
EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING FOR MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

The rationale behind this paper is that teachers will teach in ways that they have been taught and trained as teachers. Most training programmes prepare teachers to teach communicatively, but unfortunately few pay any attention to the fact that most teachers will probably be teaching English in Multilingual communities. It is my belief that lecturing teachers on communicative methodology will not be successful in helping them to teach communicatively in the classroom or prepare them to work in multilingual environments. In our training in Omani Training Centres, we adopt an experiential approach and this paper seeks to justify this by showing how it is collaborative and will lead to teacher autonomy and ultimately we hope to the encouragement of independent learning in the schools. In this approach our participants will experience different techniques and afterwards they will reflect on such educational issues as classroom management, learning styles, learner independence and collaborative learning. We also do not neglect the role of translation, but ensure that this is done in a communicative way. This paper will show how this can be done by examining several of the techniques that I use in training.

1. INTRODUCTION

In our globalized world more and more countries are becoming multilingual even though in the past there were few that were solely monolingual. For example, the British Isles had from the start several indigenous languages like Cornish, Gaelic (both Scottish and Irish varieties), Welsh and Manx, which gradually lost their prominence to that hybrid of Anglo Saxon and Norman French, English. Indeed the almost total suppression of these languages by English was the first of that languages many victories on its way to its position as the first global lingua franca that it has now become. However, increasingly cognitive scientists and linguists stress that beside social and economic benefits of being bilingual or multilingual there are cognitive benefits as well. (Cummins 1984, 2000, Diaz 1985). Thus being bilingual in English and your own L1 can bring great benefits, but above all the continued spread of English as a global lingua franca must not be at the expense of other language especially those minority languages that are already endangered. This paper advocates ways in which English can be taught communicatively but also in situations where the two languages can be used in communicative situations.

Even in this post method era, many, if not most, EFL teacher training courses stress the need for the target language to be taught communicatively. However, as Bailey (1990) pointed out teachers teach in ways they were taught. This view is supported by Olsen and Hora (2012) who also observed that teachers generally teach in the way that they were taught and many teachers were taught languages by other methods rather than the communicative approach. If this is the case then lecturing teachers on the virtues of communicative methodology or presenting prospective teachers with research evidence that points to its efficacy will not convince these teachers of its usefulness in the classroom.

2. Rationale for this approach

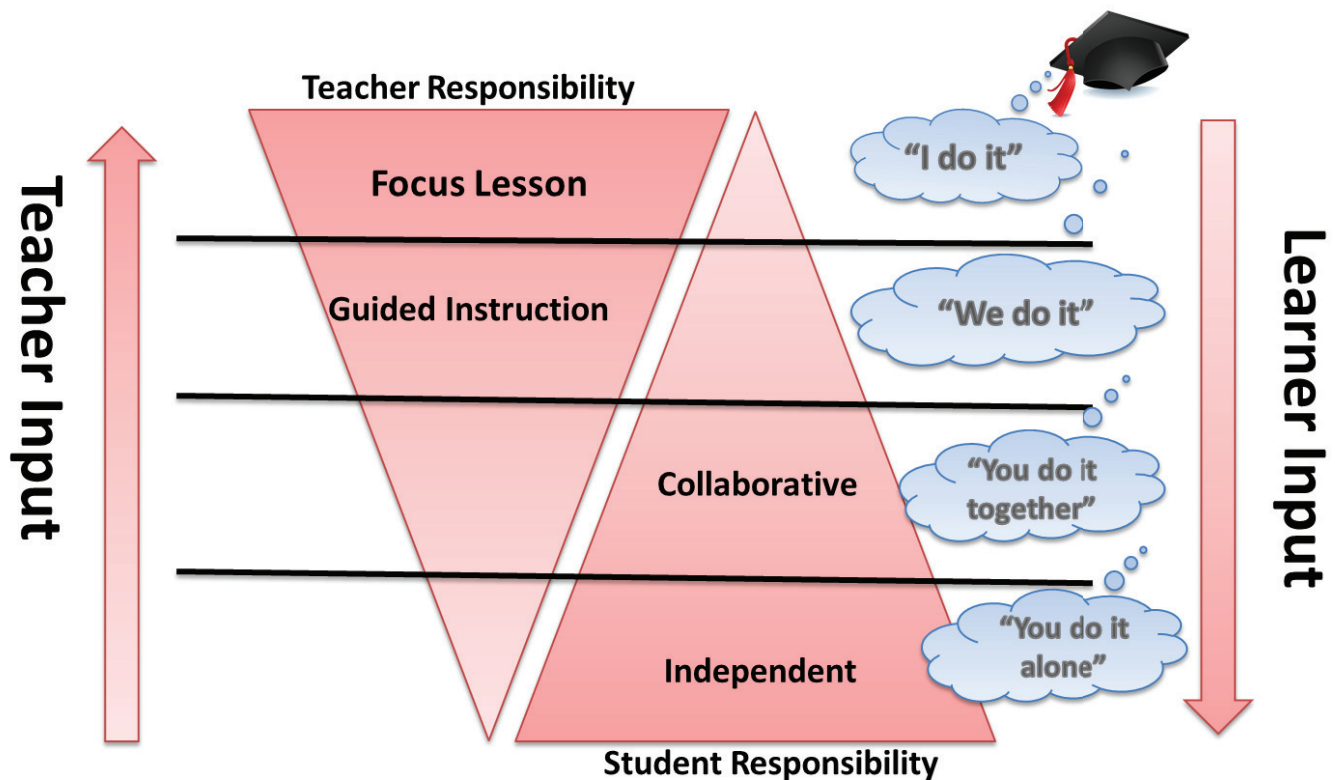
As we believe that teachers need to experience the methods they will use in teaching, the English in-service training carried out in our training centre is, in general, experiential. Our major belief is that while teachers are being trained they should, as far as possible, experience the techniques and

