
Soup or salad?

Informed eclecticism in the mixed-ability classroom

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VUS TESOL Conference, 21 July 2016





Then and now



In this talk

- Methodology and the role of the teacher
- Mixed-ability classes and the needs of the learner
- Soup or salad?
- Combining tradition and innovation
- Towards an informed and flexible approach
- Classroom activities



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ELT Methods – a selection



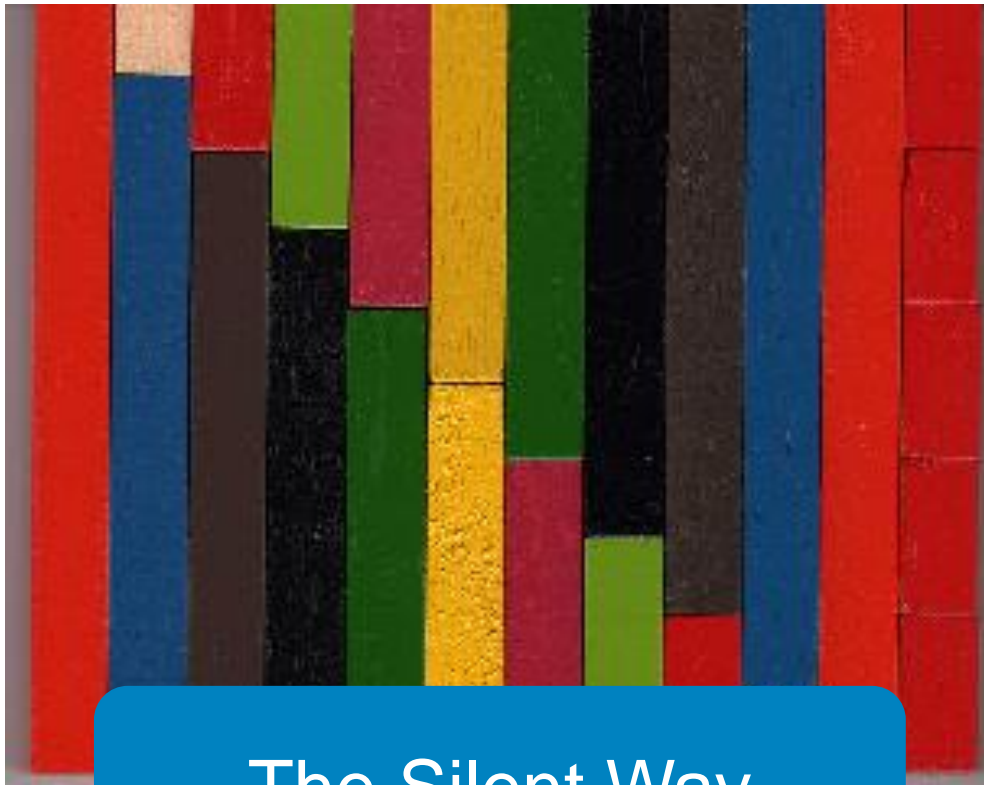
Audiolingual method

ELT Methods – a selection



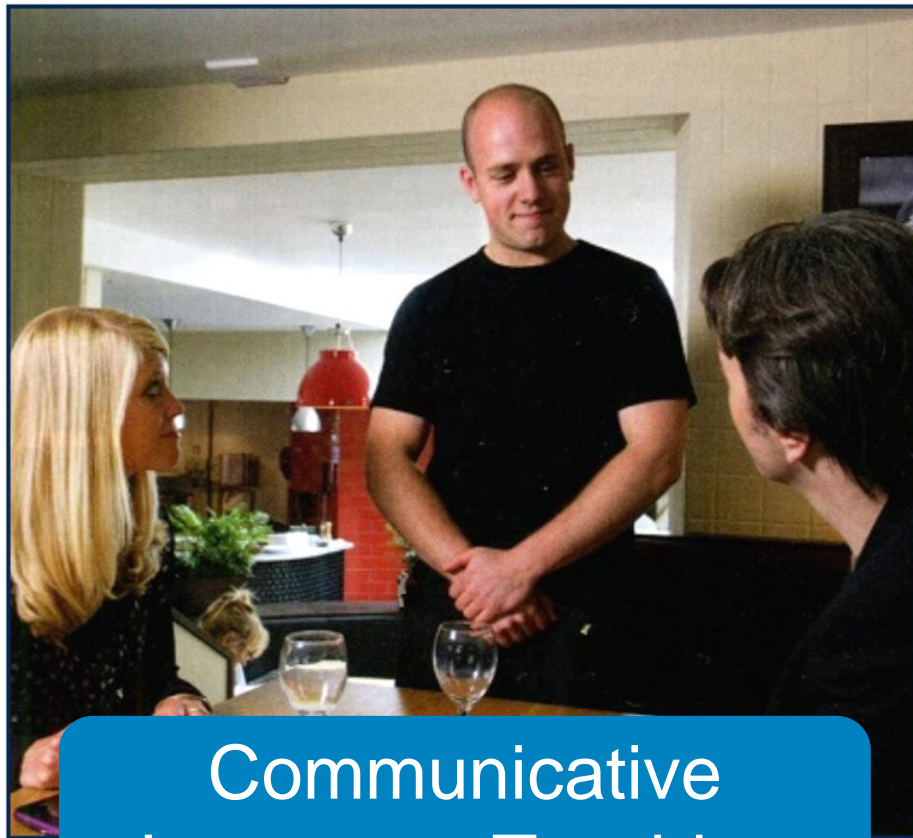
Total Physical
Response

ELT Methods – a selection



The Silent Way

ELT Methods – a selection



Communicative
Language Teaching

ELT Methods – a selection



ELT Methods – a selection



Blended learning

The role of the teacher



The teacher is responsible for modelling, controlling, monitoring and correcting.

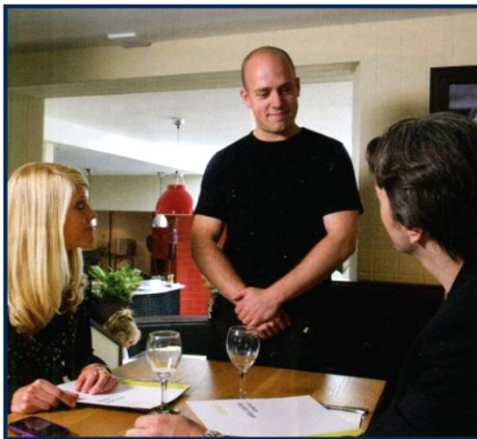


“The instructor is the director of a stage play in which the students are the actors.”
(Asher)

The role of the teacher



The teacher is a neutral observer.
“Teach, test, and get out of the way”.
(Stevick)



The teacher is a facilitator of communication
processes – and an active participant.

