

WHAT ARE THE BRITISH TEACHERS DOING?

A summary of the ELTA public talk given on 22 October by Jim Y. K. Kerr, Derek Strange and Alan Walker

Mr Jim Kerr, Professional Adviser to the Centre for British Teachers (CFBT), chaired the talk cum teaching demonstration and gave a brief summary of the history of the CFBT project in Malaysia.

The CFBT teachers have written 15 items/sets of material for use in the schools in which they are teaching, in the form of cyclostyled booklets, packs of cards and sets of pictures. The materials have been prepared over the last three years and have, in a stage by stage process, been edited, coordinated and produced in printed form.

Two of the CFBT teachers, Derek Strange and Alan Walker, showed the audience five of the sets though the remaining materials were displayed in an adjacent exhibition. Derek and Alan explained (a) why the materials were designed in the first place; (b) what they are meant to achieve and demonstrated (c) how they are meant to be used in the classroom.

The following materials were discussed:

Visual Cue Cards

This package contains 100 cue card visuals for whole-class teaching. The 100 single-object pictures are divided into six categories, for example, people, household objects and everyday activities. The pictures consist of black and white line drawings which can be coloured in by the teacher and/or pupils. They can be used for a variety of teaching purposes, for example: (a) the presentation of language items; (b) as cues for oral drills; (c) flashed to elicit responses; (d) to teach vocabulary and (e) for game-like activities. Accompanying Teacher's Notes provide a general methodology which can be adapted for most syllabus items and for most classes.

Alan Walker demonstrated the use of a few cards from the animal set to teach the relative pronoun *which*, as well as some of the everyday activity cards to teach the present continuous. The

activities he demonstrated using the cards, including a game, showed clearly how the teacher can thoroughly exploit a few cards to teach a lot. Alan emphasized the importance of student identification with the 'people' cards by assigning the characters names.

Cards for Teaching Tenses

These cards were devised to enable the CFBT teachers to teach verb tenses in a careful and controlled way. Verb tenses are a very important part of the SRP Syllabus, and the CFBT teachers felt that existing textbook material was not appropriate, especially at the initial presentation stage.

This kit consists of seven sequences of cards—five sequences for teaching five basic tenses and two sets for revising them. There are ten cards in each set. The pictures are simple black and white cartoon-type drawings illustrating a simple storyline. The accompanying Teacher's Notes again give a step-by-step methodology.

Derek Strange demonstrated how he would use the set 'Ali's Day' to present the simple present tense in three linked phases: (a) the initial presentation consisting of a simple 2-3 line oral description of each picture followed by pupil imitation; (b) a listening exercise followed by controlled oral work; and (c) written work.

Derek showed us how he would conduct the intensive listening practice by jumbling up either the picture series or his orally-produced sentences and having students jot down the correct order as they listen or watch. He also emphasized the importance of controlled oral drilling starting with, for instance, *yes/no* responses from the pupils to the teacher's correct or incorrect description of each picture, to simple *wh-* questions with visual support. The guided written work, also with visual support, could comprise a blankfilling exercise or a matching pictures and narrative exercise.

Pictures for Prepositions (of Place)

These pictures were devised simply to meet the needs of the grammar component of the SRP examination. Prepositions are important test items in the examination, comprising one quarter of the grammar items tested. They are important too for map-based composition items as well as having general communicative value to pupils.

The kit comprises 40 cards (4 sets of 10 cards) and are aimed at practising 20 different types of prepositions of place. The Teacher's Notes have the usual step-by-step methodology plus worksheets that the teacher can duplicate for his pupils, reading passages exemplifying the prepositions of place, and four large wall pictures.

Derek demonstrated how one pair of contrastive prepositions of place (*outside* and *inside*) can be taught by (a) giving a language model; (b) having students repeat the model; (c) conducting a listening exercise (similar to the one described earlier); (d) conducting oral questioning (from *yes/no* to *wh-* questions); and (e) setting the written worksheet exercise.

Derek emphasized the need to include the visual element to worksheets to make them interesting to students. The composite wall pictures can be used for oral practice, including game-like activities. They are also related to the reading passages given in the Teacher's Notes and so can be used for visual exemplification.

Picture Composition Cards

These comprise 15 pictures series with 4-7 cards in each set. They were devised in response to a lack of commercially-available local material and because the teachers wanted individual cards, which could be revealed one at a time, rather than a series of pictures on one chart. The pictures deal with humorous topics and have Malaysian settings. The Teacher's Notes provide two suggested presentations, one for better and one for weaker classes, a summary of the main teaching points, key vocabulary, a summary of the story (2-3 sentences about each picture) plus further activities/exercises. The teacher is thus able to manipulate the level of difficulty using the same set of cards.

Alan demonstrated the need for a lot of vocabulary support and controlled questioning as well as a framework for guided composition written on the chalkboard as the story is built up. He highlighted the surprise effect of revealing the pictures in the series one at a time and showed how plenty of oral exploitation of each picture, starting from *yes/no*-type questions should be carried out (in contrast to the general 'What can you see in this picture?', 'What's happening in this picture?' so commonly heard in Malaysian classrooms).

Reading Kits for Forms I and II

Despite the oral bias in most of the CFBT materials, the reading and writing skills, so important in Form III, are taken care of by the CFBT-devised reading kits. The use of these materials lies somewhere between the controlled classroom reading of passages and readers and the pupils own spontaneous reading outside the classroom.

The reading passages are printed on small cards and are illustrated with black and white line drawings. Comprehension questions appear on the reverse side of each card. Although the cards are all of the same format, the length of the passages varies according to the grading level. For Form II, for instance, there are three levels graded according to vocabulary, length of passage and complexity of grammar items. A grading symbol, for the teacher's reference, appears at the head of each card.

There are 60 passages in each kit with two copies of each passage. There are also index cards, Teacher's Notes and answer cards for self-correction of the comprehension questions. The materials are designed to be used at home as self-pacing, supplementary material. The CFBT teachers recommend that with weaker students, the cards are read in class in groups. The Teacher's Notes provide information on organization, for example, distribution of the cards and keeping a record of progress. However, the teachers have found that their weakest students are simply unable to cope with the cards and they have devised a kit of cards called 'Simpler Still'.

Editor's comment:

The topic of the talk was 'What are the British Teachers Doing?' It was obvious to the audience who both listened to the talk and looked at the materials on display, that the CFBT teachers have been doing a lot beside their classroom teaching. The above are just five of the 15 sets of material produced by the teachers in the relatively short period of three years – a commendable effort and one which Malaysian teachers should and could emulate. Although the teachers have the advantage of having a central office in Petaling Jaya to co-ordinate print and distribute the materials, it is to the teachers' credit that they have organized themselves in teams at the State level to prepare, test and polish the materials before they are disseminated through the main office.

Many of the teachers came to Malaysia with very little knowledge of the country and of the classroom situation, yet they have responded to the challenge of preparing materials specifically for Malaysian lower secondary pupils. As one of the speakers said, the initial stimulus in the preparation of the materials came from the need to be able to communicate with the pupils. Having very little, or no, knowledge of Bahasa Malaysia they found that, in comparison with their Malaysian counterparts, they needed to use visuals in order to establish communication. And out of this need grew the relevant teaching techniques. The CFBT teachers have found the using of visuals to be a stimulating and gratifying experience and, more importantly, the visuals have aroused the interest and attention of students many of whom appeared 'starved of visual experience' in the classroom.

Noor Azlina Yunus



Picture Series drawn by
Derek Strange, CFBT