TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO THE NEW GENERATION

Edith-Hilde KAITER
"Mircea cel Bătrân" Naval Academy of Constanța

Abstract: Being quite different from the past generations, youngsters nowadays have different needs of learning, which are almost totally based on practice. Daily assisted by virtual sites, games and virtual friends all over the world, intrigued by the life styles of famous people and permanently looking for opportunities, our students are very selective these days. They are interested more in the basic knowledge, which they are sure they can get online day and night. So probably most of them ask themselves about the real purpose of a teacher in front of them.
Thus, teachers nowadays should be extremely aware of this fact. Starting from their appearance, which should be accepted by the individuals of the classroom, to the way they attract the students in the learning process, teachers should come up all the time with various and interesting ways of teaching languages, which are the basis of communication worldwide. Therefore, the hereby article seeks to provide efficient ideas of teaching foreign languages to the new generation. Are the school manuals enough in this computerised era? Does team teaching still attract our students? Which would be the specific tips on how to function effectively as equal partners working together in the same classroom? Do our students still need our presence or do they find everything online? Some step-by-step tips are a basic guide to help us establish a dynamic team together so we can experiment and find the right approach which works best for youngsters.

Keywords: team-teaching, e-mail, team, communication, feedback

There are several tips seen as a basic guide to help teachers establishing a dynamic atmosphere in order to achieve the objectives set and to experiment and find the approach that works best for each type of lesson:

1. Team Teaching Tips for Foreign Language Teachers

For teachers who have never had a chance to team teach, or have perhaps avoided doing it for a variety of reasons, perhaps this idea will help allay fears and give teachers a sense of what exactly team teaching 'looks like' within the class.

Team teaching, in the most general sense, encompasses a wide variety of arrangements. One specific form, which has become quite prevalent in recent years, is having two teachers in the classroom teaching simultaneously. This is becoming more and more common throughout Japan and in other Asian countries.

In foreign language teaching, particularly teaching English as a foreign language, usually one in the pair is a native speaking assistant of the target language. The main teacher is usually more experienced and not a native speaker of the target language (hence the desire for a native speaking target language assistant).[1]

One of the advantages of team teaching is that it ostensibly produces a lower teacher-student ratio, but having two teachers in the class sharing turns speaking does not accomplish this. Only by running separate activities, dividing the class into groups - having both teachers

[1] Jeff Horwich, *Cracks Widen in Team Teaching of English*, Asahi Evening News 24 October 1999: Life Section, pp. 15-50.

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circulate and interact with students is the ratio effectively lowered. Ideally, both teachers should constantly be actively involved in managing and teaching the class.

Team teaching is most common in the domain of foreign language education, but is also starting to be used in a variety of other subject areas. It is a pedagogical approach rapidly gaining in popularity.

Successful team teaching has the potential to benefit all concerned. Teachers stand to gain in terms of their professional development. Team teaching provides teachers with a partner to help them set objectives, make plans, implement lessons and evaluate the results. They have someone from whom they can draw inspiration and who can provide them with constructive feedback on their teaching.

It is though weird that many teachers refuse to team teach because in a sense, teachers are by definition 'solitary creatures' reluctant to share the limelight or 'be observed' by a colleague.[2] However, in a successful team you should not feel judged or upstaged by your partner. Furthermore, in some situations teachers may not have been given a choice to work together and may not see the benefits of team teaching, or worse, not respect or get along well with their assigned partner.

Horwich states that using two teachers in the same classroom simultaneously is a relatively new educational phenomenon and it is not easy to find practical advice from senior teachers or professional publications.

