A Practical Introduction to Teacher Training in ELT

John Hughes

Packed with practical advice, training tips, and workshop ideas
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About the author

John Hughes is a teacher trainer and author. He has also managed a teacher training department and now works as a freelance teacher trainer, running courses for teachers from all over the world. He is a former committee member of the IATEFL Teacher Training and Education Special Interest Group.

As an author, he has worked on many ELT titles including the course series Life (National Geographic Learning) and Business Result (Oxford). He also writes on ELT methodology and has published numerous articles for the journals English Teaching Professional and Modern English Teacher (both published by Pavilion). He also has a resource book with Pavilion called ETpedia. His blog can be found at www.elteachertrainer.com.
Introduction

When I first moved from teaching into teacher training, I received little formal training on how to train but instead, like many teacher trainers before me, I picked it up on the job. When preparing a training session, one of my first starting points was to recall how I’d been trained by others. I remembered the methods of trainers and senior teachers whose input and feedback I had valued and benefited from. When observing teachers in the classroom, it was important to visualise myself teaching at the same stage as the teachers I was working with. For example, when about to give feedback to pre-service teachers, I would quickly picture how I had felt as a novice teacher before, during and after my very first teaching practice.

Another part of my development as a teacher trainer was to search for information and advice in journals and books. After all, there are so many of these types of resources for language teachers, so why not for teacher trainers? And yet, somewhat surprisingly, it is difficult to find a single book that provides a general introduction to teacher training. Having now managed, trained and developed teacher trainers for over 20 years, I am convinced that other people who are moving from teaching into teacher training have the same need. I hope that this book will help to fulfil that need.

How the book is organised

Chapter 1 looks at the typical routes into teacher training. It is aimed at the new trainer, and discusses how the skills we use as teachers are transferable into training. Chapter 2 looks at the techniques we use in input sessions and ways of structuring our sessions. These techniques range from ways of introducing basic teaching skills to inexperienced teachers, to working with qualified teachers employed in a language school. Chapter 3 considers ways of helping teachers to plan lessons. This will be especially useful for training new teachers through lesson planning to the point of teaching for the first time; however, it also includes advice for contexts where a school or institution needs experienced teachers to reflect on the ways in which they plan. Chapters 4 and 5 consider different approaches to observing lessons and giving feedback. The final chapter is aimed at anyone responsible for
planning, managing or co-ordinating a training course. This could be a training manager, a head of department or a trainer in charge of setting up a new programme.

Throughout the book, both face to face and online training contexts are taken into consideration. They are dealt with side by side, reflecting the increasing tendency of training programmes to blend course content so that it is delivered both face to face and online. Trainers might give a short presentation in a room with a group of trainees, but they could equally be talking to trainees spread across the world via a webcam. Even classroom observation of teaching practice (which has, until recently, required the trainer, the teacher and the students to be in the same room at the same time) can involve trainees sending video extracts of their teaching to their trainer via the internet. The trainer can then deliver feedback notes in the form of an email or even record their comments in a podcast or via video link.

‘Ask yourself’ questions

Within each chapter you will find a feature called ‘Ask yourself’. This is a prompt for you to stop and reflect on what you have just read and ask yourself certain questions about how it relates to you. If you are using this book in combination with a course in training to be a teacher trainer, you could discuss these questions in groups.

A note on the terminology used in this book

People often distinguish between training and development. The term teacher development is sometimes used with reference to the way more experienced teachers might wish to develop their craft. However, this book uses the word training in its broadest sense, to cover both pre-service and in-service courses. Note also that the people undergoing the training are referred to as trainees, course participants or teachers, depending on the context.
Photocopiable pages

As well as providing a background to teacher training, the book includes photocopiable pages indicated by this symbol ☑. These pages include ideas for training sessions and teaching practice observation forms. They are also available as full-size A4 pdf pages, which can be downloaded from https://www.pavpub.com/practical-introduction-to-teacher-training-downloads/.

