

Soup or salad?

Informed eclecticism in the mixed-ability classroom

Edmund Dudley

English Teachers' Day, Luxembourg,
13 October, 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



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ELT Methods – a selection



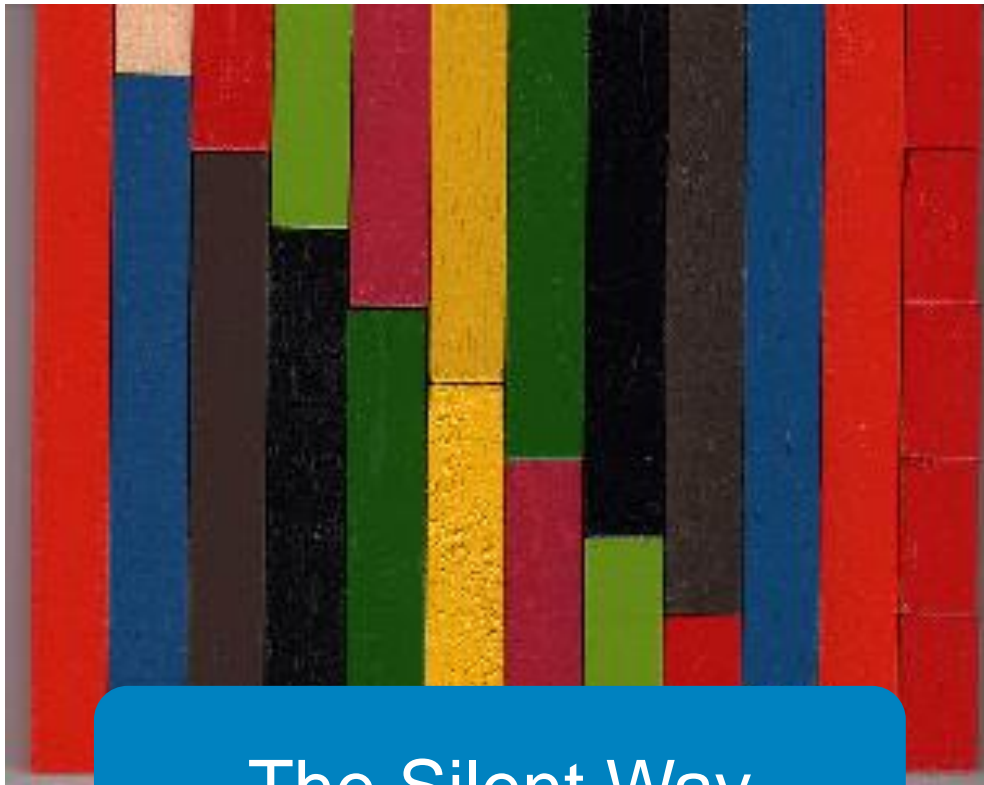
Audiolingual method

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.

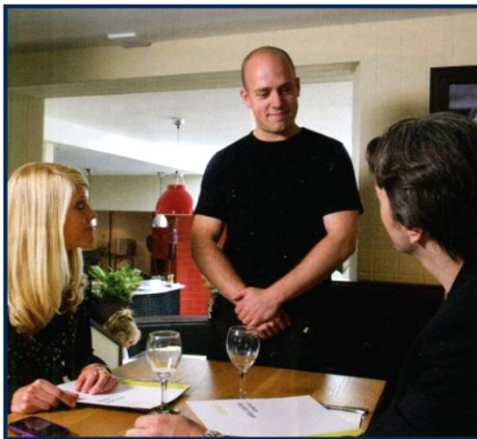


“The instructor is the director of a stage play in which the students are the actors.”
(Asher)

