goals for ELT are to enable learners to interact confidently, the explanations of applied linguistics into the components of communicative ability become more relevant for teachers and material designers. On the basis of these, different types of activities can be designed such as information-gap activity, opinion-gap activity, reasoning-gap activity.

A communicative class-room puts the teacher in a wider range of roles beyond teaching and learning. Group works, pair work etc. require class management skills with communicative language teaching. The pressure to use authentic materials increases as contrived situations and language items do not work especially for listening and speaking skills. The tasks have to be chosen as per the interest, age and cognitive level of the learners.

Unit 3 is about 'Learner Autonomy and Learner Training'. Ideas about learner autonomy and learner training have come to the ELT profession through two major sources of influence: research studies about second language acquisition and educational thinking of the last two decades. Hedge believes that

certain activities will help learners reflect on their learning. This allows the teacher to plan, proceed and shape the learning process. Activities should thus be planned in such a manner that the learners remain active throughout and are also able to check their own progress. The role of self assessment is crucial part of language learning process because it develops the capacity among the learners to carry on learning independently throughout life.

Part II of the book focuses on 'Teaching the Language System.' In this section the author covers vocabulary and grammar. Unit 4 deals with vocabulary. Recent years have seen a greater awareness by researchers, materials designers, and teachers about issues that need to be addressed with regard to vocabulary learning. In this chapter Hedge also focuses on English language and acquisition studies that tell us how vocabulary is learned along with strategies and activities for vocabulary learning, and factors affecting vocabulary acquisition. Many factors appear to play a role in vocabulary development. If learners are to be exposed to a wide range of word meanings and associations, then it will be important for them to encounter words in a variety of contexts through extensive reading and listening. One of the most severe criticisms of the traditional practice of teaching vocabulary that the author upholds is that of presenting words in isolation. However, she does advocate the use of dictionary as an important classroom and personal resource.

Unit 5 which focusses on 'Grammar' begins with a pertinent question 'how

authentically do you think grammatical structures are contextualised?' The author quotes Krashen to underscore that grammar can be acquired naturally from meaningful inputs and opportunities to interact in the classroom. She further discusses various approaches for teaching grammar along with their pros and cons. The main focus of the discussion is on different modes of presentation and the importance of practice.

Part III of the book is on 'Developing the Language skills' and they have been presented in the order of Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing. Unit 6 is on Reading. The author begins discussing reading as an interactive process. For example, in a news item the place and name enables the reader to predict the content of the news item using his/her knowledge of the world around, and then language knowledge enables the reader to read the text. It is understood that second language readers will face difficulty but at least they begin. In this chapter, a range of reading styles and their usefulness for students have also been discussed. The author makes the point that texts should be chosen to build the learners' ability to engage in purposeful reading.

Unit 7 is about listening and Tricia Hedge puts on record that in English language teaching, listening is the most neglected/overlooked skill. It is assumed that learners will automatically pick the language through exposure not realising that exposure itself is too limited. An audiolingual approach perceives listening as the primary skill. According to this approach, presenting and practising language forms will help learn

the language but the most vital element in listening is the confidence. The role of the teacher is to provide practice as much as possible in the classroom. The author has provided a number of activities that can be taken up in the class both for 'Bottom-up' and 'Top-down' processes. Further, pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities will be of great use to both teachers and learners.

Unit 8 is on Speaking. Developing speaking skills cannot be compared to 'conversation classes'. This notion which most people carry is not right. A holistic approach to developing speaking skills needs to be taken into consideration and this includes pronunciation, the ability to speak fluently and accurately for a variety of purposes. Various activities can be designed to develop fluency. Some examples are, role-play, describing the picture, finding the difference, discussions etc. Speaking activities are the most demanding for students and teachers, and class management is the key issue. As Hedge points out - even simple 'pair-work' needs planning, monitoring etc.

Unit 9 is on Writing. It acknowledges that there has been a departure from traditional approaches. Writing is not something that begins and ends as it is put down on the page for the first time. Writing as a process requires planning, drafting, reading, revising and editing for accuracy. The process approach to writing will develop a sense of audience in the students. The very first step is encouraging students to discuss. The teacher should help them plan in a flexible manner. Revisiting is an important step to improve upon one's

own written task. Though the product approach enables learners learn to produce features accurately, such as use of passive in description of processes, the use of relative clauses in descriptions of people, places, and systems etc. with young learners, a process approach might be most appropriate. A product approach would be more suitable for students who are good in writing but need to produce specific type of text, for example scientific report in English. Therefore, identifying the writing needs of the students is of utmost importance.

Part IV is about 'Planning and Assessing Learning' to deal with Course Design and Classroom Assessment. Unit X is on Course Design. The Role of the teacher in course design demands greater teacher autonomy in transacting the units/lessons. Mostly teachers use the Present, Produce and Practice model. Other formats, such as skill-based planning with basic 'pre-reading', while-reading, post-reading sequences can involve integrated skill-work. Topic-based materials are useful and these need to be chosen carefully. Materials should be evaluated periodically. In this regard students' feedback, teachers' opinion, observation are important. Teacher's autonomy should ensure that the texts are chosen from the learner's culture and environment and are supplemented with activities such as extensive reading, drama, role-play, communication games and debates etc. Classrooms tasks should reflect real life situations. Projects form a significant place within the

process approach and experiential learning. But the author hopes that curricula should be designed on evaluative research studies. 'Classroom Assessment' talks about integrating assessment with the teaching and learning process. The involvement of the students in assessing themselves would go a long way because it would lend an opportunity to the learners to reflect upon their efforts and thus improve. Continuous and Comprehensive Assessment provides a wealth of information to the teacher to guide and help the learners.

The book presents a comprehensive overview of English Language Teaching in classroom. It raises pertinent issues about teaching language and honing the learners' skills. It provides an insight into classroom procedures for effective development of language skills. Pedagogical aspects of teaching and learning have also been kept in mind while discussing all the aspects of English Language Teaching. Another feature of the book is that it provides sample activities which teachers can choose from for their learners. Thus, there is harmony between theory and practice in the book. The book can be used as a reference book or as a source book by teachers and teacher educators as it is by no means prescriptive; it reflects on various practices and would certainly help in professional development of teachers and enable them to build a critical perspective on English Language Teaching.

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