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The publisher would like to thank Cactus TEFL for permission to use images from their online courses.
3. Lesson planning and preparing for teaching practice

This chapter looks at:

- approaching planning and preparation
- providing input on lesson plans
- pre-service lesson planning and teaching practice
- experienced and in-service planning and teaching practice
- assessing the plan.

Approaching planning and preparation

An approach involving the planning of lessons followed by teaching practice is the norm on many courses. It’s logical that after attending various input sessions, trainees have a chance to put their new skills into practice. This is certainly the case at pre-service level and on courses such as the DELTA and some MA programmes. Similarly, directors of studies need to help their staff with day-to-day planning as well as making plans more detailed for inspections by validating bodies or as part of internal staff development.

Helping and training teachers to plan and prepare for a lesson is something that different training courses approach differently. Typically, the factors affecting our decision are:

- How much formal (or timetabled) time can be given to a trainer to help individual trainees to prepare?
What is a reasonable amount of time for a trainer to spend helping individual trainees to plan (bearing in mind the fact that we need to develop independent planners)?

How much ready-made resource material should be made available and to what extent should trainees create materials of their own?

How early on in the course should trainees (especially at pre-service level) be expected to teach?

Should they begin by team-teaching as a group?

What length of lesson should they begin with?

How you answer those questions will depend on the needs and experience of the individual trainees, the resources (time, money) available for what is often one-to-one training and your beliefs about the best way for a teacher to learn how to plan; for example, do you believe they need plenty of mentoring and guidance or is teaching practice an opportunity to sink or swim – to learn by doing?

Ask yourself

When you first started teaching, how much formal help did you receive from a trainer or mentor? Would you have liked to received more input, or less?

Providing input on lesson plans

Teachers often talk about ‘planning’, but this can mean entirely different things to different people. It may simply consist of deciding what order to put the all the activities in, or it may involve rigorously deciding on your aims before choosing the classroom tasks to fit (or vice versa). Planning might entail brainstorming issues related to the aims, level, nationalities, needs and wants of a group of students. Or it could be a simple case of checking what is on the next page in the coursebook. On training courses, planning is often thought of as a period of time on the timetable allocated for lesson preparation, which is then documented on a form which could be handed to the observing tutor before teaching practice.
A plan answers two main questions: (1) ‘What is the aim of the lesson?’ and (2) ‘How are you going to achieve that aim?’ For many teachers, it may barely result in any formal documentation at all – perhaps a few notes scribbled down like a shopping list. However, in training situations, there are important reasons to establish that the plan needs to result in a more detailed document.

Building strategies
For inexperienced trainees, developing a detailed plan provides them with the strategies they will need later on for day-to-day planning. It’s possible that their plans will never be as detailed again but there will be a thought process they learn from having had to write it out in full in the early days.

Re-assessing and reflecting
For more experienced trainees, having to plan in detail helps them to re-assess the way they work. The plan makes them break down the process that they take for granted and reconsider their assumptions.

Understanding thought process
The plan on paper is a useful point of contact between the trainee and the trainer. During the lesson, the trainer can follow the plan so it provides a way into the trainee’s thought process, helping the trainer to form constructive feedback.

An agenda
The written plan helps a trainee stay on track during a lesson. While teachers should feel free to stray from the plan in order to respond to learners’ needs, it does provide a basic agenda.

The lesson feedback
After the lesson, the plan provides a useful reference point for the feedback discussion. A trainee can use it to account for what did or didn’t happen and why.
A written record

As a document or record, the plan acts as evidence for any outside inspection of the course, and on many assessed courses, it will be submitted as part of a body of work from the course.

To be repeated

Plans can be referred to and used again by the trainee after the course. For new teachers this will be very useful in their first year of teaching.

Ask yourself

Look back at the different reasons for producing a plan. Which of them are you familiar with? Does the act of writing a detailed plan help you with your planning process? Do you write plans in order to be able to repeat a lesson at a later date?

