

Daniela Janakova: Time to Share

Hallo again,

As I promised, my workshop today will be very practical. Firstly, I would like to show you some of the LT materials, textbooks, video and computer programs which I and my colleague Helena Tvrdikova have found useful in teaching our deaf and hard of hearing university students, especially to get you familiar with the textbooks which we use for teaching grammar, writing and reading skills or plan to use in the nearest future. I will pass them on to you later on today to have a look and you can also go over them more thoroughly here in the LRC any time in the late afternoons when the official seminar program is over. But please, don't take them away as mostly we have just one copy of each.

I believe that all of us, teachers, here, have our own cherished teaching methods or a set of strategies which are slightly different but by sharing them with one another we can learn a lot and that is truly great. I was given a rare chance to compare several modules and approaches to teaching English to the Deaf both at the universities in the USA and in Great Britain. Surprisingly, they all differed from one another but they all worked, which is, of course, the most important thing.

Let me first characterize briefly my own language teaching method. As I am unfortunately not a signer, which I regret a lot, I have to use a sign language interpreter and a note taker during my classes. This is not ideal because I lack direct feedback from my students and am always dependent on my interpreter. The situation is slightly better if my interpreter's English is at least at the intermediate level, but it gets much worse when my interpreter is a beginner herself or himself as well.

That is why I think that the young generation of teachers of the Deaf should definitely learn the sign language first and only when they have mastered it at a sufficient level to be able to instruct their students through the it, they should start teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. That is really a very important step and I think that sign language should be taught at universities the same way as other foreign languages are taught. It could be optional but anyone interested should be given a chance to study sign language for free. The same way it is abroad. Sign languages are even taught by many other public institutions, anyone is welcome to learn. The goal is very simple: to draw attention of the public to helping the deaf citizens in an effective way.

As we at our university now even have our first deaf graduates, not far in the future we will definitely have also more deaf university teachers than just one,

Peter. And that is a dream of all deaf students: to be taught by a member of their own deaf community. I think that would be an optimal but on the other hand rather unrealistic situation because hardly ever will we have enough deaf graduates specialized in all possible branches and subjects of studies. That means, we will need many more, well educated and possibly subject-specialized interpreters.

But let us get back to teaching our deaf students here at the LRC. Let me give you some advice but because I would like to save some time for showing you some parts of the videos from the Summer Schools at Gallaudet University and at the University of Bristol and for your questions and our discussion as well, it will be just a brief summary. You will find more detailed information and advice in the Methodology Guide which was published by the LRC. In case of interest, read the passage called How to help the Deaf Effectively written by me.

In fact, the classroom should be slightly bigger than this one and have more boards on the walls or at least more flipcharts. That is very important because ideally all of your students should be given a chance to write different or the same writing tasks simultaneously on the boards. Keeping them all active is very important because if they don't pay attention, they don't learn.

Testing student knowledge and their real understanding of the explained grammar and reading tasks should take place practically all the time at any lesson. In fact you should revise with your deaf and hard of hearing students at least ten times more than with your hearing students. It is a very demanding and time consuming approach but it pays off. Your students should be always told their test results and if possible given corrected copies of all written tests. This will enable them to learn from their mistakes. You can ask them to rewrite the tests one more time without any mistakes and then to check it after them again. If it is still full of mistakes, ask them to rewrite it again and again. Deaf teachers at the Language Institute of Gallaudet University find this method of permanent rewriting tasks very efficient.

You can also exchange e-mails with your students or ask them to keep their everyday diaries, keep reports of some events in their lives day by day. Next time you can ask some of them to write their news on the board, then always let your students correct their mistakes themselves first and only then, when they finish, correct the rest of the mistakes yourself, if you consider them important. Regarding correcting mistakes, I am much more strict than our colleagues from Gallaudet because I always try to correct all the students' mistakes, not just some.

High technology can help the process of learning and teaching a lot as well. I think you all know overhead and data projectors and visualiser which can project any objects. The advantage of this device is that you can use a sheet with a written text and project it straight ahead without having to prepare transparent foils. By preparing ahead the correct version of students' homework or test, you can save a lot of precious time during your lesson because you can ask your students to correct their mistakes themselves instead of losing time on individual corrections. Also, you can project to your students a drawing or practically any object and ask them to write what is going on in the picture or ask them to give you a list of associated words which students can think of within a certain time limit. All students do like this creative and playful exercise: both the deaf and the hearing ones.

