Chapter 4

TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

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This chapter looks at how teaching implications of the new examinations were dealt with in the course. It describes how teachers' needs were identified and how it was decided to address these needs. It shows how teaching needs were considered throughout the course, and focuses on the teaching implications sessions for reading, listening, speaking writing and Use of English.

4.1 Introduction

One of the main aims of the NETT course is to promote better classroom practice through participants examining the teaching implications of the new examinations. Indeed, the purpose of the course is to encourage and support positive washback for the new examinations through in-service teacher training. This chapter describes how teaching implications were covered in the pilot courses. The first part of the chapter describes how the needs of teachers were established and the second part looks at how teaching implications were addressed in the courses and how participants responded.

4.2 How teaching needs were identified

The principal source of information about needs and current teaching practice was the classroom observation project described in Chapter 8 of the *Baseline Study* (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 221-246). The project, led by Nikolov Marianne, gathered data from 118 classes in 55 secondary schools. Members of the Teacher Training Team helped to gather the data for this project by conducting observations (see Chapter 2), and this experience was extremely influential and beneficial to the team when it came to designing the NETT course. During the course design phase frequent reference was made both to the *Baseline Study* and specific experiences from the observed classrooms.

The classroom observation project found that "the most frequently used tasks include answering teacher's questions in a lockstep fashion, reading aloud, translation and copying" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 238). Looking at individual skills, observers found that for speaking skills "students rarely get the chance to talk" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 233) and "students' responses were on the one-word or short sentence level" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 233). Listening tasks occurred in only 16 of the 118 observed classes and the study found that "students have very limited access to oral language" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 235), "listening was typically combined with sentence by sentence translation to check comprehension" and "teachers did not exploit classroom language for management as a way of improving students' listening comprehension" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*,

1999: 236). Over half of the reading tasks observed involved reading aloud. What were "communicative tasks in the course books" often turned into reading aloud activities as "reading aloud was applied with any text students came across in class" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 236), suggesting that course book tasks were not being approached as the course book writers had intended. The most frequent writing task was copying, most writing tasks were language-focused, and "remained on the one-word or sentence level: in gap-filling exercises students took turns word by word, and when translating sentence by sentence" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 234).

Interaction observed was predominantly "in a lockstep fashion, always following the IRF cycle: teacher initiates, students reply and teacher gives feedback" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 232). Other interaction patterns were not entirely absent, however. Teachers in a small number of observed lessons used pair or group work. Some classes were also observed with communicative tasks such as bridging information gaps, or dealing with language at text rather than sentence level.

Evidence from a questionnaire showed that teachers claimed to be using a wider range of tasks in class than those actually observed. For example, role play, discussion and information gap speaking activities were claimed to be used sometimes or often by most teachers, a wide variety of reading tasks operating at discourse level were cited, and copying was the writing activity claimed to be used by the smallest number of teachers. This suggests that the teachers knew what ought to be happening in their classrooms, even though it was not observed. There could be several reasons for those things not being observed. Negative washback of the existing érettségi could be discouraging those activities that do not appear in the current examination. Some teachers' understanding of how to promote the use of language skills in class could be a factor. Some teachers' understanding of the principles behind teaching and learning the four skills, or dealing with language at discourse level could also be an influence

Course books used in the majority of classes in the study were up to date, such as *Headway Intermediate* (Soars and Soars, 1996) or *Blueprint Intermediate* (Abbs and Freebairn, 1995), but used "in an eclectic way, exploiting techniques of the grammar-translation and audio-lingual" methods (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 238). Once again the factors mentioned in the previous paragraph could be affecting the classroom situation.

Another important factor revealed by the *Baseline Study* was teachers' views of their students' abilities, which tended to be critical and negative. Teachers identified more weaknesses than strengths, and "many teachers elaborated on difficulties related to students' low school achievement, aptitude and lack of instrumental motivation" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 242).

In the *Baseline Study* chapter on students' performances, however, (Ábrahám *et al* in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 93-136) it was found that most students could at least achieve Threshold level, even without preparation for the specific testing tool employed. This would suggest that many students can actually do more with language than their teachers think.

The *Baseline Study* chapter on stakeholders' attitudes (Bárány *et al* in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 137-204) also shows a positive attitude to English amongst students, teachers and school directors, for example in the fact that language learning opportunities influence about half the students' choice of secondary school.

Another important factor in students' motivation noted by the observers was the effect of the activities on the students. With reading aloud, copying, translation and

working in lockstep observed as the most frequent activities, "observers found the vast majority of classes monotonous and boring because of lack of variety of tasks" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 238), and the study identified a "vicious circle", where teachers' views of the students' abilities and motivation caused them to employ activities that "were far from motivating or interesting" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 242).

The *Baseline Study* also gave some insights into teachers' views of the learning process. "Rote-learning abilities" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 242) were seen as an important strength, speaking involved the memorisation of texts, and language learning was seen primarily as a process of learning grammar and vocabulary off by heart. At the same time, a lot of current ELT terminology seemed to be new to some teachers, for example "bridging information gaps, multiple matching, cloze-type, caption, prompt" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 244).

Finally, the study showed that teachers were dissatisfied with the existing érettségi, and many had a concerned yet positive attitude to the prospect of a new examination; "all observed teachers were pleasantly surprised to be involved in the project and showed interest in outcomes. About half felt threatened, others challenged by the new exams and said changes in education in general and school-leaving examinations were overdue" (Nikolov in Fekete *et al*, 1999: 244).

