

5 Eliciting, giving instructions and setting up activities

Eliciting

Eliciting is when the teacher brings out student knowledge, suggestions and ideas. You can do this by asking questions and by encouraging and guiding contributions. By eliciting you can use a little ‘teacher talking time’ to increase ‘student talking time’. Finding out what the students already know and getting a few ideas from the students about a context or some vocabulary related to it is a useful way of setting up an activity, whether it be a roleplay, a game, a listening task, the introduction of a new language structure, etc.

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What are the advantages of eliciting?

By eliciting you:

- get the students involved and interested;
- bring relevant information to the front of their minds;
- increase the amount they talk;
- help them take responsibility for their own learning. Eliciting gives members of a class the necessary and motivating feeling of being encouraged to invest part of themselves, give some of their opinions and contribute some of their knowledge so that what happens seems to depend partly on the students themselves;
- get crucial information about what the students already know and can use in relation to the language you are focusing on. This helps you to avoid teaching what they already know and helps you to assess how far students are with you as you go through the lesson.

What are the disadvantages?

- Eliciting can take time and if time is short you may want to *tell* the students and quickly check they understand.
- You can’t elicit something the students don’t know in the first place. You can spend ages trying to elicit language which is just not there – this leads to frustration on your part and confusion and feelings of inadequacy on the part of the students.
- There is a danger that if you elicit what you’re looking for from one student you assume (perhaps mistakenly) that all the students in the group understand.

So, eliciting is quite a difficult skill. It needs practice and experience if it is not to be time-wasting and embarrassing. The most important qualities you need are the ability to really listen to the students and the ability to respond quickly and flexibly, using the techniques outlined earlier in this chapter under these headings: *eye contact, use of gesture, using students’ names* and *attention spread*. For example, if a number of students are calling out at the same time you need to be able to ignore what you don’t want and pick up on the contributions you are looking for.

Techniques for eliciting

Usually eliciting consists of giving clues and prompts in order to get the students to make an appropriate contribution. Eliciting should never be simply guessing what’s in the teacher’s head!

At higher levels eliciting might consist of something like: *What do you know about the life of Gandhi?* or *Look at this picture and describe the man as fully as you can.*

At lower levels, however, the eliciting needs to be more guided by the teacher, particularly if it serves a specific aim, as it would when you are building up a context for the introduction of a new language item. For example:

Aim

To introduce and practise the structure *need + -ing* as in *the roof needs mending*.

Context

Diana and Charlie Roberts are looking at a house they want to buy. It’s in a very bad state at the moment.

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Visuals

A picture of Diana and Charlie. A picture of a dilapidated house.

Instead of saying to the students *This is Diana and Charlie Roberts. They are newly married. They are looking at a house for sale. It's not in good condition. There's a hole in the roof ...* you might approach the task of building up the context something like this:

- Teacher:** Right. Now, do you remember Diana and Charlie? (*showing picture*)
- Students:** Yes.
- Alberto:** Yes, last lesson. They married. (*Gesturing towards Alberto*)
- Teacher:** Married? Is that right, Alberto? They g ...
- Alberto:** Got married. (*Looking at Alberto*)
- Teacher:** Yes, again.
- Alberto:** They got married.
- Teacher:** Fine. When? Ten years ago? (*Looking round the group*)
- Students:** No.
- Beatrice:** No, no. Two days ago.
- Teacher:** Beatrice?
- Beatrice:** No. Two days ago.
- Teacher:** Yes, where are they here? (*showing picture*)
- Students:** A house. An old house. They look at house, etc.
- Teacher:** Yes. Is it theirs, Catrina?
- Catrina:** No. Maybe they want to buy it. (*Looking round the group*)
- Teacher:** Yes. Do you think that's a good idea – to buy the house?
- Students:** No.
- Teacher:** Why not, Tami?
- Tami:** It's old. No good.
- Teacher:** Tell me more, anyone.
- Students:** Dirty. It's old. The door's broken, etc.
- Matias:** Roof no good.
- Teacher:** Yes, Matias, the roof's no good. There's a in the roof.
- Emiko:** Hole.
- Teacher:** Yes, good.