As I said, situational pictures as well as signing dolls and other toys can help a lot when teaching young deaf pupils. You can also stimulate the interest of your students by giving them a proverb or an interesting quotation of a great philosopher, statesman, writer, or thinker, give them a poem and ask them to write an essay with their comments, write what literature and poetry means for them. You can read with them an interesting part of a story and ask them to write as their homework the missing part: be it the beginning or the end.

You can also use various video programmes with your students: they can be either connected with the deaf culture and history or humorous scenes from such video series as Grapevines or even Mr. Bean. Use whatever you find attractive and enjoyable to entertain your students because besides the necessary hard work the learning process needs it should be also fun. The truth is that the more playful and enjoyable you make your teaching to your students or pupils, the better the chance that they will learn considerably faster and keep the knowledge in their memories for a long time. That is why even when you teach the boring grammar, try to choose sentences which have funny meanings or are parts of some interesting context.

Unfortunately, I can use very little of the functional methods which I listed above because it all depends on how much time you have available for your teaching. At present, I meet my students once a week for ninety minutes, another ninety minutes are not a compulsory part of their curriculum. Their university curriculum is really rather tough and full. The Department of Czech Studies argues explaining that they have other, more important subjects to study at the Faculty of Arts than English. Perhaps, it is true, I am not in the position of the one who should judge that as I did not take part in designing their study plan. I can only say that it is really a pity because they could learn much more if there was more time available.

That is also why I and my colleague Helena Tvrdikova developed a study plan for deaf university students of English language which is much more compound and in a way “unrealistic” to cover within the time available in total. There is one great advantage though: there are enough LT materials to choose from.

Our situation at Charles University, regarding getting new deaf and hard of hearing students to our program of English instruction, has not changed much since year 2000 when we organized our first seminar. We are still getting some students lacking not only the knowledge of basic English grammar but lacking basic study skills as well. On the other hand, like in the past, we sometimes get quite advanced students and to make a coherent study group out of all these very different individuals is nearly impossible. Nevertheless, we try our best to cater for all individual students’ needs.

This academic year I have been teaching a mixed group of 2 deaf and 6 hard of hearing students, whose language skills are very different – from very basic to upper intermediate. But even such a mixed group can be managed if you ask the more advanced ones to help, e.g. with training the less advanced students, preparing for them special exercises, tests, etc.

As one of my most talented deaf students, Radka Novakova, studied at Gallaudet University for 3 semesters, she was asked to help the deaf students, beginners, with their studies of English as their tutor. She has been revising with two deaf students all that we have gone through during our lessons. Radka is here with us. If you like, ask her questions directly. I think she can tell you about her teaching experience during the discussion herself.

At the same time, when Radka practises with the deaf students, I practise English speaking skills and pronunciation with those hard of hearing students who want to learn to talk.

My advice is always let your students decide whether they wish to learn to talk or not. Never push them into doing so. It would not work anyway. The deaf students mostly do not want to talk at all, but some hard of hearing students ask us to train them in speaking and reading English texts aloud as they want to make use of these skills in their later lives.

Regarding the English exam which all the students of the Faculty of Arts have to take: frankly, we had and we still have to adapt and slightly lower the requirements compared with the level of language proficiency our hearing students must achieve. A sample of the exam test can be found in the brochure with a designed curriculum of English language which we developed for university deaf and hard of hearing students and their teachers. I am going to

pass on to you this booklet in a minute as well. It is a little gift for you. Use it or pass it on to whoever needs it. If you need more copies for those who are not here with us, ask me later, the same with the methodology guide. I will be glad if it serves the purpose and hope that when you produce some suitable LT material to use for teaching the Deaf, you will not forget to send us a copy as well because there is always something new to learn.

Anyway, I think that our most important goal is to teach our students to master reading academic texts, basic English grammar and writing skills to be able to communicate with their counterparts abroad.

And that is where I stop now to save some time for your questions regarding the LT materials or presentation itself or specialized library stock we have here.

But before I show you samples of good textbooks which you can use in your teaching English, let me play two short video sequences showing how English is taught by our deaf colleagues at Gallaudet and at Bristol. First comes a shot from Gallaudet:

Now a shot from the University of Bristol:

Now, please, have a copy of our curriculum of English and here are the textbooks for you to look through.

Thank you for your attention.

Are there any questions regarding this workshop or this Centre you would like me to answer?

THE END OF WORKSHOP

Radka