Teaching practice and why it is important

Classroom teaching practice and why it is important?

Why bother with practice

Would you trust a surgeon who had only learnt his or her skills from a book? Chances are that you would not. Teaching English is no different. Learning the theory is fine but you have to put it into practice to truly understand and experience what it is like to teach a class of eager learners and show them how to use English correctly.

Employers prefer to hire teachers who have done teaching practice

Almost all reputable employers will expect that the certificate course you have attended includes real practice classes given to non-English speakers. Most on-line and distance learning qualifications lack a teaching practice module and this is their main weakness when it comes to finding work.

EBC is different because we operate a four-week intensive residential course and two online TEFL courses, all of which have teaching practice.

The EBC course gives you the skills you need to get quality EFL jobs throughout the world. Our course provides practical, hands-on training and focuses strongly on real teaching practice sessions observed by course tutors.

In addition, the practice classes are observed and include feedback so that you know how you are performing.

On an ever-increasing basis language schools that hire ESL EFL teachers insist that an applicant has an accredited qualification gained through a course that has real teaching practice.

Why do the best schools prefer this type of candidate? Simple, they want to hire people who have had quality training, can prepare and execute lesson plans, know how to behave in a classroom and have taught practice classes to non-English speakers. They want to feel secure that a new teacher knows what he/she is doing and will not screw up.
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In order to teach in a classroom environment you must be prepared and know what you are going to do. This is the main reason that employers place a very high value on prospective teachers with classroom experience. You are forced to prepare before teaching the class otherwise your class will almost certainly fail.

To summarise; if you have not completed a course that has teaching practice, you will limit your job and career prospects.

Planning the lesson you will teach

You must have planned your lesson and written down what you are going to do, what you are going to say, what material you are going to use, what questions you are going to ask etc. BEFORE you teach your classes.

Having a plan demonstrates the following:

- A plan gives the lesson shape and a framework;
- A plan shows the students that you have devoted time to thinking about them;
- Planning shows professionalism and commitment;
- Planning helps you to think about where you’re going;
- Planning helps you to think out ideas for the future;
- Planning helps you remember what you intended to do;
- Planning gives students confidence that you have thought about the lesson;
- Planning is crucial when you are being externally assessed.

Things you cannot learn from a book

In addition to giving you experience of planning and successfully executing your lesson, you will also experience the human interaction side of teaching.
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A few examples of what you may encounter and ways to resolve each problem

Your students keep talking in their own language

REASONS

- They want to communicate something important therefore use the language they know best;
- Speaking in their language is a lot easier than struggling with English.

SOLUTIONS

Talk to them about the issues

- Negotiate with students when it is appropriate to use their own language in the class;
- Emphasise that overuse of their own language means that learning English will be slower;
- Explain that using their own language denies them a chance to rehearse English usage;
- Exercise sympathy to their predicament with caution NEVER FORGET that learning English remains paramount.

Encourage them to use English appropriately

- Make it clear that there is not a total ban on their own language;
- Emphasise that speaking exercises must be done in English;

Only respond to English use

- Make it clear that you want to hear English;
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- You are allowed to ignore what students say in their own language.

Create an English environment

- You MUST speak English all of the time;
- Students must be constantly exposed to how English sounds;
- Students must be constantly exposed to what English usage “feels” like;
- You could try to anglicise student names.

Keep reminding them

- Go round the class during a speaking exercise encouraging students to use English;
- You may have to be assertive when encouraging English usage as some students are shy or embarrassed due to the fear of losing face by sounding “stupid”;
- Persevere with this because over time the students will gradually overcome their inhibitions.

Your students don’t want to talk

PROBLEM

You will almost certainly find in every class at least one person who does not want to speak English.

REASONS

- The student’s character;
- Other students may dominate and intimidate;
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- Students are not used to talking freely for reasons of culture and background;
- Student fears making mistakes and therefore losing face in front of the class.

SOLUTIONS

DO NOT try to bully or blackmail quiet students into talking, you’ll just make things worse.

- Use pair-work;
- Helps to get quiet students talking;
- In small groups they are under less pressure;
- Allow them to speak in a controlled way at first for example dictate a short, simple sentence and then ask them to read it back;
- Allow students to write down what they are going to say before they say it. This removes the risk element that a spontaneous response requires;
- Once these basic skills are acquired, you can start asking them simple questions about what they read. Psychologically they are more likely to respond.

Acting things out and read aloud

- Acting out dialogues encourages quiet students;
- You must work with the students like a drama teacher;
- Explain intonation, emphasis and emotion;
- If you give good guidance and get good co-operation, the result will sound good and the student will achieve a great deal of satisfaction.