methods that their students will encounter when trying to learn English in their classrooms. Likewise, our trainees need to experience classroom management techniques, opportunities for continuing professional development, peer observation, peer coaching and mentoring as well as other aspects that go to make up a teacher's life. In order that our trainees learn experientially we employ techniques that are 'participant-centred' which encourage learner independence, autonomy, creativity, discovery, collaboration and cooperation and above all encourage them to reflect on what they have done in their lesson and their students' reactions to this. We also show them some ways that translation can be used communicatively and creatively in the classroom.

This approach is founded on our belief that successful teaching can only be grounded in successful learning. At a teachers' forum recently on "What makes a successful lesson?", a supervisor asked a question about a lesson that he said was good, but the students had failed to learn. Surely, the answer is that no lesson can be judged as 'good' or successful if learning does not take place. Of course, what helps students to learn is a matter of great debate. Most people would probably agree that what helps learning to take place is multi-faceted, and includes such factors as student motivation, teacher qualities, teacher knowledge, size of class, the curricula, equipment and materials, and learning and teaching styles. Theoretical backing for our position comes from educationalists, like Carl Rogers (1951), who emphasized that a person cannot teach another, but only facilitate learning, which we try to do by encouraging learner independence. From Kolb, Rubin & McIntyre, (1974) we have found support for the following ideas that they say will encourage learning.

- Concrete experience
- Observation of and reflection on that experience
- Formation of abstract concepts based upon the reflection
- Testing the new concepts