Now look back at the extract and note the following points.

- The teacher makes use of characters and information about them from a previous lesson, thus reducing what has to be done in this lesson.
- The use of pictures to prompt suggestions.
- The teacher picks out the contribution he or she is looking for from a number of responses.
- The use of students' names and gesture to get contributions from individual students and the word *anyone* when eliciting from the whole group.
- By using a first-sound prompt (/g/ to elicit *got*) the teacher helps the students remember a word they know. It gives an important clue to what the teacher wants.
- An obviously incorrect suggestion (*Ten years ago?*) can sometimes provoke the

right response from the students. Use this technique sparingly and only when you are sure the students know the answer. Otherwise it might sound as though you are mocking them.

- Giving a sentence with a blank in it, filled in perhaps by humming the word (the hummed word having the same number of syllables and the same stress pattern) or by the first letter of a word allows the students to hear where the word is expected to come in a whole sentence.
- In this exchange both individual language items (*got married, hole*) were elicited as well as ideas and opinions (*Do you think that's a good idea – to buy the house?*) With specific language items you might, if necessary, provide correction and pronunciation practice, but when the students offer ideas and opinions you probably won't correct what they say since it's the *idea* rather than the *language* that's important. Before the lesson, decide where you are going to correct and where you want to focus on eliciting ideas and suggestions. (See Chapter 7: *Giving feedback to students.*)

Task 1 **Aim**

To establish which types of questions are most suitable for eliciting information.

Procedure

- 1 Choose a picture which could be interpreted in different ways.
- 2 Decide on your interpretation.
- 3 Write a list of five or six salient facts about the picture as you see it.
- 4 Write a number of different questions which might elicit those facts.
- 5 Work with a partner and try to elicit your interpretation. Discuss which questions were most effective and why.

Task 2 **Aim**

To give practice in asking questions to elicit information.

Procedure

- 1 Work with a partner.
- 2 Select a topic, for example 'school days'.
- 3 In two minutes, ask your partner as many questions as possible about his or her memories. Your partner should answer with one-word answers wherever possible.
- 4 At the end write down as many facts as you can remember.
- 5 Reverse roles and go through the same procedure.
- 6 Compare both sets for completeness and discuss each other's question techniques.

Task 3 **Aim**

To practise relating the students personally to a topic before eliciting facts about it.

Procedure A

- 1 Choose an unlikely topic (like 'filling in holes in the road' or 'toothpick manufacturing').

- 2 Try to get a group of your fellow trainees to relate personally to the topic by asking suitable questions.

Procedure B

- 1 Ask the group to think up a topic they have no interest in.
- 2 Get them to relate to it by asking interesting questions.

Task 4

Aim

To evaluate the effectiveness of eliciting techniques.

Procedure

- 1 Observe a teacher or another trainee and make notes on some or all of the following:
 - Did the teacher use a variety of techniques?
 - Did the students understand the questions?
 - Were the questions concise?
 - Did the teacher use visual clues?
 - Were all the students participating?
 - How many were called on to contribute?
(You may like to add some points of your own.)
- 2 Compare your observations with another trainee and/or with the teacher you observed.

Giving instructions

How can you make your instructions effective?

First attract the students' attention

Make sure everyone is listening and watching. Don't give out any handouts which may distract the students' attention before you need to.

Use simple language and short expressions

Use language at a lower level than the language being 'taught'. Long, more 'polite' language is time-wasting, slows the lesson down and involves you in more complicated language than the students can easily understand. Remember, as mentioned in Section 4: *Teacher talk and student talk*, impoliteness partly comes from an inappropriate use of language. Short instructions are entirely appropriate to this situation where the students accept your authority. Also, they usually realize that a firm directive manner is necessary in order to make language practice efficient and to avoid confusion and uncertainty.

