

Films for ESOL training

Section 2 - Language Experience



Foreword

These resources were compiled with ESOL teachers in the UK in mind. They introduce a number of approaches and focus on giving learners a voice, encouraging them to express their identities and “speak from within”, a highly significant aspect of effective practice in ESOL teaching.

The materials are designed to be used by a group of teachers with a trainer or facilitator, either in teacher development sessions or on in-service training courses. Trainers who decide to use them on pre-service training courses may want to adapt some of them. They can also be used by teachers working alone.

Teachers not working in the UK ESOL context may also be interested in the theme of these resources and materials and should be able to adapt the materials to their own ELT context.

Introduction to the resources

These resources have been chosen for their relevance to teachers working in ESOL in the UK, where groups of learners are often very diverse. The sessions introduce different teaching approaches that focus on the learners - their varying backgrounds, experiences, skill levels, interests and aspirations. It shows how teachers can draw on this diversity to provide a rich and stimulating learning environment. All four teaching approaches featured share a concern with giving learners a voice, encouraging them to express their identities and “speak from within”, a highly significant aspect of effective practice in ESOL teaching.

“the most effective teachers...drew on learners’ own experiences and lives outside the classroom and crucially, encouraged them to ‘speak from within’...Where learners were speaking from within they produced longer, more complex stretches of talk, which we know to be essential for language learning and acquisition to take place.” (Cooke and Roberts 2007)

There are 6 sessions available:

1. **ESOL Learners - from a seminar by Philida Schellekens**

In this clip Philida Schellekens gives background information about ESOL learners in the UK and the skills they bring to class.

2. **Language experience - from a seminar by Judith Kirsh**

Judith Kirsh shows how learners’ own words can be used to develop literacy skills, using the *language experience* approach.

3. **Teaching unplugged - from a seminar by Luke Meddings**

In this clip Luke Meddings introduces the *Dogme* or *unplugged* approach to teaching English. Again, the starting point is the learners’ contributions, but this time the focus is more on spoken English.

4. **Language and literacy as social practice - from a seminar by Pauline Moon**

In this clip Pauline Moon takes a *social practices* approach to ESOL, arguing that teaching should take account of how learners need to use language in their daily lives, and of hidden assumptions and conventions surrounding and underpinning social interactions.

5. **Differentiated learning supported by technology - from a seminar by Amanda Wilson and Callie Wilkinson**

This clip focuses on differentiation strategies to meet learner needs and to enhance learner choice in the classroom. It looks in particular at how technology can be used to support differentiation.

6. **Online CPD - from a seminar by Phil Bird and Mike Harrison**

Finally, clip six shows how the internet can be used by teachers as a tool for continuous professional development.

We recommend using the clips in the sequence in which they are listed. However, each clip can also be used as a stand-alone resource.

Introduction to the photocopiable materials

The activities provided are intended to help ESOL teachers consider the issues raised in the films in more detail. Background information, clips, links to theory and annotated bibliographies are available in the participants' notes.

Each set of materials contains:

- A *trainer notes* sheet for the person leading the session
- An *activities* sheet for participants to use during the session, while watching the DVD. This is to help people consider the issues raised in the films in more detail, and to then apply them to their own practice.
- *Notes for participants*, to be read by the trainer before leading the session and given out to participants, normally at the end of the session. These give background information, expand on the theories referred to in the films and give ideas for follow-up, including a bibliography.

Section 2: Language experience : Trainer notes

Introduction

This section focuses on *language experience*, an approach to literacy teaching which is quite well known in the field of ESOL. The footage comes from a seminar given by Judith Kirsh for the British Council. Embedded within it is another video clip of a one-to-one lesson showing Marina Spiegel using a language experience approach with a beginner learner. Thanks are extended to the now defunct London Language and Literacy Unit, who gave permission for the use of this clip from the video 'Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners (1)'.

There are five activities to accompany this video. They can be used with teachers working with learners in a wide range of settings.

Activity A - This activity allows participants to share any previous knowledge and experience of language experience approaches and should generate some interest in it.

Activity B - This activity aims to get participants thinking about the way word, sentence and text level skills might relate to each other in an approach which uses the learners' own words to create text.

Activity C - The purpose of this activity is to focus on the sequencing of the stages in the lesson and the rationale for the sequence.

Activity D - This discussion activity should:

- clarify the difference between top-down and bottom-up approaches to literacy
- generate ideas about how a language experience approach based on texts created from learners' own words can be used in a group setting

Activity E - This is a practical task to give participants a chance to create and share some language-focused tasks based on a text written by learners.

Activity A**Activity A: Before starting to watch Judith's seminar****Discuss in pairs or small groups**

What do you know about the language experience approach to teaching literacy to ESOL learners? Have you ever used it yourself? If so, how?

Show the first part of the video, where Judith clarifies what is meant by a language experience approach.

Pause and lead a brief feedback on activity A. You might start by asking whether Judith confirmed participants' initial thoughts about language experience.

Clarify that the rationale of the approach is to create text using learners' own words, then use that text to work on aspects of literacy at sentence and word level.

