

# Teaching English for Pre-Service Teachers: Principles and Practice Activities

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Regular English proficiency tests are often used to determine if teachers are able to use English as a language of instruction, but teaching English in English requires other skills as well. Teachers must be able to use simplified language, restate, and explain things understandably. For students who are planning on becoming English teachers merely memorizing classroom expressions is not enough; they must build these skills. Awareness and practice activities can be effective measures.

教員の英語で教える能力を計るために通常の英語能力テストが用いられているが、英語を英語で教えることには日常英語以上のスキルが含まれている。簡単な単語を用い、言い換え、生徒が理解できるように説明することが必要である。中学校・高校英語教員を目指している学生は、中学校・高校の授業でよく使われている単語と表現を暗記するだけでなく、これらのスキルをみがくことが必要である。自覚して、英語で教える能力を伸ばすための練習活動を行うことが有効だろう。

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports and Technology guidelines stipulating that English be used as a medium of instruction in high school and junior high school (MEXT, 2002, 2008, 2014) have caused a great deal of controversy and trepidation among English teachers. Teacher trainers need to prepare their students to use English in their professional lives, which is not such a simple task. Of course, it is relatively easy to memorize vocabulary and expressions to be used for classroom management or giving instructions. However, presenting a grammar point or vocabulary in English poses a particular challenge. Focusing on principles and practice can make students feel more confident about teaching in English.

Although the MEXT guidelines express a clear goal of classrooms in which English is taught in English for communicative purposes, the literature suggests that this has not been realized, for various reasons. Teachers seem to spend a majority of the time on teacher-fronted activities such as grammar explanation (Sakui, 2004; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008), despite the fact that they feel positively about CLT. Although entrance examinations are frequently cited as a reason for this (Browne & Yamashita, 1995; Kikuchi, 2006; O'Donnell, 2005; Stewart, 2011; Saito, 2016), grammar-translation

style teaching is also done in contexts where students would not be expected to go on to college (O'Donnell, 2005). In addition to the difficulty of balancing communicative techniques and grammar teaching (Sakui, 2004), teachers may also not be sure how to use English in class. MEXT has unofficially discouraged long explanations of grammar in English, but official guidelines do not give this information (Tahira, 2012).

Two frequently cited reasons that the MEXT goal of communicative classes is still not being met fall within the scope of teacher training. The first is teachers' insufficient English skill. In 2015 only a little more than 50% of high school English teachers, and less than 30% of junior high school English teachers had achieved an advanced level of English (defined as 730 on the TOIEC or equivalent) (*Advanced Eiken levels elude almost half of high school English teachers*, 2015). Freeman, Katz, Garcia, Gomez, and Burns note, however, that such tests measure general English, not specifically English for teaching (2015). Lack of training in practical communicative techniques and adapting them to specific classroom situations is also seen as part of the problem (Browne & Wada, 1998; Kizuka, 2006). This may lead to less confidence on the part of teachers, although they have theoretical knowledge of CLT (Tahira, 2012). Kikuchi and Browne (2009) have pointed out that because of this training deficit, teachers teach the way they were taught, thus perpetuating the grammar translation method.

This article describes ways of training students to teach more interactively and in English. These activities were done as part of two classes within the Teacher Certification program for undergraduate students in the liberal arts department of a small college. Successful students receive a teaching license for junior high or high school or both. The students take the first class, which is team-taught, in the second year, and the second in the third year of the program. All classes in the department are taught in English, and all students are required to study abroad. Therefore, students already have experience expressing themselves in English, and may have higher than average English skills.

## Problems With Teaching in English

When students first taught practice activities to their classmates, we encountered the same type of problem many times. Although we carefully delineated what they were supposed to teach, students tended to spend the bulk of the class on exhaustive grammar explanation. A lesson for young children on “on” and “in,” for example, began with a description of different prepositions and their usage, before moving on to explaining expressions such as “on time” and “in a hurry.” Likewise, a lesson introducing “it” went through all possible uses, including as a dummy subject (“it’s raining”). Another very common problem was moving from grammar explanations directly into a communicative activity, without any sort of practice.

We felt the difficulty students had in doing the practice teaching was related both to insufficient knowledge of how to simplify classroom English as well as of more communicative ways of teaching. As college students, they may have never thought about making their language simpler, and may be more used to presentations in which the goal is to explain as much information as possible in a short time. We found when discussing these issues with them that most of them had little concept of sheltering and found it very difficult to order activities from least to most difficult. Therefore, the issue for our classes was twofold: to help students learn how to conduct an interactive class and to teach them how to present information in English.

## Principles for Teaching in English

Although these principles are obvious to experienced teachers, they were quite useful to guide students and made it easy for them to understand the purpose of the activities, as well as being a framework for discussion and evaluation.

1. Choose a small focus for the lesson. Rather than trying to cram as much information as possible into each lesson, the teacher should try to find a focus that is small in scope and concentrate on practicing.
2. Make it simple. Not only should the grammar explanation be as brief and simple as possible, but the lesson should also be sequenced from easy to more difficult. Students should also keep in mind that in general the more controlled an activity is, the easier.
3. Give many examples. Lack of examples was one of the major problems of the practice teaching.
4. Ask the students questions. This can make any part of the lesson interactive.

## Activities

To help students prepare for their own practice teaching, this sequence focuses on grammar presentation and lesson planning.

