

Train The Trainer Program

by

SPICE in partnership with Tharunyata Hetak and the British Council and in collaboration with Provincial English Support Centre (PESC) of Mannar

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Participant report

Lai Van Huyen – Diaspora Lanka (Australia)|Email: lai.v.huyen@gmail.com

I was invited to join the program in full attendance by Mr. Rajan Croos, the Manager of the PESC, as one of the two representatives of Diaspora Lanka (Australia), for the project of improving English for young people in Mannar.

Grace, another representative from Diaspora Lanka, and I had a chance to interact intensively in group and in personal conversation with eighteen teachers of English from Mannar educational zone and Madhu educational zone, two of the twelve educational zones in Northern Province, which provided me lots of insights about teachers of English in Mannar in particular, the current situation of teaching English as a second language in Mannar in general, and many key learning points for personal and professional development as a participant in this training program.

I would like to deeply thank Mr. Rajan Croos, Mr. Mohan Samarasinhe, the director of SPICE (the UK), and Mr. Alister Bredee, the trainer of this program, for their great support and hospitality during the program. And it is with deep appreciation to Diaspora Lanka (Australia) to enable me to join this program, as part of the research project on the improvement of English for young people in Mannar.

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Key activities and learning points

The program was designed and implemented in a structured and adaptive way, in which there were a sound series of topics for participants to learn and practice in the five-day program, including goal setting for teaching spoken English to students in Sri Lanka, rule setting in the program, designing a lesson plan, organizing and practicing warm-up activities, introducing and practicing various activities to promote spoken English, teaching simulation, designing and demonstrating a test of spoken English, and issue-based topics for discussion, brainstorming, idea-exchanging and solution recommending.

The program well demonstrated a good way of engaging, motivating, and empowering learners to practice their spoken English and choose their own way of learning, and sharing knowledge with others through all activities organized to teachers (participants), which I would call, a fine example of “learning by doing”, and “leading by example”.

Expectation setting and goal setting

It was good for all participants to be emphasized the goal of teaching English, especially spoken English to students in Sri Lanka, as well as the expectations of every participant towards the program. The “problem-solving” attitude was well set at the beginning of the program, and was well reviewed through reflection and feedback time at the end of the program.

Each-day reflection and review

All participants found it useful to have a certain time every day for reflection and review of the key points we learnt and practiced in the previous day.

Rule setting and strictly followed

The only rule applied was “speaking English only in the English zone, which was set in the total building part of which was used as the training venue.” As teachers were divided into groups, making the obedience of this rule one criterion for scoring group performance was a good driver to motivate all participants to use English in their communication.

Knowledge sharing

Open discussion

We had good time sharing our views on the key topics of teaching spoken English for students in Sri Lanka, and learn new knowledge from the trainer. On one hand, this activity also encouraged us to practice more spoken English with more confidence in the program. On the other hand, we could understand more about the current situation, share our ideas and recommendations for the way forward.

Key questions are listed below.

- Why is spoken English important in Sri Lanka?
- How do you manage a monolingual (spoken English) classroom?
- How is “English camp” organized in Mannar and how should we organize better?
- How is “English club” organized in Mannar and how should we organize better?
- How do you correct students?
- How to evaluate spoken English?
- How do you upgrade yourself as a teacher of English, in application to local situation?

We learnt that listening is the first and key skill to learn and develop in order to be competent in spoken English, however, four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) should be combined to design a through lesson with various activities for students to learn and practice. English camps and English clubs should be more interactive and engaging to students, and their parents as well. The “carrot and stick”

approach was introduced to all teachers to apply in their approach to students, in order to motivate them to learn English, which was also demonstrated to teachers in group competitions during the program.

New perceptions and theories introduced by the trainer

We learnt new ways of teaching, learning, and measuring spoken English.

- How to design a lesson plan using the frame “Lesson aim – Warm-ups – Demonstration – Presentation – Production – Evaluation”.
- The three different learning styles of people (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic). How to identify and design a lesson that addresses different learning styles of students.
- The importance of networking
- Listening as the first and most elementary skill in learning spoken English, and different ways to practice listening.
- The 75:25 rule in teaching: let students talk for 75% the total timing of the class, the rest is covered by teachers.
- The five criteria for evaluating spoken English (Pronunciation, Fluency, Accuracy, Audibility, and Understanding) and how to design a test that allows teachers to evaluate their students’ level of spoken English.

General knowledge testing and sharing

Through the quiz considered as one of the warm-up activities at class, and some other sessions where topics were extended for further discussion, we learnt more general knowledge about the world economy, some countries’ specialties, and up-to-date news of what is happening daily at global level.

