

Teaching English to Teens and Preteens

A Guide for Language Teachers
with Techniques and Materials
for Grades 4-9

Alec Templeton

with contributions

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Dedication

To my wife Julia, to my children Arnoud, Jessica and Lukas and all my pupils who taught me to teach.

Preface

Teach from your heart!

A recommendation by Mario Rinvoluceri

At last the Steiner-inspired EFL teachers who work in the 900 Waldorf schools round the world have decided to share some of their principles and practices with the rest of the EFL ESL community, some 6 million of us across the globe. Key to the whole book, in my view, is one sentence in the introduction: "A lot of the activities described here are intended to involve pupils emotionally, to appeal to their imagination and inventiveness as way of getting through to their intellect." I warmly welcome this Steinerian input to the humanistic movement in language teaching and would like to congratulate Alec Templeton on making his thinking and these exercises available to those outside the Waldorf cloister. Congratulations also to his Hungarian publisher. Read Alec's book, skip those bizarre textbooks and teach from your heart, your mind, your essence. The reader may choose which meaning she gives to the verb 'skip'.

Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims, UK

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Introduction

This book is for you, if

- you are an experienced teacher wishing to diversify from standard procedures and refresh your teaching;
- you are just off a training course and feel the need to experiment and establish your personal style of teaching. The book contains much practical and theoretical advice derived from long experience of teaching;
- you have large classes and discipline problems. Sometimes the cause for discipline problems is that pupils are bored. Variety can help you with this boredom. Another help is to consider children's characteristics at different ages, like puberty or pre-puberty for example. You will find descriptions of them in this book;
- you no longer use coursebooks;
- you like and use coursebooks but you still feel the desire to break free from their confines and do your own thing from time to time.

The aim

This book has one main aim: to describe ways of teaching foreign languages to children between the ages of 10 and 15. It is my hope that the ideas given here will not only be of use within the Waldorf School context, but also for anyone teaching foreign languages. Although this book is specifically for English, it may also inspire teachers of other languages to venture outside the comfort-zone of expensive coursebooks and go for more home-grown materials without necessarily putting success or efficiency at risk.

How to use this book

Whether you are an experienced teacher or a beginner, some of the ideas given here require minimal preparation – 20-30 minutes before your lesson. But there are also more complex exercises for which you will need a few days (classroom plays for example). Anyway we would suggest, if it is possible, that you plan your lesson a few days before the lesson. But we also know that the hectic everyday workload of correcting exercise books, marking papers, attending teachers' meetings, parents evenings and the rest of it don't always allow teachers to prepare as thoroughly as they would like every day. We hope that having this book around may help you in such cases - even just before your lesson starts.

You can easily choose exercises for your lesson from the detailed table of contents according to your syllabus and according to the basic skills you want to develop with your pupils in your lesson. The first five chapters deal with the basic skills, grammar, vocabulary work etc.

To get a better overview of your teaching, reasons and pupils' motivations you may wish to study the characteristics of children and young people between 10-15 (Chapter VI, III. Teaching foreign languages to Teens and Preteens (class 4-9) – Curriculum according to age) – then apply it to real life. This understanding will lead to a better relationship with the pupils, more self awareness and better lessons.

If you want to learn Waldorf language education or deepen your knowledge of it then please study Chapter VI where you will find lots about the principles behind this method. This chapter addresses both theoretical questions: why we try to teach imaginatively; why children need to be conscious of grammar rules as well as practical points (e.g. keeping discipline, pros and cons of coursebooks, testing and giving marks, ideas for a syllabus etc.)

The numbering of classes follows the traditional 12-year curriculum of the Waldorf School, class 1 meaning children aged 6–7 down to class 9 with children aged 15-16.

Everything in this book is there to be tried out. There's nothing in this book that couldn't be done differently or better. We all learn from our mistakes and from trying things out in different ways over and over again. The children will 'help' us find out under what conditions they learn best.

Times are changing

I support the idea of starting foreign language teaching very early. Younger children have a good ear and usually so little self-consciousness that even school-learning takes place almost naturally. A fear often expressed that this may interfere with first-language competence is not borne out by recent research.