The conclusions of the *Baseline Study* were that a great deal needs to be done in order to train teachers for the new examination. The 60-hour NETT course could not hope to solve all the problems identified, but it needed to make a start. The course therefore aimed to raise issues and make a number of implications explicit, although detailed solutions were not yet available. Course designers tried to take into account six main areas of need.

1. Language skills and teaching issues. As the new examination aims to test the four skills, the course should promote the idea that students need to be using the four skills in the classroom. The course should also promote the idea that language learning is not simply a question of understanding and memorisation, but that teachers can take positive steps to promote the development of language skills in class. This would involve looking at some terminology and methodology. It would also involve demonstrating that good teaching and good testing can work together in harmony.

2. Existing knowledge and experience. Some teachers' current practice, and many teachers' existing knowledge about what should be happening in classrooms, if applied, will enable teachers to prepare students well for the new examinations.

3. Discourse. As the new examination aims to test language at discourse level using authentic texts, then teaching would have to move away from dealing with language predominantly at word or sentence level to dealing with language in texts.

4. Course books. The most widely used course books provide opportunities for skills work and the use and study of language at discourse level using authentic texts, so the course would point out that existing course books matched the requirements of the new examination, if used in a constructive way.

5. Students. Students have a positive view of learning English, and can respond positively to a new examination that is seen to serve their needs and interests, and is fairly and openly assessed. Teachers' confidence also needs to be built up. This means confidence in the examination, that the new examinations will be well designed, interesting and useful for the students, and also confidence in

the students, that they will be able to reach a satisfactory standard, especially if learner training forms part of the teaching and learning process.

6. Innovation awareness. The important differences between the current examination and the requirements of the proposed new one needed to be clearly established in order to encourage important changes in the classroom.

4.3 Rationale

The course aimed to have an effect on teachers' awareness and practice in the six areas of need that had been identified. It is impossible to make any strong claims about the success of these aims without detailed research in the classroom. Indeed, there is not likely to have been any great immediate impact, as *"change is a slow process"* (Hayes 1995: 261). What we can say is that the course attempted to apply strategies to support development that are recommended by various writers. The course employed a cyclical process adapted from Kolb (1984) and principles from Hayes (1995), the process and principles are described more fully in chapter two. In addition reference was made to strategies proposed by Kennedy (1987) and Freeman (1989).

Kennedy notes three innovation strategies, *"power-coercive"*, *"rational-empirical"* and *"normative-re-educative"*, advocating the last, as it stresses *"the collaborative, problem-solving nature of innovation"* (Kennedy 1987: 170). Kennedy also notes the normative-re-educative strategy *"is particularly appropriate in situations of small-scale behavioural change where both insiders and outsiders are present"*, which seems to fit the situation of teachers faced with a new examination. Kennedy also observes *"the strategy… places the responsibility for degree of change and acceptance or rejection of its various aspects on to the teacher, the insider, so that a 'lip-service' effect is less likely to occur."* The strategies used in the course seem to be examples of the normative-re-educative strategy in action.

Freeman (1989; 41) suggests that in teacher development,
"rather than referring to one's own view of the situation, to one's own solution, or to an external body of knowledge or skills, the collaborator works through a development strategy to clarify and expand the teacher's awareness of what the teacher is doing and why. Solutions are generated by the teacher with or without the collaborator's help, but they are ultimately based on the teacher's awareness and understanding of the situation."

The course adopted an approach similar to the one Freeman advocates, but not the same, because in the course the trainers were ready to propose certain solutions if they were not generated by participants themselves. An example of this would be that in Debrecen discussions pre-teaching vocabulary was suggested as a solution to students' listening difficulties, and the trainer challenged this in discussion in the follow-up session. In the discussion, it became clear that many teachers agreed with the trainer on this issue. Trainers rarely felt it necessary, however, to provide their own solutions, as group members themselves produced a variety of views to stimulate reflection.

Finally, it must be noted that participants responded very favourably both in Eger and Debrecen. This might be due to the effect noted by Widdowson (1987) that the popularity of INSET comes from *"the social and professional intensity of the event"*, and a positive response is not the same as a positive effect in terms of teaching ideas and practice. However, it is clear that the course exposed teachers to a wide

variety of ideas and experience that may have contributed to the development of each individual's awareness and classroom practice.

4.4 How teaching needs were considered elsewhere in the course

Section 5.2 described how teaching needs were identified. The teaching implications sessions played an important part in addressing those needs, but they were also addressed throughout the course. This section provides examples of how the six main areas of need were catered for in the course as a whole.

1. Language skills and teaching issues

The structure of the course reflects that of the new examinations, is divided into skill areas, and this is intended to emphasise the need for attention to skills development in the classroom. Reading is covered first, then listening, writing, Use of English and speaking. Each part of the course first of all establishes some basic principles both for the teaching and testing of the skill area and Use of English. For example, Reading Session 1 in the pilot courses looked at principles for teaching and Session 2 looked at principles and practice for testing. Each part of the course also looks at how these principles can be applied in the classroom, as was shown above through the teaching implications sessions.

Essential terminology is dealt with directly in a few parts of the course, for example the first Reading Session, where reading sub-skills are named and exemplified. Testing terminology is covered, for example by participants using terms from the Working Document to describe task or text types in sample examination tasks.

Methodology is also reflected in four types of training methods used in the course. Firstly, sessions are conducted in English, supporting the view that English can and should be the main medium for communication in the classroom. Secondly, new information is conveyed not through lecturing or telling but through tasks, through participants doing something rather than just listening, for example the content of the new exam is explored by participants matching task and text types in the Working Document with task and text types used in the sample examination tasks. Thirdly loop input is used, for example the listening task in Session 8 where an interview with Charles Alderson (discussed in Chapter 3) is used both to illustrate listening examination task types and to convey ideas about the teaching and testing of listening. Fourthly warmers are used throughout the course to demonstrate ways of applying teaching ideas in an interesting way. For example, a speaking activity is initiated by participants comparing another group member to an apple they have chosen, or to explain why they chose a particular hat. The same examples give ideas on how to group and regroup students in class.