We were also encouraged to update more general knowledge such as Sri Lanka specialties, sports, movies, and so on to design questions to challenge the other groups as the quiz master group. We all enjoyed learning new things and got excited to be challenged our own limit.

Learning by doing

Practicing spoken English through a variety of interactive and dynamic activities

We were introduced different activities to practice spoken English with different lesson aims, which could be applied and developed further in different ways in our future lesson plans. All of us started to listen more carefully, speak more, get closer to each other and learn more from each other.

Key activities are listed below. (More explanation would be upon request).

- Role-playing (a criminal situational case in which participants play a role of thefts and policemen)
- Story making (using the given beginning words and ending words)
- One-line conversation
- News reading – Q&A and news reporting
- Group performance (brainstorming, preparation, rehearsal and being on-stage)

- Warm up activities that we were all energized and motivated to create our own for practice.
 - Quiz
 - Miming
 - “Simon says...”
 - Treasure Hunt

Game facilitation

We were given the chance to work in group to design warm-up games and facilitate to other groups. So were other groups. We were given score for our group performance, which was a good way to motivate our learning and doing spirit.

Different teachers had a chance to practice team-working and facilitating skill, get feedback from others and the trainer for improvements.

Teaching simulation

It was really useful and practical for us to take turn to simulate a 20-30min class to other groups, who played a role of the class students, after learning how to design a lesson plan and new ways of designing interactive activities to promote spoken English to students.

We could see the clear and immediate impact as well as direct feedback and inputs from other teachers who played a role of our students and the invaluable inputs from our trainer, which we hardly found directly from students.

It was also a chance for us to review our current level of English knowledge and spoken English, to identify our strengths and the areas for improvement.

Testing spoken English competency

This was considered one of the most interesting activities in the program, as we were introduced and could practice ourselves a very creative, fun, and engaging way to evaluate spoken English, and at the same time, we were asked to design a test to evaluate students' spoken English and demonstrate on the spot.

The test introduced by the trainer was what I would call “A magic dice with 20 seconds story telling”. We felt being a child again to share our own stories and get to know each other better, in which our pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, audibility and understanding of the task given were well challenged and evaluated.

It was also amazing to see the creativity, the serious work, and the enthusiastic participation of each group in designing the English spoken test and demonstrate in the program. The tests were so called job assignment interview, 30-second phone call, forming sentences in a given topic in a group.

Doing homework and presenting the results of homework

We learnt as students at our class, being given homework which was checked in the following morning, and we had to present them to the trainer. In that way, we could understand more about students' behaviour when they were given homework and checked by teachers. Thus we could also know how to engage them in doing homework with the right homework, and in the right approach. We were asked to design the quiz to be the quiz master to warm all groups up the following morning, to read and summarize news on the current day in English, to design the English spoken test for other groups for the following day.

Group performance

This was considered the most expected event of the program, in which teachers worked in group to create a performance in any forms of actions so that each person could demonstrate spoken English the best, in the most interesting and creative way.

We were allowed some certain amount of time every day to brainstorm, prepare, rehearse and finally perform on the last day. There were creative songs and drama, written by the teachers themselves, and well-performed at the end of the program. They felt inspired, empowered, engaged, and enjoyable performing together.

Skill development

Personally I reckon the program gave us various opportunities to work as a team, to brainstorm, to learn how to compete with each other in a healthy way in group competition, to facilitate different activities to people with different styles of learning, and to network with each other.

The trainer did his great job in engaging all participants to practice these skills, though they were not directly communicated as part of the program agenda.

For self-reflection, the following are my key learning points:

- *Teaching methods and supporting skills to promote spoken English in self and others*
- *More general knowledge (types of learning, world economy, world heritages, sports, etc)*
- *Learn more about myself (challenges in working in a team, communication, listening, motivating others, English skills)*
- *Learn how a train the trainer program works*
- *Network of teachers*
- *Understand more about teachers and the current situation in Mannar*

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Observations

Participants (teachers of English)

- *The current level of English is not adequate enough for a considerate number of teachers*

There are a certain number of teachers of English in Mannar whose level of English, especially spoken English needs improving a great deal. Some even made critical grammar mistakes in their teaching simulation. This also reinforced the urgency and frequency to practice spoken English from teachers.

- ***Teachers lack confidence in English and spoken English, however, they acutely improved during the program.***

Once teachers were engaged, and allowed to make mistakes at class, they gained more confidence and willingness to learn from their mistakes.

- ***“Can’t do” mindset is also a challenge***

Most teachers shared their challenges and problems in teaching English in the proper way that they themselves were aware of, sharing that they had been suffering a lot of pressure in the school based assessment from higher level, the diverse levels of English from their students who found the textbook too difficult to learn, the lack of facilities, the lack of exposure to an English speaking environment and the interest in English from their students.

