

CONTINUING YOUR TEACHER EDUCATION

One of the most invigorating things about teaching is that you never stop learning. The complexity of the dynamic triangular interplay among teachers and learners and subject matter continually gives birth to an endless number of questions to answer, problems to solve, issues to ponder. Every time you walk into a classroom to teach, you face some of those issues, and if you are a growing teacher, you learn something. You find out how well a technique works, how a student processes language, how classroom interaction can be improved, how to assess a student's competence, how emotions enter into learning, or how your teaching style affects learners. The discoveries go on and on—for a lifetime.

As you embark on this journey into the teaching profession, how can you best continue to grow professionally? How can you most fruitfully meet the challenges that lie ahead? Are there some practical goals that you can pursue? So far, as you have worked through the material of this book, you have already begun to address some major professional goals (adapted from Pennington 1990: 150):

- a knowledge of the theoretical foundations of language learning and language teaching,
- the analytical skills necessary for assessing different teaching contexts and classroom conditions,
- an awareness of alternative teaching techniques and the ability to put these into practice,
- the confidence and skill to alter your teaching techniques as needed,
- practical experience with different teaching techniques,
- informed knowledge of yourself and your students,
- interpersonal communication skills, and
- attitudes of flexibility and openness to change.

These eight different goals can provide continuing career growth for many, many years as you strive to do a better and better job of teaching. But you must be patient! Don't expect to become a "master" teacher overnight. Right now, as you begin your teaching career, set some realistic, practical goals that you can focus on

without being overwhelmed by everything you have to attend to when you teach. Just as beginning language learners are in a **controlled** mode of operation, able to manage only a few bits of information at a time with capacity-limited systems, so it is with your teaching. If you try to focus on everything in the classroom (the management issues, techniques, delivery, body language, feedback, individual attention, lesson goals, and mid-lesson alterations, etc.) all at once, you may end up doing nothing well. In due course of time, however, the abundance of cognitive/emotional phenomena in the classroom will be sufficiently **automatic** that you will indeed manage to operate on many planes simultaneously.

As you read on here, you will find some ideas that you can immediately put to work and others that may apply to you after you have gained some experience.

PEAK PERFORMERS

Are you doing the best you can do? Are you being all that you can be—"self-actualized," in Maslow's terms? Or are you satisfied with getting by? In the stressful world of teaching, it's easier than you might imagine to slip into a pattern of just keeping a step ahead of your students as you struggle through long working hours and cope with overly large classes. This pattern is the beginning of a downward spiral that you should avoid at all costs. How do you do that? In part by practicing the behaviors of peak performers, people who are reaching their fullest potential and therefore who, in turn, reap success. Consider the following four rules (among many) of peak performers that you might apply to yourself, even at this early stage in your career:

1. Set realistic goals.

Peak performers, first of all, know their limitations and strengths and their feelings and needs, and then set goals that will be realistic within this framework. They set their own goals and don't let the world around them (colleagues, supervisors, or friends) dictate goals to them. If you have a sense of overall purpose in your career as a mission, then this mission will unfold in the form of daily, weekly, monthly, or annual goals.

It is a good idea to write down some short-term and long-term goals. Be realistic in terms of what you can accomplish. Be specific in your statements. Here are some examples to get the wheels turning.

- Read x number of teacher resource books this year.
- Design my next test to be more authentic, biased for best, with maximum washback.
- Observe five other teachers this semester.
- Monitor my error treatments in the classroom.
- Attend two professional conferences/workshops this year.

2. Set priorities.

It is important that you have a sense of what is most important, what is least important, and everything in between, in your professional goals and tasks. If you don't, you can end up spending too much time on low-priority tasks that rob you of the time you should be spending on higher priorities. Priority-setting requires a sense of your whole professional and personal life, and how you are going to use your waking hours.

3. Take risks.

Peak performers don't play it safe all the time. They are not afraid to try new things. Nor are they put off by limiting circumstances: what cannot be done, or "the way" things are done. They don't linger in the safety of a "comfort zone"; instead, they reach out for new challenges.

The key to risk-taking as a peak performance strategy, however, is not simply in taking the risks. It is in learning from your "failures." When you risk a new technique in the classroom, try a new approach to a difficult student, or make a frank comment to a supervisor, you must be willing to accept possible "failure" in your attempt. Then, you assess all the facets of that failure and turn it into an experience that teaches you something about how to calculate the next risk.

4. Practice principles of stress management.

Contrary to some perceptions from outside our profession, teaching is a career with all the makings for high-stress conditions. Think of some of the sources of stress in this business: long hours, large classes, low pay, pressure to "perform" in the classroom, high student expectations, professional demands outside the classroom, emotional connections with students' lives, bureaucracies, pressure to keep up with a rapidly changing field, information overload. Managing those potential stress factors is an important key to keeping yourself fresh, creative, bright, and happy.