Clear communication on the part of both members of the teaching team is essential to the success of the relationship and the realization of the teaching objectives.[3] Communication is perhaps rendered more difficult for teams made up of teachers from different cultural backgrounds which value radically different communication styles.[4]

Talking things through at every stage will help the teachers define their individual roles within the team. This is essential in developing a better understanding of one another's teaching philosophy along with the personal and cultural factors that have shaped it and affect its practical applications. Honest discussion also clears up any potential misunderstandings before they have the chance to hamper the flow of a lesson and ensure that they are taking equal responsibility for staying on course towards the established objectives. These meetings will help ensure that the teachers are both feeling comfortable and productive within the team.[5]

Firstly, the teachers need to work together to analyze their individual strengths and abilities and determine how these can be used within their team context. They should remember to consider what skills each of them bring to the classroom.

The teachers should also work out how they complement one another and how they can facilitate improving their partner's skills in various areas (voice projection and articulation/diction, pacing, giving instructions, teacher-student interaction etc.). Ideally, both partners will take an active part, to a greater or lesser extent, in all aspects of the teaching and not fall into a rigid pattern of acting/teaching only within 'partner 1's domain' and 'partner 2's domain'. Once they have explored the skill-set as a team, they can begin to set goals for the term and the year. They'll need to consider what goals they want the students to achieve so that they can plan lessons according to a timetable.

Maintaining eye contact with each other is very important in the team teaching classroom. They'll often need to signal each other for transitions to new activities, communicate when to bring activities to a close or modify an activity. They should also try to

[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Junko Kobayashi, *Overcoming Obstacles to Intercultural Communication: AETs and JTEs. Studies in Team Teaching*, Ed. Minoru Wada and Antony Cominos. Tokyo: Kenkyusha Publishing Co. Ltd., 1994, pp. 162-177.
[5] Ibid.

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keep an eye on each other at least every few minutes. One of the benefits of having two teachers in the classroom is that one can increase the teacher's physical proximity to a greater number of students and thus, hopefully, keep a greater number of students more actively engaged in the lesson more of the time. It may be necessary for both of the teachers to stand at the front to address the class for various activities.[6]

Echoing is also very useful during choral pronunciation to provide students with an alternative form of pronunciation, in addition to making it easier for students in another part of the class to hear more easily (as the supporting teacher is located at another part of the classroom). Echoing is also useful where some translation from L1 to L2 is required for student comprehension. Echoing can be done at varying speeds (natural speed or slow speed). The 'supporting' teacher is often in a good position to determine what speed/amount of echoing students may require.

To keep the pace of the class going smoothly, teachers should always keep an eye on each other, and the clock. Having two teachers in the class can be a real advantage with time keeping. While Teacher A leads an activity or gives instructions, Teacher B watches the clock and makes sure that the lesson proceeds in a timely fashion.

It is useful to develop a subtle system of signalling each other (hand-signals, eye contact, and verbal cues) to make transitions between activities smooth. Explicit discussion of what is to be done next in the classroom is extremely disruptive to the flow of the lesson and gives off the impression that one of them is ill prepared to teach the class.

Ideally, both teachers will share in giving directions, taking the initiative to move on to the next activity, and in adapting or curtailing an activity that is not working. They should remember to have mutually agreed upon back-up activities, so that they will be able to work together in guiding the class from an unsuccessful activity to the back-up plan.[7]

Each teacher has a different threshold of tolerance for student misbehaviour. Before the students become disruptive, they'll both need to establish a set of guidelines and agree on what type of behaviour is not acceptable in the class, and consequences for students who disrupt the class. Without a common consensus as team teachers on what is permissible and what is unacceptable, they'll invariably find themselves in disagreement and have potentially inconsistent reactions by teachers to student misbehaviour in the class.

If inside the team there is a non-native speaking language teacher and a native speaking assistant, considerable cultural differences in classroom management between the two of them may occur. Many non-native speaking language teachers find themselves in the frustrating position of being the sole 'enforcer' in the classroom simply because they haven't discussed what kind of behaviour is unacceptable.

The first consideration when it comes to evaluation is that it should be meaningful and fair. Too often, teachers create tests or assignments with little regard to practical time restrictions or pedagogical considerations (not matching the test to material covered in class or making a test or assignment simply to fill the grading book).