If you want to develop understanding of what those aspects might be, you can use the Adult ESOL Curriculum sections on reading and writing to do so (DfES, 2001). Otherwise, elicit one or two examples of early reading skills at sentence and word level. As the video clip is primarily concerned with *reading* skills rather than writing skills, it will be best to elicit (and perhaps write up) examples of these such as:

Sentence level

- Developing the concept of a sentence
- Recognising simple sentence structures
- Using capitals and full stops to aid understanding

Word level

- Recognising the letters of the alphabet in upper and lower case
- Recognising high frequency whole words, such as *the*
- Developing awareness of sound-letter correspondence to help with sounding out unfamiliar words

These examples have been taken from the ESOL Reading Curriculum at Entry 1 level.

Activity B

Set the activity. This is probably best done in pairs, or alternatively some people may prefer to do it individually and then check in pairs.

Activity B: Before watching the video clip that Judith shows in her seminar

In the lesson you are going to see, the teacher and student (T and S) go through a number of stages together. These stages are listed in random order below. Work in pairs or small groups and number the stages in the order in which you think they will happen.

- a) T and S look at some pictures of vegetables and of fish and say what they are called in English and in Somali. T and S talk about fish in Somalia.
- b) S reads the whole text again.
- c) T prompts S to read the whole text, pointing to the words with her finger.
- d) T writes out the sentences on separate pieces of paper.
- e) T asks the S to count the sentences, which she does.
- f) Whilst engaging in dialogue with the student, T transcribes some of the things S said, making some minor changes to improve the accuracy of the language and reading aloud as she goes.
- g) T cuts the sentences up into words. S assembles each sentence in turn.
- h) S copies the text.
- i) T invites S to assemble the whole text but S seems reluctant so T does not persist with this.
- j) S reads separate sentences.

Activity C

Set the task, to be done in the same groups as activity B. There is no need to do whole group feedback at this stage because Judith does it in the video.

Activity C: While watching the clip

1. Note any differences from your predicted ordering of the lesson stages.
2. What do you think was the rationale for approaching the lesson in this way?
3. How successful do you think the approach was? What made it successful (or unsuccessful)?

Watch the second section of the clip. Pause to make sure that everybody is sure of the correct order, which is: a, f, c, d, e, j, g, i, b, h (stages d and e could be reversed if wished).

Watch clip.

Lead feedback on activity C questions 2 and 3. You may want to do this in groups first, or you may prefer to go straight into whole group feedback.

The rationale for the approach is:

- to use language that is useful and interesting to the learner to develop reading and writing skills
- to build confidence through prompting and encouraging and through getting the learner to read the same words again and again and become familiar with them through repeatedly seeing them
- to look at sentence level and word level aspects of reading within a meaningful context

Participants will probably feel that this is a successful approach, as the learner appears to enjoy the lesson and is able to read her own text at the end of it. Language experience approaches are particularly useful with beginner readers and writers, although they can be used at higher levels as well. The learner shown in the clip was obviously a beginner at speaking and listening too, but language experience is also a very good approach for people with 'spiky profiles', whose speaking and listening skills may be far ahead of their literacy skills.

Quoting Wendy Moss (1999), Helen Sunderland and Marina Spiegel (2006), suggest that the language experience approach has its origin in the ideology of Paulo Freire. Freire was a Brazilian educator concerned with giving a voice to oppressed people and situating learning in their experience and empowering them.

Activity D

Activity D: After watching the rest of the video

Would you call this a top-down or a bottom-up approach to literacy teaching?

How can this approach be adapted for use with a group?

Top-down and bottom-up approaches

This is a top-down approach, in that it begins with text and works down to sentences, words and letters. A bottom-up approach would begin with letters and words and work up to sentences and from there to texts.

Participants may ask questions about the role of phonics. As Judith points out, there is attention to phonics within this approach, but examples are picked out from the text rather than being presented as decontextualised items. In other words, the approach used is *analytic* phonics, not *synthetic* phonics. At the time of writing there is a vigorous debate about analytic versus synthetic phonics approaches, but detailed discussion of this is beyond the scope of this session.

Using language experience with groups

This is discussed at some length in Marina Spiegel and Helen Sunderland's book *Teaching basic literacy to adult learners* (LLU+, 2006). A key point is to keep texts written by small groups, or by the whole group, to use for further activities, such as word-matching, sentence reconstruction, text reconstruction, gap-fill activities, inserting missing punctuation, and dictation.

People interested in teaching basic literacy are strongly advised to read Spiegel and Sunderland's book.

Activity E

Participants have to adapt the text provided, state the aims of their activity and write instructions for an activity to work on an aspect of language or on reading skills. You might want to ask participants to work on activities for different levels.

It is probably best to do this activity in pairs rather than groups, as it will be easier to agree on what to do.