In the Waldorf Schools (the first of which was founded in 1919) two foreign languages are taught three times a week from the age of six (class 1). Beginning with an extended period of oral-aural work (with written work postponed until later) gives children the chance to really absorb the spoken language and to become familiar with its rhythms and intonations. This should be followed by using the foreign language communicatively before learning to spell. A little later, imaginative writing exercises will then lead naturally into various reading skills. From about 10 years of age, most children will want to find out when particular patterns and structural items are used. There are probably no objective rules that all children will understand, so we help them find their own criteria. A lot of the activities described here are intended to involve the pupils emotionally, to appeal to their imagination and inventiveness as a way of getting through to their intellect. I think teaching is a balancing act between conscious, cognitive language learning and activity-based incidental learning.

Long gone are the days when language learning only consisted of learning single words and drilling grammar patterns. Since then research has been carried out on language learning by specialists other than linguists: psychologists and brain neurologists for example have been turning their attention to language acquisition

as well. This has led to changes in approaches to teaching. The times of the like-it-or-lump-it approach are over. We now review our lesson, see the children before us, ask ourselves how they did and rethink our planning accordingly.

The way children behave has changed, too, as have children's attitudes towards grown-ups. We can no longer expect children to just sit there quietly listening to what their teachers tell them. They now seem to need challenges, tasks to do, problems to solve.

Different learner types

We as teachers now know there are different learner types as well as different types of intelligence. Some children can only 'function' when given clear instructions that are checked; other children are always on the look-out for some sort of challenge; others again like to stay in a dream world for a while before being able to perform really well. So today we can no longer do one type of teaching which reaches a whole class simultaneously. We have to accept children's quirks just as much as their individual talents. This means we constantly have to develop all sorts of lesson activities for different sorts of children at various levels of difficulty. Our job is becoming more and more like that of an artist and a ship's master all in one. In the classroom we are at the wheel: a little to starboard, a few degrees to port, fast ahead, and so on. The consequences of sailing the wrong course could be disastrous and we must be constantly on the look-out for unexpected hazards.



Who teaches whom?

Chapter I – Speaking

*Chaos ruled OK in the classroom
As bravely the teacher walked in
The nooligans [sic] ignored him
Hid [sic] voice was lost in the din*

Roger McGough

I. Beginning and ending the lesson

Good morning – Good bye

A brisk *Good morning, everybody!* followed by some speech exercises is a non-confrontational start to the lesson with pupils aged around 10-12. What you could say next:

*Good morning, everybody!
Good morning, Mr
How are you today?
Very well thank you, and how are you?
I'm fine.
And how are you, Jonathan?
Very well thank you, Mr ...
The weather's very nice today, isn't it?
Yes, it is. (We never contradict this!)*

*(In case the weather is not:
The weather's not very nice today, is it?
No, it isn't. Let's hope it'll be better tomorrow).*

Whereas smaller children seem to require a kind of ritual (the same procedure for extended periods of time) beginning with speech exercises, choral work and singing, a lesson with 10-year-olds and above could also begin with, say, a dictation or inspecting homework. This is especially true for a lesson straight after the main break, when they come running in with red faces after playing tag (catching or touching other children) or even fighting.

Near the end of the lesson we could ask the class to clear their desks:

Put your pens into your pencil-cases; put your exercise books into your satchels.

Then finish the lesson by telling them a little story or a further episode of some on-going story, or finish the lesson with a song or recitation. The very end could sound like

Goodbye, class Four!

To which the class will answer:

Goodbye Mrs XYZ. See you next Friday! (Be seeing you next Friday).

Do not forget that perhaps the chairs need to be put up on the desks, the black-board may need cleaning, windows closed and the like.

Warm-ups

One child after another says one item of one of the following until the whole class has said one item or word of the following:

- a letter of the alphabet
- the months
- the weekdays
- ordinal numbers
- your birthdays
- your telephone numbers
- irregular verb forms

Warm-up saying the alphabet quickly

The children always enjoyed a 'fast' version of the alphabet:

A-B-C-DEFFIGY-KELLME-NOPPY-QUEUE-RESTA-VE-DOUBLE-YOU-X-Y-Z.
(I know ... we skip some of the letters).

Getting parents to say the alphabet like this could be part of your talk at the next parents' meeting!

Warming up with the international pilots' alphabet

Every child quickly memorizes one word from the alphabet and then they say their word one after the other.