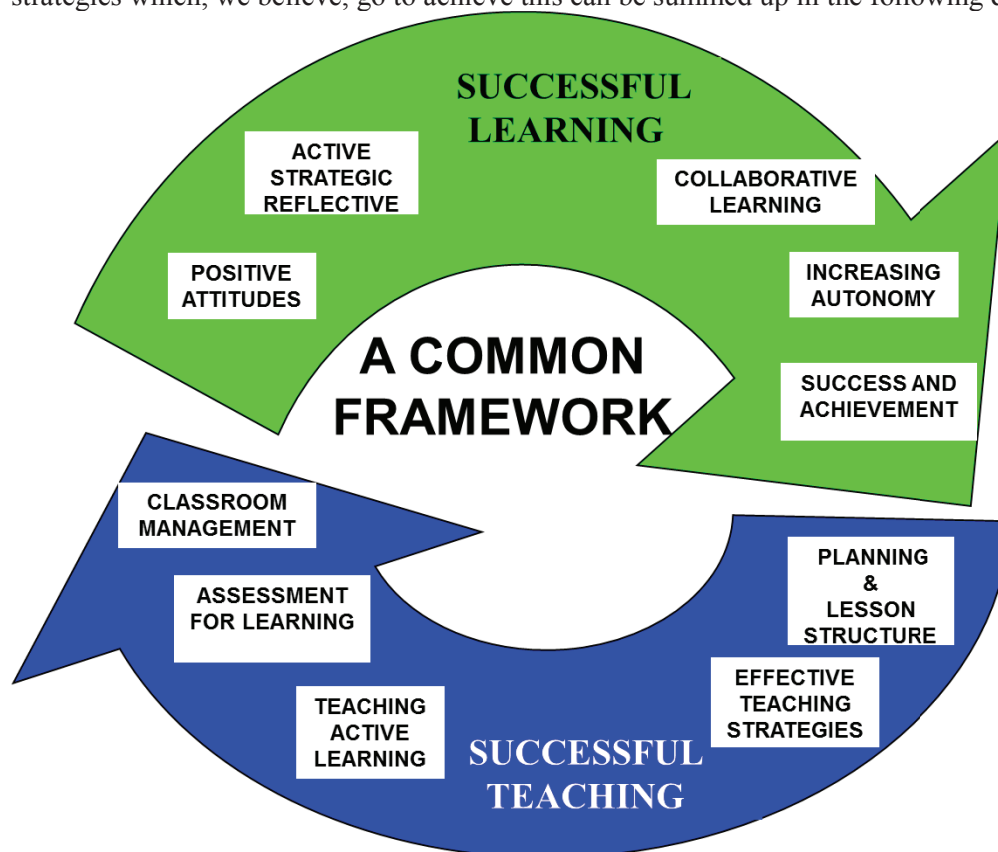
Fisher and Frey (2008) in their "Gradual Release Model" add further support to the idea of gradually giving the learner more and more autonomy by a process of at first encouraging collaborative learning before the student reaches full independent learning.



This adapted diagram illustrates the gradual release model first put forward by Fisher and Frey. It shows how the teacher's explicit input in the class gradually diminishes as learner independence grows, until the final stage when the learner is fully autonomous and the teacher becomes merely the facilitator.

Task Based Learning (Prabhu, 1987) with its emphasis on providing students with a 'reasonable challenge' is also a central tenet of our courses as nothing motivates students more than success. Thus tasks on our training courses are designed to allow students to succeed, though to do this they may need scaffolding from peers which will encourage collaborative learning. Scaffolding can of course be provided by the trainer but to encourage learner autonomy the trainer can point the students towards materials that will scaffold him or her or encourage him to get help from another student. At this stage the teacher act as a facilitator, as Rogers recommends.

Our philosophy on successful teaching which leads to successful learning and the overall strategies which, we believe, go to achieve this can be summed up in the following diagram.



This shows that, in our view, successful teaching leads to successful learning which in its turn leads to successful teaching. To achieve this goal, the teacher must plan lessons carefully to ensure that the teaching strategies used are effective in that they promote learning through varied activities that promote collaboration and help students to achieve success at each stage of the lesson. This cannot be done unless the management of the lesson proceeds in an ordered way which allows the students to be actively engaged in the lesson and for this to happen the teacher must constantly assess whether learning is taking place so that he or she can, if necessary, adjust tasks before proceeding to the next stage. If the teaching is successful learning will take place and the students will be on task and collaborate to achieve

the outcomes and thus they will succeed in their learning, which will motivate them to be engaged in further stages of the lesson.

To sum up in our view the five main characteristics of successful teaching are:

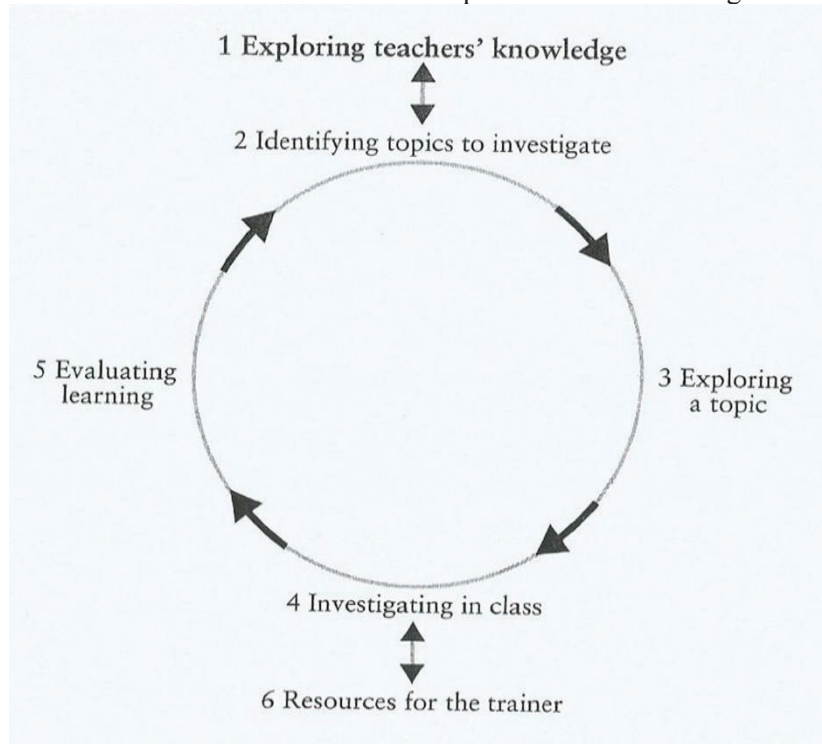
1. assessment for learning
2. interactive teaching strategies
3. teaching active learning strategies
4. class management: practical ground rules for behaviour and learning
5. effective planning and lesson structure.