One of the cardinal rules of stress management is setting priorities, which has already been dealt with above. Another rule was also touched on: Know your limitations. Other rules follow—don't take on too many extra duties; take time for yourself; and balance your personal and professional time. Peak performers don't spend eighteen hours a day working. They don't get so consumed with their profession that the rest of their life is a shambles. They work hard but stop to play. They know how to relax, and do so regularly. And they develop fulfilling personal relationships with family and friends that provide enrichment and renewal.

As you begin a teaching career, you may feel the weight of heavy demands. And teaching is not one of those careers where you can necessarily leave all the cognitive and emotional load in the office. So, you can expect to be the proverbial overworked and underpaid laborer. But in the midst of those demands, try to balance your life, and take everything in perspective.

THE "GOOD" LANGUAGE TEACHER

One way to begin setting goals and priorities is to consider the qualities of successful language teachers. Numerous "experts" have come up with their lists of attributes, and they all differ in a variety of ways. The eight goals for continuing career growth cited at the beginning of this chapter are one example of a list of attributes of a "good" language teacher. Harold B. Allen (1980) once offered the following down-to-earth list of characteristics of good ESL teachers:

1. Competent preparation leading to a degree in TESL
2. A love of the English language
3. Critical thinking
4. The persistent urge to upgrade oneself
5. Self-subordination
6. Readiness to go the extra mile
7. Cultural adaptability
8. Professional citizenship
9. A feeling of excitement about one's work

Those nine items contain a good deal of grist for the professional growth mills. How would you rate yourself on all nine? Any room for improvement on any of them? If so, you have some goal-setting to do.

I also offer a checklist of good language-teaching characteristics (Table 23.1) as a composite of several unpublished sources. You may wish to use this list as a self-check to determine some areas for continued professional growth, to prioritize those areas, and to state specific goals that you will pursue. Try rating yourself for each item on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) and see how you come out.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

One of the most neglected areas of professional growth among teachers is the mutual exchange of classroom observations. Once you get into a teaching routine, it is very difficult to make time to go and see other teachers and to invite the same in return. Too often, teachers tend to view observations as necessary while "in training" but unnecessary thereafter unless a supervisor is forced by regulations to visit their class in order to write up a recommendation for rehiring. If one of your colleagues comes up to you and says, "Hey, guess what? I was observed today," your answer might be something like "Oh, no! How bad was it?"

Fortunately, in an era of **action research** (see pp. 431, 437-38, and 442), the prevailing attitude toward observations is changing. Teachers are coming to understand that seeing one's actions through another's eyes is an indispensable tool for classroom research as well as a potentially enlightening experience for both

Table 23.1. Characteristics of a good language teacher

Good Language-Teaching Characteristics

Technical Knowledge

1. Understands the linguistic systems of English phonology, grammar, and discourse.
2. Comprehensively grasps basic principles of language learning and teaching.
3. Has fluent competence in speaking, writing, listening to, and reading English.
4. Knows through experience what it is like to learn a foreign language.
5. Understands the close connection between language and culture.
6. Keeps up with the field through regular reading and conference/workshop attendance.

Pedagogical Skills

7. Has a well-thought-out, informed approach to language teaching.
8. Understands and uses a wide variety of techniques.
9. Efficiently designs and executes lesson plans.
10. Monitors lessons as they unfold and makes effective mid-lesson alterations.
11. Effectively perceives students' linguistic needs.
12. Gives optimal feedback to students.
13. Stimulates interaction, cooperation, and teamwork in the classroom.
14. Uses appropriate principles of classroom management.
15. Uses effective, clear presentation skills.
16. Creatively adapts textbook material and other audio, visual, and mechanical aids.
17. Innovatively creates brand-new materials when needed.
18. Uses interactive, intrinsically motivating techniques to create effective tests.

Interpersonal Skills

19. Is aware of cross-cultural differences and is sensitive to students' cultural traditions.
20. Enjoys people; shows enthusiasm, warmth, rapport, and appropriate humor.
21. Values the opinions and abilities of students.
22. Is patient in working with students of lesser ability.
23. Offers challenges to students of exceptionally high ability.
24. Cooperates harmoniously and candidly with colleagues (fellow teachers).
25. Seeks opportunities to share thoughts, ideas, and techniques with colleagues.

