

The A to Z of 21st Century TESOL

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*“Tell them and they forget.
Teach them and they remember.
Involve them and they learn.”
(Adapted from Benjamin Franklin)*

As an English Teacher/Trainer for 19 years now, I consider myself lucky to have experienced teaching a range of ESL/EFL/TESOL courses to linguistically and culturally diverse students – those coming from the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, People’s Republic of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Japan, South Korea, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, India, Solomon Islands, France, Italy, Germany, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Switzerland, Eritrea, Colombia, Spain, Holland, and The Netherlands. Given this multiplicity of learner variables, the challenge has always been (at least for me) how to effectively deliver meaningful instruction, ingeniously develop valuable teaching-learning strategies with apposite multimedia use, and fittingly address the varied needs and limitations of my students.

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in the 21st century is a mixed blessing seeing that the advancement of technology and the diversity and keenness of students in learning English have prompted teachers to be receptive to both long-established and modern-day teaching methodologies. Gone are the days of sheer chalk talk illustrations and reliance on textbooks for class discussions. Now is the era of multimedia language teaching and the World Wide Web in education.

The following is an anthology of my personal observation and experience of what constitutes 21st century TESOL.

Awareness

The awareness, attention and noticing of the particular features of language that append to learning is indispensable. Indeed it is crucial for our students to pay heed to language form, for example, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Yet, our teaching these formal aspects of language through rules, memorization, exercises, and drills seems to be incompletely effective. Hence, particularly focusing on aspects of language use within a given context can be even more valuable. Since language awareness centers on the realistic uses of language, our language input must be in context. Contextualization happens when we use “real-life” pertinent activities that create significant use of language for real communicative purposes. It facilitates our student’s understanding of how language users construct language in a given situation. We can contextualize language instruction by thematically or topically organizing the content of the language curriculum and success can be had if this is integrated in the course of study the whole time.

Blackboard

No, this is not the kind of blackboard aka chalkboard that we were all too familiar with in the 1990s. The Blackboard Learning System of the 21st century is a virtual learning environment and course management system developed by Blackboard Inc (Bradford, 2006). At National University of Singapore (NUS), we call this the Integrated Virtual Learning Environment

(IVLE). We can practically do almost everything in IVLE from communication to content of our courses. On the one hand, IVLE communication covers announcements, chat, discussions, and mail. We post announcements for students to read; students who are online can chat in real time with other students in their class section; we create a discussion thread and reply to the ones already created; and we send mail to one another – mass emailing to students in a course can be done too. On the other hand, IVLE content contains course content, calendar, learning modules, assignments, Grade Book, and media library. We post articles, assignments, etc; we post due dates for assignments and tests; we post different lessons for students to access; we post assignments and students submit them online; we post grades and comments for students to view; and we post videos and other media for classroom use. In a nutshell, all is completed and captured on IVLE.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The crux of CLT is for our students to learn to communicate in the target language. Lindsay and Knight (2006) highlight the features of CLT being that the stress is on meaning and using the language more willingly than on the structure and form of the language. In CLT, the four skills are developed simultaneously. We can employ oral and written activities such as dialogues, role plays, games and problem solving where student-to-student interaction is at its best. Our role is typically that of a facilitator who helps our students to communicate in English by encouraging them to work with the language.

Delegation

The contemporary language teaching-learning continuum is no longer dominated by teacher talk. In fact, it has been enthused by the delegation of responsibilities to students. Getting our students involved and allowing them to contribute to their learning offer better learning outcomes. We can therefore enhance the facilitation of learning as opposed to merely giving knowledge.

Exploration

Whoever thinks that language learning is merely confined to the four corners of the classroom has never explored the potential of learning beyond the classroom. Discoveries do not just happen in the classroom and neither does it on the Internet. We can actually allow our students to explore learning outside the classroom every so often for them to discover innovative ways of using the language within university premises. By this means they also get totally acquainted with their school environment in places like the library, cafeteria, and certain offices. Obviously, it can be beneficial to set specific parameters in the conduct of these explorations.

