

Teaching with Limited Resources

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I. The challenges and rewards of teaching with limited resources

The aim of this module is to give you the confidence to teach effectively in a situation where teaching resources may be limited.

If you are going to teach in a developing country, you will find that the majority of schools have insufficient funds to provide textbooks, technical equipment and other materials. In fact, you may find that hardly any teaching aids are available at all and that the school expects you to teach English using nothing but a blackboard. Don't be surprised if there is no blackboard either.

Even if you are going to teach in a developed European country, access to teaching resources may be limited or they may be prone to breaking down without warning. You need to make sure you can easily make up for a lack of technical support.

1. Recognising a wider range of resources

This module will give you ideas about how to compensate for inadequate resources. So whether your resources break down or you have none in the first place, you can provide a valuable learning experience for your class.

The key to your success as a teacher is not so much in learning how to do without particular resources but how to recognise a wider range of things as potential resources.

If you need to do without such things as a photocopier, overhead projector, television, video, tape recorder, course books, or supplementary materials – don't worry. Avoid viewing it as a handicap but instead as an opportunity to get creative. Identify other possible resources and you can generate lessons that are even more interesting and useful than your high-tech classes.

One school of thought goes so far as to claim that course books and other teaching materials are best to be done without, because they enslave the teacher and the learners and leave no room for actual communication in class.

Minimal resources, on the other hand, allow you to properly communicate – and after all, that's what learning a language is all about.

It's not uncommon for textbooks, OHP transparencies and videos to become a sort of barrier between the teacher and the class. By sticking rigidly to our teaching aids, we can sometimes lose vital personal contact with our students and we may feel limited in using our own imagination.

A lack of such materials can stimulate teachers to interact directly with the class, increasing students' motivation to learn.

Teaching with limited resources could be somewhat more demanding, but it is also more rewarding. It puts to a test your own resourcefulness and your capacity to generate ideas. In the end, it's the idea that matters.

Sometimes a simple but good idea can lead to an exciting and effective lesson, whereas tons of materials can go wasted if students don't find the learning interesting or relevant to their lives.

Don't be afraid of your own ideas. In fact, often the more offbeat your ideas are the better (although of course there are certain taboos you need to be aware of).

Students will generally appreciate your creativity, especially if they see that you are doing your best for them – and may prefer it to you simply following a course book written by someone else.

2. Substitutes for common resources

At times you may need to provide substitutes for some common resources. Here is a list of resources and your options in case the resource is not available.

Tape recorder or CD player

- Use your own native speech
- If tape scripts are available, you could read them out
- Invite guest speakers
- Bring a Dictaphone from home
- Play songs on your mobile phone

Photocopier

Ask your students if any of them have access to copying facilities.

If not, get your students to copy from the board and thus practise their writing skills.

Course books

Photocopy select parts from a single copy, if that facility is available to you. Find any EFL course for the target level in a bookshop or a library, copy the contents page and plan your lesson around the same themes, vocabulary items, language functions and grammatical structures.

Paper

Concentrate on speaking/listening instead. If you have a board, you can let your students take turns writing on it.

Video

To practise listening skills use a cassette- or CD-player. Invite native speakers to talk with your students. For visual interest, use newspaper and magazine cutouts to present material.

Black/whiteboard

- Use a flipchart if available
- Pin large sheets of paper to the wall and write on them

- If the class is small, arrange students in a horseshoe with you sitting in the middle facing the same way as the students, put a sheet of paper on the desk in front of you so everyone can see
- Focus on speaking and listening

Desks and chairs

- Have students sit on cushions, mats, upturned buckets, logs, or whatever is available
- Sit on benches or tree stumps if the lesson is held outside
- As a support for writing, use a small board on the students' knees, the back of a book or for young learners even the flat floor, if suitable

Computers

The interactive learning nature of a computer-assisted lesson can easily be replaced by the teacher, other students, video, TV, role-playing, etc. Real human interaction can be encouraged rather than virtual simulations.

Classroom

Hold the lesson outside! For regular classes, any room is good as long as it protects you from the weather. This doesn't have to be a classroom in the formal sense.

3. The basic resources available to teachers

The list of basic resources you can exploit in your class includes:

1. classroom objects, furniture and space;
2. objects outside the classroom, surrounding nature, urban realia;
3. your possessions;
4. students' possessions (both those they usually bring to school and those they keep at home but may be asked to bring to school);
5. pen/pencil and paper;
6. self-made materials.