The potential harmony of good teaching and testing is shown in a number of ways. One way is by establishing the similarity between tasks in the new examinations and those in the most widely used course books. Another way is by showing that phases in classroom practice, for example pre-reading, are reflected in examination practice if candidates use clues in rubrics and titles to anticipate content of a reading text.

2. Existing knowledge and experience

The starting point for each part of the course is teachers' existing knowledge, for example ideas on the current érettségi in the first two introduction sessions. The teaching implications sessions rely on participants sharing existing knowledge of good classroom practice.

A potential criticism of the course could be that it does not set out to challenge directly the problems in current practice identified in the *Baseline Study*. The reason for this is that the course designers felt it would be more effective to use as an assumption that the new examinations would require changes to classroom practice, rather than to criticise teachers' current practice directly. Research will be necessary to establish whether this training approach is effective.

3. Discourse

The clearest example of this is in the Use of English sessions, where terms such as discourse are discussed, along with the differences between the concept of grammar and Use of English. Participants and trainers remarked on the fact that this distinction is quite new to most classroom teachers, who are more used to the idea of grammar at sentence or phrase level.

4. Course books

Each part of the new examination is connected directly with course books. The message of the course is that existing course books are useful for the new examinations. This is shown by relating sample exam tasks and texts to course book tasks and texts in *Headway* (Soars and Soars, 1996), *Blueprint* (Abbs and Freebairn, 1995) and *Reward* (Greenall 1994). For example, Reading examination tasks that involve removed headlines of newspaper texts are compared with *New Headway Intermediate* pages 80-81, and examination tasks involving paragraph insertion are compared with *New Blueprint Intermediate* section 25.

5. Students

Students' views on the sample examination tasks are elicited and recorded by their teachers through homework assignments. Student responses in the pilot courses were generally positive to samples, building confidence in both students and their teachers.

The scores achieved by students in several tasks had a similar effect, for example tasks such as Tadpoles (Alderson *et al*, 2000: 34) which were felt to be of intermediate level by course participants in Debrecen were found to be easy for students to complete, confirming data from pilot examinations (see Chapter 4) presented before the homework assignment.

The use of data from the pilots also served to build teachers' confidence that the procedures for the new examinations were being carefully and professionally developed. The elicitation of participants' views on the examinations, along with the assurance that these views would be passed on to the examination designers, also increased confidence in the new examinations.

The use of the examination rating scales in sessions for speaking and writing demonstrates to participants how procedures in the new examinations will work. The inter/intra-rater reliability tasks used in the writing sessions in particular demonstrate the effectiveness of scales and their superiority over traditional ways of marking writing. The potential use of the examination rating scales to allow students and teachers to find exactly what is expected of them is another confidence-building element.

6. Innovation

This course aimed to cover this area of need not only by noting the differences between the old and new examinations, but also by looking explicitly at the teaching implications of each section of the examination. For example Day 2, Session 10 introduces the session with; *"In this session you are going to draw conclusions and make a list of teaching implications for listening"*, and Day 4, session 27 asks *"Here are some questions and comments about teaching speaking for the new exams. How would you respond?"*

In addition to this explicit handling of teaching implications, participants were also asked to consider the effect of the existing examination on the classroom. The pre-course tasks encouraged participants to describe the existing examination, and identify problems, and this was followed up in the first two sessions on Day 1, which asked participants to identify strengths and weaknesses of the current érettségi and discuss some issues arising.

The aim of these tasks was to encourage participants to focus on the adverse effects of the existing examination, the negative washback and the need for something better. In particular the question about listening in Pre-course task 1 highlighted the absence of listening from the examination. Chapter 3 shows in detail that these aims were achieved by the tasks, although the attempt to establish that current classroom practice is adversely affected was not fully achieved because teachers were reluctant to admit to teaching in a way they knew did not reflect the best methodological approach.

Chapter 3 gives a full description of how the course presented the content of the new examinations, and how the many new elements were identified and received by course participants. This presentation was considerably enhanced by the use of

tasks that enabled participants to explore, evaluate and discuss the new examinations. This in turn was intended to strengthen the impression that the new examination required much more careful attention and thought on the part of teachers and students in terms of classroom applications.

4.5 Teaching implications sessions in the NETT course

The teaching implications sessions fit in with the training principles outlined in Chapter 2 based on a cyclical process (Kolb 1984) and principles from Hayes (1995). As you will see below, teaching implications sessions start from *"concrete experience"* (see the adaptation of Kolb in Chapter 2, section 2.5) in the form of the participants' own classroom practice, and having engaged in *"reflective observation"* of aspects of the new exams move on to *"abstract conceptualisation"* in the form of conclusions about how to apply classroom practice for the new examination, before *"active experimentation"* in the classroom.

The sessions aim to have an effect on participants' awareness and teaching practice. The sessions attempt to apply Hayes' principles that activities should be classroom-centred, prepared and delivered by practising teachers through a task-based approach that values participants' existing knowledge and enables them to participate in discussions, share knowledge and ideas and form conclusions (Hayes 1995).

Five 45-minute sessions dealt with teaching implications in the pilot courses, one for each of the four skills and another for Use of English. In addition all the teaching implications sessions were followed up later in the course. It should also be noted that teaching implications came into part of every course session in one way or other, as participants were looking at the new examinations with a view to teaching to the examinations at some time in the future.