Be consistent

This is especially important with low-level classes; use the same set of words for the same instruction. Common instructions are: *Everybody; All together; Again; Try again; Look (at the picture); Listen; Repeat; Say (X); Tell me; Look at the board; Stand up; Turn to page ...* . With beginners, spend time teaching them the language they need to follow instructions. (See Chapter 5 Section 6: *Learner development and study skills*.)

Use visual or written clues

Support instructions with visual clues wherever possible: real objects, pictures, gesture and mime (see Section 1: *Use of gesture, eye contact and the voice*). It is often easier to give instructions written on cards or pieces of paper that you have prepared, especially if you want the students to do different things (as in a roleplay) or if it is important that the students don't know the instructions given to their partner.

Demonstrate

If possible, show them what to do – give a demonstration or an example. Frequently, showing what to do is more effective than telling what to do. You can demonstrate a speaking activity by playing both parts yourself (moving position to show that you are two people), by playing one part and choosing a strong student to play the other part, or by asking two strong students to do (part of) the activity in front of the class. With written work an example on the board is often useful.

Break the instructions down

If the activity requires a series of steps, each requiring instructions, give simple instructions in segments and check understanding as you go along, rather than giving out all the instructions in one go. Or you can give only some of the instructions and allow time for them to be carried out before moving on to the next step. For example, where a change of seating arrangement is required before a roleplay, it is better to give the instructions and make the change before going on to assign roles and give further instructions about what they are going to do and say. Especially with any complicated series of instructions, write down what *you* need to do and say, in your lesson plan.

Target your instructions

Sometimes, instead of giving complete instructions to the whole class when the instructions don't concern everyone, you might give each student a number, a letter, or some kind of symbol. In which case it might be the number fives, or the Cs *only* who listen for what they should do:

Teacher: Right, listen to your number. One, two three, four, five (*pointing as the numbers are called*), one, two, three, four, five (etc). Hands up all the ones! Hands up all the twos! (etc). Monica, what's your number?

Monica: Two.

Teacher: Right. Listen. All the fours are going to All the threes ...

Be decisive

Use a signal, like the words *Right* or *Listen*, which students will learn to recognize as a cue for an instruction. Make sure the students know when to begin an activity; for example, say something like *Everyone. Start!* – perhaps accompanied by a downward hand gesture or a clap of the hands.

How do you know that the instructions have been understood?

After you give instructions *check* that they understand them – especially complicated ones.

Examples

- 1 Before a roleplay, after you have assigned roles:

Teacher: Shop assistants, hands up. Now, customers, hands up.

- 2 Before an information gap activity in which one student in a pair has information which the other student has to find out:

Teacher: Juan, are you going to show Jens your picture?

Juan: No.

- 3 Before a dictation:

Teacher: Do you write after the first reading or after the second reading?

Students: The second.

Teach the students expressions which tell you they don't understand and encourage them to use them:

Examples

Sorry. I don't understand.

Can you say that again, please?

When the activity has started, monitor to see if the students are following the instructions correctly. (See Section 6: *Monitoring*.)

Task 1



Aim

To show how clear, simple instructions accompanied by gestures are both easily understood and learned rapidly by a class.

Procedure

- 1 Make up a short dialogue in a fictitious or unknown language.
- 2 Make up some simple practice instructions to go with it: the equivalents of *listen, repeat, everybody, again* and *write*.
- 3 Drill the dialogue line by line (the 'students' – fellow trainees – listen and repeat) and then dictate the lines so those in the group can write it down as best they can.
- 4 Discuss the lesson (if possible some time later) and see how far the instructions have been remembered.

Comment

It is probable that the instructions will be remembered better than the dialogue. The discussion can then most usefully focus on the reasons for this.

Task 2



Aim

To give practice in keeping instructions to a minimum and yet making them clear.

Procedure

- 1 Take a coursebook and choose a page which has a variety of exercises on it.

- 2 Work with a partner. Discuss whether the written instructions are clear and sufficient for the students to understand without a teacher. If they are not, write out a set of instructions.
- 3 Discuss these written instructions and decide whether they are the same words you would say if you were giving instructions to a class. If they are not, write out the instructions you would give and say how you would check that the students understood.
- 4 Discuss where demonstration of the instructions might be more appropriate and how it might be done.

