



The Inspector calls on the Primary Teacher

Inspector: Well, you must admit it's a bit disappointing. Here you are, a trained teacher, and your own English is good, yet your classes are not doing as well as they should. Why do you think that last class, the IID, was so bad?

Teacher: It's the text we have to use. It really doesn't teach the syllabus properly. And even so there's not enough copies to go round. Most

of the students are sharing, and I can never set homework from it.

Inspector: What about changing it?

Teaching: We've still got two years to go with this one.

Inspector: Even when you choose another text from the prescribed list you'll still have to supplement it. So now, what have you managed in

that line with this one?

Teacher: I've really done quite a lot. I've followed the Teacher's Handbook. You must have noticed my teaching kit.

Inspector: Yes, a very good effort that. And I noticed you were using some reading passages of your own.

Teacher: Yes, most of them I got hold of on the Key Personnel course; but what is a real trouble is the duplicating. I'm lucky to have about thirty passages ready now.

Inspector: What about supplementary readers? I didn't see any in the classrooms.

Teacher: Where will I get the money? You know how poor these children are. I can't ask them to buy simplified readers when they haven't enough money to buy the textbooks.

Inspector: And I noticed that the library hasn't any simplified readers yet. The books all seem to be meant for English-medium children at about Standard VI.

Teacher: None of my students can read anything that's there. We haven't had any new books for the last two years. I wonder where

Inspector: Yes, yes, no doubt we can find out where the library money goes to. But what have you done to help? Have you provided a booklist of suitable books?

Teacher: I'm not in charge of the library.

Inspector: No, but you could help. Why not look up the booklists you were given at training college, or on the courses you've been on, and suggest that some of them might be bought?

Teacher: But really what I want your help on is just teaching the syllabus items. My classes, particularly that IIID you saw, seem to learn very slowly, and we can't keep up with the others. I really have to go on to the next item, even if they haven't learnt it properly, or we would never cover the syllabus.

Inspector: All right, then, you can go on, but keep the previous item in mind, especially if it is a really important one, and try to combine it with some later teaching. You must have seen the consolidation exercises in the Handbook, and you should try something like that.

Teacher: The trouble is, we have a scheme of work laid down for all classes, and I've got no As or Bs, all Ds and Es and even one hopeless F class. If we must stream our classes

Inspector: Yes, I quite agree. If the classes are streamed, so should the schemes of work be. But remember the students come first. You are teaching them, not a scheme of work.

Teacher: But we have a common test for all the classes and we must cover the same items or my students won't pass.

Inspector: They'll have no chance to pass anything, now or later, if you only think of "covering the syllabus". Don't you see that if you rush through all the items your pupils won't learn to use any of them correctly, whereas if you go slowly, at their pace, and see that they have really mastered some of them, they will have a real chance to pass any test?

Teacher: Yes, that sounds all right in theory, but I don't set the test.

Inspector: No matter who sets it, if your pupils have learnt 10 out of the 20 set items, they will manage to pass; but if they make a hotch-potch of the whole 20 because you rushed them through, then they'll pass nothing. But I can see that you have a tremendous range of ability in some of your classes. I noticed that when I was teaching your IIID some of them could answer very well, but some of them couldn't even read aloud – and that's the absolute minimum of what they should be able to do at this stage.

Teacher: Some of them knew absolutely no English when they came into that Standard Three class. I can't get them to speak at all, or to answer my questions. They just stand up and say nothing. You know, they don't speak English outside the classroom.

Inspector: Yes, well, I think I am aware of that. But what we are concerned with is teaching them to speak within the classroom. And we can't have all the answers coming from the same students all the time. What have you done about helping your weaker ones?

Teacher: The ones who can answer are the ones I taught last year. They really all ought to know things like the pronouns and the past tense, because they were covered in the syllabus for last

year, but they don't.

Inspector: No, they haven't managed to learn them, and so you must teach them somehow, or they will go on making mistakes in their written work and being very unwilling to speak at all. Have you tried group work? What about putting the brighter ones into one group, and giving them some assignment, reading by themselves, while you concentrate on more elementary reading with the weaker ones?

Teacher: But I can't control the class if they are in groups.

Inspector: Not if each group knows exactly what they are to do?

Teacher: But what if they make mistakes when they are reading aloud?

Inspector: Not reading aloud. I meant silent, individual reading. Or it could be written work which you have prepared for them, some exercises better than what you find in your text, some composition subject which makes them use all the structures you have been teaching.

Teacher: You know there are 48 pupils in IIBD and the period is very short. I really can't spend such a lot of time with the weak students, or I shall never cover

Inspector: There are other ways of getting them to speak that don't take up much time, and are enjoyable too. Have you tried games with them? or songs? They are probably ready to learn poems and repeat them or sing songs, even if they are too frightened to speak alone.

Teacher: But I can't sing.

Inspector: There's always someone in a school who can teach a song. Or the children could learn from a tape. Have you a tape-recorder?

Teacher: The school? Oh, no. We're a poor school.

Inspector: But you yourself have a transistor tape at home? Why not bring it once to school and see what you can do?

Teacher: But I've no tapes for children.

Inspector: Then write to your local AVA centre and ask them to send you the tape of songs for Primary English; there's a good one with lots of the songs you noticed in the Teacher's Handbook. They have the structures you are teaching, and some nice simple tunes that the

children pick up easily and enjoy singing. Do you listen to Schools Broadcasts?

Teacher: No, our classes are not at the same times. And the radio set is kept...

Inspector: Yes, I can guess that. But your local AVA centre should help you again here. Ask them to let you have a tape of some of the broadcasts, say the stories they tell, and you'll find the children will enjoy the change. Now, I notice you have the same pictures on the walls as the last time I came. What about some new ones?

Teacher: I really haven't time to do all that myself.

Inspector: Why not get your pupils working? Ask them to cut pictures out of newspapers or magazines, stick them up, and then see how much you can use them in oral work, and in games, and for written compositions. You know of course that you don't just let your pupils describe what is happening in a picture, all in the Present Continuous tense — "The man is driving a car. The woman is crossing the road." That kind of thing won't take you very far. Tell your pupils that they are that man, and they must write about where they drove yesterday, and where they drive every day and where they will go tomorrow. You must always use your imagination to go beyond the picture, so that your pupils will be made to use a variety of structures and words.

Teacher: Now my free period's up. Everything you say is all very well, but it all means more work for me. And I've got a lot of teaching hours, and the marking take me a long time because my pupils are so weak and make so many mistakes. Look at the pile of books there!

Inspector: I think a lot of that correcting might have been avoided if you had done more oral work in the class, so that the correct sentences were drilled in before they were written down. But it's not you who should be working hard, it's your pupils. Can we make them do all the talking instead of you? What about these dialogues, have you tried them out yet?

Teacher: I meant to, but really I've got to give all my time to cov.....

Inspector: They cover the syllabus very effectively, as you'll see. Come along and I'll give you a demonstration in your IIF class of what can

be done with them. You'll see we'll make even
the weakest of your students there speak,

and speak well, and enjoy themselves as well.