

## Teacher Expert or Expert Teacher?

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For many years the teaching of languages has been considered to be different from other sorts of teaching. Language teachers have suffered from the view that their discipline is highly specialized, and little attention has been paid to the broader educational context in which they operate.

This view was largely the result of language teaching being informed almost exclusively by theoretical linguistics, which led to prescriptive models of language broken down into language items (structures, functions, etc.) to be taught in a particular order. This led to the *teacher expert* view of English language teaching in which the teacher was an expert technician, trained to develop skills for controlling and organising language input so that learners would be carefully guided through the various stages required to learn the target language.

Nearly 20 years of research into second language development has shown us that learning is not a linear process. Rather, language learning is developmental, largely subconscious, and a learner- (and learning-) oriented activity. The focus of the debate in language teaching has moved from language (and the influence of linguistics), to the teacher (and the influence of methodologies, textbooks and teaching strategies), to the learner (and the importance of understanding the learning process).

This change in focus has been paralleled by a refocusing of attitudes, components, and methodologies in teacher training courses. Effective teachers need to be able to relate to their learners as individuals, to acquire skills and knowledge of an educator rather than a specialised technician. We have, therefore, developed a view of the *expert teacher*, who not only possesses the linguistic expertise required, but also manages learning by understanding the learning environment. Although we can continue to help teachers develop the skills to tailor the content of their courses to the specific needs of their learners by, for example, using and adapting appropriate materials creatively and by focusing on a specific *product* (language and communication skills), we can go further and agree on common objectives for educating students at all levels and in all sectors to become more effective learners by focusing on the *process* (learning skills). The following "ten most common misapprehensions of the *teacher expert*" are offered as a starting point.

**1. What is taught is learnt.**

The teacher does not exercise total control over what the learner learns. You cannot force learners to learn--only help them to learn.

**2. The teacher knows best.**

The teacher is responsible for managing input into the activities in the language class, but teaching also needs to be a learning process for the teacher, who must adapt to the language and learning needs of the students.

**3. There is only one way to learn.**

Learners need to be encouraged by the teacher to experiment with different ways of learning and to become aware of their preferred learning strategies.

**4. Language teaching is special and different from other disciplines.**

Language learning is closely related to other types of learning. As educators, language teachers share common objectives with, and can learn from, teachers of other disciplines.

**5. The teacher cannot change the power situation in the classroom without causing chaos.**

This is a matter of educating students to understand that they can learn more effectively if they take some responsibility for their own learning. Changes in teacher and student roles need to be introduced and managed carefully.

**6. Minimize risks.**

Risktaking can motivate and benefit learning. Learners (and teachers) who do not take risks are likely to atrophy.

**7. Language learning is a linear process.**

Languages are not learned item by item, and teachers need to take this into account when designing courses and developing learning input.

**8. Learners have little or nothing to offer from their own experience.**

It is impossible (and undesirable) to separate learning from the learners' knowledge of the world and wider educational experience. The teacher needs to seek out opportunities for learners to relate the content and methodology of activities to their own experience and to other areas of the curriculum.

**9. Real-world texts are too difficult for learners.**

Real-world texts can help to motivate learners and remove the idea that language learning is divorced from reality.

**10. The written word is sacred (especially as far as textbooks are concerned!).**

Following a coursebook slavishly will certainly not lead to effective learning by all learners. Teachers need to develop the confidence to apply their own principles for evaluating coursebooks and using them creatively.

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