Best Practices: Teaching English in Yilan
A guide for Fulbright English Teaching Assistants

Written by

Dr. Dennie Hoopingarner
2009-2010 Fulbright Taiwan Academic Advisor, Yilan County

with contributions and editorial support from
Gabe Newland, 2009-2010 Yilan County Fulbright ETA

and additional contributions from
Monica Kim, 2009-2010 Yilan County Fulbright ETA
Nikka Landau, 2009-2010 Yilan County Fulbright ETA
Jessica Yen, 2009-2010 Yilan County Fulbright ETA
Introduction

Teaching is a combination of art and science. As teachers mature and gain experience and confidence in the classroom, they develop an intuition about teaching. Experienced teachers integrate “best practices” into their own individual teaching style. Indeed, the art of teaching is the capacity to blend one’s personality into these successful teaching practices to create a unique but effective approach to teaching.

*Best Practices: Teaching English in Yilan* reflects the science of teaching. The term “best practices” refers to the aspects of teaching that are under a teacher’s control, including the classroom environment, classroom procedures, classroom materials, and behavior in the classroom (that of the teacher and the student, which the teacher influences through rules and directions). Because following these “best practices” gives teachers the best odds of achieving optimal results, and because successful teaching often reflects these “best practices,” untrained and inexperienced teachers should follow these recommendations as they begin their teaching careers.

Based on research on teaching and learning, as well as the experiences of teachers in the field, this document presents recommendations that are intended to help Fulbright ETAs with their teaching responsibilities in Yilan County. While these “best practices” are recommendations only, and do not constitute policy, they offer the best odds of successful teaching and should be followed when possible.

*Best Practices: Teaching English in Yilan* has fourteen sections, each of which is subdivided into four parts. The first part is an “Introduction,” which provides background information and a general explanation of the topic. The second part—“In theory”—gives a summary of recommendations from language teaching research and theory. Next, the “Best practice” section lists standards and principles that Fulbright ETAs should implement to achieve optimal results in the classroom. Finally, the “Voices from the field” section includes anecdotes and practical insights from Fulbright ETAs. At the end of *Best Practices: Teaching English in Yilan* there is a “Recommended Reading” section that lists several websites, articles, blogs, and books that might be helpful over the course of the year.

Together with the *English Teaching Assistant Pre-Orientation Handbook*, this teaching guide should provide incoming Fulbright ETAs in Yilan County enough information to begin their year successfully.
# Table of Contents

- Introduction .......................................................... 2
- Co-teaching ............................................................ 4
- Lesson Planning ....................................................... 5
- Classroom Management ........................................... 7
- Interacting with Students ........................................ 11
- Teaching Activities ............................................... 13
- Classroom Games .................................................. 15
- Warm-ups ............................................................... 16
- Teaching Phonics .................................................... 17
- Teaching Pronunciation ......................................... 19
- Using Technology .................................................. 21
- Songs, Music and Chants ......................................... 23
- Assessment and Grades .......................................... 24
- Dealing with “Cheating” .......................................... 26
- Mainstreamed special education students (identified and not) 27
- Recommended Reading ........................................... 29
Co-teaching

Introduction: Because ETAs are not certified teachers in Taiwan, they cannot teach alone in the classroom. In addition, ETAs are not expected to have the language skills or training to be able to conduct classroom management efficiently. For these and other reasons, this project uses the co-teaching model. You are partnered with at least one LET at your school, who is your partner in teaching. Throughout the year, you will work closely with your LET(s) to plan and teach together.

In theory: In principle, you and your LET will share all the duties in the classroom. There are many models of co-teaching. The specific model that is most suitable depends on factors such as personalities of the teachers, teaching environment, class size, particular circumstances of the students, subject matter, teaching goals, etc. The more common models are as follows:

Tag team: The two co-teachers take turns teaching. While one is lead teaching, the other monitors the students for understanding, and manages students’ behavior.

Pull-out groups: One co-teacher leads most of the students in instructional activities, while the other co-teacher works with a small group of students. This pull-out group of students could need remedial help, or they may need enrichment because they already know the material being covered.

Lead-support: One co-teacher leads the entire lesson, while the other co-teacher serves as a support resource in the classroom. Although one teacher is the lead teacher, the other is still engaged in the lesson.

Best practice: Both co-teachers should be actively involved in planning and delivering instruction. Dividing class time between the two co-teachers is not co-teaching.

LETs and ETAs should take advantage of their respective strengths. For example, the ETA is a native speaker, and so has perfect pronunciation and intonation. The ETA should model oral language. The LET has pedagogical training, and knows what will be tested, and how. Anything that needs explaining, such as grammar and semantics, should be handled by the LET. However, while one co-teacher is handling the strength area, the other should also be involved. For example, when the ETA is modeling intonation, the LET should guide the ETA by focusing on the key areas and leading student participation. When the LET is explaining grammar, the ETA can give numerous examples of the grammar in use.

Voices from the field:
Gabe Newland (Dongshan Elementary School)
I think it’s important for ETAs and LETs to discuss which co-teaching model they will follow. You don’t necessarily have to follow the same model every day; just be sure to discuss your approach with your LET during the planning phase of the lesson. At Dongshan, I most frequently used a “tag-team” method with my co-teachers. Occasionally--when I was teaching a song or a cultural activity--we would switch to the “lead-support” method. I would lead the lesson while my LET helped with translation and comprehension where necessary. It’s worth noting, though,
that my teachers and I never explicitly discussed which co-teaching model we would follow. I think we could have done a better job if we had discussed this issue.

Nikka Landau (Peng Lai and Nan Ao Elementary School)
My LET and I started out the year using the Tag Team approach. We dedicated time to lesson planning together and as an experienced teacher she was able to make a lot of helpful suggestions in both planning and teaching. As I became more comfortable teaching and we both saw how our teaching personalities played out in the classroom we shifted to the Lead-Support model. Most of our classes were between 10 and 20 students, however we had a wide range of levels in the classroom as only a few went to cram schools. The Tag Team approach let us work together while maintaining independence and our creativity, and also allowed us to focus on helping the varying English levels.

Lesson Planning

Introduction: Successful instruction does not happen spontaneously, by accident, or as a product of the teacher’s engaging and bubbly personality. Teaching effective lessons are carefully planned and deliberately executed.

Winston Churchill famously said, “He who fails to plan is planning to fail.” That is especially true in language teaching. If you do not have a clear plan, your lesson will lack direction and purpose, and your students will sense that something is wrong.

New teachers will have to devote much more time to lesson planning than experienced teachers, but even veteran teachers need to spend a considerable amount of time planning lessons. Fortunately, formats for lessons have emerged from research, and teachers can use these formats as templates to help structure a lesson. This is part of the science aspect to teaching. You should use standard formats for your lesson plans.

In theory: Every lesson should progress from a warm-up to a wrap-up, and progress from teacher-controlled activities, to activities in which students are acting independently.

See the “Warm-ups” section for details about successful and effective warm-ups.

There are many ways to structure lessons effectively. One format that is useful for new teachers is PPP, which stands for Presentation, Practice, and Production. Under this format, the lesson is divided into three stages. As the lesson moves through the stages, the teacher’s role shrinks, and the student’s role grows.