This section describes how teaching implications were approached in ten pilot sessions using examples from the course materials, records of participant responses and observers' notes.

4.5.1 Implications for teaching reading

The first teaching implications session looked at reading. This session came after participants had discussed some basic principles for teaching and learning reading, examined sample examination tasks and related the sample tasks and the content of the *Working Document* to course book activities. The materials used in the session are shown in sample 1.

Sample 1: Reading session 4 materials

Day 1, Session 6- reading 4

Task 1- Reading clinic

Here are some questions about teaching reading.
With a partner choose 3 questions you would like to answer.
Write an answer to each of the 3 questions on a piece of paper.

From a teacher
1. There are no authentic materials in my course book. What should I do?

From a teacher
2. Before reading a text in class I give the students a list of important words from the text with their translations. Unfortunately, although their vocabulary is improving their reading skills aren't.
Why? What can I do about it?

From a student
3. I know I can read very well, but I get bad marks in reading tests. What should I do?

From a student
4. My teacher won't tell me the meaning of words I don't know when we are reading, she says I must wait until we have finished the exercise. Why does she do this? I do not like it!

From a parent
5. What can I do to help improve my child's reading skills?

From a parent
6. My child's teacher makes the class read articles from real English newspapers. My child cannot understand all the words, and they seem far too hard to me. Why is the teacher doing this?

From a school director
7. When I studied languages at school we used to read a text out loud, translate it into Hungarian and then answer questions on the text in English. Isn't this still the best way to learn?

From a school director
8. I went into an English lesson last week and the students were all sitting talking to each other in Hungarian. The teacher said they were discussing how they had found the answers to a reading test.
How can this be helping the students? Why didn't the teacher just tell them the answers? Why weren't they doing it in English?

From a school director
9. I went into an English lesson the other day and the students were all sitting reading a text in silence. What was the good of that? Why wasn't the teacher teaching?

Task 2

Put your answers on the wall next to the question.
Walk around the room, read all the answers and decide if you agree or disagree with the advice.
Put a tick on the answers you agree with, a cross with the ones you disagree with, and a question mark for the ones you are not sure about.

The session uses the mechanism of a reading clinic, where participants offer advice to people who need to know about the new examination: a colleague, a student, a parent, a school director. This gave participants the opportunity to activate their newly acquired knowledge of the new examinations and combine that with their teaching ideas. These ideas were then discussed in groups, reported to the whole group and further discussed. The aim of the clinic was to open up a variety of issues concerning the teaching of reading, ways of training learners and the need for appropriate materials.

Question 2 raised the question of excessive pre-teaching of vocabulary, which was felt by the trainers to be a major factor inhibiting the development of reading skills. Responses and the ensuing discussion saw a variety of views put forward, with stronger, more confident teachers effectively putting the case against excessive pre-teaching.

Questions 4 and 6 were also connected to the pre-teaching issue, dealing with students' responses to unknown language. Trainers felt that students often put great pressure on teachers to provide language rather than to use the necessary reading skills themselves. The discussion again provided opportunities to discuss the need for learners to be taught how to read and questions 3, 4 and 8 raised the issue of how students' awareness of how to read successfully can be improved.

Questions 7 and 9 looked at methodology, especially the reading aloud issue. In discussion some participants pointed out that although there may be a place for reading aloud and translation activities, they should not be confused with tasks for the development of reading skills.

Questions 1 and 6 discussed the importance of materials, especially authentic materials, and how they relate to the teaching and learning of reading. Question 1 showed the need for teachers either to use a course book with authentic texts, or to supplement their course book. Question 6 linked the issue of materials to skills development, as participants mentioned that real reading inevitably involved unknown words, and so for students to be prepared for reading in the real world, as well as for the new examinations, the ability to deal with unknown words and texts is essential.

Whilst the arguments employed by the stronger teachers in the group appeared persuasive, and were backed up by the trainers, there was no room in the course to follow up fully the reading and listening implications in the classroom through observation or other awareness-raising activities. There is no way of telling how the presentation of these ideas affected classroom behaviour, and it would not be realistic to expect these discussions alone to have a great effect. Whilst course designers hoped that the combination of these ideas with teachers' existing knowledge and experience, course book content and of course the influence of new examinations would have some influence on teaching, further training for teachers in the form of courses that focus on teaching the four skills for the new examinations would probably be necessary.

The teaching implications session for reading was followed up on Day 3 by reviewing some of the issues discussed earlier, giving the participants opportunities for further reflection, and reinforcing messages from the earlier session. Sample 2 shows the materials for the follow-up session.

Sample 2: Reading session 5 materials, the follow-up session

Day 3, session 15, reading 5

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Task 2

In sessions 1 to 4 we looked at;
what people read in real life.
why people read in real life.
how people read in real life,
broken down into 6 reading sub-skills.

How we test reading, how we teach reading.

Some suggestions proposed were:

1.   When we test reading it should be as close as possible to real life reading, using authentic materials.
2.   When we teach reading it should be as close as possible to real life reading, using authentic materials.
3.   You can make the task fit the student, even with a difficult text.
4.   Reading skills can be developed in class...
a)   by encouraging students to read as much as possible.
b)   by raising students' awareness of the sub-skills.
c)   by discussing reading strategies in class.
d)   by encouraging good readers to share their secrets with other students.
e)   by teaching vocabulary and grammar from a text after students have read it.
f)   by ensuring students have a realistic reason to read.
g)   by ensuring there is a result or outcome from the reading.
h)   by integrating reading with other skills.

Write comments and further suggestions below.