Once there is a one-year plan for student evaluation, they can determine how their in-class evaluation will work. Some teachers like to assign participation grades, or make notes of which students answered questions. While Teacher A asks a student to answer a question, Teacher B records the student participation in a grading book.

There are also a few other key points about evaluation to keep in mind:

• Work together to make tests and assignments based on what and how you have been teaching to ensure consistency and fairness to students.

• Evaluate students based on a mutually agreed up system.

[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

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• Keep up the communication with frequent checks of how you are progressing, always keeping in mind the objectives you set out together.

• Work together to change things that are not working as you go along.[8]

Team teaching can be an extremely beneficial and professionally rewarding experience if all goes well. In order to accomplish this however, both teachers need to maintain respect for each other both inside and outside the classroom. By following the few simple tips provided above, we hope that your team teaching experience will be a true success and not simply a tolerable compromise.

2. Using E-mail in Foreign Language Teaching

E-mail, a form of asynchronous computer-mediated communication, has been called "the mother of all Internet applications".[9] Since the evolution of networks, computers can offer foreign language learners more than drills: "they can be a medium of real communication in the target language, including composing and exchanging messages with other students in the classroom or around the world".[10]

In a single decade, many new ideas for the use of e-mail in the foreign language classroom appeared. Because there are so many, it is often difficult to keep track of what these ideas are and how they might benefit the language learner.

3. Pedagogical Benefits of E-mail

As many researchers have noted, e-mail extends what one can do in the classroom, since it provides a venue for meeting and communicating in the foreign language outside of class. Because of the nature of e-mail, foreign language learners do not have to be in a specific classroom at a particular time of day in order to communicate with others in the foreign language. They can log in and write e-mail from the comfort of their own room, from a public library or from a cyber-cafe, and these spatial possibilities increase the amount of time they can spend both composing and reading in the foreign language in a communicative context. Rankin notes that the additional interaction in the foreign language provides foreign language learners with more input than they would be able to expect from class time, which typically amounts to not more than four hours per week in most high school or college settings.[11]

The e-mail provides a context for real-world communication and authentic interactions. By connecting foreign language speakers outside of the classroom, e-mail also provides a context for communicating with other speakers in authentic communicative situations. Interaction via e-mail lends a feeling of reality to students' communicative efforts that may seem artificial in a classroom setting. This communicative interaction is much like spoken language because of its informal and interactive nature.

E-mail allows for communication between students in a context where the teacher's role is no longer at the center.[12] In e-mail communication, foreign language learners can experience increased control over their own learning, since they can choose the topic and change the direction of the discussion. The end goal is to communicate with another person in

[8] Jeff Horwich, *Cracks Widen in Team Teaching of English*, Asahi Evening News 24 October 1999: Life Section, pp. 15-50.

[9] C. Meloni, "The cities project" in M. Warschauer (Ed.), *Virtual connections: Online activities & projects for networking language learners*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995, pp. 211-215.

[10] R. Oxford, *Language learning strategies*, New York: Newbury House, 1990, p.79.

[11] W. Rankin, "Increasing the communicative competence of foreign language students through the FL chat room," in *Foreign Language Annals* 30(4), 1997, pp. 542-546.

[12] P. Patrikis, "Where is computer technology taking us", ADFL Bulletin, 26, 1995, 2: 36-39.

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the foreign language rather than to produce a mistake-free composition. Beauvois reported that computer-mediated communication increased total class participation to 100%. Others have noted that students reticent to speak in face-to-face contexts are more willing to participate in the electronic context.[13] E-mail allows students to communicate with native speakers of the target language without the high cost of travelling abroad.[14] Before the advent of the Internet, it was not possible to communicate so immediately and so frequently with native speakers or with other learners.[15]

4. Suggestions for Incorporating E-mail into Foreign Language Classes

E-mail offers students a practical opportunity to interact with others in the target language. Students can create their own mailing lists or the teacher can set up a class e-mail list or listserv. Allowing interested outsiders to subscribe to a class e-mail list can create additional opportunities for authentic communication with other target language speakers beyond one's own familiar classmates.[16]