Now let us imagine that we are sitting in an empty classroom with none of the above available. Even in such an extreme situation it is possible to design lessons and assign homework drawing on the following resources:

1. teacher's life experience;
2. students' life experience;
3. family members'/friends' life experience;
4. students' imagination;
5. teacher's imagination.

As you can see, what first appears to be a limited-resource situation actually provides the teacher with plenty of room for manoeuvre.

4. Using the board

The board will be central to providing input and directing activity in your class. The challenge is to use the board efficiently and effectively to avoid the class becoming teacher-focused.

Plan your board

What students see on the board will be central to their learning experience. Make sure it is well-organised and neatly presented. Divide it into sections (for example with lesson aims on one side, vocabulary on the other, and a workspace in the centre). Use colours when you draw or categorise words or analyse sentences. It is worth sketching out how you'll the board will look on your running sheet or lesson plan.

Share the board

Wherever possible, share the board with students. Bring the whole class up the front and let students write and draw alongside you. After an activity, hand out board pens or chalk to a number of students, and ask them all to come to the board at the same time to write up their answers.

Draw pictures

Without visuals or realia, you will need to draw often to bring the real world into the classroom. Don't worry about your drawing skills – stick figures are fine! Draw pictures to elicit vocabulary, or to set a context for a dialogue, or as prompts for a practice activity.

Use word prompts for practice

To practice any new language, you can simply write up word substitution prompts. If students have learn how to invite people to places, elicit places you can go to in your free time (cinema, park etc) and write the list on the board. Students practice inviting each other to all the places in the list.

Generate speaking and writing

Write up controversial statements or questions for students to discuss and write about. Write up seemingly unconnected words which students must use to write true sentences about themselves, or to create a story. Write incomplete sentences which students finish using their own imagination.

Engage students

Finally, learn from your experience of teachers who used the board badly and bored the class to tears! Don't turn your back. Don't make students wait while you spend ages drawing a picture or write up a long slab of text. Take students with you on an adventure.

Draw a tiny part of a picture, and, facing the class, ask, 'What's this?' – then keep drawing little by little and asking, until students can work it out. Ask students to tell you what to write on the board. Deliberately include mistakes that students have to spot and correct.

5. Being prepared

Finding out what teachers and students usually do in this environment will mean you won't have to come up with all the solutions yourself!

(In the next section we'll also look at other realia you might want to pack before you leave home.)

Ask other teachers

Ask the school and other teachers how they deal with lack of resources. If possible, observe a class.

Ask students

Ask your students what interests them in general, and what they like doing in class. Ask them to teach you the games they like playing in their first language, and think of how you can turn these into language practice activities.

Use a coursebook for reference

Even if students have no coursebook, you can still use one to help plan your course and give it structure.

II. Using realia around you

1. Classroom objects

Even in poor locations, classrooms will usually contain some furniture and objects such as a light bulb, some chalk, plants, a clock, and some books. Doubtless there will also be a door, a ceiling, a floor, four walls and windows.

You can expect different objects to be differently coloured, and every object will occupy a certain position in relation to others (in front of, behind, above, under). Objects will also have certain other characteristics apart from colours (old, big, square, clean, soft, broken). In fact, with some thought, what appears to be a poorly-equipped classroom is actually packed with vocabulary.

Classroom realia can be especially useful at lower levels, where students learn to recognise and use basic vocabulary, such as the objects which surround them. At this level they can practise structures such as “there is/there are” “what colour is it?” “what is it like?” and “where is it?”.

Use the classroom realia to help you teach alphabet and spelling too. One of the ways to use it for that purpose is by playing “I spy”.

2. The world outside your window

There is no need to feel limited by what is inside your classroom, and you can use what goes on outside as a great teaching resource – assuming that your classroom has at least one window.

Even if all you can see is the edge of a forest, the view could be exploited to:

- practise colours and basic descriptive sentences using ‘there is/there are’
- describe what the trees/the earth/the sky look like
- teach students how to talk about the weather by looking out of the window.

Consider yourself exceptionally lucky if your classroom commands a view of a busy street or intersection. For your language practice, consider using:

- the car, bicycle and pedestrian activity
- shops, stalls, vending machines and so on
- colours and descriptions
- the weather
- action verbs
- tenses, such as present simple (general truths), present continuous (what is going on), present perfect (what’s just happened).