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Discuss your ideas with the whole group.

4.5.2 Implications for listening

The second teaching implications session looked at listening, again after participants had discussed some basic principles for teaching listening, examined sample examination tasks and related the sample tasks and the content of the *Working Document* to course book activities. The session once more used the device of asking participants to offer advice by answering questions about listening, this time using a "problem box". The materials are shown in sample 3.

Sample 3: Listening session 4 materials using the "problem box"

Day 2, Session 10, listening 4.

In this session you are going to draw conclusions and make a list of teaching implications for listening.

Task 1 Problem box

a. Take a question out of the problem box, read and learn it. When you think you've learnt it put it back. There is someone else in the group with the same question. Find your partner and answer the question.
b. With your partner write your question and answer on a large piece of paper and put it on the wall.
c. Read the other questions and answers on the wall. Put a pen mark on the answers that you especially like.

Full list of questions

1. My students stop listening when they hear someone speaking at normal speed. They say it's too fast. What can I do?
2. My students give up listening as soon as they don't understand a word. What can I do?
3. How should I check listening activity answers?
4. Is it a good idea to break up a listening text into sentences to help the students?
5. How can I set a listening homework?
6. Is it a good idea to use authentic texts with Basic level students?
7. Shall I teach the new words before or after the listening activity?
8. Do you think that in a lesson there should be exclusively listening tasks?
9. Do you think it is a good idea to make the students repeat each sentence after the tape?
10. Do you think it is a good idea to teach listening with recorded real life conversations?
11. Is the tape the only way students can improve their listening?
12. Course book listening tasks often have a pre-listening activity that leads into the task. The students can't do this in exams, can they?

Task 2 Discussion and conclusions

The whole group will discuss points arising from the session.

The questions raised similar issues to the reading clinic task, such as methods, learner training and materials. For the Debrecen pilot course participants' written responses were shared amongst the group in the follow-up session on Day 3. They are given in Sample 4.

Sample 4: Listening session 4 materials showing participants' answers to the questions raised

Day 3, session 16, listening 5

Task 1

Discuss these questions in a small group.

What new ideas concerning listening did you hear on day 2?
What do you need more of to prepare students for the listening exam?

After answering compare your replies with the list of answers on the handout.

Task 2

In a group of 4, brainstorm the main points of listening sessions 1-4 and write them down.

Participants' answers to Problem-box questions

1. Begin teaching them the basic intonation.
    Tell them they are not expected to understand every single word.
2. Warn them beforehand not to get worried about it.
    Tell them to go on answering questions that they can understand.
    If they know they will have a chance for a second or third listening, it may help to ease the stress.
    Sometimes we can wind the tape back and stop at a particular word and listen to it a few times until someone catches it.
3. Compare answers in pairs. Read out individually. Group work.
4. No. We need to persuade students that without understanding every word/ sentence they will be able to deal with the questions.
5. Choose a TV programme – not dubbed, eg. weather forecast or news
6. Yes, it is. They can listen to numbers, the time, weather forecast, conversations (Where are they?)
7. Before, but only the keywords plus important expressions.
8. It depends on the listening text. We can begin with a pre-listening task, then the while listening and finally the post-listening activity.
9. It depends on the level of students, probably with basic level students it is a good idea, for example to practise intonation.
10. Yes, authentic texts seem to be more motivating and challenging for students.
    Those texts can be graded as well.
    Students can listen to utterances where accuracy does not always matter.
11. No, they can listen to the teacher, to each other, to a video/ TV/ radio/ films, to native speakers or foreigners.

These responses only give a general impression of the ideas that were produced, discussed and revised. They demonstrate how ideas from participants rather than from external sources can be used in the training process. Unfortunately they cannot give a full picture of how the issues were discussed and conclusions reached.

Observer notes from the Eger pilot course shown below in Excerpt 1 give a further perspective on the teaching listening discussion.

Excerpt 1: Observer's notes taken during listening sessions

Listening 4

Activity 1- advice for teachers. Started off with milling activity to organise groups into pairs, find partner with same question, then prepare answer, write down and put on board. Participants were then asked to sit down and report on answers, GI invited comments and discussion on responses, but few comments were made. There was some discussion afterwards on the issue of listening and vocabulary teaching, where pre-teaching was again warned against, but with the reminder that vocabulary study after a listening task was always an option. Finally some terms were explained and discussed, top-down, bottom-up, authentic in nature or origin. This activity took 26 minutes.

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Listening 5.

There was a discussion arising from the question of pre-teaching vocabulary for listening (and reading). It was pointed out that whilst this can make things easier for the teacher and students, it does not represent useful preparation for exams or real life where there will not be a teacher present to pre-teach hard or key words. It was suggested that instead pre-listening or reading tasks should concentrate on activating student skills to predict and on activating student language resources on a given topic provided by a title.

Once again it can be seen how issues of pre-teaching were raised in connection with developing receptive skills, and this seems to be an important issue amongst course participants.

4.5.3 Implications for teaching writing

One session on teaching implications for writing in Debrecen focused on marking, and the materials are shown in sample 6.

Sample 6: Writing session 4 materials, teaching implications

Day 3, session 21, writing 7

Developing writing

Task 1- marking students' writing

Take the 3 pieces of student writing that you graded in the last session.
Now mark the texts as you would usually for a piece of student writing.
Compare your marking with others in your group. Note similarities and differences.
What do you expect the student to do with the writing after you have marked it?

Task 2- discussion

In a group of 4 look at how you marked the student writing.