Task 3



Aim

To develop the ability to grade instructions to the level of the group, organize them, segment them and check the students' comprehension.

Procedure

- 1 Look at these role cards for a guided roleplay:

<p>STUDENT A</p> <p>AT THE GREENGROCER'S</p> <p>You are the greengrocer.</p> <p>Your prices: apples 90p per kilo oranges 20p each bananas £1.10 per kilo grapefruit 50p each pears 95p per kilo melons £1.60 each</p> <p>You have no grapes.</p> <p>You have no small change.</p>	<p>STUDENT B</p> <p>AT THE GREENGROCER'S</p> <p>You are the customer.</p> <p>You want: 2 kilos apples 6 oranges 1 kilo grapes a melon if they're not more than £1.50 each something else</p> <p>You have a £10 note.</p> <p>You don't want to spend more than £4.</p>
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- 2 Read the following transcription of how the activity might be set up with proficient speakers:

Well, we're going to do this roleplay, see, and we're in the greengrocer's. Now there's a slight problem. The greengrocer hasn't got all the fruit the customer wants and hasn't got any change. Not for a £10 note anyway. Now, the customer's got a £10 note but doesn't want to spend more than £4. OK? Look, I'll give out these cards. I want you to carry out this roleplay in pairs. Right? Now, you know who you are? Right? Now, you'll see if you're the greengrocer and a set of prices and, if you're the customer, you'll see a shopping list. I want you to stick to what's on those cards. All right. Are you ready? OK. Get on with it.
- 3 Underline the information students need to know in order to carry out the activity.
- 4 Simplify the vocabulary for an elementary class and cut out any unnecessary language. Add instructions where it would clarify what the students have to do.
- 5 Number the instructions and arrange them in logical order.

- 6 Write down how you would check that the students have understood the instructions.
- 7 Try the activity on a group, checking understanding at each step, or compare and discuss your instructions with another trainee.

Comment

Similar instruction-giving can be done for such activities as making models from Lego, operating simple machinery (eg tape recorders), giving directions, etc. It is often worth recording and transcribing the instructions as they would be given to a) a proficient speaker, and b) a low-level class. You might find you need to give very little contextual information in your instructions, but make sure your students know all they need to know.

Setting up activities**What are the different types of activities?**

For convenience, activities can be divided into the following categories, although there is often an overlap.

Controlled activities

Where *you* decide on the exact language to be used and control it accordingly, perhaps by the use of prompts, maybe spoken or written on cards.

Many drills (listen and repeat, or listen and change the language in a prescribed way) are examples of controlled practice activities. Drills can be choral (when the whole class speak together); you can cue in a part of the class at a time, or you can indicate for individual students to speak.

Other teacher-controlled activities include those in which students take part in short dialogues supplied by the teacher, or when one student asks a set question and another student has a prompt to indicate the appropriate reply. Many written exercises are controlled in that only one answer is 'correct'.

Guided activities

Where *you* decide on the language areas to be practised (eg giving directions) but give the *students* a certain amount of freedom. The materials you choose should allow the students to make different language choices, although these choices may be fairly limited. Both controlled and guided activities are often used when the focus is on the practice of particular language structures or vocabulary.

Creative or free communication

Where *you* supply the motivation and maybe the materials but the *students* are free within the constraints of the situation to use any language they have to communicate and complete the task set. These activities are often used when the focus is on the development of speaking and writing skills.

Ways to set up interactive activities

Students interact when they are doing pairwork or groupwork activities – they talk and listen to each other, rather than to the teacher. Where there is an *information gap* or *opinion gap* (when one student has some information or ideas that the other student has to find out about) these can also be referred to as *communicative activities*.

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Pairwork is sometimes referred to as *open* or *closed* depending on whether just one pair is speaking, usually across the class, to provide some sort of model for the others (*open*) or whether the whole class is divided into pairs and working simultaneously (*closed*). Frequently a closed pair activity is preceded by a small amount of open pair practice to get it going.