The lesson begins with teacher-fronted and teacher-controlled instruction, often with the teacher involved in direct instruction (the “presentation” stage). At this stage, visual cues and props, PowerPoint, media, etc. are useful tools to help the students understand and learn.
Students are then encouraged to practice what was just taught in structured activities. Structured activities can be in the form of games, worksheets, and group work, or whole-class, teacher-led activities. The point of this stage is to get students using the lesson content actively.

Finally, students apply the learning to communicative activities that require them to use the language that they were presented with and that they practiced. This, of course, is the point of communicate language teaching: to be able to use language for real-world communication. Again, this can be accomplished in a number of ways, including games, interviews, presentations, role plays, interviews, discussions, debates, (written) composition, storytelling, etc.

The PPP model has been criticized as being too teacher-centric and artificial, but those criticisms have targeted the use of PPP in second-language classrooms and advanced-level classrooms foreign language classrooms. For a foreign-language class taught at the elementary and middle school levels in Taiwan, the PPP model is completely appropriate.

**Best practice:** Use a lesson plan template that includes space for you to write the teaching objectives, materials, procedures, homework, assessment, and time. This template will guide you as you structure your lesson. Fill in the form with the content of your lesson.

Every lesson should have specific, measurable learning objectives. Plan to begin every lesson with a warm-up, and end every lesson with students communicating in English.

Lessons should contain a variety of activities, each of which should last no more than 15 minutes (middle-school lessons may last longer, because students at that age have longer attention spans). Activities should fit with the learning objectives of the lesson; even fun activities should have a teaching function.

**Voices from the field:**

*Gabe Newland (Dongshan Elementary School)*

I began this year with a lot of experience working with children through sports and coaching, but I didn’t have much formal education training. Thus, I began the year relatively unfamiliar with the details of lesson planning. In fact, I was very skeptical of all the templates and academic jargon that would inevitably spring up in any discussion related to lesson preparation. I didn’t expect to “wing it,” but I thought things would go well in the classroom as long as I had a rough sketch of my “lesson plan” in mind before I began class. When I coached tennis, I’d begin practice with a few drills and outcomes in mind and proceed from there, responding to the ability and needs of my students. That approach worked well. So, at the beginning of this year, I approached language teaching in a similar way. For better or worse, my primary co-teacher and I were on the same page.

As the year progressed, I learned more about the realities of teaching a foreign language to a classroom full of elementary students. Personal experience, classroom observations, conversations with fellow teachers, and diligent perusal of *The New York Times* and *The Atlantic* made it clear to me that, while one can occasionally “pull off” a lesson with a rough sketch in mind beforehand, the success of a lesson--and thus the education of the students--is directly correlated to very, very thorough preparation. Teaching tennis to a small group of mature,
English-speaking high school students in Michigan is very different from teaching English to a classroom full of thirty rambunctious elementary school students in Taiwan!

During the second semester, I began planning lessons in much more detail and I saw dramatic improvements in my teaching and similar improvements in the behavior and the English language ability of my students. I didn’t use any of the lesson plan templates described above--though they may have helped--but I had a notebook in which I would write down detailed plans. After class, I would go back to my notebook to keep track of what I was actually able to accomplish, what didn’t work, how I should approach things the next time, what I should teach during the next class, et cetera. Having a written record of my lesson plan and the results of previous lessons was invaluable as I continued through the curriculum and planned for future lessons. In general, I think the format of a lesson plan is less important than understanding the need to plan. Do whatever works best for you and your co-teacher; the key is to make sure you are well prepared for every lesson.

“What Makes a Great Teacher” from The Atlantic:  

“Building a Better Teacher” from The New York Times Magazine:  
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/magazine/07Teachers-t.html?pagewanted=1&sq=Doug%20Lemov%20Teachers&st=cse&scp=1

Classroom Management

Introduction: In addition to delivering instruction, the teacher is also responsible for students’ behavior in class. Those two factors influence each other. If students are not on-task, then they cannot learn. If students are actively engaged with the lesson, then they are less likely to misbehave.

Teachers are responsible for managing students’ behavior. Setting classroom rules and monitoring, correcting, and reinforcing behavior helps accomplish this.

Effective instruction can prevent behavior problems. However, even the best teacher has to attend to student behavior.

In theory: Unlike other areas, such as lesson planning or warm-ups, classroom management cannot be generalized to the extent that other aspects of teaching can. The two variables that will determine an effective classroom management system are the teacher and the class.

A classroom management system is a reflection of the teacher’s personality. But many factors that are beyond the control of the teacher will influence student behavior in class. Some children have physical conditions such as ADHD that make it difficult for them to stay on-task. Students for whom the material is too easy or too hard will disengage more easily. Class size and the physical classroom environment can affect students’ attitudes and their willingness and ability to concentrate.
The way that a teacher is expected to run a class differs across cultures. Brown (2007, p 252) lists some contrasts in cultural expectations of teachers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers are expected to have all the answers.</th>
<th>Teachers are allowed to say, “I don’t know.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are expected to suppress emotions (and so are students).</td>
<td>Teachers are allowed to express emotions (and so are the students).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty.</td>
<td>Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as a stimulating exercise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers reward students for accuracy in problem solving.</td>
<td>Teachers reward students for innovative approaches to problem solving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students admire brilliance in teachers.</td>
<td>Students admire friendliness in teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should speak in class only when called on by the teacher.</td>
<td>Students are encouraged to volunteer their thoughts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers should never lose face; to do so loses the respect of the students.</td>
<td>Teachers can admit when they are wrong and still maintain students’ respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students expect the teacher to show students “the way.”</td>
<td>Teachers expect students to find their own way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The point, of course, is not which is the correct expectation, or even whether it is desirable or possible to change these expectations. The point is that there are differences in expectations. In other words, ETAs may encounter a classroom environment that is different from what they assumed a classroom should or would be like. ETAs are responsible for discovering what the schools expect of them, and for developing a classroom management system that is compatible with local expectations.

**Best practice:** A best odds approach to classroom management:

**Set classroom rules:** Generally speaking, students want to behave, and will try to meet standards of behavior that you set for them. You should make classroom rules, give them all a copy in writing, and, if possible, post them on the wall in the classroom. Classroom rules should be few in number, phrased in a positive voice (i.e., “be on time” instead of “don’t be late”).

Here are some examples of classroom rules:

1. Bring your textbook, workbook, notebook, and pencil to class every day.
2. Come to class on time.
3. Raise your hand before you speak.
4. Follow directions.
5. Respect yourself, other people, and school property.

1. Be prompt
2. Be prepared
3. Be positive
4. Be productive
5. Be polite

Establish classroom procedures:
Introduce a mechanism for getting students’ attention (such as a short chant or a call-and-response).

Follow a similar pattern for every lesson or activity. For example, if you want students to work in groups, then teach a procedure for getting into groups.

Use classroom English: Classroom English is simple instructions for managing the daily activities in English class, such as “sit down,” “open your books to page ____,” etc. Being able to give these instructions in English will make it easier for you to manage the classroom, as well as give the students additional exposure to spoken English.

