

Teaching Lexically

By Hugh Dellar and Andrew Walkley
DELTA Publishing 2016
978-1-909783-22-5

As a great believer in a lexical approach to teaching English, I eagerly awaited the publication of *Teaching Lexically*, and I wasn't to be disappointed.

If you are unfamiliar with a lexical view of language and teaching and are unsure about what it entails, *Teaching Lexically* is an ideal introduction, but it also offers something new for those teachers who already incorporate lexical approach ideas in their lessons. Like other titles in the excellent Delta Teacher Development series, the book contains three distinctive parts which focus on theory, practice and development.

Part A explores the core ideas behind lexical teaching and the principles of how and why people learn. It provides useful insights into how vocabulary, grammar and the four skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing are approached by lexical teachers. The authors also acknowledge that there can be potential problems inherent in teaching lexically, and on page 15 they highlight the challenges presented in the classroom, and how teachers can successfully react to them.

One essential point raised in Part A and reiterated in Part B is that *meaning* is

just a starting point. This is central to effective lexical teaching, because learners need to notice and remember the actual word combinations that are used to express meanings. Learners might understand the meaning of a word or sentence, but fail to notice the surrounding language which is needed for their future language production.

Part B suggests specific ideas for teaching lexically vocabulary, grammar and the four skills, and contains a wealth of activities designed to put particular lexical principles into practice. In this part, *Teaching Lexically* really comes into its own as a teacher development book, as in each activity a principle is outlined, then the reader is involved in practising that principle, before they will finally apply the principle to their own teaching.

There are many useful activities worthy of comment, but here is a brief selection that caught my eye:

- 'Choosing words to teach' in Chapter 1 considers word frequency, and proposes a fun online test for teachers to apply the principle.

- Applying a lexical view of language to our coursebook is crucial if we wish to develop as competent lexical teachers, and we are shown exactly how to do this with numerous activities. Two that I particularly recommend are 'Single-word exercises' and 'Collocation exercises'.
- One of the key skills a lexical teacher needs to possess is the ability to ask 'good' questions about vocabulary. This is thoroughly dealt with in six activities under the umbrella title 'Asking questions about words'.
- Making students 'more aware of the fact that understanding meaning is not the same as noticing and being able to re-use language' is one of the aims of 'Mining texts for language' in Chapter 4. This activity, along with 'Exploiting and expanding on lexis' on the opposite page, explains how teachers can apply a lexical approach to texts.

These last two activities are exemplified with texts that are included in the Appendix which clearly show how the principles work in practice. Perhaps the book would have benefited from more sample texts like these, to illustrate activities for the reader.

Part B is rounded off with ten revision activities, while Part C addresses various important issues from a lexical perspective – such as 'Assessing materials', 'Teaching exam classes', 'Teacher training', 'Organising courses' and 'Writing your own materials', amongst others.

In the words of the editors, 'this book is much more than a simple collection of activities for vocabulary lessons'. I couldn't agree more! It's a book for professional development which will make teachers more lexically aware, and it is required reading for anyone who is seriously interested in teaching lexically.

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