Alpha	Hotel	Oscar	Victor
Bravo	India	Poppa	Whiskey
Charlie	Juliet	Quebec	X-ray
Delta	Kilo	Romeo	Yankee
Echo	Lima	Sierra	Zulu
Foxtrot	Mike	Tango	
Golf	November	Uniform	

A warm-up with irregular verbs

Ask one pupil to say an irregular verb in her first language. The whole class then says this in English: *To go* and hold up their hands in the air, arms stretched above their heads. Then the class say the second form *went* and hold arms akimbo i.e.

fists touching the waist, elbows outwards. Then the third form *has gone* and slap both knees.

A little problem to solve: What can we do with a verb where the last two parts are the same, or where the first and last are the same, or the first two are the same, or where all three parts are the same? If we go by sound rather than whether it is the first, second or third part of the verb we would get interesting patterns, e.g.

to beat – beat – has beaten: hands up, hands up, arms akimbo (or hands on knees?).

Warm-up: Saying sentences using clear gestures

The following gestures are to be tried out. How do they feel?

Point at an imaginary hat while saying:

I'd like to try on that hat - No, not that one. - The second from the left.

Make the voice a little sharper, turn the palms upwards and shrug your shoulders while saying:

But it costs too much.

Make a little shrug; a wry face.

How shall I ever be able to pay for it?

Give the imaginary assistant 'a look'.

Weigh up pros (arguments for) and cons (arguments against) by swaying head from side to side while saying:

Yes, maybe it'll do - Let me think about it for a while.

Touch the lower lip, scratch behind the ear while saying it.

Show antipathy when we make a gesture like pushing or throwing something away:

No, I can't stand it. Take it off at once. It makes me look like a witch.

Expressing sympathy: (A warm, longing voice? A smile?)

This one is different: It sort of fascinates me. Doesn't it look pretty in the mirror?

And if we do not want the hat, if we withdraw from the deal we say:

No, it's no use; it's not for me. I'd better stick to my old one.

Make a warding-off gesture (rather like soccer players do after fouling someone). (After Hans Pusch who made an English version from Rudolf Steiner's original).

A choral activity improvising whole sentences

Write *I saw Esau sitting on a seesaw* up on the blackboard and tell the class you would like to them to replace one word of this sentence.

Which word should go out if we want the word 'she' to come in? Shall we replace the word 'I' with 'she'? How would the sentence sound now?

Someone or the whole class says:

*She saw Esau sitting on a seesaw.
Now which word do we leave out for 'Jacob'?
Esau.
All right. Say the new sentence again.
She saw Jacob sitting on a seesaw.*

Then we go on giving the new word. By this time the class will probably know which word can give up its place.

*'Standing'!
She saw Jacob standing on a seesaw.
'Swing'!
She saw Jacob standing on a swing.
'Watched'!
She watched Jacob standing on a swing.
'I'
I watched Jacob sending on a swing.*

And so on back to the beginning, if you like.

Sentence drill competition

For this exercise it would be helpful if the class could sit in a circle. If this is not possible, we give the pupil sitting in one corner of the class an object such as a green plastic felt-pen. We then get her to say as quickly as possible:

This is a green plastic felt-pen – What is it? – It's a green plastic felt-pen.

Then this pupil passes the felt-pen to her neighbour and the same exchange of words repeats itself between the second and the third.

At the same time we start a different sentence at the other end of the classroom:

This is an orange rubber ball. – What is it? – It's an orange rubber ball.

The pupils are to say these conversational exchanges as quickly as they can to see if the first input gets to the other end first. Of course it is exciting to see if the input given last can 'overtake' the other, who will have to deal with two objects at the same time, and how that person will manage.

Speech exercises

Speech exercises are short oral activities that we keep doing in most lessons through the years albeit for various different reasons. At the beginning of our course they help to practise pronunciation of the many speech sounds (vowels, consonants, diphthongs). Later they help children to articulate clearly, to put a little energy into their speech. They help pupils to get their hold on the rhythm of a phrase or sentence.

Concentrating on the rhythm or intonation, a stress pattern of an expression helps pupils memorize it. Memory works mysteriously. If we try clapping the rhythm of a song, the words miraculously come to mind; if we hum the tune, the words come as well.

