

## The Flexible Method

### Week 8 Assignment – The Flexible Method

Carl Peel

UCLA Extension: TESOL Methods: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking

March 16, 2025

My teaching method is a mixture of techniques taken from several methods we've studied. Each of them has its strengths and weaknesses. I aim to utilize various methods' and techniques' strengths, while keeping their weaknesses in mind. Using this approach and knowing the variety of teaching situations one might find oneself in, I've decided to call this the Flexible Method. I plan to teach in a way that is responsive to the situation as it presents itself in the classroom, remaining flexible to use any methods and techniques that could be helpful in the given situation.

This method is influenced by my observations from being a foreign language student myself as an adult. For instance, the Silent Way method is not one I would use very often, at least not with intermediate or advanced students, but it could be useful with beginning students. I have been in classes where a teacher will come into the classroom, say nothing, but instead use gestures (like pointing, or acting out activities) to communicate. I think this can lead people to pay more attention, since it's not the normal way we communicate (it takes extra effort to convey and understand meaning nonverbally) but is sometimes the only way we can communicate. It's especially useful when two people do not speak the same language, which is exactly the situation found in language classes at the very beginning.

More common, and very useful, especially with beginning students, is to use the Grammar-Translation Method. While I know it's largely meant to be able to read dead languages like Latin or Ancient Greek, having at least some translation from students' native language to the target language is, in my mind, almost necessary, especially in beginning classes. This could be incorporated via scaffolding, and lessened or dropped as students learn more of the target language. At first instructions (e.g. Turn to page 4; Take out a piece of paper; We're going to learn about colors today, etc.) will depend on language the students probably don't yet know, and is not part of the topic being studied in that lesson. So some translation might be necessary to help students participate and put the lesson details in context.

I love the idea of Desuggestopedia. It can be very useful with young students. I do worry about potentially infantilizing adult students with this though. So making students comfortable and ready to learn is going to be achieved by different techniques depending on the students' ages and backgrounds. I also recognize that many adult classrooms are not like an elementary school classroom used by one teacher who can decorate as they wish. Adult

classrooms are often shared by many teachers and even types of classroom subjects (e.g. a different language taught in that classroom an hour later, or even a chemistry class). So there's a limit to how much customization to a classroom a TESOL teacher working with adults might be able to do. That said, the goal of desuggestopedia is a worthy one, and anything I can do to make the students more at ease and receptive to learning, I'll do. I recall so many classes where the pressure to give correct answers made me (and others) less responsive with too much brain power spent trying not to be embarrassed, or spiraling in anxiety about being wrong or not quick enough.

The most common and useful method I've seen so far in my classes as a language learner is the Audio-Lingual method which I plan to utilize a lot. Perhaps combined with the structure of the Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) technique. PPP seems like a natural outgrowth or partner to the Audio-Lingual Method. Both are based on habit formation where the teacher introduces a dialogue and having each student repeat what the teacher (and textbook) have modeled, then expanding so the students produce other ways of utilizing the language points being learned.

The Audio Lingual method is also a good way to incorporate multiple learning intelligences, a vital technique since students learn in different ways. Some people learn best by reading, some via visuals, some need to incorporate movement to get new information to really sink in. By using multiple learning intelligences, not only is repetition achieved, but a teacher is more likely to get through to more students who might learn via one learning intelligence over another. Some of this can be achieved by using techniques from the Total Physical Response Method and others.

Of course, I would not rely on the Audio-Lingual or any other method alone. The Audio-Lingual method can be very good at regular verb conjugations, and anything where repetition and pattern recognition can be relied on, but English is so full of grammar, usage and spelling exceptions, that other techniques besides pure modeling and repetition would need to be utilized.

I think Widdowson (2004) would agree with me. Widdowson "...observes that what is needed is not a universal solution, but rather a 'shift to localization,' in which pedagogic practices are designed in relation to local contexts, needs and objectives" (p. 13). There are also situations that happen in the classroom that can't be planned for, so having some flexibility in methods and techniques can be important. As Bell (2007: 141-142) pointed out, "A knowledge of methods is equated with a set of options, which empowers teachers to respond meaningfully to particular classroom contexts" (p. 14).

A final, additional benefit of the Flexible Method is that it can also incorporate new information and new research as time goes on. It's not wholly committing to one approach no matter the outcome, but can be adapted as the field of study in teaching and learning continues to develop, and as situations change in school districts and classrooms.

### **List of 15 Ideas for Techniques I Intend to Use**

- 1) Learn who my students are.
- 2) Small talk at the beginning of class to get students comfortable and talking.
- 3) Create as inviting a classroom for student comfort as possible.
- 4) Using scaffolding and translation, especially with beginner students to put what they're learning in context and help them understand.
- 5) Utilize visual aids wherever possible.
- 6) Clear modeling with good enunciation.
- 7) Repetition, repetition, repetition.
- 8) Model real-life scenarios to put the language lessons in the context of real communication.
- 9) Play games, that get people moving and excited.
- 10) Be observant and aware of when students appear to be struggling, or misunderstanding something.
- 11) Elicit both group responses (to draw out the shy students, incorporate repetition and practice, and get everyone comfortable with the lesson/patterns before moving onto) and individual responses (to make sure each student understands).
- 12) Have students talk and practice the language points with each other.
- 13) Bring up grammar and vocabulary points learned in past lessons to reinforce learning and incorporate the previously learned lessons with the new material.
- 14) Explain some basic origins, etymology and development of language points when appropriate to deepen or cement understanding (e.g. Anglo-Saxon, vs. French vs. Latin vs. other derivations and cognates/relations with vocabulary and grammar, or why there are various pronunciations of *-ough*).

- 15) Pay attention to and help students with pronunciation so they have the accent and understandability that they want.

### References

**Bell, D.** 2007. 'Do teachers think that methods are dead?' *ELT Journal* 61/2: 135–43. Reprinted in and taken from Larsen-Freeman, D and Anderson, M., *Techniques in Language Teaching* (3<sup>rd</sup>. edn.) p. 13. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Widdowson, H. G.** 2004. 'A perspective on recent trends' in A. P. R. Howatt with H. G. Widdowson. *A History of English Language Teaching* (2nd edn.), 353–72. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Reprinted in and taken from Larsen-Freeman, D and Anderson, M., *Techniques in Language Teaching* (3<sup>rd</sup>. edn.) p. 14. Oxford: Oxford University Press.