Personal Qualities

26. Is well organized, conscientious in meeting commitments, and dependable.
27. Is flexible when things go awry.
28. Maintains an inquisitive mind in trying out new ways of teaching.
29. Sets short-term and long-term goals for continued professional growth.
30. Maintains and exemplifies high ethical and moral standards.

observer and observee. Before you get into the nasty habit of filling your time with everything else, why not carve out some time in your work schedule to visit other teachers and to invite reciprocity? As long as such visits pose no undue complications in schedules and other institutional constraints, you will reap rewarding benefits as you gain new ideas, keep fresh, and sharpen your own skills.

A second form of observation, which can be very effective in different ways, is self-observation. Actually, self-observation is no more than a systematic process of monitoring yourself, but it's the systematic part that is crucial. It requires discipline and perseverance, but the results are worth it. How do you go about observing yourself?

1. Select an element of your teaching to "keep an eye out for" as you teach. Make sure it's one finite element, like teacher talk, eye contact, teaching predominantly to one side of the classroom, or chalkboard work. If you try to take in too many things, you could end up becoming too self-conscious to the detriment of the rest of the lesson.
2. Monitor that particular element during the class period. If you can, videotape yourself (or have someone come in and operate the camera).
3. After class, set aside a few moments to give these elements careful assessment.

The most common and instructive means to go about observing oneself or others is to use an observation checklist. Dozens of such instruments are in active use by teacher trainers, supervisors, and teachers across the profession. Two such checklists follow. Figure 23.1 is a checklist for observing other teachers; Figure 23.2 is designed for self-observation.

CLASSROOM RESEARCH

Research is a scary word for many of us. We are happy to leave it in someone else's hands because it involves statistics (which we hate), experimental design (which we don't know), and the interpretation of ambiguous results (which we think is best left to the "experts"). Even so, leaving all the research in the hands of researchers is an upside-down policy, as Anne Meek (1991: 34) noted:

The main thing wrong with the world of education is that there's this one group of people who do it—the teachers—and then there's another group who think they know about it—the researchers. The group who think they know about teaching try to find out more about it in order to tell the teachers about teaching—and that is total reversal.

Teachers are the ones who do it and, therefore, are the ones who know about it. It's worth getting teachers to build on what they know, to build on what questions they have, because that's what matters—what teachers know and what questions they have. And so anybody who wants to be a helpful researcher should value what the teachers know and help them develop that.

Figure 23.1. Teacher observation form: observing other teachers

Teacher Observation Form A: Observing other teachers

Keep in mind these criteria when observing a teacher. Circle or check each item in the column that most clearly represents your evaluation: 4=excellent, 3=above average, 2=average, 1=unsatisfactory, N/A=not applicable. You may also write comments in addition to or in lieu of checking a column.

I. PREPARATION

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. The teacher was well-prepared and well-organized in class. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
| 2. The lesson reviewed material and looked ahead to new material. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
| 3. The prepared goals/objectives were apparent. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |

II. PRESENTATION

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 4. The class material was explained in an understandable way. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
| 5. The lesson was smooth, sequenced, and logical. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
| 6. The lesson was well-paced. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
| 7. Directions were clear and concise and students were able to carry them out. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
| 8. Material was presented at the students' level of comprehension. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
| 9. An appropriate percentage of the class was student production of the language. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
| 10. The teacher answered questions carefully and satisfactorily. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
| 11. The method(s) was(were) appropriate to the age and ability of students. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
| 12. The teacher knew when the students were having trouble understanding. | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| Comment: | |
-

13. The teacher showed an interest in, and enthusiasm for, the subject taught.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

III. EXECUTION/METHODS

14. There were balance and variety in activities during the lesson.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

15. The teacher was able to adapt to unanticipated situations.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

16. The material was reinforced.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

17. The teacher moved around the class and made eye contact with students.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

18. The teacher knew students' names.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

19. The teacher positively reinforced the students.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

20. Student responses were effectively elicited (i.e., the order in which the students were called on).
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

21. Examples and illustrations were used effectively.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

22. Instructional aids or resource material was used effectively.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

23. Drills were used and presented effectively.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

24. Structures were taken out of artificial drill contexts and applied to the real contexts of the students' culture and personal experiences.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

25. Error perception.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

26. Appropriate error correction.
Comment:

4 3 2 1 N/A

(Continued)

IV. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 27. Patience in eliciting responses.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 28. Clarity, tone, and audibility of voice.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 29. Personal appearance.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 30. Initiative, resourcefulness, and creativity.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 31. Pronunciation, intonation, fluency, and appropriate and acceptable use of language.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |

V. TEACHER/STUDENT INTERACTION

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 32. Teacher encouraged and assured full student participation in class.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 33. The class felt free to ask questions, to disagree, or to express their own ideas.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 34. The teacher was able to control and direct the class.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 35. The students were attentive and involved.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 36. The students were comfortable and relaxed, even during intense intellectual activity.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 37. The students were treated fairly, impartially, and with respect.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 38. The students were encouraged to do their best.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 39. The teacher was relaxed and matter-of-fact in voice and manner.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 40. The teacher was aware of individual and group needs.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |
| 41. Digressions were used positively and not overused.
Comment: | 4 3 2 1 N/A |

Figure 23.2. Teacher self-observation form (adapted from Christison & Bassano 1984)

Teacher Self-Observation Form

Thoughtfully consider each statement. Rate yourself in the following way:

3=Excellent 2=Good 1=Needs Improvement 0=Not Applicable

Write your ratings in the blanks. When you've finished, give overall consideration to the various areas.

I. Learning Environment

A. Relationship to Students

- _____ 1. I establish good eye contact with my class. I do not talk over their heads, to the chalkboard, or to just one person.
- _____ 2. If I tend to teach predominantly to one area of the classroom, I am aware of this. I make a conscious effort at all times to pay attention to all students equally.
- _____ 3. I divide my students into small groups in an organized and principled manner. I recognize that these groups should differ in size and composition, varying with the objective of the group activity.

B. The Classroom

- _____ 1. If possible, I arrange the seating in my class to suit the class activity for the day.
- _____ 2. I consider the physical comfort of the room, such as heat and light.
- _____ 3. When I need special materials or equipment, I have them set up before the class begins.

C. Presentation

- _____ 1. My handwriting on the chalkboard and charts is legible from all locations in the classroom. It is large enough to accommodate students with vision impairments.
- _____ 2. I speak loudly enough to be heard in all parts of the classroom, and I enunciate clearly.
- _____ 3. I vary the exercises in class, alternating rapid and slow-paced activities to keep up the maximum interest in the class.
- _____ 4. I am prepared to give a variety of explanations, models, or descriptions for all students.
- _____ 5. I help the students form working principles and generalizations.
- _____ 6. Students use new skills or concepts long enough so that they are retained and thus future application is possible.
- _____ 7. I plan for "thinking time" for my students so they can organize their thoughts and plan what they are going to say or do.

D. Culture and Adjustment

- _____ 1. I am aware that cultural differences affect the learning situation.
- _____ 2. I keep the cultural background(s) of my students in mind when planning daily activities and am aware of cultural misunderstandings that might arise from the activities I choose.
- _____ 3. I promote an atmosphere of understanding and mutual respect.

II. The Individuals

A. Physical Health

- _____ 1. I know which students have visual or aural impairments and seat them as close to my usual teaching positions as possible.
- _____ 2. I am aware that a student's attention span varies from day to day, depending on mental and physical health and outside distractions. I pace my class activities to accommodate the strengths. I don't continue with an activity that may exhaust or bore them.
- _____ 3. I begin my class with a simple activity to wake students up and get them working together.
- _____ 4. I am sensitive to individual students who have bad days. I don't press a student who is incapable of performing at the usual level.
- _____ 5. I try to challenge students who are at their best.
- _____ 6. If I am having a bad day and feel it might affect my normal teaching style, I let my students know it so there is no misunderstanding about my feelings for them.

B. Self-Concepts

- _____ 1. I treat my students with the same respect that I expect them to show me.
- _____ 2. I plan "one-centered" activities that give all students an opportunity at some point to feel important and accepted.
- _____ 3. I like to teach and have a good time teaching—on most days.

C. Aptitude and Perception

- _____ 1. I am aware that my students learn differently. Some students are visual-receptive, some are motor-receptive, and others are audio-receptive.
- _____ 2. My exercises are varied; some are visual, aural, oral, and kinesthetic. I provide models, examples, and experiences to maximize learning each of these areas.
- _____ 3. I know basic concepts in the memory process. When applicable, I use association to aid students in rapid skills acquisition.

D. Reinforcement

- _____ 1. I tell students when they have done well, but I don't let praise become mechanical.
- _____ 2. I finish my class period in a way that will review the new concepts presented during the class period. My students can immediately evaluate their understanding of those concepts.
- _____ 3. My tests are well-planned and -produced.
- _____ 4. I make my system of grading clear to my students so that there are no misunderstandings of expectations.

E. Development

- _____ 1. I keep up to date on new techniques in the ESL profession by attending conferences and workshops and by reading pertinent professional articles and books.
- _____ 2. I realize that there is no one right way to present a lesson. I try new ideas where and when they seem appropriate.
- _____ 3. I observe other ESL teachers so that I can get other ideas and compare them to my own teaching style. I want to have several ideas for teaching one concept.