Another type of interactive activity is the mingle activity in which all the students stand up and move around talking in turn to the other students – so that pairs and small groups are being continually formed and re-formed.

Why are pairwork and groupwork useful?

Doing these interactive activities:

- gives the students more valuable talking time. It gives them more of the time they require to practise the language than is possible when you are dealing with the class as a whole;
- allows you to withdraw and monitor individual performances;
- encourages rapport between students;
- provides an opportunity for the students to co-operate with one another and learn to become independent of the teacher;
- enables the students to invest much more of themselves in the lesson;
- gives an opportunity for shy or unconfident students to participate whereas they would be reticent about contributing in front of the whole class;
- provides a change in pace;
- adds variety to a lesson.

Special considerations for pairwork and groupwork

The way you approach pairwork and groupwork can depend on such factors as the experience and expectations of the students, their level, and whether they are in a monolingual or multilingual group.

It is important to remember that not all students are used to interactive activities in class. You may have to introduce pairwork and groupwork activities gradually, making sure the tasks are clearly defined, and pointing out the rationale and advantages of the approach. In a monolingual group it may be useful to discuss the purpose of such activities and to set up the first one or two in the mother tongue. For further considerations for pairwork and groupwork with a monolingual group, see Section 9: *The monolingual and the multilingual class*.

At lower levels tasks need to be limited, more structured and generally shorter than at higher levels. However, although lower levels will need more controlled practice than advanced students they will still need opportunities to express themselves freely, just as advanced levels will need some controlled practice.

When do you do pairwork and groupwork?

This type of activity has a place in most types of lesson. Every opportunity should be taken for the students to talk to each other – when asking about unknown words, comparing their answers to tasks, correcting each other's work as well as in activities set up especially with pairs and groups in mind – practice dialogues, information gap activities, roleplays, discussions and games, etc. (See also *How can you encourage good group dynamics and interdependence between students?* on p57, and Chapter 5 Section 4: *Productive skills: speaking*.)

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The stage at which pairwork and groupwork takes place depends on the particular lesson.

Example 1

The focus is on the teacher as he or she introduces a topic or language area. The teacher elicits from the whole class and then they do some repetition practice together, followed by some 'open' pairwork. Later the students are divided into pairs or groups for some guided practice.

Example 2

The lesson starts with the students in pairs or small groups brainstorming a topic, analysing some language or doing a problem-solving activity before they come together to pool their ideas. The teacher picks out some items of language the students have been having problems with and conducts a controlled activity (listen and repeat) with the whole group for a few minutes.

Planning the activity

Make sure that:

- you have a clear idea of the purpose of the activity and how it fits in with the rest of the lesson. You may also want to make the purpose clear to the students, especially if this type of activity is new to them (see also Chapter 5 Section 6: *Learner development and study skills*);
- the activity lends itself easily to pairwork or groupwork;
- the seating can be organized to make the activity possible (see also Section 2: *Classroom arrangement*);
- the time the students spend doing the activity justifies the time you need to set it up. Often groupwork takes a long time to set up; pairwork is usually more suitable for short activities;
- all the students are occupied for most of the time, ie that some are not having to wait until another pair or group has finished;
- where different pairs or groups have different tasks these tasks will either take approximately the same time to complete or more capable groups are given the longer tasks;
- you have enough materials for each group or pair;
- you decide how you want the pairs or groups to be constituted (see below);
- you decide whether a chairperson or secretary is needed for each group;
- you think carefully about your instructions.

Organizing the class: putting the students into pairs/groups

You will need to plan how you will organize the students and perhaps indicate this on your lesson plan. You need to decide whether you want the groups to be random, 'streamed' according to level, or a mixture of weak and strong, talkative and quiet. Will they be grouped according to nationality, sex or age? Do you want friends to work together or are there some students you want to keep apart? Do you want to let the students choose who to work with? Do you want them to work in the same groups every day or in different groups each time?