Similarly, we believe that successful learners:

1. achieve
2. learn actively
3. progress towards increasing independence
4. work collaboratively
5. have positive learning attitudes.

3. Our Practice

Now that we have defined our philosophy we will show how we do our best to put this into practice in our training of in-service teachers. First, we have to find out what knowledge and skills our teachers already have before they attend our courses so that we can tailor these courses to meet their needs. Once we have identified the topics they wish to develop we must explore ways in which we, the trainers, and they, our teachers, can jointly investigate these topics. It is also important that both the teachers and the trainers reflect on the process before deciding how to explore further topics.



As mentioned earlier we believe in experiential learning and therefore the great majority of our activities involve an element of experiential learning on which the teachers reflect on how and what they learnt and whether they can adapt the technique in the teaching of their own students. In the next part we will present some of the actual activities we have used.

4. THE ACTIVITIES

The activities can be divided into several broad categories, most of which are developments of methods well known in the teaching of EFL. From Tessa Woodward (2003) we have adopted, or in most cases adapted, ideas from 'Loop Input'. Adaptations from other common EFL techniques include: jigsaw readings, information gap activities, role plays, EFL games, sorting, matching and prioritizing activities to mention a few of the techniques. In some cases our activities may incorporate several of these techniques in one task.

We have also experimented with ways in which translation can be used communicatively in such activities as role plays and the use of authentic materials.

I will now give examples of some of the activities.

4.1 The loop input. A running dictation.

This is adopted directly from Woodward. In this activity the teachers are divided into pairs and several identical texts on the instructions on how to do a running dictation are placed on a wall outside the classroom. The teachers then do what is on the text (see Appendix I).

After they have completed the activity we return to the classroom and the teachers are encouraged, first in groups, and then in a plenary to reflect on the activity and whether and how they can adapt such an activity for their own classes. Such reflections inevitably bring up issues such as class and time management, how to find suitable texts, and learning styles. A running dictation is noisy and will stir up the children and this can lead to a discussion on 'stirrer' and 'settler' activities and how after a stirrer you may need a settling activity, such as a writing task, to restore a more tranquil atmosphere.

4.2. Another loop input activity. Jigsaw Reading.

This can also be done as a loop input with the instructions on how to do a jigsaw reading being divided into three separate sections. The teachers are divided into three equal groups, with each group reading one section. The groups then discuss their sections and make notes on the important points in their sections. It is important that each person in the group makes notes. Then each person in each group is given a number and then all the people with the same number from the different groups get together and form new groups. In these new groups they tell the others about their information. At this stage it is important that they don't just read the information.

Once the jigsaw reading is complete the teachers with the help of the trainer reflect on issues such as the instructions needed to do the activity and class management issues that may arise from such an activity and what they need to do if they are to use jigsaw readings with their own classes. At this reflective stage we have often found that teachers point out that such a technique integrates all the skills. First of all the students read the text which they then discuss in their groups to write notes, so that when they form the other groups to disseminate their information they can easily speak about their text without reading it. Finally, they will listen to others telling them about their texts and write further notes.

A final stage in this experiential activity on learning how to use jigsaw readings is that the teachers take a text from one of the textbooks they use in school and see how they can adapt it for a jigsaw reading. Ideally the teachers should then try these texts in their classes and report back on the results in a subsequent session.