III. The Activity

A. Interaction

- ☐ 1. I minimize my role in conducting the activities.
- ☐ 2. I organize the activities so they are suitable for real interactions among students.
- ☐ 3. The activities maximize student involvement.
- ☐ 4. The activities promote spontaneity or experimentation on the part of the learner.
- ☐ 5. The activities generally transfer attention away from "self" and outward toward a "task."
- ☐ 6. The activities are organized to ensure a high success rate, leaving enough room for error to make the activity challenging.
- ☐ 7. I am not always overly concerned with error correction. I choose the appropriate amount of correction for the activity.

B. Language

- ☐ 1. The activity is focused.
- ☐ 2. The content of the skill presented will be easily transferrable for use outside the class.
- ☐ 3. The activity is geared to the proficiency level of my class or slightly beyond.
- ☐ 4. The content of the activity is not too sophisticated for my students.
- ☐ 5. I make the content of the activity relevant and meaningful to my students' world.

Actually, research does not have to be a scary prospect at all. You are researching ideas all the time, whether you know it or not. If, as a growing teacher, you have as a goal to improve the quality of your teaching, then you will ask some relevant questions, hypothesize some possible answers or solutions, put the solutions to a practical tryout in the classroom, look for certain results, and weigh those results in some manner to determine whether your hypothesized answer held up. That's research. Some classroom research is an informal, everyday occurrence for you. You divide up small groups in a different way to stimulate better exchange of ideas; you modify your usual non-directive approach to getting students to study harder and take a bold, direct, no-nonsense approach; you try a videotape as a conversation stimulus; you try a deductive approach to presenting a grammar point instead of your usual inductive approach. Other classroom research may be more of a long-term process that covers a term or more. In this mode, still in an informal manner, you may try out some learner strategy training techniques to see if students do better at conversation skills; you may do a daily three-minute pronunciation drill to see if students' pronunciation improves; you may assign specific extra-class reading to see if reading comprehension improves.

This kind of action research, also known simply as "classroom research," is carried out not so much to fulfill a thesis requirement or to publish a journal article as to improve your own understanding of the teaching-learning process in the classroom. The payoff for treating your teaching-learning questions seriously is, ultimately, your becoming a better teacher. And, yes, you might also find that what you

have learned is worth sharing with other teachers, either through informal chats in the teacher's lunchroom or through a conference presentation.

David Nunan (1989b) suggested that classroom research may be categorized into four different aspects: the developmental features of learner language, interaction in the second language, classroom tasks, and learning strategies. Table 23.2 lists some examples of research questions in each category.

You still may be feeling a little queasy about labeling some of your teacher inquisitiveness as "research": Can I really ask the "right" questions? How do I know if my research methodology is sound? How will I deal with numerical results (statistics)? Will my conclusions be valid? Good questions. First of all, I recommend that you consult a teacher resource book on classroom research. Two are referenced at the end of this chapter (Allwright & Bailey 1991, Bailey & Nunan 1996).

Second, consider the following pointers to get yourself started on some simple but potentially effective action research.

1. Convert your "ideas" into specific questions.

You may have quite a few "ideas" about things that you could investigate in the classroom. That's good; keep those creative juices flowing. But in order to be able to draw conclusions, your ideas have to be converted into questions that you can answer. Sometimes those questions are too broad: Is communicative language teaching effective? How useful is reading aloud in class? Does process writing work?

Table 23.2. Examples of research questions (from Nunan 1989b: 36)

Learner Language: Developmental Features

1. In my teaching, I generally provide an application task to follow up a formal presentation. Which language items do learners actually use in the application task?
2. Do learners more easily learn closed class items (e.g., pronouns/demonstratives) when these are presented as paradigms, or when they are taught separately over a period of time?

Learner Language: Interaction

3. In what ways do turn-taking and topic management vary with variations in the size and composition of learner groups?
4. Are learners more effective at conversational management when techniques such as holding the floor, bringing in another speaker, etc., are consciously taught?

Tasks

5. Which tasks stimulate more interaction?
6. Which tasks work best with mixed-ability groups?

Strategies

7. Is there a conflict between the classroom activities I favor and those my learners prefer?
8. Do my best learners share certain strategy preferences that distinguish them from less efficient learners?

So, make sure that your questions are specific enough that you can look back after your investigation and really come up with an answer. The questions do not have to be long and drawn out, just specific, like the eight questions listed in Table 23.2. As an example here, we will consider the following question:

Given a selection of six commonly used techniques, how do they compare with each other in terms of stimulating interaction?