It may be physically impossible for all the students in a large group to get a good view of the outside activity, but you can use this limitation for your benefit by playing the 'watchman' game.

At the beginning of a lesson, have several students stand near the window and get the rest of the class to ask them questions inquiring what the objects outside look like and what is happening in the street.

In this way, question-answer techniques are practised, and you are able to focus on different language points, for example present continuous (by encouraging questions about activities) or descriptive vocabulary (by encouraging questions about what things look like).

Tell the students who remain in their seats to listen carefully to the 'watchmen's' descriptions – then they could either sum up what they've heard or draw the street scene as they imagine it on a sheet of paper.

Another idea is to have the same or different students look out of the window at the end of the lesson and think what has remained the same or what has changed.

This will encourage practising degrees of comparison and some vocabulary such as "the same", "different", "still", "no longer".

For example:

"Is the man still selling apples across the street?"

"No, he is no longer there."

"Is the water in the river the same colour?"

"Yes, it is."

"Are there more people in the street?"

"No, there are fewer people".

If you also wanted to practise past simple and past continuous, one way to do it would be to encourage students to recall what they saw (or what their classmates reported they saw) out of the window, at the beginning of the next lesson.

For example:

"There were a lot of people in the street. The sky was blue. A man was standing at the bus stop and reading a newspaper."

Of course, you could now have them look outside again and describe how the scene had changed.

By exploiting the realia of the outside world, to which your students can easily relate, you are more likely to keep them engaged than by getting them to describe pictures of an unknown place in a textbook or on handouts.

3. An outdoor lesson

It may be that you are teaching in an environment where you don't need to confine your class to the four walls of the classroom. If weather and circumstances permit, why not give your class an outdoor lesson?

Not only is it a welcome change which could breathe new life into your lessons, but the scope of realia you can now use increases dramatically. Do, however, be aware of the increased risks associated with the outdoors and make sure that your establishment allows this.

Teach them words to describe nature or the urban scene, depending on where you are.

An excellent idea would be to give students time to prepare a walking tour of their place in English. Tell them you're interested in learning more about their city/town/village and you would appreciate their taking you around on a sightseeing tour.

Let each student choose a sight to speak about – its history, present day, outstanding personalities associated with it.

Show genuine interest – and you can be sure your students will approach this task with genuine enthusiasm.

This activity could be difficult for beginning/elementary learners but should work with any level above elementary.

4. Students' possessions

As well as furniture and classroom objects, you can also use students' possessions to teach vocabulary, alphabet, and colours. Your imagination is the limit.

Here are some examples of games using possessions or props that will help with basic language teaching (beginner/elementary level)

I Spy toys

- Consider asking your students to bring in toy animals and put them around the classroom
- Then play 'I Spy' based either on the first letter of each animal or on its colour/size (e.g. "I spy with my little eye something big and yellow.")
- You could also practise prepositions of place – describe an object's location – for the others to guess the object.

Hunt the toy

- Tell each student to bring a toy to school.
- Ask them if you can keep the toys until the next lesson.

- Before the next lesson, put the toys in different places around the classroom and write a certain number of instructions on strips of paper, e.g. “Find a big, yellow animal under the teacher’s desk. Put it on the shelf in the corner.”
- Split the class into two teams and hand two different instructions simultaneously - one to each team.
- The team which is the first to follow their instruction correctly gets a point.
- Then hand out the next pair of instructions.

Learning numbers

For basic teaching, consider teaching numbers by getting students to count how many notebooks, pens, pencils there are on their own desk, on all the desks in their row, in the whole classroom, etc.

And here are some ideas for higher levels:

What am I?

- Split the class into team A and team B
- Team A gives team B a bag full of different objects they know the names for.
- The students from team B take turns putting their hand in the bag, picking one item, holding it inside the bag and describing what it feels like.
- The rest of team B has to guess what it is.
- The person holding it is likely to be the first to guess, however he/she is not allowed to give any clues other than saying what it feels like. E.g. holding an eraser, they can say: it’s a small, rectangular object, half the size of your finger, it bends but not very easily, it’s not too hard and not too soft. They are not allowed to say “you can use it to wipe off what you’ve written”.
- The team gets a point if the item is guessed within a set time limit.
- The teams take turns drawing one item after another out of their bag.