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



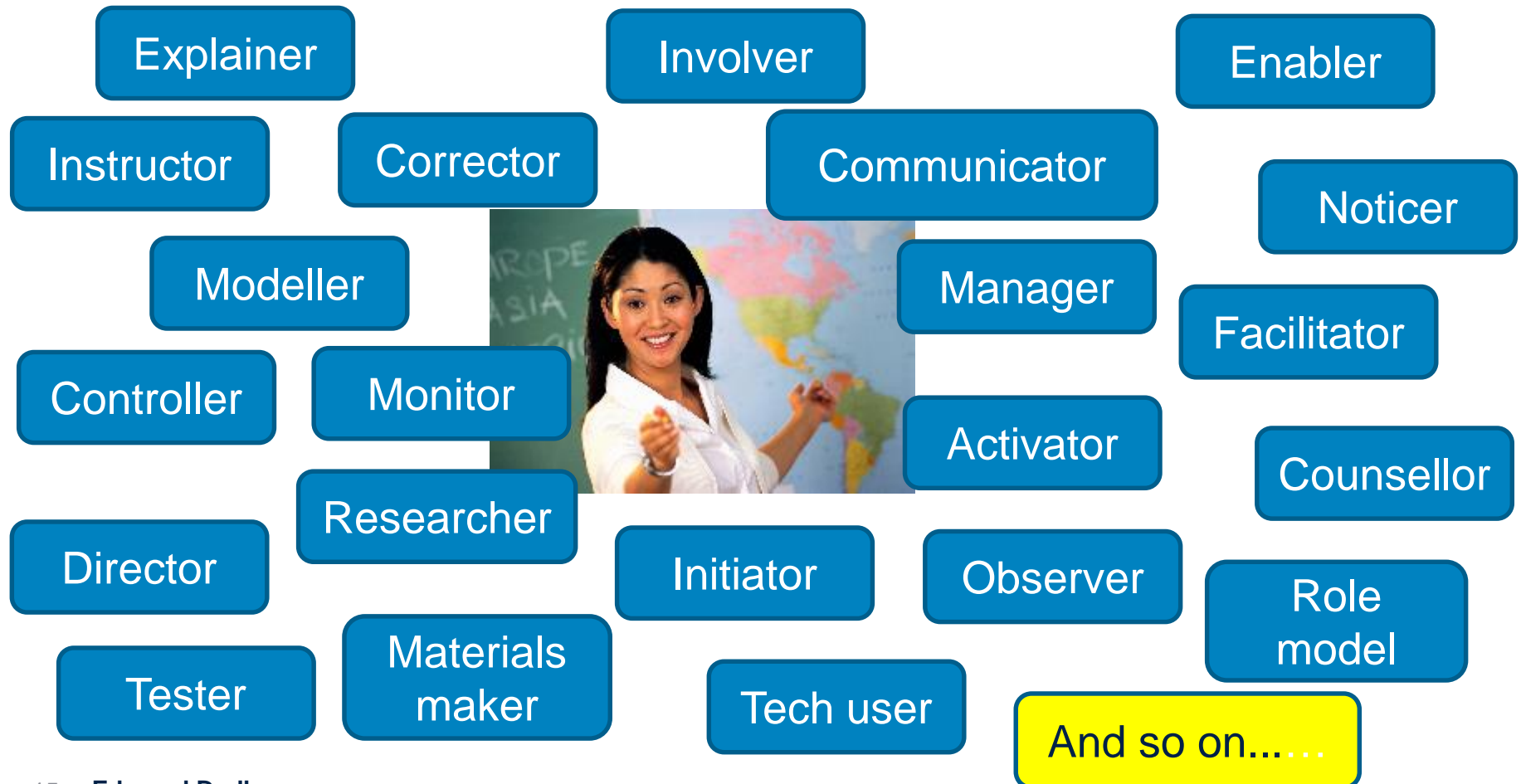
The teacher initiates conversation and optimises the “language learning affordances” of emergent language - without using textbooks.



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 | age or maturity |
| language knowledge | gender |
| cultural background | personality |
| learning style | confidence |
| attitude to the language | motivation |
| mother tongue | interests |
| intelligence | independence |
| world knowledge | self-discipline |
| learning experience | educational level |
| knowledge of other languages | |