1. Do you use a correction code with your students?
2. Compare your correction code with the one in sample course book writing task A.
3. Do you write comments about the writing?
4. Do you comment on the content of Ss' writing or only the accuracy of the writing?
5. How do you comment on content?
6. On an OHP transparency make a list of dos and don'ts for correction.
7. Report to the other groups.

These tasks connected with the session looking at course books, as the *Headway* writing task studied included a sample marking system (Soars and Soars 1996; 12). The task gave participants the opportunity to discuss ways of marking students' writing.

Other course sessions looked at broader issues of teaching writing, including planning a lesson using one of the sample examination tasks. The sessions in Eger, reported on in the observer's notes in Excerpt 2, produced a discussion with the following results.

Excerpt 2: Observer's notes from writing session

i) Participants' views on writing from Eger

Good writers are people:
  – who are able to convey their messages in a clear way
  – who have something relevant to say
  – who have relevant ideas / messages
  – who are enabled with a sound / wide range of vocabulary to express their ideas
  – who can put / arrange their ideas in a logical way
  – who can articulate their thoughts
  – who have imagination, vivid fantasy, and can make it work at any time
  – whose style is appropriate / suitable
  – who can satisfy the needs of their readers
  – who can raise an appetite for reading
  – who are original, creative

A good piece of writing should:
  – be clear, logical
  – be grammatically correct
  – be well-organised
  – have a good style
  – have a good lay-out
  – communicate ideas
  – be concise
  – be coherent
  – be enjoyable, interesting
  – be informative
  – have a large vocabulary
  – have a clear message

How can teachers help students become good writers?
  – make them write a lot
  – give them enough feedback
  – make them read a lot
  – develop students' thinking and imagination
  – use the technique of brainstorming
  – teach them gradually, step by step (skeleton, paragraph, guided composition, free writing)
  – use the technique of paragraph writing, make them write only a part of the text at a time
  – devote enough time to teaching different discourse types, discourse markers
  – develop students' creativity
  – draw students' attention to differences in lay-outs
  – teach students to organize their ideas in paragraphs, around a topic sentence
  – give a lot of sample pieces of writing, analyse texts together
  – teach linking words
  – read out loud the good pieces of writing, discuss them with the whole group

There were two follow-up sessions on writing. Unlike the reading and listening sessions, which had focused on student performance in the sample examination tasks, the writing follow-up sessions looked at issues concerning students' writing performance in the classroom. This gave participants the opportunity to discuss further the teaching issues that had arisen in earlier sessions. The materials are shown in sample 6.

Sample 6: Writing session 8 materials

Day 5, Session 31, writing 8

Task 1, writing lesson review

a) In a group of 4 go through the plans you prepared and describe what happened in the lesson.
b) How do you feel about the lesson now?

Task 2, student performance review

a) How did the students perform the writing task you gave them?
b) How do you feel about their performance?
c) How well were you able to use the rating scales?

Task 3, conclusions

What changes will the new writing exam require

a) for you?
b) for students?
c) for other teachers?
d) for the school authorities?

These three tasks raised issues of confidence in students and the use of rating scales. A number of participants found that examination and discussion of students' performances produced a more positive view than they had formed initially. When the tasks were tried out in class, participants were pleased to find that their students were able to do the tasks. The positive view of students' performance was enhanced by the use of the rating scales, which required a focus on four criteria (communicative aims, range of vocabulary, accuracy and organization), rather than focusing on number and seriousness of errors, as many participants did when asked to evaluate scripts the first time. It was extremely interesting to note that no resistance to the idea of scales surfaced during discussions, and participants responded extremely positively to them, seeing them as a good way to assess students' writing.

As for whether classroom practice would need to change for the new examinations, Task 3 produced a wide variety of responses, ranging from identifying a need for major changes in the classroom to satisfaction that current practice would be good for the new examinations. This reflects the diversity of teaching approaches and attitudes of the participants.

4.5.4 Teaching implications for Use of English

Sessions on teaching implications for Use of English started with a comparison of teachers' and students' views of grammar in the classroom. The materials are shown in sample 7.

Sample 7: Use of English session 2 materials

> Day 4, Session 23, use of English 2
>
> …
>
> Task 3, teaching for the new exam
>
> A. In a group of 4 make a list of tips for teachers and students preparing for the use of English paper in the new exams.
>
> Advice for teachers
>
>
>
> Advice for students
>
>
>
> B. Report your suggestions to the rest of the group.

This task looked at classroom implications for two issues raised in the previous session, one concerning the need to take into account discourse rather than just grammar, the other concerning the difference between teachers' and students' views of grammar. The tasks give participants the opportunity to describe and explain their own ideas and practice, and then refine their ideas through discussion with colleagues. A summary of the discussions is shown in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3: Observer's notes from Use of English sessions

> *Use of English 1, 2*
>
> EJ introduced sessions on use of English.
> Activity 1- write down how you feel about teaching grammar, then compare your thoughts with students' opinions and discuss in groups. After 10 minutes discussion groups reported. Comments included; we like teaching grammar because it is easier, needs less preparation, systematic, logical and marking is objective. EJ added own comments, agreeing. We mostly like teaching grammar but it was overemphasised in our own education, it is difficult to make exciting for students. We like teaching grammar, students don't, they find it difficult but know it is important. Teaching grammar also a question of age groups. Younger students don't need grammar, they can memorise things, at age 14/15 they can start. This took 20 minutes.
>
> Participants' responses
>
> Question 1. How do you feel about teaching grammar?
> "I like it because it is enjoyable, interesting, surprising. It makes me think."
> "It is difficult but challenging (not to make it boring, make it simple but not simplified, practical and correct)."
> "Teaching grammar is OK. if I do not give priority to it. Students' achievements should be measured positively. Grammar without words or fluency is not useful. Achievements can be measured objectively. It is difficult to maintain motivation. It is sometimes boring."
> "I love it. It is logical and easier than teaching spoken English (at least for me). It is interesting that students also like it, and often they think that learning English is equal with learning grammar."
> "I love it, it has an influence on the mother tongue as well. My students become grammar-conscious which helps them with Hungarian grammar. They prefer speaking activities."
> "Teaching grammar is a 'must'. Sometimes it is boring and exhausting. One has to be very careful when choosing the follow-up activities."
> "I really enjoy teaching grammar, but the students do not. Fortunately, there are a lot

