31 Teaching with limited resources

> It is as well to remember that language is life itself, and that life is very largely language … Language is not a sterile subject to be confined to the classroom. One of two things must be done: either life must be brought to the classroom or the class must be taken to life.
>
> Peter Strevens, 1956

A Warm-up

Imagine you're going to teach in a place where there are no available resources, nor any digital technology. Make a list of six things you might take with you, and put them in the order of importance.

Here are some ideas:

- a grammar of English
- a grammar of the local language
- a bilingual dictionary
- a coursebook
- a picture dictionary of English
- a student grammar of English plus exercises
- the collected short stories of a contemporary writer
- a selection of popular magazines
- a teacher's resource book of language practice games
- your photo album
- a book of jokes for children
- a traditional English songbook
- blank notebooks and pencils

Make your own choice and then, in groups, try to agree on a common list.

B Teaching in difficult circumstances

1 Your trainer will read a short text. As soon as they have finished, try to write down as much as you can remember. Then compare in groups. The trainer will then read it again, and you can make any changes.

2 In the same groups, try to predict what the young teacher did, in the circumstances. Your trainer will then tell you what actually happened.

3 The activity you have just done is a version of what is known as 'dictogloss'. Work in pairs and answer these questions.

1 What were its different stages?
2 How could you adapt it to teach an item of grammar?
3 Could you use it in your own teaching situation?
4 What are its potential strengths?

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C Low resource activities

1 Your trainer will demonstrate three activities using few or zero resources. After each one, work in pairs to complete this table.

	1	2	3
Give the activity a name that describes it memorably.			
What language skills did it involve?			
Was there any obvious grammatical or lexical content?			
How would you rate it in terms of: 1 language productivity? 2 learner interaction? 3 learner engagement?			
Could you do this activity: 1 online and face-to-face? 2 with a one-to-one student? 3 with young learners? 4 with a range of levels?			

D Learner-generated material

Learners bring not only material objects to the lesson but also a wealth of experience, knowledge, opinion, preferences, abilities and needs.

1 Work in pairs. Read these descriptions of classroom activities. Which of the above domains – experience, knowledge, opinion, preferences, abilities, needs – does each one tap into?

1 'One of us': Learners work in groups of four, asking each other questions, so as to generate as many true sentences, as possible using this rubric:

One of us	can
Two of us	
Three of us	
All of us	
None of us	

Each group reports to the class.

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2 'Five finger exercise': Draw the outline of a hand on the board. Students do the same on a sheet of paper. At the tip of each finger and the thumb write these prompts: a name, a place, a number, a date, and a symbol (e.g. emoji, logo). Instruct students to use the prompts to write something that is significant for them (and that they are prepared to share). Demonstrate by using examples from your own life. In pairs (or mingling), students ask and answer questions about each other's 'hands' (which can then be displayed around the classroom walls). Ask individuals to report on anything interesting they discovered.
3 'Class poll': Establish a topic (it may be the topic of the current coursebook unit, e.g. travel, health, homes). Ask learners to create a survey or questionnaire on the topic in order to find out what the majority thinks about the topic. They first prepare questions in groups, and then are redistributed into new groups to ask and answer their survey questions. They then re-join their original group in order to collate the answers, using a rubric such as 'X out of Y students think that … '. A spokesperson from each group then reports their findings to the class.

2 Work in pairs or small groups. Choose one of the above activities.

1 How could it be adapted so as to address another of the learner domains? For example, what effect would there be if you changed the verb in the 'One of Us' activity?
2 How can the report stage be developed so as to focus on a specific grammar item or function?

KEY WORDS FOR TEACHERS

Check you know the meanings of these terms.

- *resources v resourcefulness*
- *learner-centredness*
- *dictogloss*

REFLECTION

1 Choose one of these resources that were listed in the warm-up activity.

- the collected short stories of a contemporary writer
- a selection of popular magazines
- a teacher's resource book of language practice games
- your photo album
- a book of jokes for children
- a traditional English songbook
- blank notebooks and pencils

In groups, discuss how you might plan an activity or even a whole lesson around this resource, with the aim of generating authentic language use. Report your ideas to the class.

2 Read the quotation by Peter Strevens at the beginning of this unit. How can you 'bring life to the classroom'? How can you 'take the classroom to life'?

Reference

Strevens, P. (1956). *Spoken Language*. London: Longmans, Green & Co., p.69.

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