Random pairing or grouping

Common techniques for doing this are:

- going round the class and giving each student a number – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc – and then asking all the 'number ones' to sit together;

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- asking the students to line up in order of the initial of their first name or second name, birthday or height and then dividing into the appropriate sized groups;
- having as many long pieces of string in the hand as there are to be pairs. Students take an end and find their partner at the other end of the piece of string;
- blindfolding as many people as there are groups who then in turn touch the people that are to be in their group (popular with children);
- giving out to each student at random a card with a word on it. The students have to mingle and find their partner. For example – *salt* would find *pepper*, *fish* would find *chips*, *Romeo* would find *Juliet*, etc. If you want to form groups you can put words on the same topic on the cards – eg *traffic light*, *road*, *car* would sit together and *apple*, *banana*, *pear* would form a group. To make this activity more difficult you can attach the words on the students' backs so they have to find out what their word is by asking one *yes/no* question of each of the other students before going on to find their partner. In this way you are using one type of interactive activity (a mingle activity) to set up pairs or groups for another interactive activity. This is a rather time-consuming way of pairing or grouping the students. Make sure you allow enough time for it and that, if possible, it links in (perhaps by topic or theme) with the following activity.

You choose the grouping

You can do this:

- by indicating by gesture and with the words *Get into pairs* that the students pair up with the person next to them (see also Section 1: *Use of eye contact, gesture and the voice*);
- by simply saying *Petra, Ali, Paula and Georg – I'd like you to work together over here*;
- by allocating numbers or letters as above, but to particular students, rather than at random. It is a good idea to have a list drawn up beforehand that you can refer to;
- by giving out cards as above but to particular people, according to a list you have drawn up.

In large classes you can quickly divide the class into three or four large groups and then do the grouping activities with cards. You have three or four identical packs of cards and the grouping takes place within the large groups.

You let the students choose who to work with

This is usually a good idea if you want the students to work on a longer activity or project, especially if it involves them co-operating outside class hours.

For longer activities such as a roleplay or discussion you may want to group twice. For example, in a class of twenty you want to have four groups of five students each playing a part in a roleplay. The situation is that parents of a teenager come home a day early from holiday to find a party in their house. A neighbour has called the police because of the noise. The characters are the *teenager*, *mother*, *father*, *police officer*, *neighbour*. In the preparation stage you can allocate roles and put the four students playing the same part together to prepare their part – ie all the mothers together, the neighbours together, etc (five groups of four students). After they have had time to pool ideas, go to each group and allocate numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 and say *All the ones in this corner*, *all the twos in that corner*, etc. In this way each group should have a complete set of characters (four groups of five students) and the roleplays can go ahead.

Sometimes there are uneven numbers or the person you had planned to take a particular role is absent. You have to be quite flexible and be prepared to change your plans at times. In a quick pairwork activity you can play one half of one of the pairs, although doing this prevents you from monitoring the other students, of course. You can often make one group of three instead of a pair, especially if the activity involves pooling ideas or comparing answers. In a roleplay one group can make do without one of the characters. Or if there are one or two 'spare' people ask them to take the role of evaluators and get them to feed back on how they thought the activity went.

Organizing an information gap activity

Often in communicative activities there is an information gap which has to be bridged. One student has information that the other student has to find out. It is usually important that each student does not see the material of their partner so you have to organize the class so that pairs can sit opposite each other, with the material they are using between them. The material (perhaps a picture, a chart, a short text, etc) is often in a textbook. If you create the material it is sometimes best stuck onto stiff card or concealed in a folder. In large classes, pairs sitting opposite each other may look at the facing wall where the material may be hanging or projected. Or you could use the video (with the sound turned down) as the source of information to be conveyed to the students with their backs to it.

Managing an interactive activity

Make sure you give very clear instructions (for complicated arrangements it is a good idea to write instructions down so you can refer to them). In particular, students must know when to start and finish. Be very decisive at these points, saying something like *Right everyone, are you ready? Start.* Some teachers clap their hands, tap on a table or even blow a whistle to signal the end of an activity!