### Grammar Presentation

Seeing many examples of brief and easy to understand grammar presentations is always beneficial for students. The more examples a student can see, the more likely they are to find a teaching style that they feel comfortable emulating. I use questions from Ur (1996, p. 82) as a way of beginning discussion. First, introduce the questions that students will use to evaluate the lesson: 1. Is the rule explained? 2. Is the structure compared with a similar one in Japanese? 3. Is the name of the structure given? Students can also note if these things were done in English or Japanese.

I use videos from Oita Kyoikuiikai (2017) as these are easily available, and there are lessons available at several levels. Students can watch these, take notes, and answer the questions from Ur (1996). I usually use a segment of around ten minutes.

After this, students in small groups recreate what happened in the lesson with as much detail as they can, before moving on to the questions. I find it is most helpful to steer the students away from what the teacher should have done and examine potential reasons for the teacher’s choices. For example, a rule may be explained if it can be done easily and quickly, but some rules are too complex for a quick explanation.

Students can also note when the language of instruction changes, and discuss why this is done. Some possible reasons are to make a grammar point more clear, for procedural explanation, or for discipline (see Cook, 2001).

### Making a Lesson Plan

#### Pre-Teaching

Before teaching lesson plans it is good to give students an idea of what can and cannot be included. I do a demonstration of mechanical and meaningful drills, with students participating in the learner role.

Students can practice one part of making grammar activities by contextualizing a grammar point. Students can be told to find a situation in which the grammar point is used (e.g., certain prepositions when asking the way), or a topic that the grammar point can be used to talk about (second conditionals to talk about imaginary situations). Grammar that

works well are sentences with “can” (used to make a schedule, or talk about sports and hobbies), command form (used to explain how to play a game), adjectives (used to describe a picture), past tense (used to tell a story), future tense with “going to” (used to make a date or appointment), and future tense with “will” (used to tell someone’s fortune).

### *Making the Lesson Plan*

In our classes we have students use a lesson plan consisting of warm-up, presentation, controlled practice and free practice. First explain these elements briefly and then give, or elicit, examples of what might go into each section. Give students a blank lesson form. Enact a simple (10–15 minute) lesson with one part missing.

An example of this type of lesson would look like the following:

1. Ask students how they come to school and write answers on the board. (Warm-up)
2. Say “I usually ride to school, but yesterday I walked.” Write this on the board and underline “ed.” Give a few more examples and elicit the past-tense form from students. (Presentation).
3. Ask students to have a conversation about what they did yesterday. (Free practice).

After the lesson, ask the students to talk together about what they saw, and to fill in the lesson plan. They should try to extrapolate the goal of each activity, for example: “Teacher asks students how they get to school in order to practice present tense.” Ask students which part is missing. Many students will not realize that a conversation is free practice, not controlled practice, perhaps because the task is very easy for them. Remind students that younger learners will need practice activities in which they are less creative, but which help them to become confident about the structure. The students can think of their own controlled-practice activities.

If you do not have the means to teach a sample lesson, this could be done as a written lesson. This is done by giving students a mixed-up list of activities, with activities for controlled practice left out. Have the students sort the activities into each part of the lesson plan, and fill in their own ideas for controlled practice. This can also be done as a warm-up or review for the activity above.

The main benefit of these activities is that students and teachers can gain a shared understanding of teaching communicatively. The principles can help students focus on the important points of a lesson, and can be used for self-reflection and peer

evaluation. The activities help the students see how to apply these principles in the classroom and the variety of ways this can be done.

The best thing that a teacher trainer can instill in students is flexibility. Expertise in one method or way of teaching is no good if the teacher is helpless when faced with circumstances which prevent them from teaching in that way. Equipping students with the ability to teach in English, as well as make judgments about when to use the students’ L1, will make them better, more confident teachers no matter what sort of teaching situation they find themselves in. Although teachers may have many reasons not to use English as the language of instruction “because I can’t” should not be one of them.

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## JALT NOTICES

### JALT2018 Fee Waiver Scholarships

JALT wants to provide opportunities for JALT members who would like to present at our International Conference but are unable to due to a lack of financial support, so the JALT2018 Conference Team is offering three fee-waiver scholarships.

#### Scholarship Details

Free entry to the main conference from November 24th to 26th, 2018. This includes entry to our Welcome Reception on November 23rd and our Best of JALT Event on November 24th. This scholarship is not for Technology in Teaching presenters and does not include entry into the Technology in Teaching Workshops (held November 23rd).

#### Eligibility

- You must not have access to funding from any external source (external to JALT, such as a research budget from your employer) that could be used to cover conference fees. We rely on your honesty for this.
- You must be a JALT member at the time of the application through to at least the final day of JALT2018.
- You must not have presented at an International JALT Conference in the past.
- You must have your presentation accepted through one of three systems.
  1. Our regular vetting system (ie submit your presentation application for vetting by February 12th, 2018). Only those whose presentations are accepted during the first round of acceptances are eligible for this scholarship through this option. Presentation applications can be made here: <https://jalt.org/conference/call-proposals>
  2. An unvetted application through the JALT Chapters First-time Presenters Program. Applications are due on May 21st, 2018. Please contact your Chapter President to find out if your Chapter is willing to support your application and submit with the help of your Chapter President.
  3. An unvetted application as part of a SIG Forum. Applications are due on February 12th, 2018. Please contact your SIG Coordinator to find out if you can be involved in your SIG’s Forum.

You must submit a scholarship application by May 31st. Applications can be made here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/37DY9QM>.

Note: Incomplete applications will not be accepted.