Question me

- Display some items that you have in your bag, in your briefcase, desk drawer, etc.
- As you hold each one up, talk briefly about it – where you got it, what you use it for, what personal significance it has, and so on.
- Encourage students to ask questions.
- Divide the class into groups and ask them to remind each other what you said about each object.
- Show the objects again, one after another, and elicit from the students what they remember about each object and its significance.
- Students then do the same in small groups, using objects from their own bags.

I won't live without...

- Ask students to bring in something they cherish.
- They must then explain why it is significant to them, so have a student demonstrate the object to the class/group.
- Classmates should guess what makes the thing so special to its owner by asking yes/no questions.
- Let them tell you about their conclusions and let the owner comment if those conclusions are right.
- That activity could be turned into a discussion about material possessions, or about favourite, useful or sentimental things.

5. Family pictures

Having students bring their family photos to class can give you a variety of ideas. Students tend to like getting to know each other's family and enjoy talking about their own too.

The pictures could become an invaluable resource to practise a variety of language points.

Examples are: vocabulary of family relationships, people's appearance and character, holidays, past simple and specifically "used to", occupations, hobbies ("Here's my grandfather. He is 68. He is a retired military man and he likes fishing"), ability in the past ("This is me at 12. When I was 12, I could ride a bicycle but I couldn't drive a car").

Note that it is important to be sensitive to the economic situation of your students. In an impoverished community, families may not own a camera – so naturally you would not ask them for photos.

6. Packing your bag: what objects to take

Before you set out for your country of choice, think what you can bring from home to enrich your lessons with authentic materials representing your own culture and lifestyle.

The important selection criteria are as follows:

- Choose lightweight and compact things. Since there's a limit on how much you can take with you, it's better to have a lot of small lightweight objects which will help you in many lessons than carry along a few heavy and cumbersome objects, which you'll have used up very soon.
- Each object should tell students something about your culture/lifestyle.
- Choose objects which are not likely to be found in your destination country.

- Before taking a certain object with you, think what activities can be planned around it, how it can be exploited in your lessons. If it looks nice but there doesn't seem to be any way you can exploit it, maybe you shouldn't take it at all.

7. Activities using a pen/pencil and paper

Pens/pencils and paper are basic accessible resources, so you can assume that your students will have them even when other resources are missing.

Apart from the situations where they are used by students to take note of what the teacher is saying, write dictations or compositions, or do exercises from a textbook, they can be used as a teaching resource in itself.

Take a look at the following pen and paper games:

Taboo

Have each student or team write a concrete noun (best for elementary learners), an abstract noun (best for intermediate learners) or an idiom (best for advanced learners) on a strip of paper. Tell the students to fold the paper so the word is not seen. Collect them in and put them in a hat. The students take turns drawing the words/idioms out of the hat and trying to explain to the class what the word/phrase means. As they explain they cannot use the noun itself or any related words (for example, to explain 'student' they cannot use 'study' or 'studying'). Set a time limit, for example 30 seconds for an explanation. The other students or teams are to guess the word/idiom. If successful, they get a point.

This is a good way to review vocabulary on a given topic:

Continue the story

As a fun ice-breaker, have the class sit in a circle and give each student a sheet of paper with the first line of a story on it. Each student writes the next line of the story and passes it on. The next person adds his/her own line to the story, folds it so that the line written by the first student isn't seen and passes it on to the next student. The next student can only see the last line and adds one of his/her own. Once each sheet of paper has gone around the class, it is unfolded and the stories are read out loud. The result is usually very funny.

III. Materials created by the students

Sophisticated teaching aids, such as audio equipment can only be factory-produced, but there are a variety of simple aids which you and your students can create with your own hands.

1. Flash cards and other visual aids

Flashcards are an invaluable means of teaching new words, especially at lower levels. They can be conveniently used to demonstrate and drill vocabulary.

Any flash card pictures you draw do not have to be works of art as long as they are recognisable and serve the purpose of the lesson. If your drawings are a bit primitive, it can bring humour into the classroom and highlight the fact that nobody is perfect, which can relieve the students' anxiety about their own imperfections.

You don't have to do all the preparations yourself, however. Get your students involved too. You may not have much luck getting a class of business executives to draw pictures between lessons, but with a class of school children it can become a great homework assignment.