Feedback

We certify the learning in our classrooms by providing feedback, that is, teacher to students and peer feedback. This can be effective for our own reflection and our students too. We give feedback on the basis of our students' strengths, areas of concern, and suggestions for improvement. This can be similarly done by their peers. We can organize templates for a structured compilation of comments while our students can work on time-lapse photography or videos for later reflection. According to Parson (2001), *“teachers who provide specific, skill related feedback to students assist them in learning the skill at a faster rate. These teachers structure the class in a way that provides necessary practice opportunities, as well as give skill-related feedback at appropriate times. Learning would not occur without these critical elements.”*

Going Green

It is never too late to go green. We can teach our students to keep abreast with nature and its pressing concerns by creating posters or magazines that initiate the call for environmental protection and preservation. Besides, we can organize panel discussions or debates on germane themes. And we can let our students write essays or accomplish mini-research or even full-scale research either individually or as collaborative undertaking.

Habitude

The benefits of forming good habits among our students cannot be ignored. We can train them to develop their listening skills by subscribing to Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) Talks, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), The Cable News Network (CNN), Voice of America (VOA) and other interesting podcasts and decent talk shows. As for oral fluency, we can teach them how to deliver persuasive, impromptu or extemporaneous speeches. In addition, their reading habits can be formed through Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) from graded readers to more mature reading strategies and materials. Moreover, their vocabulary building can be shaped by engaging in General English (GE) and Academic Word List (AWL) online exercises and keeping vocabulary logs. Furthermore, their writing skills can be improved through journal or reflective writing.

Innovation

Certainly we can welcome the age of technology by teaching our students to be inventive. This means we model multimedia presentations and require them to do the same for their own demonstrations. You will be amazed at how our students can be really creative in integrating audio and video applications in their exhibitions.

Joint Venture

We can always teach our students the essence of collaboration. Employ activities that require pair work and group work whether for simple tasks or complex ones. Think-pair-square-share (TPSS) is a good avenue for our students to exchange ideas on applicable topics, synthesize information and arrive at a logical presentation of their group's stand on certain issues.

Kaleidoscope

A diverse collection of teaching strategies will always come in handy and it will surely rejuvenate our passion for teaching from time to time. We can discover new ways to relate to our students. We can assimilate storytelling, dramatization, singing or chanting into our classroom. I personally love integrating music in class whenever feasible. I look for songs whose themes are relevant to my lesson focus and use them as lead in. The lyrics of the song become a catalyst to achieving the learning aims for the day.

Learning Journey

Travelling with your class off-campus such as learning journeys (LJ) to museums and places of interest can be even more invigorating than on-campus explorations. With LJ, our students learn how to significantly use the language when they communicate with other people in these venues. Prepare a task sheet for them to accomplish before, during, and after the trip as this can be really useful. Again, it can be helpful to set detailed restrictions in the conduct of these tours.

Multiple Intelligences (MI)

Gardner (as cited in Lane, n.d.) asserts that *“a contrasting set of assumptions is more likely to be educationally effective. Students learn in ways that are identifiably distinctive.”* In this regard, we need to be sensitive, flexible and resourceful in conceiving and consolidating

activities that can legitimately accommodate these acumens from our students. An excerpt of Lane's (n.d.) "*The Distance Learning Technology Resource Guide*" delineates Gardner's MI and she proposes (to which I concur) how to go about them. At first, we have the *Visual-Spatial learners* who are very responsive to their environments and think in terms of physical space. Therefore, we can teach by incorporating drawing, jigsaw puzzles and maps. Next, we have the *Bodily-kinesthetic learners* who utilize their bodies efficiently. Hence, we teach with physical activity, hands-on learning, acting out, and role playing activities in mind. Then, we have the *Musical learners* who show sensitivity to rhythm and sound as they love music, but they are also responsive to sounds in their environments. Actually, they may study better with music in the background. Thus, we can turn lessons into lyrics, speak rhythmically, and tap out time. After that, we have the *Interpersonal learners* who can easily understand and interact with others. These students learn through interaction. They have many friends, empathy for others, and are street smarts. In view of that, we can teach them through group activities, seminars, and dialogues. Afterward, we have the *Intrapersonal learners* who have understanding of their own interests and goals. These learners tend to retreat from others as they are accustomed with their inner feelings; they have wisdom, intuition and motivation, as well as strong will, confidence and opinions. On that account, we can capitalize on independent study and introspection. Subsequently, we have the *Linguistic learners* who use words effectively. These learners have highly developed auditory skills and often think in words. They like reading, playing word games, making up poetry or stories. For this reason, we can encourage them to say and see words, and read books together. At last, we have the *Logical-Mathematical learners* who love reasoning and calculating. They think conceptually, **Abstractly** and are able to see and explore patterns and relationships. They like to experiment, solve puzzles, and ask cosmic questions. Ergo, we can integrate logic games, investigations, and mysteries in our exercises. Take note they need to learn and form concepts before they can deal with details.