Who has not experienced looking for a word or expression and feeling we have it 'on the tip of our tongue'? Usually the words present themselves immediately afterwards, when we only think of what we want to say. To enable our students to be able to do this, it is worth investing time and trouble to get them to pronounce accurately and articulate clearly, getting the intonation and the stress patterns right. This will later be a solid basis for the ability to read and write meaningfully.

To get back to the speech exercises: Here are some aspects of speaking we hope to train through doing speech exercises:

- strength of voice
- intonation and pitch
- breathing in accordance with the meaning
- projection
- being relaxed while speaking

The whole class contradicting the teacher (for strength of voice)

You tell them things you did. If they believe you they say nothing, if they think you are 'pulling their leg' they say *No, you didn't*.

I found a 50 Euro note in the waste-paper basket over there. (No, you didn't!)

I came to school on a motor-bike this morning. (No, you didn't!)

I had cornflakes for breakfast. (Silence or Mm-hm, maybe you did)

I talked to Roger Federer yesterday. (No, you didn't).

Exercises for pronunciation

Apart from learning correct pronunciation at the beginning, we may have to concentrate on pronunciation again at a later stage. At around the age of 10, when most children lose their unselfconsciousness, even children who had already acquired a good pronunciation will sometimes begin to speak with a first-language

accent. Children who begin learning at this age may already be having difficulties to hear, let alone imitate foreign speech sounds accurately.

Speech exercises can be fun and will certainly benefit all young learners.

Who can say: 'The witch which bewitched this switch is Swiss?'



Tip: Listen to the class reciting rather than being the loudest 'reciter' yourself. Here are examples of exercises for a number of vowels or consonants:

a/e *Thank you for your letter
Is your leg any better?
My leg's getting better, yes.
Well, I'm glad you're getting better.
I was glad to get your letter.
I'll be back again next Saturday.*

Teaching English to Teens and Preteens

ow, u and ee	<i>There's a mouse in the house; see it there, by the chair, eating cheese, if you please. We will say 'run away!' to your house ! Run, run, run: That is fun !</i>
ow and o	<i>There was an old owl who lived in an oak. The more he heard, the less he spoke; the less he spoke, the more he heard. Why aren't we like that old bird?</i>
h	<i>Who's there? Hey, Henry! Hold it!</i>
m	<i>The monkey mounted a monastery wall and munched melon and macaroni</i>
t	<i>Tiny Tom took two trips to Truro.</i>
t/ch	<i>Choose stew Tuesday. Tuesday is stew day.</i>
r	<i>'Around the ruggèd rocks the raggèd rascal ran.' 'Ron Williams won the racewalk.'</i>
f	<i>Fine fish fresh from France</i>
s	<i>See silvery sails</i>
sl	<i>Down the slippery slide they slid</i>
s/sl/swl	<i>Sitting slightly sideways;</i>
sk	<i>Slipping swiftly see them skid</i>
th	<i>thrust through thick and thin</i>
m	<i>Milk merely makes my milk much more mild</i>
n	<i>Nine nickel knitting needles</i>

Long vowels, short vowels and consonants

In English vowels or diphthongs followed by voiced (soft) consonants such as *b, d, g, ge, ll, z* etc. tend to be longer than when they are followed by unvoiced (hard) consonants like *p, t, ck, ss, tch* etc. Some vowels or diphthongs are long anyway: *a* in *made*, *e* in *Peter*, *i* in *time*, *o* in *Coke*, *u* in *tune*. There is usually a final unpronounced *e* in these words but not always. The same letters can be short vowels when followed by unvoiced consonants: *cat, pet, Tim, cock* and *tun*.

The relative lengths can be tried out with the following exercise. The individual words in each horizontal group become longer or heavier as you read on.

back	bag	backed	bang	<i>banged</i>	
caught	store	coarse	call	<i>cause</i>	<i>caused</i>
<i>chase</i>	chain	change	<i>changed</i>		
hat	has	had	ham	<i>hand</i>	<i>hands</i>
<i>heart</i>	hard	charred	charge	<i>charged</i>	
hoot	hoof	whose	<i>hooves</i>		
house	how	mouth	howl	<i>mound</i>	<i>mouths</i>
<i>put</i>	push	pull	<i>pulled</i>		
shoot	chew	choose	<i>chewed</i>		
wit	wish	witch	wished	<i>wig</i>	

I learnt this from *The Actor and His Text* by Cicely Berry (Harrap, London 1988).