However, they had not been aware of the role they could play as catalysts for finding the solutions out of the box in the current situation, to lead by example to master spoken English themselves, to create the English speaking environment to their students, to engage their students in learning through interactive activities and to give direct feedback to people at higher levels in order to give them more support in their teaching.

Throughout the program, they had some positive changes in their own ways of practising spoken English, investing in various activities to engage students, and learning from each other, thanks to the good engagement and agenda of the program, which could be well applied into their own learning and teaching afterwards if they kept their learning spirit and there were appropriate support from different stakeholders.

- **Capacity building is strongly needed for teachers to work efficiently and effectively**

The lack of proper team-work, computer literacy, internet using skill, and time management were strongly demonstrated in all activities in the program, and in the teachers’ sharing as well.

Computer literacy and internet using skill might be the focus to support teachers in teaching more affectively, and at the same time, help teachers update world knowledge and good practices all over the world to help upgrade themselves and enrich their lessons to students.

- **Exposure to an English speaking environment helped inspire teachers of English to learn and teach better**

It was not only thanks to the rule set at the beginning of the program that all participants must speak English only but also the presence of the trainer, Mr. Mohan and me, as people whose mother tongue are different from local teachers that motivated them to use English for

communication and networking. This can be one of effective ways to engage teachers in practicing their spoken English more and more in their future.

Trainer

- ***Good engagement***

He was friendly and always communicated with each participant to encourage them to talk, to share, and to learn from each other. Moreover, he had a good sense of the energy level of the class to warm us up in time with various activities, which enable us to refresh ourselves and also learn to apply in the future with our own classes.

- ***Professional teaching methods and training skills***

He finely led by example to teach us how to improve ourselves and our students with the real activities he did for us and let us do. He always kept himself focus and energetic during the program, despite the challenge of weather that I assumed he did suffer at some level.

- ***Knowledgeable and sharing knowledge***

It was always great to have a knowledgeable trainer who shared a lot of valuable lessons and knowledge with us in relevance with the key topics focused in the program.

- ***Balancing between motivating and “alarming”***

Mr. Alister was great in allocating us into group, motivating us to perform the best we can on order to get more points, and get the prize at the end of the program, which was a good strategy to get us energized and engaged every time.

At the same time, he was also strict and showed seriousness in giving constructive straight-forward feedback on our current level of English in general, and spoken English in particular, as well as our teaching methods, and other related critical knowledge and skills.

- ***Flexible and adaptive***

He listened actively and carefully to teachers' ideas and feedback. He was keen on asking for teachers' feedback on order to adjust his approach to learners' interests, and stay objective but really supportive to all groups, in order to find a synergized solution.

Recommendations

- **Keep the good points mentioned above**
- **More practical issues discussed and simulation**

There were still points teachers did not find applicable in their teaching, however, because either they did not share directly with the trainer in order to ask for discussion, or there should have been more time and focus on discussing the application of what teachers learnt into their reality afterwards. This will create commitment from teachers to bringing what they learnt to life and create a sustainable way of collaboration from all parties.

- **“Chat with trainer” or “Lunch with trainer”**

This session can be done in 30 minutes in the morning or during break-time or lunch time, where teachers reserved in advance for each day in order to practise their English, their networking skill, and to learn informally from the trainer.

The guest speaker could be extended to the director of SPICE, or other available “resource” people in the training place.

- **Group shuffling in balance with the scoring system/ group competition**

This will help to bring diversity in ideas, experience, ways of learning and solving problems, and even personality in group discussion and group work, which will benefit teachers a great deal in learning how to respect differences and adapt themselves to different types of person, thus help them to adjust themselves to their students in the future.

- **Reflection should be shared in group and presented to others. It should be done on the same day of what is required to be reflected.**

We found sharing in group useful and eye-opening, especially for reflection, because it would help us not only learn from each other, complementing each other’s learning, but also create a chance for us to brainstorm the solutions for current challenges teachers had been suffering, or, making themselves suffer.

Personally I found it less impactful to reflect on the following day than on the same day what we learnt and discovered about ourselves. It would be great if we could spend some time for individual reflection, and group discussion and sharing about our reflection and the “take-away” points everyone would bring to their class in the future.

- **Goal setting should be written and visible during the program**

Goal setting of the program should be collected from participants, clearly written and posted around the classroom so that participants are all aware of the goals and reflect every day, and the goals can be easily checked at the end of the program.

- **Shorter break time in the afternoon and stricter time management to cover more topics for teachers to learn and practise**