2. Operationally define the elements of your question.

Next, take your question and operationally define all the elements in it. "Operational" means that you have a measurable means for determining something. So, in the example question above, let's say that for the purpose of your research you have selected six small-group techniques (jigsaw, role-play, etc.). You will limit your investigation to those six. Interaction then has to be defined. Suppose you define interaction as the total number of turns taken in each group. And, for a possible additional interesting statistic, total up the number of minutes of student talk as well.

3. Determine how you will answer your question.

Now you are ready to launch the investigation. How will you answer the question? Your research methodology may call for several weeks of data collecting and, in this particular case, some tape recorders, since you will not be able to record data for several small groups at once and attend to the techniques as well. For each of the six designated techniques, you will have a tape recorder placed in each small group and running during the entire technique. (Yes, the tape recorders may inhibit some students, but that's the risk you have to take.) You will (perhaps with the help of a colleague?) then listen to each tape and tally the number of turns for each and add up minutes of talk as well. Assuming that you have allowed all the groups an equal number of total minutes within each technique, you can come up with a grand total of turns and minutes for each technique. The number of turns for each technique will determine its rank order among the six.

4. Interpret your results appropriately.

According to your findings (see below), technique A stimulates the most interaction, B is next, and so on. But your conclusion may not be so simple. Every research study has its necessary caveats, so before you make a sweeping generalization about your findings, it will help to state, even if only for yourself, some of the limitations on your results. Here are the results you found:

Technique	Turns	Minutes Student talk/Total time
A	137	73/90
B	133	85/90
C	116	79/90
D	114	69/90
E	102	71/90
F	91	79/90

First, can you be sure that Technique A stimulated significantly more turns than Technique B? And B more than C, etc.? Ask a statistician to help you to determine how probable it is that your results stemmed from the technique rather than from just random possibilities. This way you will be able to determine the statistical significance of your findings.

Second, notice that the number of minutes of student talk didn't correspond, meaning that in some techniques (A, for example) there was some relatively rapid turn-taking interspersed with student silence, and in other techniques (F, for example) certain students talked for longer stretches of time. This may give you cause to redefine interaction or at least to interpret your results accordingly.

Finally, results need to be seen in terms of other limitations in the study itself: the choice and number of tasks, number of students, the operational definitions chosen, and your particular group of students. You may, for example, be tempted to generalize results of classroom research to the world at large. Beware. Your safest conclusion is one that reports what you found for your class, and to invite others to replicate your study if they wish to see if similar results are obtained.

Classroom research is ideally suited to current practice in language teaching where we are not in the business of buying into one of the "designer" methods with their prescriptions of what teachers should do in the classroom. Instead, our communicative, interactive language-teaching approach asks every teacher to assess his or her own classroom of students and to design instructional techniques that work under those particular conditions, for those particular learners, who are pursuing particular purposes in learning the English language. David Nunan (1989b: 97-98) commented:

In contrast with the "follow the method" approach, a teacher-as-classroom-researcher orientation encourages teachers to approach methods and ideas with a critical eye, and to adopt an experimental approach to incorporating these ideas into their classrooms. Rather than adopting new methods, materials, or ideas and judging their efficacy on intuitive grounds, it is far more satisfactory, and professionally rewarding, to establish a small-scale classroom experiment to monitor, observe, and document the effect of the new methods or materials on learner language, learning outcomes, classroom climate, [and] patterns of group interaction. . . . In addition, this alternative orientation seeks to derive principles for teaching from the close observation and documentation of what actually happens in the classroom rather than uncritically importing and applying ideas from outside.

TEACHER COLLABORATION: LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

The process of continuing to develop your professional expertise as a teacher is sometimes difficult to manage alone. The challenges of teaching in a rapidly changing profession almost necessitate collaboration with other teachers in order

to stay on the cutting edge. Can you successfully collaborate with other teachers to fulfill your expectations? Let me suggest five forms of collaboration—of teachers learning from each other—that have worked for others and that may work for you.

1. Peer coaching

Already in this chapter you have been given some guidelines for observation of both yourself and other teachers. *Peer coaching* is a systematic process of collaboration in which one teacher observes and gives feedback to another teacher, usually with some form of reciprocity. Kate Kinsella (1994: 5) defines and elaborates as follows:

Peer coaching is a structured process by which trained faculty members voluntarily assist each other in enhancing their teaching within an atmosphere of collegial trust and candor, through: (1) development of individual instructional improvement goals and clear observation criteria; (2) reciprocal, focused, nonevaluative classroom observations; and (3) prompt constructive feedback on those observations.

Observers need not technically be “peers,” in every sense of the word, but as colleagues, observer and teacher engage in a cooperative process of mutual communication about the actual teaching–learning process as directly observed in the classroom. Feedback is classified as **formative** rather than **summative**. It is offered and received as information for the enhancement of one’s future teaching, not as data for summing up one’s competencies as a teacher.