Enforce rules impersonally and unemotionally: When you have to invoke consequences because of an infraction, don’t make a big deal out of it. Deal with the behavior and move on.

Look at the infraction as a conflict between the student and the rule, not between you and the student. Don’t take student behavior personally.

Consequences for misbehavior should be real, but not unreasonably harsh. If the penalty is too severe, then students will have no more incentive to change their behavior. People who have lost everything have nothing to lose.

Focus on the positive, not the negative: Many teachers in Taiwan use a reward system. Some teachers, for example, have a system in which students can earn “points” that they can exchange for goodies such as stickers and candy.

Using the rewarding system has another advantage: the threat of withholding the reward is often as effective in managing behavior as the threat of a punitive punishment.

See: Douglas Brown’s Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy (3rd Edition)

Also see this page: http://712educators.about.com/od/discipline/tp/disciplinetips.htm

Voices from the field:
Gabe Newland (Dongshan Elementary School)
Classroom management, another term that occasionally loses meaning with repetition, is extremely important. And to manage your classroom well, it’s best to begin thinking about how you will do it before you show up for the first day of school. Unfortunately, I was learning on the fly first semester, which made it harder to focus on teaching. While I was able to pick up the pieces and create a more stable foundation second semester, my life would have been much easier--and my students’ education would have been better--if I had asked myself and my co-teacher some of the following questions at the beginning--or before the beginning--of the first semester: What are the names of my students? How will I remember their names? Will I memorize them? Will they have name cards on their desks? Will I carry a seating chart with names? Knowing the names of your students will have a big, positive effect on your relationship with your students, your ability to manage the classroom, and thus your teaching. How will I arrange the classroom? How will I situate the desks? In rows? In a circle? In groups? If groups, what size groups? What will be on the walls of the classroom? Will there be a seating chart? How will it be determined? Will it be permanent? What sort of reward/punishment systems will I use? Is there any way I can connect performance and behavior in my class to a reward/punishment system already in place in the students’ homeroom class? Or will my reward/punishment system be self-sufficient? What “Classroom English” will I teach?

There is a good chance that your co-teacher, who probably has experience at your placement school, will have already addressed a lot of these questions. So it’s fine for you to follow your LTs lead at the beginning of the year, especially if you don’t have much teaching experience. Still, it’s important for ETAs to know the answers to these questions and it will be helpful to understand why your LET prefers a certain seating arrangement or reward system, for example. And as you gain experience and confidence you will undoubtedly have lots of new ideas. Use tact whenever making suggestions, but don’t be afraid to contribute!

If you are in a situation in which your LET does not already have a classroom management system in place--perhaps both of you are new to the placement school or you are working with a part-time teacher--it’s important that you begin discussing and getting a system in place as soon as possible.

Jessica Yen (Lising Elementary School)
From my experience teaching in Taiwan and teaching in the States, it is always important to think about classroom management before it becomes a problem. That means, thinking completely through a system of rules, procedures, rewards, and consequences before the first day. The tone you set on the first week of school is critical to determining how the rest of the year will go. Being consistent and smooth with discipline from the beginning will make the rest of the year run much more effortlessly.

In one of my classes, because my LET and I had not set up a very consistent behavior system, our students got out of control. We wasted a lot of instructional time on disciplining students in that class. At this point, my LET and I finally thought through an entire behavioral reward and consequence system that held students responsible at the group and class level. We spent an entire day explaining the new system to students and practicing some of the behaviors that we would expect them to produce; for example, using the “1, 2, 3, eyes on me” call-and-response as
an attention grabber for the class. Because students wanted to earn the rewards, their behavior was drastically improved.

I have also found the rule of proximity an excellent tool for classroom management. Research shows that students are less likely to do off-task behavior when the teacher is in closer proximity to the student. Even if this means just walking around the room while teaching, without even saying anything, students are more likely to get back on-task as the teacher comes closer. I have also found using the classic “Teacher look” to remind students to get on-task and stop deviant behavior to be very effective. It’s important for the ETA to also be empowered in the classroom to be part of the classroom management; otherwise, the students will not take them seriously.

**Interacting with Students**

**Introduction:** For many ETAs, teaching is a daunting task at first. You are expected to lead the class, but the students are very young, and have very low English proficiency. How can you communicate with them when they have so little language?

**In theory:** Americans tend to be uncomfortable with silence. When engaging in communication, if the other party doesn’t take up their role, Americans tend to fill the silence out of discomfort. In a language-teaching scenario, though, the other party may need time to think and to formulate their response. Having the American barge in and step on their turn is counterproductive. Similarly, in a lecture-presentation mode, when American teachers meet with blank stares from students, they tend to babble on and on, instead of pausing and checking for understanding.

Even the most motivated students need to be instructed how to communicate. They need vocabulary and examples of the appropriate thing to say in a given situation. The language teacher’s role is to give the students the tools that they need to communicate, then put them into a situation where they have to communicate.

**Best practice:**

*Don’t be afraid of silence:* In fact, silence can help to focus students’ attention. When you ask a question, expect a response. As long as the students understood the question and understand that you expect an answer, they will try to respond if you give them time. If, on the other hand, you rush in and supply the answer, then what you are doing in effect is training them not to respond, which is the exact opposite of what you want.

*Speak simply, but not in pidgin:* It is a temptation to over-simplify language when interacting with low-proficiency students. In fact, there is a psychological phenomenon called Foreigner Talk, similar to Caregiver Speech, in which people naturally and subconsciously simplify their language.

Be careful, however, to keep your English accurate as you simplify. Do not feel that you have to drop word endings (such as the ‘s’ plural marker, or the ‘ed’ past tense marker on verbs). It is well known that listening comprehension tends to be much better than production ability, and so your students probably understand more than you think they do.
The most useful way to simplify is to avoid relative clauses. For example, the phrase “the book that I read before I saw the movie that it was based on” is very complex, and difficult to parse, even for native speakers of English. Speak more sentences with simpler structure, rather than fewer sentences with more complex structure.

**Focus on meaning:** The purpose of listening is to capture the meaning of the speaker’s utterance. Therefore, when you speak to your students, make every effort to help them understand you. Use body language, draw pictures or write key vocabulary words on the blackboard, rephrase yourself. PowerPoint with pictures is an excellent visual aid.

**Scaffold, model, give examples, build up:** You can’t throw a complicated question to students such as “what do you want to do on your summer vacation?” without preparing them for it first. That question should be put to students no earlier than in the second half of the lesson, after you have built up to it.

When you want your students to produce language and/or interact in English, make sure that they have the tools necessary to do so. You can write on the board or use PowerPoint, but a worksheet is often a better instrument. The worksheet can have the target sentence patterns, examples of usage, and key vocabulary words. The worksheet can be a reference for students to use as they engage in interaction with the ETA and/or with each other.

**Check for understanding:** When you are talking to your students, pause often and check that they understand. With elementary school students, it is not enough to ask, “Do you understand?” They are very likely to say “yes” even when they don’t understand, or they may think that they understand, when they have a fundamental misunderstanding. To check for understanding, you can play Simon Says, have them act out a word, write an answer, or play a short (5 minute) game.