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

Mixed-ability classes and the needs of the learner

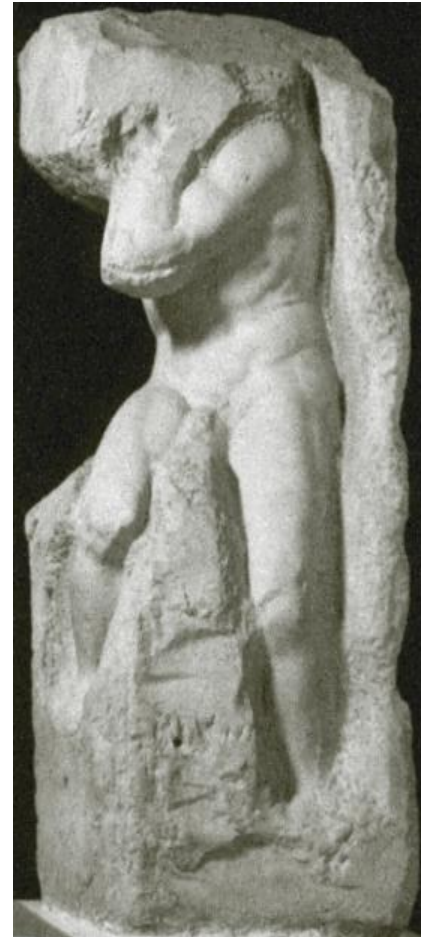


Rigid adherence to any one method is likely to be problematic if the learners in the room have different needs, strengths and preferences.

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

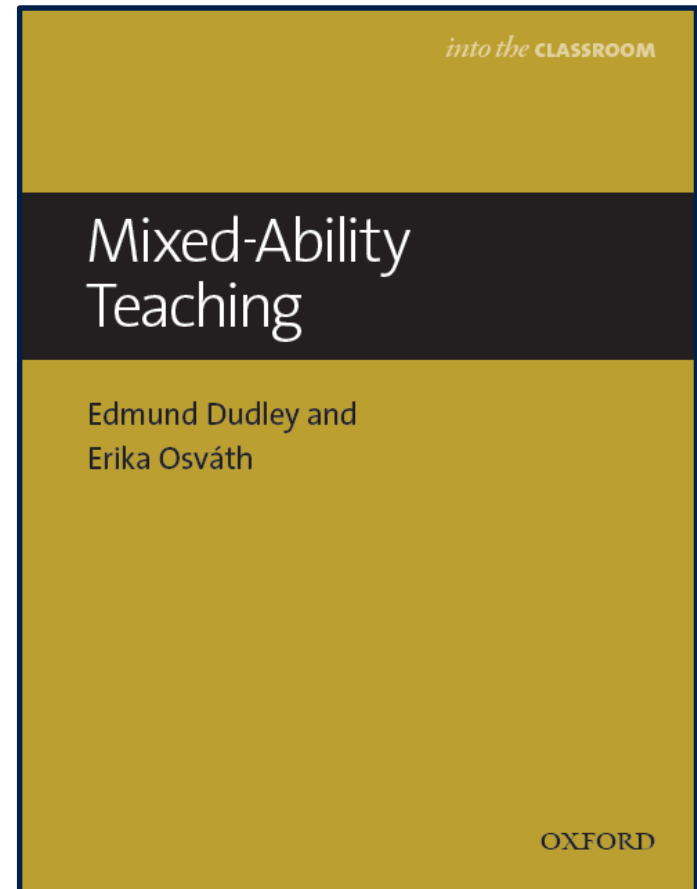
Soup or salad?



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

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)

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

Who is he?



IQ

- Average person IQ of 100
- Extremely smart person IQ of 130+
- Albert Einstein IQ of 160
- **Chris Langan IQ of 200**



What does he do?

- Construction
 - Farm-hand
 - Ranch-hand
 - Cowboy
 - Firefighter
 - Forest ranger
 - **Bouncer**
- Teacher
 - Lawyer
 - Astronomer
 - Army General
 - Economist
 - Professor
 - Physicist