Get the timing right. If the activity lasts too long it will drag. If it doesn't last long enough it won't give any sense of satisfaction. Sometimes students need a little time before they get going while others get on with the task immediately. If one group finishes early give it a further activity, related to the task. Or you may wish to stop all the groups at that point. Generally it is better to stop an activity when it is going well, provided it has achieved its main aim, than to let it peter out. If there is a definite goal, like writing a story, the students might be encouraged to finish it later.

After the activity it is often worth asking the students whether the activity was useful, what they learned, etc. If you have asked them to do something like write an article, then do something with it, like pin it up, exchange it with other students or collate the information onto a graph. If the practice itself was the goal there may be no need. (See also Chapter 7: *Giving feedback to students.*)

See also Section 9: *The monolingual and the multilingual class* for suggestions about how to avoid the use of the mother tongue during pairwork and groupwork in monolingual classes.



Task

Aim

To promote discussion of the uses and organization of pairwork or groupwork.

Procedure

This exercise consists of a number of discussion points and should be carried out in pairs or groups. You may not want to discuss all the points.

- 1 Draw up a list of classroom activities (eg interviews, repetition practice, two- or three-line dialogues, roleplay, writing a letter, etc).
- 2 Discuss which are suitable for pairwork and which are better with larger groups.
- 3 Discuss ways in which those which seem best suited to pairwork could be adapted to larger groups and vice versa.
- 4 Write down the organizational roles that students might be assigned within a group (eg chairperson, reporter, etc).
- 5 Discuss which of the activities from the first list might require the assignment of roles like these.
- 6 Discuss which of the activities from the list might need students to be grouped and then re-grouped. How would you do this?
- 7 Select an activity from a coursebook and discuss how it could be dealt with in pairs, threes and larger groups. Discuss organizational roles that students might need to be assigned for each of these possibilities.
- 8 Discuss how you would cope if there were an odd number of students for the activity.
- 9 Discuss which size of group you prefer to work in for the different activities that you may do with other trainees.

6 Monitoring

When students are engaged in an activity, especially if it is independent of you, you will need to keep an ear on what they are saying or glance at what they are doing. Your aims will be to see if they have understood your instructions, to assess how well they are performing the task and to evaluate particular language strengths and weaknesses. Whether you help or correct will depend on the task and what effect it will have.

Monitoring what the students are doing is just as important a skill as teaching. Because the focus isn't on you, there's a temptation to believe that you aren't doing your job. However, giving the students appropriate tasks, knowing how and when to leave them alone and providing suitable follow-up requires sensitivity, intelligence and confidence. It is the nervous or inexperienced teachers who don't have a clear idea of why they have set up the task, who find themselves unsure of their appropriate role at different stages of the lesson and who feel the need to interfere and take control of activities.

An important aspect of monitoring is the discipline often necessary for less well-motivated students, younger students and sometimes monolingual classes, where the temptation might be to abandon the task or to talk away unnecessarily in the mother tongue. Often just being in the room and giving the students the feeling that they are being supervised is enough. See Section 9: *The monolingual and the multilingual class* for further suggestions.

Monitoring the class

Whenever the class is working with you as a whole group (for example, in a choral repetition practice or when you are illustrating a language point) part of your attention must be taken up with monitoring how well the group as a whole is getting on and how individual students within the group are reacting. This monitoring process will tell you whether you are going too slowly or quickly, whether most of the students are with you, which students need a little more time or further help, etc. Monitoring helps you make decisions about whether correction is needed, when it is time to go on to the next stage of the lesson, whether further examples are needed, etc. So try not to be so involved in your plan and your materials that you have no time to watch and listen to your students. (See also Chapter 7: *Giving feedback to students.*)

Monitoring groupwork

An aim of pairwork and groupwork is often to encourage fluent, uninterrupted communication, even at times when the students' aim is more 'product-oriented' – to decide on the answers to a set of questions, to write a story, etc. So:

1 Stand back

Once you have set up the activity, allow a short time for the students to get on with it. This will give you a chance to see which groups seem to be working satisfactorily and which are having problems. It will also give all the students a chance to get into the activity before you offer help to any one group. Don't be too concerned if a group doesn't seem to be too sure of itself at first; some groups take time to get going.

