

the practice of english language teaching

by Jeremy Harmer · Language: EN

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Overview

Jeremy Harmer's "The Practice of English Language Teaching" is a seminal textbook designed for both trainee and experienced English language teachers. It offers a comprehensive and accessible exploration of the principles and practices of teaching English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL). The book systematically covers various aspects of language pedagogy, from understanding how languages are learned and the different methodological approaches to practical classroom management, lesson planning, and the teaching of specific language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and systems (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation).

The book's main argument centers on the idea that effective language teaching requires a blend of theoretical understanding and practical application, emphasizing a communicative approach while acknowledging the value of various techniques. Harmer encourages teachers to be reflective practitioners, adapting methods to suit their students' needs and contexts rather than adhering rigidly to a single methodology. It matters because it provides a foundational understanding for new teachers entering the profession and offers a valuable reference and source of new ideas for seasoned educators, making it one of the most widely used and respected resources in English Language Teaching.

Key Takeaways

- Understand that effective language teaching involves a balance between various methodologies, adapting them to suit specific student needs and learning contexts.
- Prioritize creating a positive and engaging classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable taking risks and participating actively.
- Integrate the teaching of language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) with language systems (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) for holistic development.
- Plan lessons meticulously, considering aims, stages, activities, and potential problems, but also be prepared to adapt plans spontaneously.
- Utilize a variety of teaching techniques and materials to maintain student motivation and cater to different learning styles.
- Reflect regularly on your teaching practice, evaluating what works and what doesn't, and continuously seek opportunities for professional development.

- Recognize the importance of feedback, both corrective and encouraging, in helping students improve their language proficiency.

Chapter Summaries

Teaching and Learning

This section introduces fundamental concepts of language acquisition and learning, exploring various theories and their implications for the classroom. Harmer discusses different learning styles, learner motivation, and the roles of both the teacher and the student in the learning process. It lays the groundwork for understanding why certain teaching approaches are more effective than others, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive and engaging learning environment.

Managing Learning

Focusing on practical classroom management, this part covers essential skills for teachers, such as organizing group work, pair work, and whole-class activities. It addresses issues like giving instructions, monitoring students, dealing with discipline, and creating a positive rapport. The emphasis is on establishing routines and strategies that foster an effective and cooperative learning atmosphere, ensuring smooth lesson delivery and maximum student participation.

Language Skills: Receptive

This chapter delves into the teaching of receptive skills: reading and listening. Harmer outlines various strategies and activities for developing students' comprehension abilities, from extensive and intensive reading to listening for gist and specific information. It discusses pre-reading/listening tasks, while-reading/listening activities, and post-reading/listening follow-ups, highlighting the importance of authentic materials and task design to engage learners effectively.

Language Skills: Productive

Dedicated to productive skills – speaking and writing – this section provides practical guidance on how to help students express themselves effectively. It covers techniques for promoting fluency and accuracy in spoken English, including role-plays, discussions, and presentations. For writing, it explores process writing, genre-based approaches, and strategies for teaching different writing styles, emphasizing the importance of planning, drafting, and revising.

Language Systems

This part focuses on teaching the core language systems: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Harmer presents various approaches to grammar instruction, from deductive to inductive, and offers practical ideas for vocabulary acquisition and retention. It also addresses the challenges of teaching pronunciation, providing techniques for improving intonation, stress,

and individual sounds, all within a communicative framework.

Planning and Materials

This chapter guides teachers through the process of lesson planning, from setting clear aims and objectives to sequencing activities and anticipating problems. It also explores the selection and adaptation of teaching materials, including coursebooks, authentic resources, and digital tools. Harmer emphasizes the importance of creating coherent and engaging lessons that cater to diverse learner needs and promote effective learning outcomes.

Assessment and Evaluation

Harmer discusses different forms of assessment, including formative and summative, and explains how to design effective tests and evaluate student progress. It covers the importance of providing constructive feedback, self-assessment, and peer assessment. The chapter also touches upon teacher self-evaluation and the broader concept of program evaluation, encouraging a reflective approach to teaching and learning.

Themes

- ELT methodology
- Classroom management
- Language skills development
- Teacher professional development
- Learner-centered teaching

Notable Quotes

- "Good teaching is not just about methodology; it is about personality, belief, and passion." — Reflecting on the qualities of effective teachers beyond mere techniques.
- "The best teachers are often those who are still learning themselves." — Emphasizing the importance of continuous professional development and reflection for educators.
- "Language learning is not just about knowing things; it's about being able to do things." — Highlighting the shift from a knowledge-based to a skills-based, communicative approach in language teaching.
- "Students need to feel safe to make mistakes. It's part of the learning process." — Discussing the importance of creating a supportive and low-affective-filter classroom environment.
- "Variety is not just the spice of life; it's the spice of language teaching." — Advocating for diverse activities and approaches to maintain student engagement and cater to different learning styles.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the practice of english language teaching about?

Jeremy Harmer's "The Practice of English Language Teaching" is a comprehensive guide for English language teachers. It covers the theories of language learning, practical classroom management techniques, methods for teaching all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), and systems (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation), as well as lesson planning and assessment. It aims to equip teachers with both theoretical knowledge and practical tools.

Is the practice of english language teaching worth reading?

Yes, it is highly recommended and considered a cornerstone text in English Language Teaching (ELT). It's invaluable for trainee teachers seeking a foundational understanding and for experienced teachers looking to refresh their knowledge or explore new approaches. Its balanced perspective, clear explanations, and practical advice make it an essential resource for anyone involved in teaching English.

How does the practice of english language teaching end?

Spoiler: As a non-fiction pedagogical textbook, the book doesn't have a narrative ending. It concludes by emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional development, reflection, and adaptation for English language teachers. Harmer encourages teachers to continuously evaluate their practice, stay informed about new developments, and tailor their methods to the specific needs of their learners and teaching contexts.

Who should read the practice of english language teaching?

This book is essential reading for anyone training to become an English language teacher, including those pursuing CELTA, DELTA, or MA TESOL qualifications. It is also highly beneficial for experienced teachers who wish to deepen their understanding of ELT principles, explore new methodologies, or find practical solutions to classroom challenges. Teacher trainers also find it a valuable reference.

How long does it take to read the practice of english language teaching?

Given its comprehensive nature and academic depth, reading "The Practice of English Language Teaching" thoroughly can take a significant amount of time. Depending on your reading speed and how much you engage with the concepts and activities, it could take anywhere from 10 to 20 hours to read cover-to-cover. Many readers also use it as a reference book, dipping into specific sections as needed.