**Voices from the field:**

*Gabe Newland (Dongshan Elementary School)*

At my elementary school, even the most advanced sixth graders did not have anything beyond very basic conversational English. And as far as I can tell from teaching students at English Village and talking with other ETAs, the situation is similar at most elementary schools in Yilan County. When I came to Taiwan, I understood that my students would not be advanced English speakers. But I thought their English ability would be higher than it actually is.

This doesn’t mean that you will not be able to communicate with your students in English. It just underscores the need for a well thought-out approach to teaching. Investing a lot of time at the beginning of the semester teaching classroom English and establishing a good system of classroom management, for example, will pay lots of dividends later in the year. With this foundation in place, your students will be more likely to understand your instructions in the classroom, you will have fewer discipline problems, and you will be able to execute more challenging lessons in the future.

After you’ve developed a strategy for managing your classroom and your students have a grasp of classroom English, you will still need to prepare students carefully and lead them step-by-step
(scaffold) through activities and to the outcomes you have in mind. For example, if you want your students to respond to the question, “What do you want to do on your summer vacation?” you first need to be sure they understand the question. Do they know the seasons? Do they understand different pronouns? Do they know what vacation means? Do they understand that the question refers to the future and, more specifically, the upcoming summer and only the upcoming summer? That is, do they understand that this isn’t a question about what they do, in general, on their summer vacations? Once your students understand the question, you should make sure they have the necessary vocabulary and grammar to respond to the question. At the minimum, they should understand and be able to use the following sentence pattern: “I want to _________ on my summer vacation.” And they should understand and be able to use several verbs that they can plug into the sentence pattern. For example: “go swimming,” “have a picnic,” “play basketball,” or “play tennis”. Finally, after you’ve done all the necessary scaffolding and practiced the sentence as a class, you might proceed to a group activity or individual work that reinforces what you’ve taught.

**Teaching Activities**

**Introduction:** A 40 or 45-minute language lesson should be divided up into several different parts (see the section on “Lesson Planning” for why and how to do that). Some activities will be teacher-led, some will involve students interacting with each other, and some will consist of students working independently. When to choose what kind of activity should be determined by the learning goals and the location in the lesson that the activity occupies. This section discusses some general principles about the structure of activities.

**In theory:** Language learning, especially courses for young (elementary school) learners, should be a process in which students are actively involved in using the language. Constructivist learning theory claims that learning is not a process of memorizing a list of facts. Similarly, language acquisition theory claims that the process of acquiring a language is a process by which, through input, interaction and feedback, learners create a rule-based system for communication. Learning a language, therefore, must require active participation by the learner.

Active learning can manifest itself in many ways, including structured sentence drills, games, puzzles, role-playing, or acting out dialogs. Activities can be conducted as a whole class with the teacher leading the activity, working in groups, or individually.

Activities can happen at any time in the lesson, from the warm-up to the wrap-up.

A language learning activity should focus on the target language structure, whether it’s pronunciation, vocabulary, sentence patterns (commonly referred to as ”grammar”), or communication strategies. The activity should be designed so that students must successfully use the language in the target form in order to achieve the goal of the activity.

Whole-class activities have all students doing the same thing at the same time. Examples of these activities are chants and songs. These activities have the advantage of involving every student, and giving the students a low-pressure environment (students are not singled out to perform in
front of the whole class). The disadvantage of this kind of activity is that the teacher is less able to monitor individuals’ performance. Therefore, it is best to use these activities for warm-ups and practice.

Sometimes the teacher has to teach explicitly. This should be as little like a lecture as possible. When explicit instruction is necessary, the teacher should frequently check for understanding (see the “Interacting with students” section for details).

**Guided practice** gives students the chance to try using the language in very small steps and small chunks. Activities of this type include having students try to pronounce a word or reproduce a chunk or phrase, identifying a correct answer, or creating sentences by inserting words into the appropriate place or manipulating a sentence pattern.

The focus of a guided practice exercise is on the mechanics (structure) of the language, not necessarily on meaning or communication. It is a necessary prerequisite step to communication, but lessons should spend only as much time as necessary on this kind of exercise.

After the students can manipulate the structure with reasonable accuracy and confidence, then you should engage in **structured practice** activities. The focus in this kind of activity is on real communication. In other words, activities in which students use language to achieve a communication goal. Activities of this type include information gap, jigsaw, surveys, and interviews.

Even beginners can engage in real communication. A survey activity can be structured to only require one sentence pattern ("Do you like ____?") and a short list of vocabulary words (e.g., fruits, actions, famous people). In this activity, students engage in real communication using English, and practice speaking, listening, reading and writing.

The ultimate goal of learning a language is to be able to use it to communicate on topics chosen by the speaker. While talking about politics or art requires very advanced language skills, even first-year students can engage in unscripted communication. Open-ended activities have a set starting point, but participants are free to take it where they like. One example of this kind of activity is the “role play”. Students can also re-write the dialog from the textbook. This kind of activity works best with partners or in groups.

**Best practice:**
Have several activities in every lesson.

Design the activities to keep every student actively engaged. You don’t want to have the activities be one-on-one between the teacher and one student. This structure does not actively involve all of the students.

Give specific instructions for the activity. Model the activity if you think it will make the activity flow more smoothly. Integrating the activity with a worksheet can help focus attention and guide students’ work.
Design the activity to be communicative; students need to use language in order to complete the activity.

Ensure that the activity has a language focus. The purpose of the activity should be to practice the language.

Keep activities short. No activity should last longer than 15 minutes.

**Voices from the field:**

_Gabe Newland (Dongshan Elementary School)_

I found it helpful to think of each class as a transition from whole-class instruction/activity to a small group activity to an individual activity. After a warm-up, for example, you might spend ten minutes introducing a topic and modeling an activity. Then you might spend another ten minutes coordinating a small group activity reinforcing what you’ve just taught. Finally, for the remainder of the class, students might do individual work in the form of a worksheet or another homework assignment. Another way to think of this process is: “I do, we do, you do.”

It’s important to think of ways to get students actively involved in all activities. For example, if you are teaching a unit on clothing, and plan to lead a warm-up chant using clothing vocabulary, you might create flashcards for everyone in the class to use during the chant. Each flashcard could have one of the vocabulary words. You could put the flashcards in a pile at the center of each table and then, before you begin the chant, ask each student to take one card. Instruct the students to hold up their flashcard if they hear the corresponding vocabulary word during the chant. This makes the chant more exciting, more challenging, and it gives you and your co-teacher a great way to check for comprehension. And students feel more comfortable because, in this group setting, they’re not embarrassed if they make a mistake. After a few repetitions of the chant, you can ask students to switch flashcards so they have a new vocabulary word.

**Classroom Games**

_**Introduction:**_ There is a very fuzzy line that separates an activity from a game. The primary distinguishing characteristic is that a game is designed to be fun. Games can be very motivating in the classroom, and so you should integrate them into your lessons judiciously. One approach is to use them as rewards and motivators.