2 Quickly check

Go round, listening in briefly to each group in order to satisfy yourself that they understand what they are supposed to be doing. If one or two groups are unclear about what they should be doing, or are not doing what you intended, stop them and give the instructions again. If you find that most students are confused it is better to stop, get the whole class's attention and give the instructions again.

3 Don't interrupt unless:

- the group has misunderstood what it is supposed to be doing (see above);
- some of the groups seem to be on the verge of finishing (so either give them something else to do or get ready to stop the whole activity);
- the group you are with seems to be a long way behind (so indicate anything that can be omitted and encourage them to hurry up);
- you are asked by the group (they may properly need some advice or information, but don't let them get too dependent on you).

4 Spread your attention

If you concentrate on one particular group, they will feel cramped by your presence and you won't get a very clear idea of how well the rest of the class is

doing; the rest of the class, apart from feeling neglected, may well start drifting away from the task without you realizing.

5 Be easily accessible

All the groups should feel they have equal access to you and are being supervised equally.

6 If you need to feed in ideas

It is often better to talk quietly to one member of the group and suggest a possible change of direction, rather than interrupt the flow of the whole group.

7 Provide encouragement

At the beginning, groups often need encouragement to get them going; sometimes a group may start to lose interest. Always be positive. Your enthusiasm will motivate them and give them confidence. Never suggest that the activity could be less than totally useful.

8 Give correction and/or gather data for feedback

Whether you give correction during groupwork depends on the nature of the activity. For example, you will need to correct if the activity is controlled language practice and the students are making mistakes with the target language. Or you may choose to correct if a student asks you to. Occasionally students will want you to help them say something correctly, but don't hover so close to any one group that they get self-conscious and afraid of making mistakes. If you do have to correct, do it discreetly, perhaps by crouching at the level of the group and allowing individuals to turn away from the rest of the group and talk to you. If the students need a lot of help and correction then the chances are that the task is inappropriate and/or beyond their capabilities.

Although in groupwork you are often concerned to show students that you are interested in *what* they are doing, you should always be looking at *how* they are doing the task – evaluating the performance of the group and of individuals within the group. You do this in order to:

- help you decide what to do next (go on to the next stage, give further practice, skip an activity, etc);
- plan future lessons;
- give the students feedback.

Gathering data so that you can give helpful feedback is one of the main purposes of monitoring. (For when and how to give feedback, see Chapter 7: *Giving feedback to students.* Other sections to look at for help with monitoring include Chapter 2 Section 1: *Use of eye contact, gesture and the voice*; Section 2: *Classroom arrangement*; Section 3: *Attention spread.*)

Monitoring pairwork

Most of what you need to consider when monitoring groupwork also applies to pairwork. Remember that controlled practice which calls for immediate

correction is more often done in pairs than in groups. Differences between monitoring pairs and groups are that a pair is more likely to stop work when you approach than a group, and in pairwork it is easier for you to take one half of the activity for a part of the time to show the students what it is about.

Monitoring individuals

Since students are individuals with different capabilities, different speeds and different work rates, some activities set (particularly reading and writing tasks) have to be individual. It follows that giving feedback (providing encouragement, feeding in ideas, correcting) will usually be on an individual basis too, so:

- make sure everyone has enough to do before you go round;
- be discreet in your approach (not too loud or disruptive). You can do a lot from your chair, especially in small classes. You don't have to loom;
- try to be encouraging;
- consider whether you will dot around the class unpredictably or move from one student to the next down the row or round the circle (consider what the effect will be of either approach);
- make sure everyone has some attention (even if it's only *Well done. Carry on*).

If all individuals are doing the same task you can monitor to see how quickly individuals are getting on and whether you need to feed in supplementary tasks to the quicker students.