Write a list of words you're going to teach in one of your future lessons and give one or several words to each student or a team of students. For homework, tell them to consult the dictionary, look up the meanings and prepare flashcards depicting each of the words. If the students don't have dictionaries at home, they could either use those from the school library or you could let them use your own.

Collect their cards in and check their drawings. Have the students re-do some cards if you find that some of the words were misunderstood. Use those picture cards as you teach vocabulary in the next lesson. Since each word will have already been learned by the student/group of students who drew it, your task of teaching new vocabulary will be much easier and you can rely on students' checking and correcting each other as the vocabulary is drilled and practised.

Students can get involved with developing all kinds of visual aids, such as:

- drawing illustrations to a story you're going to read to them
- drawing a country map or a city plan for a lesson on travelling or giving directions
- cutting pictures out of magazines on any topic discussed in class
- drawing grammar tables based on the material recently studied, which could be hung around the class
- creating a class newspaper, with the articles written by hand (if no computer/printer is available)
- creating a scrapbook.

Any newspaper/magazine clippings that your students use throughout the year, along with texts written by them or teachers, drawings and photos can be compiled into scrapbooks.

Creating a personal scrapbook could become an exciting year-long project. In this way, students essentially create their own textbooks, which can be an invaluable resource when real textbooks are in short supply.

2. Tests

If you feel stuck with limited testing materials your options are:

- Stick to oral testing. If you are teaching a conversation class, written tests may not be required at all (although compositions/essays would still be an excellent way to reinforce vocabulary and structures as well as practise written conversation skills).
- Keep printing minimal. If you have the opportunity to use a computer and printer, design your own tests based on the material recently studied and print them out for each student (or one for a pair/group of students, if there's a limit on how much you can print out).
- Have students create tests/quizzes themselves – based on the study material. Explain what sort of tasks you're looking for, how many tasks there should be, give them an example. Divide the students into groups and have one group design a text/quiz for another, either in class or for homework. Collect their tests in and correct the errors that are in the tasks, if any. You may then wish to have the students re-write their quizzes taking your corrections into account. Finally, have the groups swap the quizzes and give them time to work on the answers. In that way, any of the following could be tested:
 - Vocabulary
 - Grammar
 - Cultural facts
 - Knowledge of the books/texts read lately

IV. Drawing upon experience and imagination

1. Using students' experience

Both your students' and your own life experience can serve as an almost bottomless resource.

Rather than feeding the information to the class in the form of texts, videos and lectures, you can elicit much of the same information by asking questions and encouraging your students to share their experiences.

A smoking discussion

For example, in a lesson on smoking ask the students if anyone smokes or has ever smoked.

Ask them why they smoke and what the benefits of smoking are for them. Has anyone given up?

Does anyone know anyone who has tried giving up?

If someone raises their hand, ask about how they gave up and how hard they found it.

The students are now interested in discussing the benefits of quitting and any methods they have heard about. The questions refer to their personal experience, which makes them more inclined to participate.

Talking about an English-speaking country

Even if the topic seems to be removed from home, there is a good chance that your students will tell you a lot once you prompt them to. For example, you could begin talking about the USA by asking students: what they've heard about that country, what associations its name generates in their mind, whether their image of the USA is generally positive or negative and why, what famous Americans they know, if they have met any Americans before, if they or their family members have ever travelled to the USA or have American friends, what American cities and states they know and what they've heard about each city or state, and so on.

As they speak, praise their knowledge (even if it's not too impressive) make gentle corrections and add any relevant information. Even if the educational level of your students is not particularly high, you're likely to elicit answers to most of the questions listed above. That will help the students see the relevance of the topic to their own experience and make them feel that they are contributing significantly to the lesson (which they are!). It will also help you hold students' attention and keep them occupied for a large part of your lesson.

Interviewing the teacher

Students' questioning skills can be developed by encouraging them to interview you on any of the topics discussed, thus using your own experience as a resource.

E.g. Tell them to ask you questions to find out as much as they can about your hobbies, and then write an article for the class newspaper entitled "Our teacher's hobbies"

Using children's experience

While eliciting information about certain issues may be more feasible with adults, we should not assume that children do not have enough experience, and therefore information has to be fed to them rather than elicited from them.

Any child who is old enough to study a foreign language has something to tell you about their everyday life, special events in their life, the people around them, and what they learn from their parents about the surrounding world.