_**In theory:**_ A game is a structured activity that has challenges, rules, and rewards. Doing a grammar exercise, filling in a worksheet, memorizing a vocabulary list are not games. However, they can be fodder for games.

A game can be included in any part of the lesson: from warm-up through wrap-up. Games can be used as a mechanism to review or reinforce material, or can even be a part of your classroom management system.

While games can be useful, lessons should not be built around games. The game should be added to the lesson only as appropriate.
Not every game is suitable for the language class. Only games that make integral use of language should be included in the lesson. Games are activities that allow students to use their language skills to complete with each other and with themselves. Games that are overly physical, that require running or speed, for example, may not meet these criteria.

“Because it’s fun” is not a good reason to play a game. Language class is for language learning. A game that enhances language learning is suitable for the class. Choosing to play a particular game that does not have a linguistic aspect is a waste of valuable instruction time.

**Best practice:**
Use games to enhance your language lesson, motivate and reward students.

Give your games a language focus: succeeding in the game is contingent on using language correctly. “Language first, game second.”

Games should last between 10-15 minutes.

Use games sparingly: there is such a thing as too much of a good thing.

**Voices from the field:**
*Monica Kim (Siao Wei Elementary School)*
Games were a great way to motivate students into learning. However, it’s also important to consider how the game will emphasize the four skills (reading, writing, speaking, or listening). When my co-teacher and I would plan a lesson and a corresponding game we would also try to address one or more of the skills in the game. However, more complicated games, which may be more fun for the students, may also take longer to explain. Many of our favorite games in the classroom involved simple teamwork relays that addressed the four skills.

**Warm-ups**

**Introduction:** English is a foreign language in Taiwan, which means that for most students, English class is the only time that they will be exposed to English. It is also probably the only time that they will be expected to interact in English. The transition to an English environment is not an insignificant shift for students cognitively. A short activity can help students get used to working in English; prime their minds to accept English input from the teacher, and get them ready to produce language. This is the function of a warm-up.

**In theory:** Warm-ups set the stage for learning. An ideal warm-up involves every student, requires everyone to be actively engaged, is linguistically easy, is related to previous learning, and anticipates what will be covered in the current lesson. While it is not practical to implement all of these ideals in every warm-up, they should be seen as goals for every warm-up. A bad warm-up is performed largely by the teacher, involves only a few students, lasts too long or not long enough, and has no communicative function.
Warm-ups can be productive, requiring students to produce language, or receptive, such as “listening to pictures.” Warm-ups can also consist of choral work, in which students all produce language in concert. Chants and songs belong in this category. There is no one single best or most appropriate warm-up. Your warm-up should fit the criteria listed above, and should be related to your lesson.

**Best practice:**
Get right into it: The warm-up should be the first thing you do in class, right after taking attendance. Don’t announce the warm-up—“We’re going to do a warm-up now”—just begin.

Expect everyone to participate: If not every student is warming up, then not every student is getting ready to participate in class.

Have a routine: It’s a good idea to have one chant or song that you do regularly. It can be very short, and it can be part of your warm-up for that lesson. A regular warm-up establishes a routine for your class, which helps make classroom management easier.

**Voices from the field:**
*Gabe Newland (Dongshan Elementary School)*
I didn’t begin using warm-ups effectively until the middle of 2nd semester. Once I did, though, I found them to be extremely helpful. A good warm-up helps by getting students attention, getting students excited to begin class, and priming students to communicate in English. Starting with a chant that uses vocabulary relevant to the current lesson—like the one I described in the “Teaching Activities” section—is a good idea.

---

**Teaching Phonics**

**Introduction:** Phonics is the relationship of the printed word to the spoken word. In the United States, phonics is used as a tool to help children read. As such, it is intended to help native speakers of English, who already know the words, to sound out the words. In the United States, there is an active debate as to whether phonics or whole language is the more appropriate approach to teach reading. As is often the case in controversies of this type, the truth is that a mixture of whole language and phonics techniques is probably the best way to teach reading.

In English instruction in Taiwan, phonics is used to teach pronunciation. Prior to the introduction of phonics, a phonetic system called KK was taught to aid in pronunciation. Using phonics to teach phonetics is a bit incongruous, especially because phonics is intended for use by native speakers. However, there is some value in using phonics, mainly because it helps language learners to read “real” English, and not an abstracted phonetic system. The fact that written English is not phonetic (it’s morphophonemic) presents some challenges to all readers, regardless of native language.

**In theory:** Phonetic systems capture the pronunciation of a language much better than phonics, because whereas phonics is an imperfect correlation of letters to sounds, phonetic systems use special symbols to represent the specific sounds.
Learning to read requires an awareness of the phonemic nature of English. Although written English is not as phonetic as other languages, such as Korean and Spanish, it can be claimed that English is mostly phonemic. The relationship between the written and spoken word, while not completely corresponding, nevertheless is about 70% predictable. For example, although “th” has two distinct sounds, such as in “this” and “tooth,” the two sounds are more similar than they are different. Examples of this characteristic of written English can be seen in an examination of the “p” sound in the words “pull,” “tap” and “spill.”

The task of English teachers with regard to phonics is to teach the phonemic characteristics of English, and the pronunciation patterns of the English language.

Reading as a skill is very much developmental in nature. Very young learners of English, if they were in American schools, would still have emerging reading skills. The focus of reading instruction would be on word identification and word attack skills (another word for phonics). They would not be expected to read very complicated material. In Taiwan, phonics skills should be taught not with the goal of teaching reading, but the relationship of written symbols to sounds. The linking of sounds together to form words is actively taught in Chinese instruction in early elementary school, as children learn the Chinese phonetic system “zhuyin” which helps children learn to read Chinese.

**Best practice:**
Give lots of examples: As a native speaker, it is probably easier for you than for your LET to think of examples of words that fit the target pattern. Feel free to use multisyllabic words in which only one syllable fits the pattern. For example, if the target is “at,” of course you will use “cat”, “bat,” etc., but you can also use “democrat” or “acrobat.”

Integrate with other skills and activities: Explicit, direct instruction in phonics is probably necessary, but you can also branch out to activities or games that integrate phonics practice. A plain phonics lesson is dry and uninteresting.

Recycle: When you are teaching and practicing a new phonics pattern, bring in patterns that you have previously taught, both to review and to contrast with the new pattern.

Keep it communicative: As much as possible, all teaching activities should be communicative. Try to design activities that require students to apply their knowledge of phonics. For example, a jigsaw or an information gap exercise could put them in situations where they have to distinguish between sounds.

**Voices from the field:**
*Monica Kim (Siao Wei Elementary School)*
Teaching phonics is an important yet difficult aspect of teaching English. To encourage interest in learning phonics, my LET and I would use chants and games with our students so they would find it more interesting. We would often isolate the sounds and use games that encouraged listening and identifying specific phonic sounds. When teaching phonics, the LET would usually explain the phonics within a relatable context to Chinese. For instance, we would constantly
Teaching Pronunciation

**Introduction:** Taiwanese students are famous for not being able to speak English. Part of the reason for this is that English instruction in Taiwan focuses on reading and writing, and neglects speaking and listening. As a result, Taiwanese people generally have poor oral language skills. Having an ETA in a class can and should address this situation.