The role of the teacher



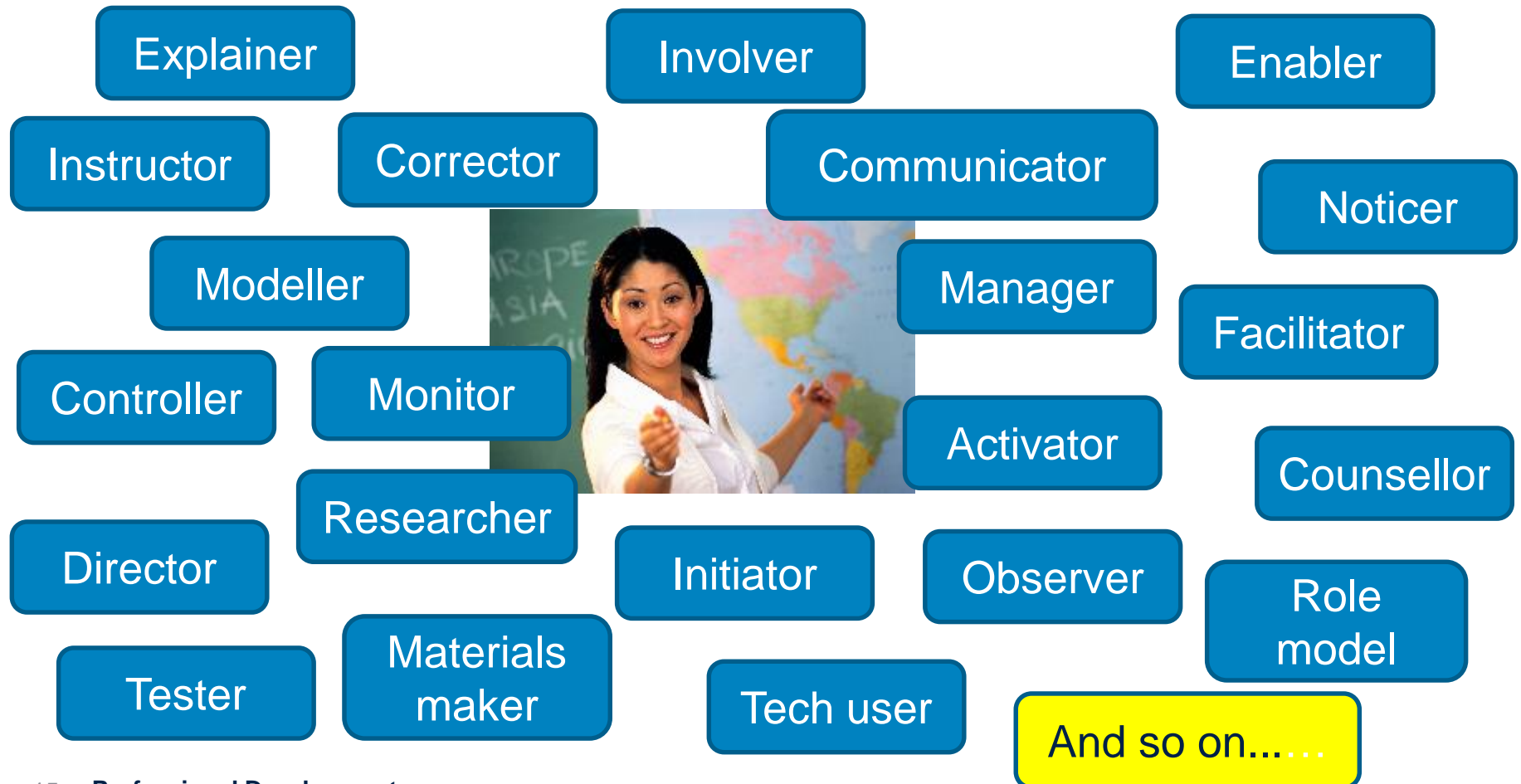
The teacher initiates conversation and optimises the “language learning affordances” of emergent language - without using textbooks.



The teacher combines face-to-face and technological input to facilitate learning in dynamic groupings – both inside and outside the classroom.

Teacher roles

Where does that leave me?



Everyone happy?



The needs and preferences of the *learners* should inform decisions we take about appropriate methods to use in the classroom.

This is not possible if we select our preferred methods before we have met our students.



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What do we mean by *mixed ability*?

Differences between learners

Here are four ways that learners in the same class can differ:

- language-learning ability
- language knowledge
- learning style
- attitude to the language

Is that all?

Can you think of any others?

What do we mean by *mixed ability*?