By asking your young students about the things that are relevant to them, you will be able to enjoy their participation and it will increase their motivation to learn new words and find new ways to express themselves in the target language.

2. Involving the family

Here are some examples of ways you can bring students' families into your language teaching:

Tell me about your family

Having introduced the vocabulary of family relationships, get students to tell you who their family members are, how big their family is, if they have any brothers or sisters, if they live with their immediate family or extended family, etc.

Time permitting, you may want to pair your students together and have each student ask their partner the same questions and then report their findings

An interview

You could also get them to interview you about your family (you could show them some photos too).

What's the problem?

Prepare several pieces of paper with a question or a problem written on each. Hand a piece to each pair and have them go around the class asking the classmates' opinions on the given question/problem.

While one student asks questions, the other takes notes and finally they draw a graph.

What's your opinion?

Ask your students to explore each others' opinions to certain issues, for example:

- "Find out if family is more important, as important, or less important to your classmates than their career."
- "Find out what they think the ideal number of children in a family is."
- "Find out what they think is the best age to get married"

Get to the core of the issue

You could concentrate on different aspects of family life depending on the age and level of your class and the vocabulary/grammar point you are making. The following could be either discussed in class or assigned as homework.

Here are some ideas for lower levels:

- Describe a usual day/weekend in your family
- Describe the most unusual/the best day you've had with your family
- Describe the appearance of your family members
- Describe the characters of your family members. Is it easy for you to put up with each other?

And here are some ideas for higher levels:

- Is/was sibling rivalry an issue in your family, what causes it?
- What sort of conflicts and disagreements occur in families and how to resolve them?
- Is living with your extended family a good idea?
- Why do people have children?
- ...and so on.

3. Engaging students' imagination

Most students will enjoy the opportunity to skip the mundane and use their imagination. As teacher, your role is to inspire them to think creatively and not to be afraid to come up with any offbeat ideas. As long as students know that in your class they won't be criticised for being slightly more daring and unorthodox than in other classes, you can be sure they will feel motivated and encouraged to express themselves.

The outcome will be some memorable and effective lessons – so aim to be original. Your ideas will be the incentive for the students to be creative themselves.

The tasks that appeal to students' imagination traditionally follow the more formal practice activities and those which are related to their experience. Place them at the end of a lesson or for homework as some fun extension practice of the topical vocabulary and/or structures. It will be a relief after the more serious work.

Needless to say, you can draw on your students' imagination at any stage of the lesson.

Let us say, for example, that the theme of your lesson is 'holidays'.

Here are some ways you could let imagination loose in the classroom.

- Imagine your ideal holiday: Where would you go, who with, how long would you stay, what would you do there, etc? Depending on the grammar you wish your students to practise, this could be in the past (imagine you had your ideal holiday last year – tell us about it), present (imagine you're on your ideal holiday now, telephone your friend and tell her about it) future (plan an ideal holiday), or using “would”(just imagine).
- Imagine what it would be like to have a holiday on another planet or in a country that doesn't really exist. Once again, they can either report it as a past event, as something unfolding, planned for the future, or purely their imagination.
- Think how people will spend their holidays in the year 2060. How will it be similar to the way we spend holidays now and how will it be different? This could be discussed as a whole class, given to pairs or groups, or as a homework composition.
- Imagine people have learned to travel in time and they can spend their holiday in any historical period they choose. Where would you go to and why? Discuss in pairs, as a class or write for homework.

Another way to unleash your students' imagination is to ask them to take time to prepare and act out conversations in pairs in which they assume imaginary roles. It's up to you to decide how much room for imagination you leave them.

For example:

1. It is the year 2060. Discuss how you would spend your holiday. This is a free situation, you don't define their roles. The only things you define are the time and the theme.
2. It is the year 2060. In each group there is the father of a family, the mother and two children. Discuss how you would spend your holiday. Here you also assign roles.
3. It is the year 2060. In each group there is the father of a family, the mother and two children. Discuss how you would spend your holiday. Keep in mind that the parents prefer traditional beach holidays, while the children favour some more modern ways of holidaymaking. Here you define the time, the theme, assign roles and set the direction of the dialogue.

If you wish, you can give further details so that you can more or less predict the kind of dialogue your students will produce. Often, a vague scenario stimulates their imagination more than either total freedom or a very narrow context.

4. Homework based on experience/imagination

Interesting and relevant homework can enhance students' learning experience and give them extra opportunities to use their creativity.