4.3. Role Play on Learning Styles

The objective of this activity is for the teachers to experience what it is to do a role play while finding more information about learning styles. This is usually done after the teachers have already been introduced to the idea of different learning styles in a reading text. The class is divided into four groups and each group is given the same role card which is about one pupil who has a certain learning style. (See Appendix II for the role cards). Each group then decides what they should say when playing the role of their student in a discussion. This preparation can be for five to ten minutes. The preparation

stage is important especially for less able pupils. Once they are ready they form new groups so that each group contains at least one person for each role.

After the role play, the teachers will reflect both on the importance of learning styles in teaching and how the EFM (English for Me) textbooks used in our schools can be adapted to provide for these different learning styles. They will also discuss the instructions and management techniques need to conduct successful role plays.

4.4. Bilingual Role Plays

Role plays can be adapted for bilingual or multilingual settings. One way to do this is to do a role play with three people. One is a monolingual English speaker, one a monolingual L1 speaker and the third a speaker of English and the L1. The scene could be a local market where the monolingual English speaker goes with the bilingual speaker to buy something. As the shopkeeper cannot speak any English the bilingual speaker must act as translator and help to negotiate the sale. Such role plays give an opportunity for students who may be shy to speak, but can gain confidence by first speaking in their L1. Once they have gained confidence in speaking they may feel able to try speaking in English. These role plays can also show students that their own language has value. This is particularly important for minority languages in multilingual situations.

4.5. Other communicative approaches to translation.

In many multilingual environments, goods in shops may be advertised or priced in two or more languages. For example, in the Sultanate of Oman in supermarkets the names of goods and sometimes their descriptions are written in both Arabic and English. Once students are reasonably literate in both languages they can use this information to increase their vocabulary. In the fruit and vegetable section I read the Arabic and then when I go to the weighing area I try out my Arabic on the assistants and they correct my pronunciation and I help them with their English pronunciation. Most students these days have camera phones and so can photograph English signs and bring them to class, where the teacher can help them with pronunciation. Menus in restaurants are usually written in both languages as well. Some people might argue that some signs on local shops or the English translations in restaurants are sometimes misspelt or grammatically incorrect. However, this need not be a problem as students can be encouraged to notice and correct the mistakes.

4.6. Vocabulary

Recognition of the importance of vocabulary in language teaching has come to the fore since the publication in 1993 of Michael Lewis's book 'The Lexical Approach'. The importance of vocabulary had earlier been pointed out by Halliday (1975) who believed that the learning of a language is essentially the learning of meanings. We have often heard teachers say that students 'learnt that word last week'. Our reply is that 'the students were introduced to that word last week, but it is doubtful that they learnt it'. Such a view on the learning of vocabulary is supported by Nation and Waring (1997) who stated that learners need to encounter the word multiple times in authentic speaking, reading, and writing contexts at the student's appropriate level.

To ensure that teachers in our courses grasp the importance of ensuring that their students have multiple encounters with the vocabulary in their textbooks we have many short vocabulary activities which recycle the specialised vocabulary of teaching EFL. For example, we have a word bag for each day, where participants put the key words we have used in a vocabulary bag for that day. The next day these words from the vocabulary bag are used in at least one vocabulary activity. These activities include: bingo words, SNAP, GOT IT, Pictionary and other well-known word games. Instructions for the GOT it game can be found in Appendix III.

4.5. Extensive Reading

The value of extensive reading in the development of reading, writing and the building of vocabulary has been emphasized by ESL academics, such as Krashen (1984) We believe that "Reading Teachers" will encourage students to read and therefore it is important that the teachers should experience extensively reading for pleasure.

Several of our courses, like the Senior Teacher's Course, that we run in our Training Centre have up to 15 sessions that extend over several months. Teachers who work in Cycle Two Schools (Grades 5 -10), and the Post Basic Schools (Grades 11 and 12) are encouraged to get their students to read extensively for pleasure. To help them do this we include in these longer courses an extensive reading element where the teachers are encouraged to borrow both fiction and non-fiction books from our centre's library and to help motivate them do this we set up a friendly competition with prizes for those who read the most. There is also a prize for those who produce the most creative evidence to show that they have read what they claim to have read. To encourage them to enter the competition we show in each of the early sessions short videos (2-3 minutes) on extensive reading (Oxford Big Read 2013). We also have short informal discussions on what we all have been reading during the time when teachers are arriving or during the break.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have given the rationale for the training techniques used in in-service training programs in our Regional Training Centre in Oman. The approach is largely experiential and is designed to give serving teachers a real experience of the use of communicative methods which they can then adapt for use in their own classes. However, it recognizes that Oman is a multilingual society and that bilingualism is a skill that should be fostered and so within our training we have adapted some activities to incorporate communicative translation tasks.

