

2. Teaching English

Transcript

Slide 1

Teaching is what we do, it is our job. In this section, we will try to define teaching, describe its different functions and relate it to education. We will also underline the importance of reflection in instructional practice, and the benefits of becoming aware of the way that we teach, the methods and techniques that we use, the curricula and syllabi that provide specific guidelines for the teaching practice and the courseware we employ. Finally, we will review the benefits of lesson planning for both teaching and learning and we will consider the ways in which lesson planning makes us better teachers of English.

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So, first things first. What is **teaching**? We all know what it is. It is the 'steering' of the process of learning by the teacher in a classroom setting. This means that, for teaching to happen, it is necessary to have **learners, learning** and some sort of **context** in which the three can co-exist and interact.

In contexts where teaching is purpose- and goal-oriented, it is typically necessary to have some form of underlying plan (or syllabus) that:

- addresses a particular type of learner or learners
- runs for a specific time and
- should lead to specific outcomes

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Most teaching contexts involve teachers and learners. For learning to be successful, teaching needs to be effective, and for teaching to be effective, the teachers need to be aware of the **needs** of their learners. There are different kinds of needs. Individual learners have their own individual cognitive and psychological needs that go to make their individual learning profiles. Teachers should be aware of these profiles and tailor their instructional methodologies AND the language learning materials available (coursebooks, grammar books, dictionaries, any other teaching tools) to cater for these needs.

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But let's backtrack a bit and focus on teaching itself. Teaching comes in many different guises, depending on the context.

- It can be **Direct**—this is the case when the teacher explicitly instructs learners, in a classroom context, usually with reference to one or more textbooks.
- It can be **Indirect**—in which case the teacher is less obviously involved and the learners are prompted to engage in authentic communicative interactions.

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Teaching can be **Theory-driven** or **Practice-driven**, depending on how learning and language use are connected. If theorizing about linguistic structures and functions is prioritized and activities emerge from such theorizing, then teaching follows a top-down approach to learning and is theory-driven. Alternatively, if teaching prioritises learners' exposure to specific uses of language, then it is practice-driven and espouses a bottom-up approach to learning.

Again, different learners have learning styles of their own – not everyone prefers one way of teaching or the other. It is the teacher's job to do their research, locate these styles by performing some sort of needs analysis of the learners and fine tune their teaching to meet these styles and needs.

It is important, at this stage, to begin to think about your own teaching style—is it closer to being top-down and theory driven, or bottom-up and practice-driven? Is it a combination of the above?

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Of course, it's not only a question of personal style that different teachers have. Since teaching is linked to education in general, it is worth considering how the educational system in which we as teachers are incorporated is structured.

There are 3 general forms or types of education.

First, we have the so-called **formal** type that we are all very familiar with. This form of education defines the official educational and training system of a country. By nature, therefore, it has to be structured and organised (in the sense of curricula and other documentation that aim to delineate its philosophy, scope and specific ways of reaching specific goals). Formal education engages public organisations or recognised private institutions and provides formal certification and formal level of qualification that is recognised by relevant national and international educational authorities.

If you graduated from a university or college, if you have a Master's Degree, then you were involved in a formal type of education as a student. Similarly, if you are a teacher in a state school, then you are embedded in a formal educational system.

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Another type of education is the **non-formal** type. This type of education offers structured and organised learning, with plans and goals, that is often provided by institutions, but it does not lead to any type of formal level of qualification that is recognised by the relevant national education authorities in the same way that a university degree or a PhD diploma are recognised.

If you're following teacher education seminars offered by certain universities, then you're following a non-formal type of education. Our own programme, in the ENRICH Project, can be characterized as such a type as well.

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And then we have the third type of education, the **informal** one. This is very interesting, because it is linked to learning that takes place outside and beyond any designated areas that are traditionally associated with teaching and learning. When we are engaged in activities and interactions in everyday situations that are outside a formal educational setting, in the context of our work, our family or even when we're having fun, then whatever we learn (and we learn ALL the time) is part of informal education. Interestingly, it could be argued that these informal learning occurrences that are without external support and not institutionalised are probably the most important ones for learning. Why? Probably, because we are least nervous and most motivated to participate in these experiences with our whole self, and, as we know, this is a prerequisite for learning.

Watching YouTube videos on a specific concept that interests us can be informing—we learn from them. In this way, YouTube can be part of our informal education.

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Now let's go on to our first Activity.

Look again at the 3 types of education presented in the previous 3 slides. Do the following:

1. Which of the 3 types of education have you experienced as student or teacher? Briefly provide an example from each of these experiences. They

can be from your experience within ELT or from any other educational activity.

2. Then, shift your thinking specifically towards English Language Teaching. Can you think of examples for each of the 3 types of education that are linked with ELT?

Stop the video now and click the link underneath the video to share your views on the Forum.

This is the time to relate what we're discussing here with your own experiences and reflect about these links, so do take your time. It is learning time for you! When you are done, come back to the video and continue viewing—you'll have the chance to review your reflections in what follows.

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Let's see some examples from ESOL or EFL and try to identify the types of education that they are can best be associated within.