A good homework assignment:

- provides extra practice between classes
- helps you plan your next lesson as part of it can be spent checking/discussing homework
- allows students to use their imagination while being under little or no time pressure

- allows students to interact with other people, e.g. family members, and incorporate their feedback
- allows them to use additional resources, such as TV, magazines or the internet

Here are some examples of homework assignments:

- Interview family members about their past experience in any subject, such as deciding on a career, looking for a job, finding a husband/wife, a memorable holiday, etc
- Interview family members to find out their opinions on any subject, e.g. the younger generation, violence on TV, rules of family life, etc. (the interviews can be conducted in the student's native language but the results will be written or presented orally in English)
- Read an article in a newspaper/magazine about some latest news and report to the class
- Find information on a given subject on the internet (this, however, may not be easily accessible in developing countries)
- Write an essay or composition on any subject
- Write a diary, i.e. the interesting things you do every day.

V. Activities and lesson planning

1. Games which use no materials

While most games require certain resources, others can be played using the students as the only resource.

This well-known game can serve as an example:

The market game

One person starts by saying "I went to market and I bought a pineapple". The next person has to repeat what the first person said, and then add one new item: " I went to market and I bought a pineapple, and a dozen eggs ". This continues around the class. Players who can't remember an item drop out and the game continues until there is one winner. The game is good practice of vocabulary, plus the past forms of go and buy.

A variation

The game can also be modified to increase the amount of grammar practice, such as practising the past simple as follows:

- I went to the USA and I saw the president
- I went to the USA and I saw the president, and I visited Disneyland.
- I went to the USA and I saw the president, and I visited Disneyland, and I climbed the Empire State Building etc.

Add to the rules

You can make it a rule that players are not allowed to use a verb that has already been used.

Other structures you can practise in this way are:

- Going to (e.g. making New Year resolutions: This year I'm going to learn to drive, and I'm going to grow my hair ,etc);
- The present perfect: My brother has never travelled abroad, and he's never been arrested etc.
- Used to: When I was little, I used to watch cartoons, I used to make a lot of noise, I used to pick my nose... etc.

In fact, any structure can be adapted to this game.

2. Dictation activities

While traditional dictation has a bad reputation – it's 'hard' and you 'get into trouble' if you get it wrong – dictation in fact can be great fun. It also integrates a number of very important areas of language: listening, vocabulary, grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Challenge students to complete a dictation activity with a text that is completely correct (words, spelling, capitalisation and punctuation). Of course give students every opportunity to succeed: choose an appropriate text, read it several times, and allow students to compare their notes. Here are some dictation activities you can use.

Dictogloss

Tell students you are going to read a short text, and they need to work together to write it 100% accurately.

1. Read the text at natural speed, and then slightly slower. Students write down as much as they can.
2. Students compare what they wrote in pairs.
3. Join pairs together so students compare in groups of four.
4. Read the text again at natural speed.
5. Students compare again in groups of four.
6. Ask the whole class to come to the board, and work together to write it up in full.

About me

1. Dictate five sentences about you to the class.
2. Then, in pairs or groups, students dictate five sentences about themselves to each other.

Running dictation

Write a text and cut it into four or five pieces. Blu-Tack these at random around the walls.

1. Divide students into pairs.
2. Tell students one person in each pair will write. They cannot leave their chair.
3. The other student runs to each piece of text on the wall and tries to memorise it. They are not allowed to take a pen.
4. They then run back to tell their partner, who writes it down.
5. The first pair with the text accurate and complete wins.

3. Drama and roleplay

As we have suggested, not being tied to material resources can unleash your students' creativity and imagination. This can be not least through drama and roleplay.

Whenever you teach grammar or functional language, let students script and perform their own roleplay as a production activity.

When students encounter people or characters in a story, a song, or a real-life event, have students roleplay those characters; both what they did, and what students imagine they will do next.

Students can improvise in theatre sports activities. Set a scene and assign students characters. Let them perform for the class, or in an inter-class competition.

4. A lesson plan

When you teach with minimal resources, a good lesson plan is as important, or even more important than when you teach with a variety of resources on hand. If everyone in your class has a textbook and you have access to audio and video materials you can quickly prepare a logical sequence to use them, however if the resources are limited you have to build each lesson from scratch. That is why careful planning is essential.