Novelty

Novelty teaching and learning can be truly promising. Since monotony is basically rebuffed by both teachers and students, what better way to address this from happening than to try something new, explore new undertakings that can be very stimulating to both teachers and students? Newness in language teaching can be as huge as a complete change in the syllabus and as minor as the change in classroom layout. Having said that, whether big or small, the result is altogether favorable for our brain as it prompts us to revisit the whys and wherefores of doing something and trusting that we figure out how to subsequently do it differently and possibly more positively.

Observation

In the educational realm which is transcendent to real life, we can teach our students to be keen observers in the same way as we teach ourselves to also focus on our student's judgment. Rethink how our students interpret our lesson. Are we saying what they are hearing? Are we on the same page of achieving our learning objectives?

Project-Based Teaching (PBT)

In PBT, our students are actively engaged in doing and learning their coursework while we are keenly involved in facilitating the conduct and execution of assigned projects. Clearly, this is a learner-centered teaching which is inherently inspiring as it promotes collaboration and cooperative learning. A presentation or performance is required of PBT.

Question

Let our students question what they are learning. We should promote and consider questions to arrive at a comprehensive learning. Peter Abelard, a pre-eminent philosopher and theologian of

the twelfth century, aptly supposed that *“the key to wisdom is constant and frequent questioning, for by doubting we are led to question and by questioning we arrive at the truth.”*

Research

The readiness of the information superhighway that we call the World Wide Web can be a boon or a bane. Research has become even more challenging now due to our immediate access to innumerable sources that pose great danger in discerning which ones are creditable materials for research and which ones are nonsensical. Therefore, it is crucial that we teach our students how to discriminate good quality information from bad. We also teach them academic integrity so that they reference their sources properly and avoid plagiarism. Fortunately, we have Easybib, for instance, to help us generate citations in APA, MLA and Chicago formats for our bibliography, and Turnitin to detect plagiarism.

Social Media

Be social in the name of education. We can start by creating a Facebook group page for our class. This is not a bad idea at all so long as there is no abuse or misuse of any kind. Since most of our students' updates are instantaneously made through Facebook, why not take advantage of this chance to have real time updates with them pertaining to class activities and announcements.

Task-Based Teaching (TBT)

In TBT, the emphasis is on our students' communication through interaction in the target language. We endow them with opportunities to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself. An essential component to TBT is the enrichment of their personal experiences thereby instituting a clear association between the language they use in and outside the classroom. Nunan (2004) defines tasks *“in terms of what the learners will do in class rather than in the world outside the classroom. It involves communicative language use in which the user's attention is focused on meaning rather than grammatical form – this does not mean that form is not important as meaning and form are highly interrelated, and that grammar exists to enable the language user to express different communicative meanings”*.

Ubiquity

The omnipresence of learning objectives is the key to successful teaching and learning. We teach with the subsistence of learning aims coupled with the wealth of teaching materials and the efficacy of instruction.

Values

Academic integrity is the bedrock of scholastic endeavors. McCabe and Pavela (2004) emphasize the Ten Principles of Academic Integrity for Faculty. First, we *recognize and affirm academic integrity as a core institutional value*. We need to provide our students a mental framework to conform to the influx of ostensibly incoherent facts and information. Second, we *foster a lifelong commitment to learning*. We can be evidence for our students that learning can be an experience full of fascination and bliss especially when it involves ingenious ways of exploring interesting, significant and challenging questions. Third, we *affirm our role as guide and mentor* as the paramount impact we have on our students comes in the context of respect, attention, and connection. Fourth, we *help our students understand the potential of the Internet and how that potential can be lost if online resources are used for fraud, theft, and deception*. We need to accentuate that the culture of freedom and openness associated with the Internet depends highly on virtues like self-discipline, courtesy, and proper respect for the work of others. Fifth, we *encourage student responsibility for academic integrity* as students need to