As a native speaker of English, you are a source of correct pronunciation, and so you should be a model, monitor, and a coach to your students.

**In theory:** Pronunciation consists of forming the consonant and vowel sounds correctly, and having a command of the stress pattern of English. In fact, there is an ongoing controversy about teaching pronunciation. One school of thought holds that the individual speech sounds (vowels and consonants) should be emphasized, and the other camp believes that intonation and rhythm are more important.

It is commonly accepted that accent-free second language speech is generally unattainable. Therefore, you should strive to have your students speak understandably, but not necessarily perfectly.

Before students can produce language correctly, they must be able to distinguish the sounds correctly. Therefore, you can include listening as part of your pronunciation instruction. You can plan simple activities such as saying a word and asking students to identify the speech sound (or better yet, having your students take turns speaking, and having the other students identify what they are saying).

Teach using minimal pairs. For example, the words “sit” and “sat” are identical except for one element: the vowel. Minimal pairs allow you to focus on the key characteristic that you want your students to notice.

When your students make a mistake in pronunciation (or in anything else), you have to decide whether and how to correct it. Not every error needs correcting, and not every time is appropriate for correction. For example, when students are engaged in a task or a role-play activity in which pronunciation is not the focus, then you probably don’t want to interrupt the flow of the activity in order to address the pronunciation problem. However, if you are engaged in an activity in which pronunciation is important, then you should address mistakes promptly.

The most effective way to correct pronunciation problems is done in two steps. First, get the student to notice the problem. You can do that by repeating the error, writing it down, or otherwise calling it to the student’s attention. The second step is to try to elicit the correct pronunciation from the student. Ideally, the student will be able to correct herself. If not, then you can model the correct pronunciation, and have the student repeat after you.
Best practice:
Model pronunciation: Your activities should include a lot of speaking and listening. When you model pronunciation for your students, make sure that you give them the chance to try it on their own, either chorally or individually, or both.

Correct mistakes: When the focus is on pronunciation, and an error causes a breakdown (or potential breakdown) in communication, then correct it. Not correcting an error can actually reinforce the mistake.

Chants and songs can help: Practice makes perfect, and speaking is a complex action. Lowering the affective barrier through choral work can help build speaking skills and confidence, especially among less-confident students.

Encourage students: When you call on an individual student, and she says something correctly, praise her, and then ask her to repeat it loudly so that everyone can hear. Then praise her again. This will build confidence.

Voices from the field:
Gabe Newland (Dongshan Elementary School)
As mentioned above, Taiwan’s English curriculum tends to stress reading and writing at the expense of speaking and listening. This is an area where the ETA can be a big help. So it’s important for ETAs to think of lots of ways to model language. If you don’t, you may end up serving as a human replacement to the audio recording that accompanies the textbook. LETs might not know how else to leverage your comparative advantage vis-à-vis oral language, though, so you should take the initiative to think of creative ways to model language and engage students in oral communication.

A couple of ways I did this at English Village: In the Health Center, I had students stand in a circle and play a Simon Says-style game using “parts of the body” vocabulary like head, eyes, ears, nose, throat, stomach, and feet. I began as leader, telling students, “Touch your______.” Students competed to respond the quickest and I had an easy way to check for comprehension. After a few repetitions, I picked a student to be the leader, which put him/her in a position in which he/she had to produce English. After several repetitions I had that student pick a new student, etc.

In the Airport, I lead an activity in which students described a suitcase. After introducing several adjectives related to color, shape, and size, and leading an activity to practice the vocabulary, I introduced the sentence pattern, “My suitcase is______.” As a model, I described my suitcase: “My suitcase is red and black. My suitcase is big. My suitcase is square.” I’d already distributed pictures of different suitcases to students so, as I modeled the activity, they would look at the board where I’d written the vocabulary words and think about how to describe their own suitcases. Before the end of class, I had each student come to the front of the class to describe their suitcase to the group using the sentence pattern I’d just taught.
Using Technology

Introduction: If you are lucky, you will have a computer, projector and Internet connection in your classroom. These assets give you powerful tools that can add interest and effectiveness to your teaching, and increase your reach to students.

Your textbook probably has numerous ancillary materials, including posters, flashcards, audio CDs and interactive CDs. If you have a SMART Board in your classroom, you can use some of the activities included on the interactive CD during your lesson.

In theory: Technology is a tool. It is not a methodology, or a teacher. Technology cannot replace teachers, any more than chalk, whiteboards, textbooks, or any other tool can replace teachers. Therefore, the guiding principle behind the use of technology in the classroom is to put pedagogy first. Technology should only be used when it can enhance teaching or improve learning.

Technology can do this in the following ways:

Focus attention: You can’t teach students if you don’t have their attention. Even if their eyes are on you, you can’t be sure that they are really paying attention. Technology has a “cyber tropic” effect (“photo tropism” is the natural tendency for plants to turn toward a light source).

Provide input: An audio CD with recordings of the dialog from the textbook can expose students to the speaking styles of more native speakers. Research shows that in order to improve listening comprehension, language learners needs to be exposed to a variety of speech and speakers. While this has not been practical to achieve in traditional classrooms, technology can bring additional speakers into the classroom. Other forms of input that technology facilitates are video clips (from You Tube, for example), photographs, and animations from the ancillary materials from the textbook publishers.

Enhance instruction: “Chalk and talk” approaches to teaching are very abstract and not appropriate for elementary school language learners. Visual aids, such as posters and flash cards, which have been used in classrooms, can be made more engaging and effective when delivered via technology. A photo instead of a line drawing, an audio clip instead of the teacher singing, and a video clip instead of a photograph are all examples of enhancing visual aids, bringing more of the outside world into the classroom.

Best practice:
Use technology to support your teaching: Don’t design a lesson around technology.

Use technology as an attention-getter and to focus students’ attention: You can show a video clip, display key vocabulary words and/or pictures, and even play games with the projector as a focal point.
Use PowerPoint as a visual aid to show pictures: The projector screen is bigger than any flash card that you can create, and for larger classes, your pictures and text will be much easier to see when you display them with PowerPoint and a projector.

Link the technology and student work: A worksheet can reproduce the key information that is on the PPT, and also have areas for students to write on their own, take notes, and do exercises. Combining central projection with individual worksheets is especially effective for middle school.

Have a backup plan: Technology is infamous for failing. A good teacher always has a contingency plan, regardless of whether technology is part of the lesson plan. This is especially important when using technology. If you are depending on technology and it fails, then you should have an alternative way to deliver the lesson, even if it isn’t as fun, interesting, or engaging as your original plan. You don’t want to lose valuable instruction time if your technology doesn’t work.

Voices from the field:
Gabe Newland (Dongshan Elementary School)
At my school, one of my English classrooms had a computer and a projector, which I occasionally used to deliver PowerPoint presentations or to show You Tube videos. But the computer and projector were unreliable and, at one point, broken for more than a month. In the other two classrooms, I didn’t have a computer or a projector. So, while I was occasionally able to use technology to augment my teaching, I didn’t use it on a regular basis. I had to be creative with chalk, the blackboard, and flashcards.