of books that can be used for practice. In most cases the students become bored. They keep saying that that is too difficult for them."
"It is difficult to make the lesson exciting. I feel teaching grammar is absolutely necessary. One should choose variegated activities and task types."
"I like teaching grammar. Students require grammar learning in a systematic way of teaching."
"Teaching grammar is comfortable."
"It is necessary to teach grammar, it belongs to the language. Interesting tasks can make it 'student-friendly'. It helps accuracy."
"It is a hard task to teach grammar. It is hard to find good exercises to avoid boring lessons. Students are not motivated."
"I like teaching grammar, though problems always occur. I have constant problems with Use of English – I miss a native speaker in my school so much! The longer I have been 'studying' and teaching English, the more problems I have."
"Some experts say that communicative language teaching has failed to a certain extent, and grammar should be smuggled back to course-books, sometimes with Hungarian explanations. (Criss-Cross) Grammar is also neglected in teaching Hungarian language. Descriptive grammar is important."

Participants' responses

Question 2. Advice for teachers
– design your own materials
– use a variety of tests
– teach strategies for solving the tasks
– use previous year's exam materials
– pay attention to timing
– brush up students' vocabulary
– revise and develop students' lexical, grammatical and discourse knowledge
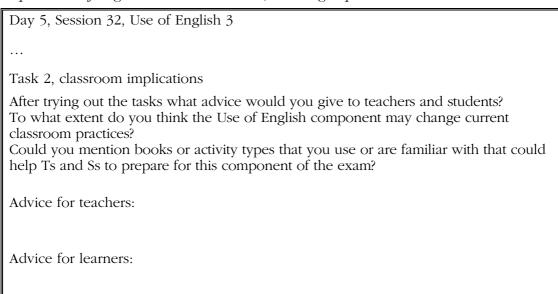– do a lot of practice papers
– do mock examinations

These views of grammar teaching illustrate both the participants' liking and their worries concerning grammar. Most, it seems, like teaching grammar, though not always for positive reasons, and some are worried about their own knowledge of English grammar.

Participants were also presented with a list of views of learning grammar produced by a group of students. The differences in perceptions were striking and led to an interesting discussion on the need to take students' views of grammar into account. Conclusions ranged from teaching grammar less to the need to explain carefully to students the need for grammar.

The need to approach language at discourse level seems to have arisen only a little in these tasks. If it was a new concept, as a number of participants said it was, then this is not surprising as internalisation is only likely to place over a period of time. The summary to Task two, though, does not do justice to a rich and varied discussion that lasted some time, and gave the more confident participants the opportunity to support their colleagues.

Sample 8 shows how the teaching implications were followed up on Day 5, by asking participants to offer advice to other teachers and learners in the light of experiences of the new examination. It was interesting for participants to compare their answers to those from Use of English Session 2 on Day 4, as there were some differences.

Sample 8: Use of English session 4 materials, teaching implications

> Day 5, Session 32, Use of English 3
>
> …
>
> Task 2, classroom implications
>
> After trying out the tasks what advice would you give to teachers and students?
> To what extent do you think the Use of English component may change current classroom practices?
> Could you mention books or activity types that you use or are familiar with that could help Ts and Ss to prepare for this component of the exam?
>
> Advice for teachers:
>
>
> Advice for learners:

4.5.5 Implications for teaching speaking

A session on Day 4 looked at teaching implications for speaking. The device used on this occasion was a selection of provocative questions designed to elicit disagreement from participants. The materials are shown in sample 9, and the results of discussions are reported in the observer notes in excerpts 4 and 5.

Sample 9: Speaking session 6 materials

> Day 4, Session 27, speaking 6
>
> Task 1- teaching speaking
>
> Here are some questions and comments about teaching speaking for the new exams. How would you respond?
>
> 1. The best way to learn how to speak is for students to memorise texts provided by books or teachers.
> 2. The main difficulty students have with speaking is knowing enough grammar and vocabulary, so the best way to prepare for a speaking exam is by learning grammar and vocabulary.
> 3. The use of pair work in class is inefficient and noisy and I do not like it.
> 4. When students make mistakes in speaking they must be corrected immediately or students will learn mistakes from each other.
> 5. I test my students' speaking by asking them to stand up in front of the class and give a talk about something. Will this be good preparation for the new exams?
>
> Task 2- teaching for the new exam
>
> Discuss the following questions in your group:
>
> a) Do your students need any special training to perform the warm up and general conversation tasks?
> b) Do you still have problems with the other tasks? If yes, what sort? Try to give some suggestions for solution.

These tasks raised the issues of pair work, memorisation, accuracy and correction. Participants' responses to the first task are given in Excerpt 4, and to the second task in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 4: Observer's notes showing participants' responses in session 6 task 1

> Session 27, speaking 6.
>
> Responses to the questions were as follows:
> 1- Memorisation is time-consuming, not life-like, does not require initiative or thinking, is easily forgotten, can sound nonsense, but can be useful in limited amounts for beginners.
> 2- Iit is most important for students to speak in lessons, exam tasks need to be practised.
> 3- Noise is tolerable if learning is taking place, monitoring should ensure students are on-task, pairs are essential for classroom work, an important aspect of cooperative development.
> 4- Correction when speaking does not happen in real life, interrupts fluency, should come after speaking.
> 5- No, they are regurgitating, not communicating.