To help participants to decide on an appropriate focus, you may want to provide access to the ESOL curriculum, particularly if working with new teachers, or teachers from a non-ESOL background. This can be accessed online at:

<http://rwp.excellencegateway.org.uk/resource/Adult+ESOL+Curriculum+-+Entry+1/pdf/>

If participants have trouble getting started, ask them to look at the features of language that the text exemplifies, paying attention to lexis (phrases, not just words); grammatical elements such as tenses and word order; paragraphing; sentence structure; punctuation. They can then develop an activity to focus on one or more of these.

After doing the activity, participants can display their activities around the room and walk around to see what other people have done.

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Activity E: Developing language activities to use with a language experience text

The text below was co-written by a group of 8 learners in an ESOL literacy class in Portsmouth. This class was similar in character to many ESOL classes in the UK. They had all been living in the UK for several years, some much longer, and had spiky profiles, i.e. they had different levels in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Their speaking skills ranged from Entry 2 to high and very fluent Entry 3. Reading skills ranged from high Entry 1 to Entry 3. Six had writing skills in the Entry 1 range, while the other two were working at low Entry 2.

They came from a range of language and ethnic backgrounds and several of them were married to British people. In the class, which was held during the first week of term after the New Year celebrations, they discussed their experiences of New Year. They then co-wrote this text, dictating sentences to the teacher and co-editing as they went.

New Year in England

In England people celebrate New Year with their friends and families. They talk, laugh and have fun. They celebrate in different ways. Some of them celebrate in the church. Others go to the pub, or a club. A lot of people visit friends after midnight.

Some people start New Year's Eve with a meal together. Some have nibbles with drinks. Other people have a buffet, or a roast dinner with some red wine. A lot of people have pudding.

After the meal, people talk, dance, sing and laugh. Sometimes they let off fireworks at midnight. Some of them get drunk and after that they start fighting. The Accident and Emergency departments are often full on New Year's Eve.

In the morning some people have hangovers and say they will never drink again. But they often change their minds.

Working with a partner, produce an activity based on this text for use at either E1, E2 or E3 level, focusing on an aspect of language or literacy.

1. State the aims of the activity.
2. Adapt/add to the text to produce your activity.
3. Write brief instructions for the learners.

Section 2: Language experience : Activities

Introduction

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Activity A: Before starting to watch Judith's seminar

Discuss in pairs or small groups

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Activity B: Before watching the video clip that Judith shows in her seminar

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- g) T cuts the sentences up into words. S assembles each sentence in turn.

Activity B (continued)

- h) S copies the text.
- i) T invites S to assemble the whole text but S seems reluctant so T does not persist with this.
- j) S reads separate sentences.

Activity C: While watching the clip that Judith shows in her seminar

1. Note any differences from your predicted ordering of the lesson stages.

2. What do you think was the rationale for approaching the lesson in this way?

3. How successful do you think the approach was? What made it successful (or unsuccessful)?

Activity D: After watching the rest of the video

Would you call this a top-down or a bottom-up approach to literacy teaching?

How can this approach be adapted for use with a group?

Activity E: Developing language activities to use with a language experience text

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Section 2: Language experience: Notes for participants

Freire

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian literacy educator who worked with poor and socially excluded people, and saw literacy and education as a force for liberation. Freire argued that literacy should be taught not as a set of de-contextualised skills but as a means of political participation. In accordance with this view, the relationship between teacher and students should be an equal one, using methodology that draws on concepts and experiences from people's everyday lives.

Although Freire's view of education has its critics, his influence on adult education and literacy education is far-reaching. His thinking is briefly summarised in an article by Scott Thornbury on the Teaching English website: *Dogme: nothing if not critical*. This article relates Freirian pedagogy not to *language experience* approaches but to the *Dogme/teaching unplugged* approach, which is the focus of Section 3 of these resources. Thornbury discusses Freirian thinking under the sub-headings *Critical thinking* and *Freire's dialogic*.

A current project which draws on Freirian thinking is *Reflect ESOL*, which Pauline Moon refers to in Section 4 of these resources. A resource pack for people interested in this approach is downloadable from the Skills for Life Network website (website address provided below).

Language experience

Marina Spiegel and Helen Sunderland have a very useful section on language experience in their book *Teaching basic literacy to ESOL Learners* (LLU+ 2006, pp 32 –39). Marina is the person we saw using a language experience approach in the clip. The book explains the approach and gives a rationale for it. There is also some guidance on using language experience with groups.

There is a shorter section on language experience in Sunderland and Spiegel's chapter *The Written Word* in *Teaching Adult ESOL: principles and practice*. Details of both publications are given below.

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Cardiff, P., Newman, K. and E. Pearce. *Reflect ESOL Resource pack*. Available to download from <http://www.skillsforlifeframework.com/?atk=964>

Spiegel, M. and H. Sunderland. (2006). *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners*. London: LLU+

Spiegel, M. and H. Sunderland. (2009). The written word. In Paton, A and M. Wilkins, (Eds.) *Teaching Adult ESOL: principles and practice*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Thornbury, S. (2009). *Dogme: nothing if not critical*. Available to download from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/Dogme-nothing-if-not-critical>