Peer coaching can be especially helpful if you focus on certain aspects of your teaching. If you’ve been concerned, say, about the quantity of teacher talk vs. student talk in your teaching, a peer observer may be able to give you some feedback that could lead you to make some adjustments. Among topics that peer-coaching programs have centered on are distribution of student participation across the classroom; teacher speech mannerisms, patterns, eye contact, and nonverbal distracters; group and pair work management; and transitions from one activity to the next, to the next.

Peer coaching is able to offer a personalized opportunity for growth. Both sides of the team benefit: the observer is called upon to carefully analyze another’s teaching and thereby sharpen his or her own metacognitive ability to reflect on the teaching process; the teacher being observed is nudged out of what might otherwise be some complacency into a heightened awareness of his or her own areas of strength and weakness.

2. Team teaching

To the extent that the structure and budget of your program permit, team teaching can be an extraordinarily rewarding experience. Several models of team teaching are common: (1) two teachers are overtly present throughout a class period, but divide responsibility between them; (2) two teachers take different halves of a class period, with one teacher stepping aside while the other performs; and (3) two or more teachers teach different consecutive periods of one group of

learners, and must collaborate closely in carrying out and modifying curricular plans.

The first two models are less frequently found among English language programs not because of absence of reward for student and teacher, but because of budgetary limitations. The third model is extremely common in the English language-teaching world, especially whenever a group of learners compose an intact set of students across two or more class periods. Within this model, the importance of collaboration is sometimes underestimated. Teachers may be too ready to assume that a curriculum spanning a whole term of, say, ten to fifteen weeks will simply proceed as planned, only to discover that another teacher has not been able to follow the time-plan, throwing off the expected sequencing of material.

The advantages of team teaching, especially in the first two models, parallel those of peer coaching. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate, to consider respective strengths, and to engage in reflective practice. In the third model, teachers must develop a pattern of frequent communication and exchange, the fruits of which often are greater professional growth.

3. Action research

Classroom-based, or "action," research has already been described in a previous section of this chapter. Research in the language classroom offers another opportunity for you to collaborate with other teachers in creative and ultimately rewarding ways.

A few years ago I instigated a collaborative effort at the American Language Institute at San Francisco State University to study the effect of error treatment on the performance of our ESL students. Two matched sections of the same low-intermediate intensive English course were selected for investigation over a seven-week period. An oral pre-test was designed by the research group and administered to each student. In one section, teachers deliberately withheld any treatment of present tense, present progressive, and third person singular speech errors committed by the students. In the other section, teachers attempted to treat overtly all such errors that they noticed. During the seven-week study time, teachers observed each other, and other members of the research group not teaching those sections also came in to observe, mostly to check up on the extent to which teachers were carrying out their respective charge. At the end of the seven-week period, the pre-test was re-administered as a post-test, and gain scores were calculated.

The statistical findings of this little study were disappointing: no significant difference between the two sections! But the pedagogical gains accrued by the collaboration among eight teachers were more than worth the effort. In the process of investigating a potentially interesting instructional variable, teachers did the following, all collaboratively: they formulated research hypotheses; they designed the study; they designed a test; they observed and gave feedback to each other; they were sensitized to the complexities of error treatment; and they lowered their fear of performing research!

4. Collaborative curriculum development and revision

The process of curriculum development and revision warrants a similar collaborative effort. In the same way that teachers are sometimes all too happy to turn over research to the experts, so we are tempted to get curriculum specialists to do course and program development. Growing, dynamic language programs are a product of an ongoing creative dialogue between teachers and among teachers and those that are assigned to compile curricula. Not to involve teachers in the process is to run the risk of programs that are generated in a vacuum of sorts, devoid of a dynamic interaction among student, teacher, and administrator.

At the American Language Institute, our curriculum supervisors are in daily communication with teachers. As teachers consult with them on lesson design, textbook adaptation, and pedagogical innovations, new curriculum is born every day. This kind of collaboration results in solicited teacher contributions to course syllabuses which are then adapted and incorporated into established, revised curricula. Thus the curricula for courses are in a slow but constant state of creative change.

5. Teacher support groups

Finally, collaboration can take the form of gatherings of teachers at a number of different levels. At the local level of the day-to-day routine that we all find ourselves in, the importance of purposeful gatherings of teachers cannot be too strongly stressed. Even if agendas are rather informal—empathetic support will readily be found even within informal agendas—it is important to have times when a staff of teachers gets together to cover a number of possible issues: student behavior problems, teaching tips, curricular issues, and even difficulties with administrative bureaucracy. When teachers talk together, there is almost always a sense of solidarity and purpose, and ultimately a morale boost.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

We have heard a lot in recent years about the “critical” nature of language pedagogy. As language teachers we have to remember that we are all driven by convictions about what this world should look like, how its people should behave, how its governments should control that behavior, and how its inhabitants should be partners in the stewardship of the planet. We “embody in our teaching a vision of a better and more humane life” (Giroux & McLaren 1989: xiii).