Role-play
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- Quiet students, in general, speak more freely when they are playing a role;
- They do not have to be themselves;
- Allows the students to take on a new identity and behave in uncharacteristic ways;
- Allows the student to connect to a different personality and therefore reduces risk.

Use the tape recorder

- Ask students to record what they would like to say, outside the lesson;
- Listen to the tape and point out inaccuracies;
- Student is given the chance to listen, get feedback and repeat;
- Positive iterative process that encourages self-assessment and motivation.

NOTE: Some students may feel inhibited about this so try to persuade the student into accepting the task prior to asking him/her to do it.

Your students are distracted and/or not paying attention

- Remain silent until peer pressure causes the class to settle down and listen to you;
- Make a loud noise such as a hand clap;
- In a loud voice, say “OK. Please listen” or “Please look here!”;
- Stop the lesson and ask the distracted student what you and/or another student just said;
- Move closer to the distracted student and/or touch his/her desk;
- Give the distracted student a role/responsibility in the class, e.g. correcting homework or scoring in a game.
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Your students are bored and/or unmotivated
- Choose a juicy theme well pitched to students’ interests/experience. This gives automatic motivation and interest;
- Do a regular needs analysis;
- Negotiate a course plan with the students;
- Start the term with a personal information survey so you can identify the students’ experiences, interests, and concerns.

Your students are unclear what to do or doing the wrong thing at the wrong time
- Ensure instructions are clear: use gestures, imperatives, short 3 to 4 word sentences;
- Unify word and gesture;
- Ensure voice projection is strong;
- Ensure model is clear: use BB pictures, gestures, mime, visuals. Model the whole activity exactly on how you want the students to do it.

Strong student dominance
- Encourage, but gently deflect some answers from strong students to give production time to other members of the class. e.g. say, “Thank you, This side?”
- Use your eyes to encourage silent students to respond;
- Ask silent students a direct question;
- Grammar activities so that each student must contribute;
- Give strong students a non-production role, e.g. scoring;
- Use “class blocking”, i.e., gesture with your arms towards certain sections of the class when eliciting.
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Personality clash

- Separate the students concerned;
- If there is a conflict between two students, don’t ask student “A” a question, and then student “B”, as this will allow student “B” to exploit the situation to the detriment of student “A”;
- Be very balanced with your time and encouragement;
- Beware of themes/activities that may give vent to a personality clash, e.g. lesson themes/functions such as criticising, blaming etc.

As you can see, these are not things that you can experience from a book, you have to be there to see it.

EBC teaching practice modules

The EBC residential course includes eight hours teaching classes of non-English speakers at all levels.

The EBC premium online course has six hours of observed teaching practice. We also offer a two-week teaching practice course in Madrid. In all cases, you will teach classes to non-English speakers at all levels.

Your students are local residents who have a keen interest in learning English.

Classes are arranged so that you teach to groups of beginner, groups of intermediate and groups of advanced students. We do this so that you get to see the full range of problems at each learner level.

Teaching practice is observed and critiqued. Feedback is always provided so that you know how you are progressing and can iron out any wrinkles in your teaching style.

Imagine trying out your teaching style on the job, it would not take your employer or your students very long to figure out that you did not know what you were doing. Result? No more job!
Introduction to TEFL – Unit 4

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End of unit
Please answer the questions and then continue to the next course unit.

Question 1
Why should you bother doing teaching practice?

1. All the students want to learn English so why bother with practice.

2. To put theory into practice truly understand and experience what it’s like to stand in front of a class of eager learners and help them learn how to use English correctly AND you can make mistakes without putting your job at risk.

3. I will just practice on the job, no one will notice if I make mistakes.

Question 2
Why is teaching practice important?

1. It is not, I can learn to teach from a book.

2. I will get to meet people and be able to socialise more.

3. Almost all reputable employers will expect that the certificate course you have attended included real practice classes given to non-English speakers.

Question 3
Why should your teaching practice give you experience in teaching practice classes to beginner, intermediate and advanced students?

1. So that you become aware of the problems that each level’s learners have.

2. To add some variety to the teaching practice sessions.
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3. To find out how good my English is.

Question 4
What are some of the reasons students may not want to participate in speaking exercises?

1. They are embarrassed because they do not speak as well as I do.
2. The student’s character, other students may dominate and intimidate cultural reasons or the fear of making mistakes and losing face in front of the class.
3. They are lazy.

Question 5
Why is a lesson plan important?

1. I am a great improviser so I will not need to plan.
2. It gives the lesson shape and a framework, it shows the students that you have devoted time to thinking about them, it helps you to think about what you want to achieve in the class, it helps guide you through each lesson phase and activity.
3. To impress my course tutor.