

## A Teacher's Companion

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***The English Language Teacher's Handbook: How to Teach Large Classes with Few Resources, Continuum***

**AUTHORS:** Baker Joanna and Westrup Heather, London, 2008.

**Pages** 170

The English Language Teacher's Handbook is based on the authors' projects and experience of teaching English in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. This book offers a practical guide to teachers of English who teach large classes and have limited resources. There are a plenty of activities along with examples and ideas in the book which can be practised in classroom processes, in order to address this issue.

The book has twenty chapters which can be broadly classified into four heads – Overview of ELT approaches; Techniques to improve new language skills; Detailed language activities and ideas; and Large

classroom management and use of resources. The first three chapters of the book give a brief overview of the various approaches to language teaching because there is no 'single' way to learn English. Some students get to listen to and speak in English in their environments, so they understand and begin to use English easily, however, there are many students who come across English only in books at school; they do not get exposed to an English language environment at home or even in the school. As a result, it is more difficult for them to learn English. Therefore, the effectiveness of any teaching method depends on the needs of the learners. Using eclectic approaches, activities and materials make learning meaningful and joyful, thus giving all the students an equal opportunity to make progress.

Chapters four and five focus on organising lessons and activities to develop language skills among the learners. The authors talk about the

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PPP framework wherein a lesson is divided into three phases: Presentation, Practice and Production. In the presentation phase, the teacher presents a language item by demonstrating it to the students. Language is modelled by giving examples in context. Thereafter, students can be given a lot of practice to use the language item themselves, through contextual examples. By the end of the lesson, during production phase, the new language becomes part of the students' own language because they construct it on their own. This applies to all the language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Chapters 6 to 15 of the book contain activities and ideas to develop activity-modules as per the needs of the learners for teaching English to them. They cover all aspects of language teaching such as vocabulary, grammar; listening, speaking, reading and writing skills; ideas about projects and presentations; and testing. For example in the chapter Ideas for Improving Reading, before reading, while reading and post reading activities have been dealt with in detail. For improving writing, the 'process of writing' approach has been discussed. This is an important section, because we must remember that the students' first attempt is not the final product, but a beginning and recognition thereof is most important.

The authors also recommend that assessment needs to be built into the

processes of teaching and learning. They emphasise that "continuous assessment is a way of monitoring the progress of students during the year. It helps teachers and students to identify their strengths and weaknesses as they learn to improve those areas before the end of term test or exam". This is accompanied by different techniques of assessment like close test, open ended questions, true and false, dictation, etc.

Joanna and Heather have also given examples of teaching various skills. According to them, pair work and group work are an integral part of learner centred teaching. They recommend that students should use their first language instead of English during pair or group work especially when they are deciding who will do what or are discussing an idea. However, the production phase must be in English only. Further, the teacher should monitor the group activities when they are ongoing and must also give feedback in a general manner rather than picking on individuals.

The book also focuses on the challenges of teaching English to large classes, which is a common scenario in our country. The authors recommend a variety of activities and teaching approaches that can give a chance to all the students to participate and learn English better. And once students are motivated, they learn better. The last few chapters of the book are on class management and planning activities

according to the needs, interests and cognitive level of the learners. In these chapters there are many creative and practical techniques and advice on how to make students participate in large classes with minimal resources and materials. Using blackboards for themselves as well as allowing students to use it to complete the activity started by the teacher is one such way of involving students constructively in the teaching learning process despite a resource crunch. Other resources can be drawn from the learners' environment such as the objects that learners carry, 'sharing books', reusing resources that are available and finally creating an input rich communicational environment in the class.

The book is also reader friendly and its layout makes it a handy resource for teachers. Each chapter contains objectives, steps and clearly spelt out activities. There are blurbs recapitulating the key points and illustrations accompany activities. The book also has Classroom Action Tasks which encourage teachers to think and prepare activities most suited to their learner profile. The authors distinctly avoid jargon and have also provided a list for further reading in the end.

This book is a must read for all the teachers of English as it gives many ideas for overcoming the challenges of a large ELT class with few resources. It suggests different ways of teaching English which make learning more effective and joyful.