Activities can be planned for use within a class or between two or more classes in different locations. Students can also join discussion forums outside of their regularly planned course. E-mail has been described as a conversational writing medium, a crossbreed language with elements of both written and spoken language.[17] Because it is separated from face-to-face contact, the high pressure of such immediate demand for production is lessened, and learners can take their time formulating their thoughts, much like they might do in written composition. As decelerated conversation, e-mail communication "provides an excellent first step to help students prepare for the face-to-face classroom discussions as well as the more carefully conceived and polished written compositions instructors ultimately expect from their students".[18]

When e-mail communication is kept within one class, the teacher can easily connect communicative tasks to the topic currently being covered in class and thereby extend the learners' communicative time and involvement with that topic. Instructors can design e-mail assignments as pre-class, post-class, or supplementary activities.

Frequently it is difficult for students to engage in an activity in a foreign language class without preparation ahead of time. A pre-class e-mail assignment can take care of the groundwork and save valuable class time. Examples are given of ways in which the teacher might prepare students for writing, listening, and speaking activities.

E-mail can provide a context to prepare students for longer written assignments. The teacher can tell the students, for example, that their next writing assignment will be to write a brief biography of a famous person of their choice. Through e-mail exchanges the students can collaborate on a list of potential subjects for this assignment in order to save valuable class time.

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[13] M. H. Beauvois, "E-Talk: Attitudes and Motivation in Computer-Assisted Classroom Discussion" in *Computers and the Humanities* 28, 1995, pp. 177-190.

[14] N. Hedderich, "Peer tutoring via electronic mail" in *Die Unterrichtspraxis / Teaching German*, 2, 1997, pp. 141-147.

[15] S. Roakes, "The Internet: A goldmine for foreign language resources", 1998, retrieved from the World Wide Web on February 2, 2001, at http://www.call.gov/resource/essays/internet.htm

[16] M. Gonglewski, "Linking the Internet to the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning" in *Foreign Language Annals*, 32(3), 1999, pp. 348-362.

[17] C. Moran, & G. Hawisher, "The rhetorics and languages of electronic mail" in I. Snyder, (Ed.), *Page to screen. Taking literacy into the electronic era*, London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 80-101.

[18] D.C. Van Handle, & K.A. Corl, "Extending the dialogue: Using electronic mail and the Internet to promote conversation and writing in intermediate level German language courses", CALICO Journal 15(1-3), 1998, pp. 129-143.

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Another way in which learners can use e-mail for pre-class preparation is to share background knowledge on a topic before a listening comprehension exercise. The teacher can provide students ahead of time with the subject of a listening comprehension lecture, e.g. the celebration of Thanksgiving in the United States. Before listening to the lecture in class, students can share via e-mail what they know about this traditional holiday, including their own personal experience or their questions about it.

E-mail is ideal for preparing ahead of time for class discussions. Ramazani tells of an activity called "The Weekly Essay." A few days before the class meets, his students e-mail each other essays that they have written about a particular reading. In this way the students are better prepared for the class discussion of the essays.[19]

Similarly, the teacher can assign a debate topic and ask the students to begin to discuss it via e-mail. When the time comes to form debate teams in class, the students will already have a satisfactory understanding of both sides of the issue and will be able to make a more informed decision about where they stand.

Teachers can create e-mail assignments to reinforce or extend what students have done in the classroom. This encourages students to revisit class discussions, giving them the opportunity to reiterate or clarify opinions expressed in class or to offer an opinion they were not prepared to express in class. In post-class e-mail activities, students can also utilize new vocabulary or structures that they were exposed to in class.