Differences between learners

SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEARNERS IN HETEROGENEOUS CLASSES

language-learning ability

language knowledge

cultural background

learning style

attitude to the language

mother tongue

intelligence

world knowledge

learning experience

knowledge of other languages

age or maturity

gender

personality

confidence

motivation

interests

independence

self-discipline

educational level

Penny Ur (1996) *A Course in Language Teaching* CUP

Mixed-ability classes and the needs of the learner

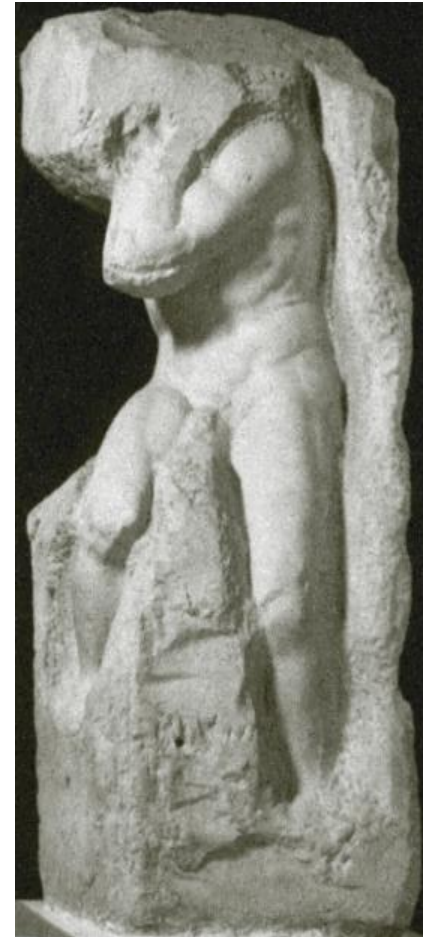


Rigid adherence to any one method is likely to be problematic if the learners in the room have different needs, strengths and preferences.

What do we mean by *mixed ability*?

“Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.”

- Michelangelo



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Soup or salad?



The chef = the teacher

The ingredients = the students

Soup or salad?



Soup

- all ingredients are blended together
- individual flavours merge and cannot easily be separated

Soup or salad?



Salad

- different ingredients stand out
- interesting contrast and complement of separate tastes

Soup or salad?



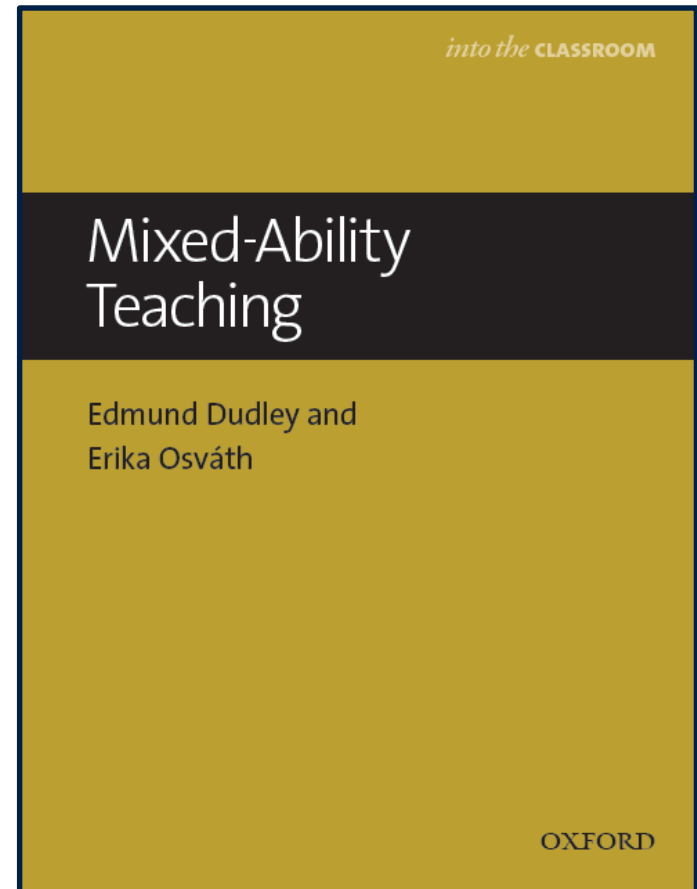
The 'ingredients' of the mixed-ability setting can be the basis for great 'salads'...