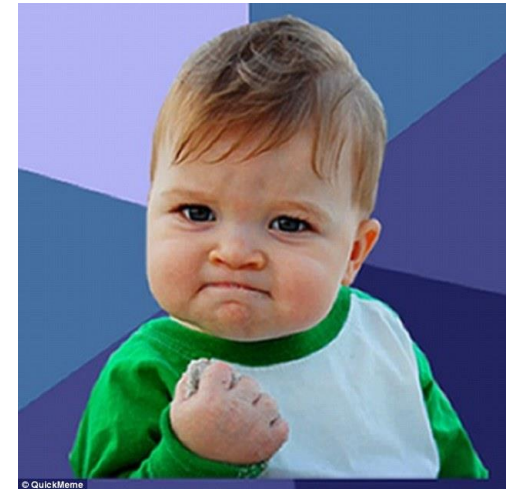
Self-esteem and success

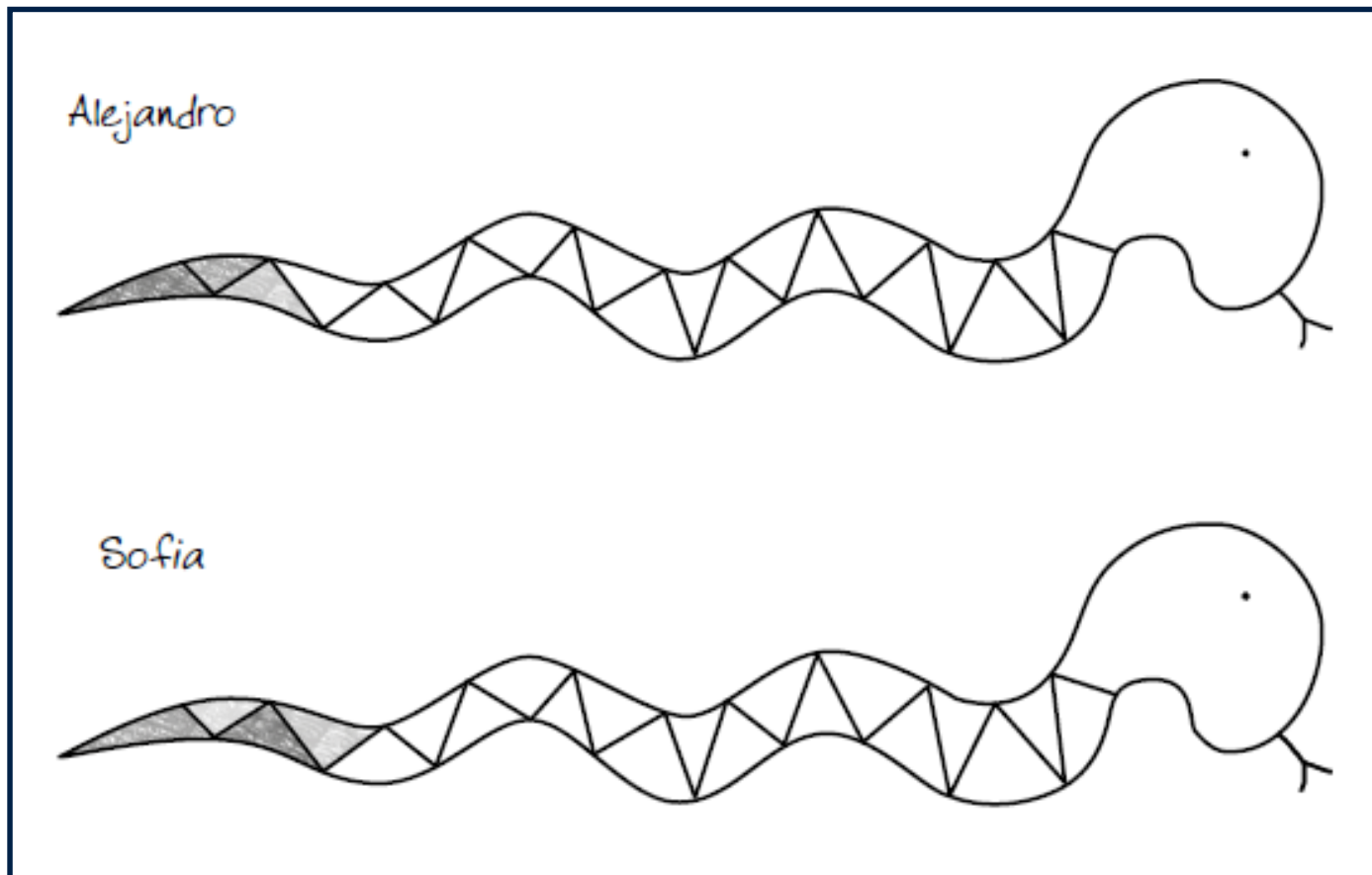
“Students should never be allowed to fail at tasks until they have had a reasonable chance to succeed.”

J Raffini

“The only way true self-esteem is built is by making people successful.”

D Scheidecker and W Freeman





Dice Master

Choose a student to be *Dice Master*

- Present the group with two options
- Ask the *Dice Master* to help
- Dice Master rolls:
 - 1,2 or 3 = Option A
 - 4,5 or 6 = Option B



Promoting group harmony and a positive learning environment

Leaving the classroom



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