On a couple of occasions at the beginning of the year I planned lessons that required a computer only to see the computer, the projector, or the Internet connection fail. All of the schools in Yilan County have very different levels of technology. I recommended getting a clear understanding of the situation at your school early in the year, incorporating technology into your teaching when possible, and having a good back-up plan. Without the back-up plan, class can quickly descend into chaos, which is stressful for the teachers and a waste of the students’ time and education.

Songs, Music and Chants

Introduction: Music and chants can play a valuable role in the language classroom, contributing to overall language fluency and confidence among language learners. By making choral language activities a regular part of your class, you will add variety and interest to your
lessons. Taiwanese students generally like to sing, and even middle-school boys will sing in class if it is a whole-class activity.

In theory: Music can facilitate language learning in a number of ways. There has been some brain research that indicates that language is processed in the left hemisphere of the brain, but prosody (intonation, stress, and rhythm of language) is processed by the right hemisphere, the same area of the brain that is responsible for music processing. That suggests that music is closely connected to the flow of language. Language-focused music activities are thus very beneficial to language learning.

In this section, the term “music” will be used to refer to songs with lyrics (words) and chants. Songs have to have words in order to be relevant to language learning, and although chants are not musical, they have the same linguistic content that songs do. It is also assumed that the students will sing or chant together as a whole class. The term “choral language” is also applicable to this kind of activity.

Choral language activities have the following benefits:

- They can be used to introduce and practice stress patterns of language.
- They can help students achieve fluency in language production.
- The ability to produce a long stream of language can increase student confidence.
- Putting language in a musical context helps students memorize large chunks of language.
- By embedding language in music and producing it as a whole class, individuals’ self-consciousness (referred to in the research as the “affective barrier”) and hesitation to produce language is lowered.

Some common techniques for using music in the language classroom:

- Nursery rhymes, famous poems: Many nursery rhymes from Mother Goose have potentially valuable cultural content as well as having passed the test of time.
- Change lyrics to familiar songs. You can take the melody of a folk song like “Twinkle twinkle little star” or “Frère Jacques” and write lyrics to fit your lesson content.
- Have kids write their own song. After students know a song, they can modify your version of the song, or write their own from scratch.

Best practice:
Teach in small chunks, slowly build up over time: Some simple chants like “Humpty Dumpty” or “Hey Diddle Diddle” can be taught quickly, but students will need lots of time and practice before they are able to produce them easily.

Explicitly teach the stress pattern: the linguistic value of including songs, especially jazz chants, lies in the emphasis on the rhythm and stress patterns of English. It is not enough that the students can pronounce the words correctly; they also need to put the stress in the correct parts of each line.
Use them as warm-ups: Songs are excellent instruments for warm-ups. They can be part of the classroom routine, and used regularly, they will be easy, familiar lead-ins to your lesson (see the section on Warm-ups for details).

Regular part of class: Songs are most effective when they are used repeatedly in lessons. It is appropriate to use the same song for a month then change to another.

Turn it into a game: This works best with chants. When you have a few extra minutes in class, because you finished your lesson early or because you have to wait for the computer to reboot, you can challenge students to do a chant faster and faster. Or you can determine a specific word which students have to replace with a clap (or have them replace every other word with a clap). When you make a game out of the chant, retain the linguistic characteristics of the chant.

Voices from the field:
Gabe Newland (Dongshan Elementary School)
“I really liked to use music in the classroom. Some favorites from this year: The Jackson 5’s “ABC”, Bob Marley’s “Three Little Birds”, and “Hard Knock Life” (versions from Annie, Jay-Z, and beat-boxing flute player Greg Patillo). Generally my music lessons came in the form of a special activity or class period. With the exception of “Deck the Halls,” which my class performed at our school Christmas assembly, I didn’t incorporate music teaching into class in small, regular doses, though that approach probably would have been better in several cases.

Singing is often popular with the students but a lot of their willingness to sing depends on their personality and their interest in the song. Each class has its own personality, so there can be great variation even within one grade. When I taught Bob Marley, for example, several of my 5th grade classes were really excited to sing but one class wasn’t interested at all. It’s also important to pick songs at an appropriate English level. If the song is too hard, students won’t be able to sing it, even if they like singing.

In addition to teaching music, I would often play songs (in English) as students entered class or as they completed worksheets or other homework.

Assessment and Grades

Introduction: As an ETA, your role in assessment and assigning grades should be supportive in nature. This is because the stakes are high. Taiwan’s academic environment is much more competitive than America’s, and grades and test performance matter a great deal more than they do in the United States.

It is appropriate for ETAs to help write test items, and to correct student work. Tests are typically designed by LET’s, however. In larger schools, the English tests are standardized within the school, created by committees and used by all the English classes in the school. Deciding the criteria for test design and for assigning grades is a huge responsibility, and because ETAs do not have the educational background, training and experience, it is more appropriate that their involvement in this process be advisory and consultative in nature.
In theory: Testing is the attempt to bridge the gap between teaching and learning. Teaching is visible, measurable, and under the direct control of the teacher. None of this is true of learning, however. Assessment is used to try to measure learning. However, this is problematic. Testing happens at one point of time, while learning happens over a protracted amount of time. Testing measures performance, which may or may not reflect what the learner actually knows. Testing is an imperfect, problematic activity.

There are two forms of assessment. Summative assessment happens after teaching is done, and is intended to measure student achievement. A final exam is an example of summative assessment. If a student does poorly on a final exam, the conclusion is reached that the student did not learn enough, and the only recourse is to have the student take the class again.

As an ETA, you should engage in more of the other form of assessment: formative assessment. Formative assessment happens in concert with teaching. It is used to gauge learning in process. The results of formative assessment are used to adjust teaching to meet student needs.

There are many ways to conduct formative assessment. The simplest is to ask a student a question in class. If the student can respond to the question correctly, then you can assume that the student has learned, and you can proceed. If the student cannot respond, then you can assume that the student is not ready to move on yet. The action that you take based on the results of formative assessment is a teaching decision. You may increase or decrease the speed of instruction, re-teach, or teach differently. The point is that the assessment informs and influences teaching.

Best practice:
Get input and feedback from your LET about your assessment instruments: When you are a beginner to creating homework, quizzes, and test items, you should consult with your LET, who should give you feedback about the appropriateness of your work. Budget time to allow you to make changes to your materials.

Remember the purpose: Worksheets and homework are designed to help the students learn, not to trap them or catch them in a mistake. Set your students up for success.

Give feedback: You should correct and return materials to your students as quickly as possible. Research indicates that feedback is the most effective the closer it follows performance. When students make mistakes, you should supply the correct answer. Corrective feedback is much more effective than simply indicating right or wrong.

Voices from the field:
Monica Kim (Siao Wei Elementary School)
Within my co-teaching experience, my LET and I regularly tested at the beginning and end of every lesson. Assessments were usually in the form of writing and speaking to see if students were doing their homework and grasping material. It also helped identify weaker students in need of remedial lessons. Formative assessment in the form of games can also help the teachers
identify what parts of the lessons need reinforcement. My LET and I would often stop games to review tricky sentence patterns or vocabulary words with students.