...or Phở



Discovering and realising potential

“As teachers, our job is to familiarize ourselves with the ‘raw materials’ with which we are working. It is only by becoming aware of students’ needs, strengths and capabilities that we can identify the right tools with which to work.”



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Combining tradition and innovation



informed



eclectic

- Familiarity with a variety of different ELT methods
- Commitment to investigating and discovering the needs, strengths and preferences of our learners
- Combining strands and elements from whichever methods best suit ***the given situation***
- A willingness to tailor or adapt our approach over time as these needs emerge and become clear – or change

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Towards an informed and flexible approach

What we can do: a checklist

- Find out about ELT methods
- Find out about our learners (e.g. informal needs analysis and action research)
- Experiment flexibly with a variety of activity types and modes of interaction
- Get feedback from our students
- Reflect on our experiences and get support where possible (PD, PLNs, peer collaboration)

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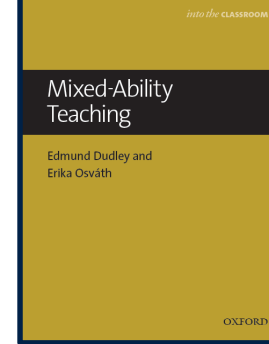


Classroom activities

- Finding out about learners
- Differentiating materials and activities
- Using group-work and pair-work
- Focusing on non-linguistic skills
- Promoting group harmony and a positive learning environment

Finding out about learners

Predict and observe



Try this **Teacher predictions**

Invite a colleague to observe one or more of your classes. Choose two students that you would like to focus on. Write some notes about each student.

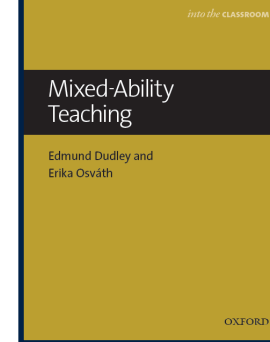
Think about:

- attitude towards learning
- personal traits and characteristics.

Make predictions about how you think each student will respond to the activities you have planned. Write simple sentences, as in Table 1.1.

Finding out about learners

Predict and observe



Maria

- 1 I think she'll talk in L1 to her neighbours during the first activity.

Observer's comments:

- 2 I think she'll be cheerful and enthusiastic about volunteering for the speaking task.

Observer's comments:

Daniel

- 1 I think he'll copy the answers to the first activity from Luis.

Observer's comments:

- 2 I think he'll be shy and will not volunteer for the speaking task.

Observer's comments:

Finding out about learners

Benefits of *predict and observe*



Trying not to *pigeonhole*



Promoting peer collaboration

Differentiating materials and activities

You have 30 seconds.

→ Write as many different fruits as you can!

What are the strengths of this activity?

- Everyone gets a chance to contribute
- Stronger students do not dominate
- Students need to listen to one other
- Students can learn from one other



Differentiating materials and activities

Providing options

- **Go to the fruits and vegetables section of a market or supermarket near your home. Choose one of the following tasks:**
 - a.) Write down as many of the fruits and vegetables as you can in English. You can use your phone to take photographs of the display and finish the task at home.

Differentiating materials and activities

Providing options

- **Go to the fruits and vegetables section of a market or supermarket near your home. Choose one of the following tasks:**

b.) Which fruit/vegetable is

- the most expensive
- the cheapest
- the most delicious
- the most beautiful
- the heaviest
- the longest
- the ugliest
- not from your country

Differentiating materials and activities

Providing options

- **Go to the fruits and vegetables section of a market or supermarket near your home. Choose one of the following tasks:**
 - a.) Interview the person selling the fruit and vegetables. Perhaps use your phone to record the interview. Translate the questions and answers into English and write them down.
 - b.) Interview the person selling the fruit and vegetables. Perhaps use your phone to record the interview. Translate the questions and answers into English and write them down.
 - c.) Interview the person selling the fruit and vegetables. Perhaps use your phone to record the interview. Translate the questions and answers into English and write them down.