Anecdotal evidence of the impact of the training on learning in the schools is generally positive, but a more systematic research project on the efficacy of these techniques and how this has impacted on Omani students' learning is needed.

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APPENDIX I

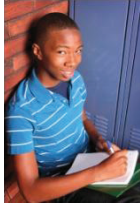
TEXT for Running Dictation

In this dictation there is a text on the wall outside the classroom.

The students are divided into pairs. One is a scribe and the other the runner. The scribe remains seated with pen and paper to copy the text he hears from the runner who runs to the wall dictation and memorizes some text and then runs to the scribe and tells him about it. The scribe can run back and forth as many times as the two feel is necessary to produce the full correct text.

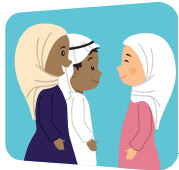
APPENDIX II

ROLE PLAY CARDS



BASHIR

Bashir takes learning English very seriously. He's particularly keen on English grammar and he spends many hours at home studying grammar and doing exercises. In class he often asks grammar questions and he knows so much about grammar that the teacher sometimes finds it hard to answer his questions. Bashir is also keen on learning vocabulary and he always has his bilingual dictionary in class and looks up any new words he meets. He prefers to do this than to listen to the teacher's explanations, because he likes to have an exact translation of the words or phrases. He quite enjoys his English lessons, but he doesn't like group work as he doesn't like speaking to the other students because he doesn't think that they are very good at English. When the teacher does group work he usually looks at his grammar books because he thinks that he can learn more by doing this.



RAYA

Raya really enjoys her English lessons, though she is very busy at home helping her mother and doesn't always have time to do all her homework. She likes her teacher and her classmates and enjoys speaking English in class. She always tries to say as much as she can, even when the topic doesn't interest her, because she knows by speaking she is practicing her English. If she doesn't know how to say it she will ask the teacher. She tries to correct herself but doesn't worry too much if she makes mistakes. She knows that she sometimes gets things wrong, but she believes that you will make mistakes when you are trying to learn. Raya is quite good at grammar and she enjoys trying to work out grammar rules from examples. She knows that she should spend more time on her homework, but her duties at home make this difficult. When she is out she will try and speak to foreigners she meets in English and she enjoys reading signs and notices in English.



MOHAMMED

Mohammed doesn't know why he has to learn English and he doesn't see how it can be useful to him now. He often comes to school late and he is tired because he spends his afternoons playing football and the evenings playing video games. The teacher usually explains new vocabulary and grammar in English, but Mohammed doesn't listen and instead asks his friend Ismail to explain what the teacher says in Arabic. Sometimes the teacher asks him questions in English but Mohammed doesn't try to answer him in English and at most will answer in just one or two words. He feels shy in speaking in English because he knows he makes many mistakes. The teacher often gives them group work and Mohammed uses these times to talk to his friends in Arabic about other things. At home he usually asks his older brother or sister to help him with his homework and is happy when they do it all for him.



MOZA

Moza is a hardworking student who finds learning English difficult. She enjoys her classes, though she is a little afraid to speak in group work because she knows that she makes mistakes and is afraid that the other students will laugh at her. She wants to use her English more, but the friend she sits beside will translate what the teacher says for her. She is interested in learning English, but she wants to be able to use what she learns outside the classroom more. She likes doing things with her hands, but finds that the teacher doesn't have many activities that involve them in making things. She doesn't like sitting at her desk for long periods of time, but likes to get up and move around and she wishes that the teacher would have more activities that require them to move.

APPENDIX III

GOT IT

- Use the 12 words from the word bag of the last lesson.
- Make a set for each group.
- Ask the participants to clear up the group table.
- Give a set of the words for each group.
- Ask them to put the words face up on their table.
- Ask them to put their hands on their knees, and they have to do this every time before you say a word.
- The trainer says a word from the set.
- The first one from a group to grab the word should say "Got It" loudly and keep the word.
- Do the same thing until you finish all the words.
- The winner is the one who collects the most words.