However, **critical pedagogy** brings with it the reminder that our learners must be free to be themselves, to think for themselves, to behave intellectually without coercion from a powerful elite, to cherish their beliefs and traditions and cultures without the threat of forced change. In our classrooms, where “the dynamics of power and domination permeate the fabric of classroom life” (Auerbach 1995: 9), we are alerted to a possible “covert political agenda [beneath our] overt technical agenda” (Phillipson 1992: 27).

Is there a middle ground? As a teacher, can you facilitate the formation of classroom communities of learners who critically examine contemporary moral, ethical, and political issues, and do so without pushing a personal subversive agenda? A number of the so-called "hot topics" that we sometimes address in our classrooms, such as non-violence, human rights, gender equality, racial/ethnic discrimination, health issues, environmental action, and political activism, are controversial; they demand critical thinking, and they are sensitive to students' value systems. I would like to suggest four principles, along with some examples, for engaging in critical pedagogy while fully respecting the values and beliefs of your students.

1. Allow students to express themselves openly.
(be sensitive to power relationships, encourage candid expression)
2. Genuinely respect students' points of view.
(seek to understand their cherished beliefs and traditions)
3. Encourage both/many sides of an issue.
(welcome all seriously offered statements, opinions, and beliefs)
4. Don't force students to think just like you.
(delay or withhold your own opinion)

Consider the following examples of classroom activities from around the world. Do they abide by the above principles? Can your classroom replicate any of them?

In Brazil, a curriculum for children takes them on an adventure trip searching for magic glasses which, they discover, will enable them to see the world as it could be if everyone respected it. The program teaches appreciation for Native Indians of Brazil, their culture, stories, and music; it teaches gender roles, animal rights, and environmental stewardship. (Maria Rita Vieira)

In Japan, a classroom research project called Dreams and Dream Makers had students choose a person who worked to make the world a more peaceful place. (Donna McInnis)

In Singapore, an activity called "stamping out insults" focused on why people insult others and helped students to learn and use kind, affirming words as they disagreed with one another. (George Jacobs)

In China, a teacher had students study oppression and suppression of free speech in the former Soviet Union, calling for critical analysis of the roots and remedies of such denial of freedom. Without espousing any particular point of view himself, and under the guise of offering criticism of another country's practices, the teacher led students to comprehend alternative points of view. (Anonymous by request)

In Armenia, a teacher had students share their grandparents' experiences during the 1915 Armenian genocide, when more than 1.5 million Armenians were killed in Turkey. Nearly every student had family members who had been killed. Discussions focused on how ethnic groups could overcome such catastrophes and learn to live together as cooperative, peaceful neighbors. (Nick Dimmitt)

In Egypt, where the inferior status of women is an integral part of the culture, a teacher used an activity that culminated in the students' writing up a "bill of rights" for women in Egypt. (Mona Grant Nashed)

Can you, in turn, engage in sensitive critical pedagogy in your classroom? What are some activities you can do that would respect students' points of view yet stir them to a higher consciousness of their own role as agents of change? The little differences here and there that you make can add up to fulfilling visions of a better and more humane world.

AGENTS FOR CHANGE

Your role as a "critical pedagogue" serves to highlight the fact that you are not merely a language teacher. You are much more than that. You are an agent for change in a world in desperate need of change: change from competition to cooperation, from powerlessness to empowerment, from conflict to resolution, from prejudice to understanding.

What could be more intrinsic to the spirit of all language teachers around the world than to finely tune our ability to become agents for change? Our professional commitment drives us to help the inhabitants of this planet to communicate with each other, to negotiate the meaning of peace, of goodwill, and of survival on this tender, fragile globe. We must, therefore, with all the professional tools available to us, passionately pursue these ultimate goals.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION, ACTION, AND RESEARCH

[Note: (I) Individual work; (G) group or pair work; (C) whole-class discussion.]

1. (G) If students have been systematically reading and studying the chapters of this book, they have by now picked up a reasonably comprehensive picture of principles and issues in language teaching and how they apply to the classroom. With that background information, ask pairs to go back now to Chapter 1 and look through the lesson that was described there. Then, have them look at the thirty questions posed in the subsequent section ("Beneath the Lesson," pp. 9-11). Dividing the questions among pairs or small groups,