- Typical schooling that leads to **high-stakes exam certificates** is certainly a BIG part of **formal** education within EFL. We all know what this means, teaching (and learning, of course) under sometimes very stressful conditions to meet the target needs of a particular exam and receive the desired certificate that we will proudly add to our CV.
- Have you ever taught an ESP (English for specific purposes) class? Most likely, it would be a **non-formal** educational situation. For example, helping a businessman to present a paper at an international conference.
- And, of course, playing online video-games and using Skype/chat with other players; watching YouTube videos; or even travelling: ALL these activities engage us in using English with other people in authentic communicative situations, and we certainly learn how to use English through these experiences. And all this is part of our **informal** education.

What is interesting is to ask is this: if authentic communicative interactions are where we are most motivated to use English, and if when we use English in these situations we learn best, then which of the three types of education mentioned above are more **relevant** for learning? It is interesting to ask yourselves this question. Could it be that informal education holds secrets for successful learning of English that we may never have thought or acknowledged before? Think about this.

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As we're mentioned before, good teachers are aware of

- **how** they teach (i.e. the way they employ different instructional sequences)

- and what **impact** their teaching has on different learners (i.e. how their teaching leads to successful learning)

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But why is such **awareness** important?

Awareness leads to improved teaching practice and increased learner performance

- Teachers reflect on their own practice: this is the role of **Reflectivity**—this is done when we ask questions like *What am I doing right now? What am I doing that is right? What am I doing that is wrong?*

But this type of reflection is not enough. We are not robots that act, we are humans whose actions are intrinsically associated with our feelings and beliefs.

- Therefore, teachers ought to reflect on their own perceptions and convictions about their practice as well: and this is the role of **Reflexivity**— this is done when we ask questions like *How do I see myself? How do I see my role as a teacher? How do I see myself as a user?*

These are important questions we should always ask ourselves, they will help us become more aware of ourselves as teachers and will lead us to becoming better teachers.

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Awareness is particularly important for ESOL teachers. Awareness is important in terms of **Reflectivity**: Ask questions like *Do I know my learners? The curriculum? How do I use the coursebook? How do I assess learners' performance?*

Awareness is also important in terms of **Reflexivity**, when we ask questions like *What do I consider "proper" English to be? What is my notion of "language error"? How do I see myself and my role as a teacher and as a user of English? To what extent do I acknowledge the importance of informal learning in my learners?*

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In this Course, we will ask you to reflect on all of the above. One of the central domains to think about and draw information from is, of course, our **Teaching context**.

As we have seen the teaching contexts that belong to any type of Formal or Non-formal education use curricula and syllabi.

- A **Curriculum** is a broad framework or philosophy of a course; it describes the methods and delivery of instruction. Curricula tell us what to teach and how to teach it.
- A **Syllabus** is a set of specific items to be taught in sequence, specifying learning purpose and outcomes. Syllabi delineate the day-to-day or week-by-week process of teaching and learning.
- And then we have the **Language teaching materials**, the teaching resources used in formal settings (textbooks, dictionaries, grammar books, interactive whiteboards, worksheets, websites).

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Then, we have to refer to the **means of instruction**, and these go from the more general orientations of the philosophy toward teaching and learning to the more specific ways and means that this philosophy unfolds in the classroom. And we have terms like:

- **Approach**, the general assumptions about what language is and how learning a language occurs
- **Method**, the overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material
- **Procedures**, the step-by-step measures and ways to execute a method
- And **Technique**, the actual moment-to-moment classroom steps that lead to a specified outcome.

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Clearly, working in these Formal and Non-formal education contexts can be very demanding. This is why the English language teacher needs to be in control not only of their **own perceptions** but also of **everything related to formal teaching**. In other words, teachers should be **informed practitioners**:

- They should be knowledgeable of the **theories, practices, methods** and **approaches** in language teaching and learning.
- They should also be aware of their **own teaching context**, their **learners** and their **learning profiles** and the **target situation** – preparing a learner for a high-stakes exam, for example, is very different from teaching a class of 35 first-year university students studying economics. Teaching contexts can be very **diverse** and we need to be aware of the specificities.

Why do teachers need to be in control and aware of all of the above? Because they have to make **decisions** regarding their teaching practice, they have to see what works and what doesn't work. Making decisions means always evaluating the **impact** of your teaching within your specific teaching context.

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And here is where **lesson planning** comes in, as a tool to help us organize our teaching and also reflect on the impact of our teaching.

Lesson planning involves:

- A **Lesson**, that is, a unified set of activities that cover a period of classroom time, usually ranging from 40 to 90 minutes but this can change.
- And it also involves **Planning**, the organisation of the activities to be carried out during a particular lesson.

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What are the parameters to be considered in lesson planning? These should raise awareness and an informed capability of:

- the curricular situation
- the resources available for that lesson
- learners' current learning situation
- learners' preferred strategies and learning styles (how they prefer and how they like to learn)
- the means of guiding the learners from that particular point of their learning to the next milestone of their learning.

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Let's now make a quick overview of this Section, "Teaching English". We will talk about what we call "ELF-aware teaching". Then, we will describe the content of ELF-aware teaching, with reference to language skills and communication activities and large and small cultures in English Language Teaching.

We will also talk about the methodology in ELF-aware teaching, specifically using CLIL or Content and Language Integrated Learning, using TBLT or Task-based language teaching and learning within ELF-aware teaching, using ICT or Information and Communication Technologies and using corpora for language learning within an ELF-aware environment.

We will also talk about the importance of language assessment and we will describe lesson planning & evaluation. We will provide all the tools you need for developing the perfect lesson plan and how to use it in order to evaluate and improve your teaching.