

I will talk about this material as regards my teaching approach with particular reference to working with texts. The handout I've designed covers 2- 3 hours of learning time. This is a listening text and is part of a report of a review carried out by the LSE and the Guardian on the recent riots in the summer of 2011. The listening text involves an introduction as to why the report was carried out (in the absence of any governmental reflection and critique) and then a series of short narratives from people who took part in the disturbances.

I will discuss the choice of text and handout design under headings which reflect my approach.

### **"Difficult" or "challenging" texts**

This particular text has short narratives from people using regional and group variations from what's considered as Standard English. I give this text to intermediate level students and above with various activities on the handout which scaffold learning and make the text more accessible to them. I'm particularly interested in designing activities for texts which are extremely challenging to a learner in relation to her level. This interest actually developed out of teaching weakness – I have never been very good at matching a text to level and have often given "impossibly" difficult texts to learners. However, my learners have always surprised me and surprised themselves as to what they can engage with. It started me thinking about learners performing beyond their level and learning as process and engagement with what you cannot yet do. Vygotsky famously said that children learn and develop by "performing a head taller than they are". I think that this idea of performing and engaging with what you cannot yet do can be applied to adult (language) learners too.

### **Language as culture, community and text**

The text I have chosen is authentic in the sense that it has not been designed or heavily doctored for a linguistic (language learning) purpose. Authentic texts represent language as it is used by various groups of the language-speaking community. I like this text as it represents and amplifies the voices of members of the community that you would be much less likely to hear, particularly if you were following a coursebook and using materials designed for linguistic purposes. I particularly like the topic of the text which is about an event that we (my learners and myself) have had a recent and shared experience of, either through the media or first-hand, and we most likely took part in discussions and articulated opinions about it.

Although authentic texts often have very interesting and learnable content, I don't like to take the approach of *learning something through* the medium of English, as if language were a *tool*. At the same time I don't want to use *texts as a vehicle* for focusing on language as a *system or set of functions*. I take the position that

language is part of and an expression of culture; we are working in and through language. I like the learners to have a possibility to participate in the language and indeed the culture through engaging with a variety of interesting texts.

### **Unpacking texts**

I designed the part of the handout activity so that the short narratives could be unpacked and decoded through organising the points mentioned under experiences/feelings; activities; understandings. This provides a way into what might seem to an intermediate student an abstruse and impenetrable text. Organising of the narrative in this way will it more direction and fluidity. At the same time the learner has recorded and can now reflect on what is mentioned in the narratives and look out for some common themes.

### **Not prescribing learning**

There are no prescribed answers to this section, apart from at the beginning when the background needed to be well-established. I'm very interested in what the learners perceive and what we discuss. I envisage that a lot of conversations will develop and I prefer to deal with language issues and interests as they emerge. My approach includes a focus on language form and use in the classroom and I see my interventions as extremely important here in scaffolding, correcting and providing alternatives. However, I prefer not to have a prescribed agenda of language to focus on but deal with language as it emerges. I think Michael Long's distinction of "Focus on Form" as opposed to "Focus on Forms" useful here. The former "focus on Form" involves a focus on language as it comes up in the classroom rather than a focus on language items which have been set and prepared for beforehand.

### **Language play**

The last part of the handout plays with some of the language in the text narratives through a free online word-cloud application - Wordle. I like the playfulness of this and how text and words are presented in a visually different way. Learners can add words that they heard or think about to this application to make their own word cloud about the riot. They can then share it with their classmates alongside giving a brief commentary. I adhere to Guy Cook's position (in *Language Play, Language Learning* 2000) that deconstructing chunks of meaning and playing with language is a constituent part of language learning in much the same way as children might make up nonsense rhymes in the process of becoming competent in their first languages.