An exchange with the teacher "may serve as a transition toward the use of foreign language in a real-cybernetic-world context".[20] Gonzales-Bueno points out that in addition to building up learners' confidence in their language skills, "[t]he initial opportunities to interact in the foreign language via electronic communication, as offered to students by their foreign language teachers, may provide the necessary first steps to render the learner capable of navigating the Internet autonomously in a foreign language."[21] Thus, the secure environment through one-on-one e-mail exchange with the teacher helps learners gain self-assurance as well as experience using electronic media in the foreign language.

A teacher/student e-mail exchange can be simple and unstructured. Teachers can require that their students send them periodic e-mail messages. They must first decide on the frequency (e.g., once a week, once per chapter, twice a semester) and the content of the messages (e.g., course- or chapter-related, open). Linking the e-mail messages to course content encourages integration of new vocabulary and forms and also discourages overuse of the dictionary which can lead to frustration and discouragement. As teachers should respond promptly to the student messages, they should keep in mind how much time they would like to spend on the exchange and design the assignment accordingly.

Since e-mail makes time and space/place immaterial for fast and easy communication, teachers have also explored its use for communicative interaction between learners outside of the immediate language learning context, for example at another university, in another city, or even in another country. Such a context makes it possible to exchange ideas with a new audience and focus on communication.

Teachers can offer their students the opportunity to confer with them electronically about their writing. This possibility is very useful, especially when a class meets only once or twice a week. Students can e-mail their questions to the teacher, without having to wait for the next class session.

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[19] J. Ramazani, "Student writing by e-mail: Connecting classmates, texts, instructors", 1994, retrieved from the World Wide Web on February 2, 2001 at http://www.virginia.edu/~trc/tcemail.htm

[20] M. González-Bueno, "The effects of electronic mail on Spanish L2 discourse", in *Language Learning & Technology* 1(2), 1998, pp. 55-70.

[21] Ibid.

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Students can also utilize e-mail to submit their composition assignments as soon as they are finished. Then the teacher can make comments and return the assignments to the students electronically. The teacher's comments may have a more notable effect on students' revising process when the feedback is received shortly after the writing is completed.

Writing only to the teacher through an e-mail journal provides a communicative outlet while keeping the language private. Gonzales-Bueno notes that "students benefit from the advantages of a safe writing environment to communicate their messages while maintaining a conversational format."[22] Another advantage to intensive communicating individually with the teacher at the early stages of language acquisition is the extent of authentic input and corrective feedback learners receive in this context as contrasted with the type of input learners would receive from the language and content their peers might send.[23]

While the benefits of individual e-mail exchange with the teacher are obvious, the potential problems with such intensive e-mail communication must also be acknowledged. To begin with, student-teacher e-mail interaction might give the teacher a nearly impossible amount of work.[24] While the student has one partner with whom to correspond, a single teacher could have as many as one hundred, and the responsibility to answer each e-mail – or even one per student per semester – would quickly become a formidable task.

Furthermore, the type of communication between teacher and student is likely to be different from that between peers. As evaluator, the teacher holds an authority that may skew the relationship and arguably also the communicative interaction. Students may pay more attention to form than content, knowing that the teacher's role is often to correct form.

There are, however, other alternatives that preserve the high level of feedback and input on an individual basis. The e-mail exchange can be very closely integrated into the course by basing the topics for discussion on the content of the curriculum. The partners would engage then in discussions that would further their understanding of course materials as well as improve their language ability. The exchanges can also be structured so that students have specific tasks to carry out with their partners that are not specifically tied to course content but that assist the language learning process and are enjoyable and challenging.

Being involved in an e-mail exchange with a native speaker may be the most advantageous type of exchange for a language learner, since, while maintaining the unrehearsed communicative context, learners receive plenty of authentic target language input from their exchange partner. In this context, the learner's comprehension can soar. In addition, teachers have reported that language learners writing to native speakers are more eager to self-correct their own grammar because the communicative aspect motivates them to make themselves understood.[25]

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[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] C. Meloni, "The cities project" in M. Warschauer (Ed.), *Virtual connections: Online activities & projects for networking language learners*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995, pp. 211-215.
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