work in communities where fair competition, respect for integrity and retribution for dishonesty thrive. Sixth, we *clarify our expectations for our students* concerning honesty in academic work including the nature and scope of student collaboration. Seventh, we *develop fair and creative forms of assessment* because our students anticipate their academic work to be fairly and fully assessed. We should utilize and constantly revise forms of assessment that oblige dynamic and creative thought, and endorse important learning opportunities for our students. Eighth, we *reduce opportunities to engage in academic dishonesty* by providing clear-cut policies, well-defined and realistic standards for collaboration, adequate classroom management and strict examination security. Ninth, we *respond to academic dishonesty when it occurs*. We cannot ignore nor trivialize this and so we nip it in the bud. The enforcement of academic integrity policies has to be prompt and impartial but not necessarily overly punitive. There must be educational implications whenever sanctions for first offenses are imposed. Tenth, we *help define and support campus-wide academic integrity standards*. McCabe and Pavela (2004) uphold that “*although faculty members should be the primary role models for academic integrity, the fact is that defining, promoting, and protecting academic integrity must be a community-wide responsibility not only to identify repeat offenders, and apply consistent due process procedures, but also to affirm the shared values that make colleges and universities true communities.*”

Web 2.0

LIKE Web 2.0. *Learn, Integrate, be Keen, Explore* Web 2.0. Teaching in the 21st century dictates that we be just as tech savvy as our students. We can start by *learning* the concept of Web 2.0 in education taking into consideration that there is more to the World Wide Web than just retrieval of information. Subsequently, we can *integrate* active online participation of our students such as wiki blogs whereby the bottom line is publishing of articles and commenting on them. Also, we have to be *keen* on the comings and goings of our virtual learning as it is paramount that we are equally active and visible in this process. We read their blogs, comment on them, and generate lively online discussions for all. Then, we *explore* other possibilities of staying connected with our students for educational purposes like Google Hangouts, Whatsapp and the rest. We can in effect allow them to use their android and smart phones in the interest of maximizing and documenting their learning. Correspondingly, we can use our tablets or iPads to search for information and conduct lessons.

X-Factor

The pursuit of excellence is not entirely cramped into reality television. In the gamut of education, Simon does not have the say but we do. For us teachers, we aspire for quality of teaching nearly on a daily basis. The epitome of our success is dependent on equipping ourselves with the finest ideas, effective methods, motivating materials, and relevant assessments. Additionally, we continually attempt to realize the best learning outcomes for our students and we never disregard the opportunity of molding them into well-rounded individuals.

Yearning

We inculcate among our students the desire to learn by moderating distractions and taming their mind. We complement this with activities that require thinking outside the box so that they do not dwell on anything at face value. We can also train them to be independent learners who can think on their feet and write critical responses at any given time.

Zeal

Yes, we promote enthusiasm in our classes however satisfying or challenging is the lesson. We guarantee that we come to class well-prepared, highly motivated, and open-minded. Parson

(2001) describes the following behaviors of enthusiastic teachers. First, we can vary our speaking voice; we can employ vocal calisthenics when we teach so as not to bore our students with droning lectures. Next, we can let our eyes mirror the excitement in our teaching; in this manner, we can convey the sincerity and congruence of our expressions and intentions. Then, we can use effective body language and facial expressions; we can animate teaching and learning with appropriate gestures, pacing and movement in order to keep them all on task. Most importantly, we offer our students encouragement; we can motivate them for sustained involvement in class when we give ample and sensible feedback.

Through the years, all the facts and information embodied in this compilation of 21st century TESOL have spawned a teaching philosophy that I am privileged to promote, that is, teaching *LIFE*. Teaching *LIFE* is accomplished through assisting our students in *learning* the fundamental content and related concepts of the course, *inculcating* in them the need to enhance their critical thinking skills and acquire lifelong learning skills, *facilitating* valuable involvement in both independent and collaborative learning activities, and *expanding* problem-solving and critical thinking strategies to promote meaningful learning with emphasis on integrating tasks, cultivating their attitudes, skills, and knowledge, and reflecting on end for educated decisions on their learning progress.

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