Using group-work and pair-work

Mediation task

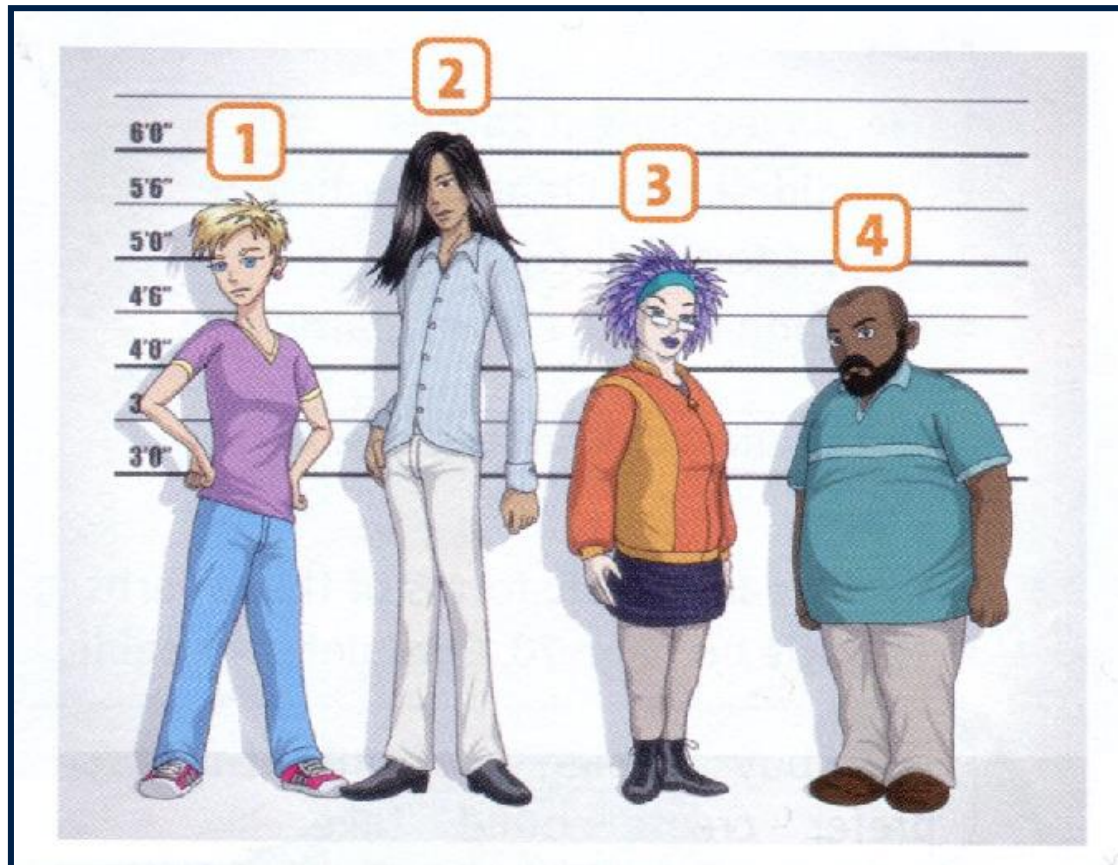
Reading & Grammar *was and were*

- 1 Work in small groups. Make a list of things a person needs to be successful in life. Do you all agree?

a good education, ...

- Student A - Interviewer: asks questions in **English**
- Student B - Speaker: gives answers in **L1**
- Student C - Mediator: translates between **English and L1**

Focusing on non-linguistic skills



Promoting group harmony and a positive learning environment

Leaving the classroom



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