Provide a form for the plan

When you start training teachers and helping them to plan lessons, you’ll need to decide what you would like your trainees to include in a lesson plan. Once you have established what your requirements are, it’s worth holding a formal input session on lesson planning and stating your expectations. This might include providing teachers with a form which they are required to complete or follow as a guideline.

The form on pages 77–78 is typical of the type of form given to trainees to fill in. The first part provides an overview of the lesson with all the key details. In the second part, the teacher writes out the procedure of the lesson stage by stage. This form could include other columns such as indicating classroom layout or anticipated difficulties.
Lesson plan form: 1 of 2

Name of teacher: ________________________________

Date of lesson: ________________________________

Time/length of lesson: ____________________________

Classroom: ________________________________

Main aim:

Subsidiary aims:

Additional aims:

Student/class profile:

Rationale for the lesson:

Assumption about students’ knowledge of the language points in this lesson and anticipated problems:

Materials:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Aims of this stage</th>
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Input activities on lesson planning

Many trainees find it helpful if you provide them with a completed lesson plan in order to demonstrate what is required. You can also use this kind of plan as the basis for an input session; there are a number of activities you can use it for.

The plan on page 80 is designed to be copied, cut up and used as part of a series of input session activities. It contains some suggested activities which focus on different aspects of planning. The activities may all form one complete training session or you could use only some of the activities to target the specific needs of the group.

Activity 1: Focus on aims
Hand out plans but with the column headed ‘Aims of this stage’ cut off. Trainees read each stage and procedure and decide what the aim of each one was.

Activity 2: Focus on staging
Cut up the plan stage by stage. In groups, trainees re-order the stages in the way they think they were planned. Discuss whether the stages could have been planned in a different order, and if so, what the effect would have been.

Activity 3: Focus on timing
Remove the timings column. Trainees guess how long they think each stage was planned to take.

Activity 4: Considering the whole plan
Make copies of the whole plan for each trainee and set any or all of the following tasks:

1. Define the teacher’s role at each stage, for example, controller, monitor, listener, instructor or facilitator.
2. Define the main aim of the lesson, for example: ‘To enable the student to write a description of a holiday’.
3. Draw the classroom layout and interaction patterns for each stage.
4. Design the boardwork for each stage.
5. Peer-teach parts of this lesson to your colleagues.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Aims of this stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>Show students video extract from my holiday in Mallorca. Students brainstorm words that describe my holiday in pairs. Then elicit whole-class feedback and write words on board.</td>
<td>Lead-in to topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Give each student a description of a holiday to read. Students answer comprehension questions on board.</td>
<td>Reading for detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>Students underline past simple verbs in the text describing the holiday. Elicit rule for regular verbs and the <em>ed</em> ending. Illustrate the structure of the question form on the board using a substitution table.</td>
<td>To focus on past simple tense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Drill the question form using the information in the holiday description as prompts.</td>
<td>To provide controlled practice of question form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>Put students in pairs. Give each pair two copies of a description of another holiday. These should be the same as each other but with different pieces of information missing. Students ask each other questions to get answers and complete the description.</td>
<td>To provide freer practice with p/s questions forms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Hand out a series of cartoon pictures showing something that went wrong on a holiday. Students discuss in groups what happened and report back.</td>
<td>Freer practice with past simple.</td>
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<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Students tell their partner about their last holiday.</td>
<td>Free speaking practice.</td>
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<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Carry out error correction and give feedback on speaking activity by writing sentences with errors on the board – students identify the mistake.</td>
<td>To clarify any problems/errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 mins</td>
<td>Students write a description of their last holiday or the holiday shown in the cartoon story.</td>
<td>To provide writing practice and consolidation of the past simple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>Pin students’ descriptions around the room for everyone to read.</td>
<td>Reading, peer correction and nice way to end the lesson.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>