**Dealing with “Cheating”**

**Introduction:** “Cheating” is a loaded word. It assigns motive to action, which may or may not be an accurate assessment of the situation. Cheating implies a deliberate choice to undermine the integrity of the academic process, which may be why teachers often feel personally insulted and indignant when faced with cheating.

ETAs should be aware of some cultural differences in Taiwan that affect student behavior, however. What might be considered cheating in an American context may or may not be considered cheating in a Taiwanese context. There are different conceptions of the academic environment, power structures and sources of authority in the classroom, and the roles of teacher and student. Regardless of the background, or perhaps because of it, addressing this issue in the context of ETAs teaching in Taiwan is important.

**In theory:** Cheating is a kind of behavior, and so it is addressable by classroom rules (see Classroom Management). Every school should have a policy related to academic honesty. For your classes, you can make additional rules, which can further define cheating and outline penalties.

The definition of cheating is cultural. When students are working on in-class assignments, and ask each other questions about the assignment, is that cheating? That frequently happens in American classrooms as well. Some teachers feel strongly that students should do their own work, and asking another student is betraying that ideal. The same situation happens with homework. It is not uncommon for an ETA to discover several students’ homework to be identical, including identical mistakes.

There is a context in which this behavior does not fit the American definition of cheating. In traditional Chinese educational culture, there is one single correct answer, and education is the process of acquiring the answer. Whether that answer is acquired from a textbook, reference book, teacher or classmate is immaterial. What is important is that the student has the answer, and is able to produce it on demand (usually in a testing situation). Copying another student’s work, therefore, is simply one way to acquire the knowledge. In fact, the student really isn’t “copying” other students’ work, because that student had to acquire it from somewhere herself. In that context, then, it isn’t copying or cheating at all.

Following that logic, these behaviors are not cheating:

- Copying each other’s homework.
- Asking a student for the answer to a question on a worksheet.
• Blurting out the answer to a teacher’s question, even when the question is directed at another student.
• Whispering the answer to a student to whom the teacher posed a question.

Best practice:
Don’t accuse students of cheating: You may shock, offend, and confuse students by putting a negative label on behavior that they do not consider wrong. Instead of saying, “don’t cheat,” try saying, “please work on your own,” or “let him answer for himself.”

Teach behavior: Explicitly tell your students what you want and don’t want them to do. You may have to tell them that you want them to work on their own. You may require students to raise their hands in order to answer a question.

Voices from the field:
Gabe Newland (Dongshan Elementary School)
In my school, it was very common for students to whisper answers to a peer if he or she didn’t know the answer to a question I asked in class. Occasionally, I had issues with students copying answers from other students’ worksheets. I never had any major issues with cheating on tests. I encourage ETAs to discuss expectations for “academic integrity” with LETs at the beginning of the year.

Mainstreamed Special Education Students (Identified and Not)

Introduction: The days of isolating special-needs students are in the past, both in Taiwan and in the US. In today’s classrooms, teachers have to deal with students who have behavioral, emotional, and physical handicaps. This requires additional effort on the part of the classroom teacher. As a teacher in the classroom, you will be expected to accommodate special-needs students. As an untrained and inexperienced ETA, you should request help in doing so.

In theory: Every student is unique, and so it might be fair to say that every student has special needs. While it is true that students with ADHD or autism have measurably different needs, it is also true that many handicaps are gradient; that is, there are varying degrees of handicap. This is the primary reason for ending the separation of children with needs into so-called “special education” classes. The truth is that it is impossible to predict what a given student can and can’t learn in a regular classroom, and it is presumptuous and unfair to try.

Students who have identified special needs have the right to an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which is a curriculum customized for that student, taking into account the learning disadvantages and the level and kind of assistance that the student needs. The classroom teacher has the right (and need) to know the contents of the IEP, and the responsibility to do everything possible and practical to assist the student.

Students with more severe needs need a “para-professional” to assist them. The para-pro is in the classroom solely to help that student, not assist with anything else that happens in the classroom.
The teacher is not expected to change the content of the lesson, style of instruction, or to devote an unreasonable amount of extra time to helping special-needs students.

**Best practice:**
Treat every student differently: As mentioned above, every student is different, and has different needs. Adjust your expectations of each student as much as you can, based on your time, flexibility in the teaching activity, and your knowledge of the student. The key goal is to have every student succeed. It is not necessary that every student succeed under the same circumstances. To illustrate this point, on report cards and transcripts, grades are not footnoted with comments like: “this student achieved an A in class, but the teacher needed to help him a lot, and he tried seven times before he succeeded.”

Maintain high standards: The above point does not negate the responsibility of the teacher to expect excellence, hard work and success from all your students. The same high standards should apply to all students, not just the mainstream students, and not just the special-needs students. Note that this point should not contradict the first point. Expect effort and success from each student, and give them the help that they need in order to achieve.

Request help: A large chunk of time is spent on training teachers to work with special-needs students. As an ETA, you are not expected to have these skills. If you have trouble, or want help in helping students succeed, then enlist the help of your LET, the para-pro (if applicable), the school administration, your academic advisor(s), or the AP.

**Voices from the field:**
*Monica Kim (Siao Wei Elementary School)*
Special Education needs students are included in general English classes in Taiwan. Some of these students are identified and receive additional assistance outside of general classes and some are not. As an ETA, I would suggest having a conversation with your LET about special needs students and how you can assist during class time. In almost every grade, we had a special needs student. Luckily, there are two teachers in the classroom so one could assist the student with more difficult activities or lessons. We would also allow certain students to spend time after class to complete activities.

**Recommended Reading**
Douglas Brown’s *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*
http://www.btinternet.com/~ted.power/teflindex.htm

http://www.eslcafe.com/

“What Makes a Great Teacher” from *The Atlantic*:

“Building a Better Teacher” from *The New York Times Magazine*:
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/magazine/07Teachers-t.html?pagewanted=1&sq=Doug%20Lemov%20Teachers&st=cse&scp=1

"On the Ground" blog from Will Okun, guest-blogger with Nicholas Kristof. Former Chicago public school teacher and winner of Kristof's "Win a Trip" Contest.
http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/tag/will-okun/

"2Sisters.2Schools" blog from Fulbright Taiwan ETA Nikka Landau and her sister Claire Landau, a public school teacher in Philadelphia.
http://2sisters2schools.blogspot.com/


"Teaching as Leadership: The Highly Effective Teacher's Guide to Closing the Achievement Gap." Great book by Steven Farr, Chief Knowledge Officer at Teach for America.
http://www.amazon.com/Teaching-As-Leadership-Effective-Achievement/dp/0470432861/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1263320659&sr=8-1

"Teaching as Leadership." A website breaking down the Teach for America approach to effective teaching.
http://www.teachingasleadership.org/

"Effective Teaching in Action." Teaching success stories from Teach for America Corps members overcoming all sorts of obstacles.
http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/teaching/effective_teaching_action.htm#backman_kristen