This brief summary can only give a general idea of the discussion. Participants gave a variety of criticisms of rote learning, and no dissenting voices were raised. This is perhaps surprising, given the importance that teachers interviewed in the Baseline Study attached to learning by rote. It is possible that participants felt obliged to give an idealised view of the topic, and that therefore dissenting views remained underground. A similar process may have happened with the pair work and error issues.

Excerpt 5: Observer's notes from discussion on rote-learned speaking in Eger

> *Rote-learned- all against, whilst recognising it can be part of the learning process, and there is a need for repeated practice, but a rote-learned piece cannot be the end result for an exam, it is weak students that tend to memorise. Assessing while speaking to students- not really possible, but teachers have to. GI asks groups to report on rote-learning discussions using OHTs. Comments included:*
>
> | Spontaneous | Rote |
> | --- | --- |
> | needs a long process of learning | can be quick and short and easy for teachers |
> | more life-like | only pretend |
> | students have to react | students can't react |
> | gives students' view | gives teacher's view |
> | needs a certain level of knowledge | easier to grade and anticipate |
> | needs more time but is more satisfying | |
> | needs some self-confidence | |
> | can give students pleasure | |

There was also a task that discussed the differences between spontaneous and rote-learned speaking, described in excerpt 5 from the observer's notes from Eger. This discussion seems to have gone more fully into the issues, noting positive as well as negative aspects of memorisation.

Excerpt 6: Observer's notes showing participants' views on speaking

> ii) Participants' views on speaking
>
> Participants` answers to Question a) in Task 2 Speaking session 6
>
> No special training is needed but practice in every single lesson, encouraging the students to speak, convey message etc.
> As they will have had a lot of practice & experience by then, they basically don`t need

> any special training.
> Not really.
> No.
> We constantly do warm-up exercises at the beginning of the lessons which are very similar to general conversation tasks, so they do not need a special training but they need to be encouraged to speak.
> Yes, they do.
> Not much. I think they will have to be familiar with the situation (sitting in front of a panel, chatting freely with a teacher, cope with the stress).
> No. These exercises are parts of the lessons, so the students are used to them.
> Yes, training is indispensable. The students have to get used to reacting to questions promptly.
> Yes, especially the shy. They should be prepared to answer usual warm-up questions with the least possible mistakes.
> Generally, yes.
> Yes, they need practice, but it is not difficult to teach them the basic techniques, expressions. They can get used to them soon.
> Yes, they need background knowledge and a lot of practice.

The task produced an interesting variety of responses, with some participants confident that their current practice is adequate for the examination tasks, whilst others felt that changes will be needed. The purpose of the activity, though, was to raise the question rather than to decide on the right answer.

Speaking follow-up sessions came on Day 5. They enabled participants to report on their classroom experiences, share ideas and further reflect on teaching implications. The materials are shown in sample 10.

Sample 10: Speaking session 8 materials

> Day 5, Session 29, speaking 8
>
> Task 1, lesson review
> In a group go through the plans you prepared and describe what happened in the lesson.
> How do you feel about the lesson now?
> How did the observation go?
>
> Day 5, session 30, speaking 9
>
> Task 1, student performance review
> a) How did the students perform the task you gave them?
> b) How do you feel about their performance?
> c) How well were you able to use the rating scales?
>
> Task 2, conclusions
>
> What changes will the new speaking exam require
> a) for you?
> b) for students?
> c) for other teachers?
> d) for the school authorities?

Reporting back on classroom activities enabled participants to compare their experiences with their views expressed on Day 4. As in the sessions on writing, the rating scales received a favourable response from participants, who reported that they were able to apply the scales, and that students responded well to the five criteria (fluency, accuracy/ range, pronunciation, task achievement and interactive communication). Once again it was noted by participants that focusing on these

aspects of performance produced a more positive view of student performance than attention to accuracy. Trying out the tasks and scales in class was also intended to give participants confidence that the tasks in the examinations would be accessible to their students, and that marking procedures would be fair and allow students to achieve appropriate grades.

4.6 Conclusion

In the course both the classroom implications and the issues mentioned in the previous section are addressed through a cyclical approach consisting of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. The starting point for each part of the course is some kind of reference to concrete experience such as the current érettségi, how people read or listen, reasons to write and so on. Reflective observation takes the form of discussion on existing practice, or the introduction of a new element, such as the content of the new examination. Abstract conceptualisation takes the form of focusing on points encountered through reflective observation, in particular through the teaching implications sessions that are described in this chapter. Active experimentation occurs through the homework assignments, with the application in class of the points from the earlier stages. The cycle then starts again with participants reporting on the results of the active experimentation.

The materials prepared by course designers show how teaching implications and teachers' needs were catered for. Observers' notes and participants' responses in sessions and through the assignments show the successful results of these materials.

The success of the course in terms of classroom behaviour cannot be ascertained at this stage. Whilst many course participants claimed that their classroom behaviour had been influenced by aspects of the course, this needs more careful examination. There are two reasons for this, the main one being that as the new examinations have not yet been introduced then the training connected to the examinations is unlikely to have had any effect as yet. The second reason is that, as the *Baseline Study* showed, what teachers claim and what they do in the classroom can be rather different, and extensive classroom observation will be necessary to ascertain the effect of the course and the new examinations.