



Teaching English in Large Classes: A sociocultural approach

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British Council English Agenda



Structure of the webinar

1. An example context
2. What do we mean by 'large'?
3. Where do we find large classes?
4. What are the challenges of large classes?
5. The sociocultural perspective
6. The search for solutions
7. 3 examples: an approach, a strategy and an activity
8. Further resources

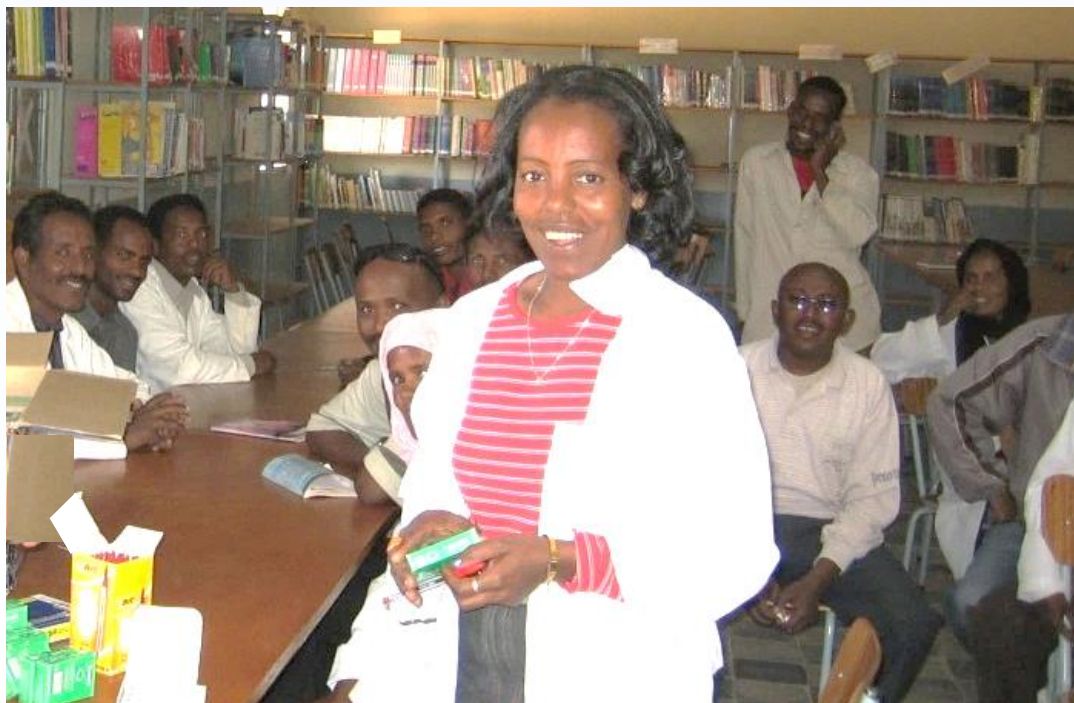


Meet Genet... and her large English classes





Genet's other communities



Colleagues, friends and family



The dual challenge faced by English teachers

Two challenges

1. Teaching large classes
2. Using an 'imported' methodology from small class contexts



Our starting point

- Genet's whole context





What do we mean by 'large'?

- Genet's classes - 70-80
- Bigger?
- Smaller?



What do we mean by 'large'?

- Let's say **over 40**, following Shamim and Kuchah:
'40 or more students in a class can pose a number of challenges for effective teaching and learning'.

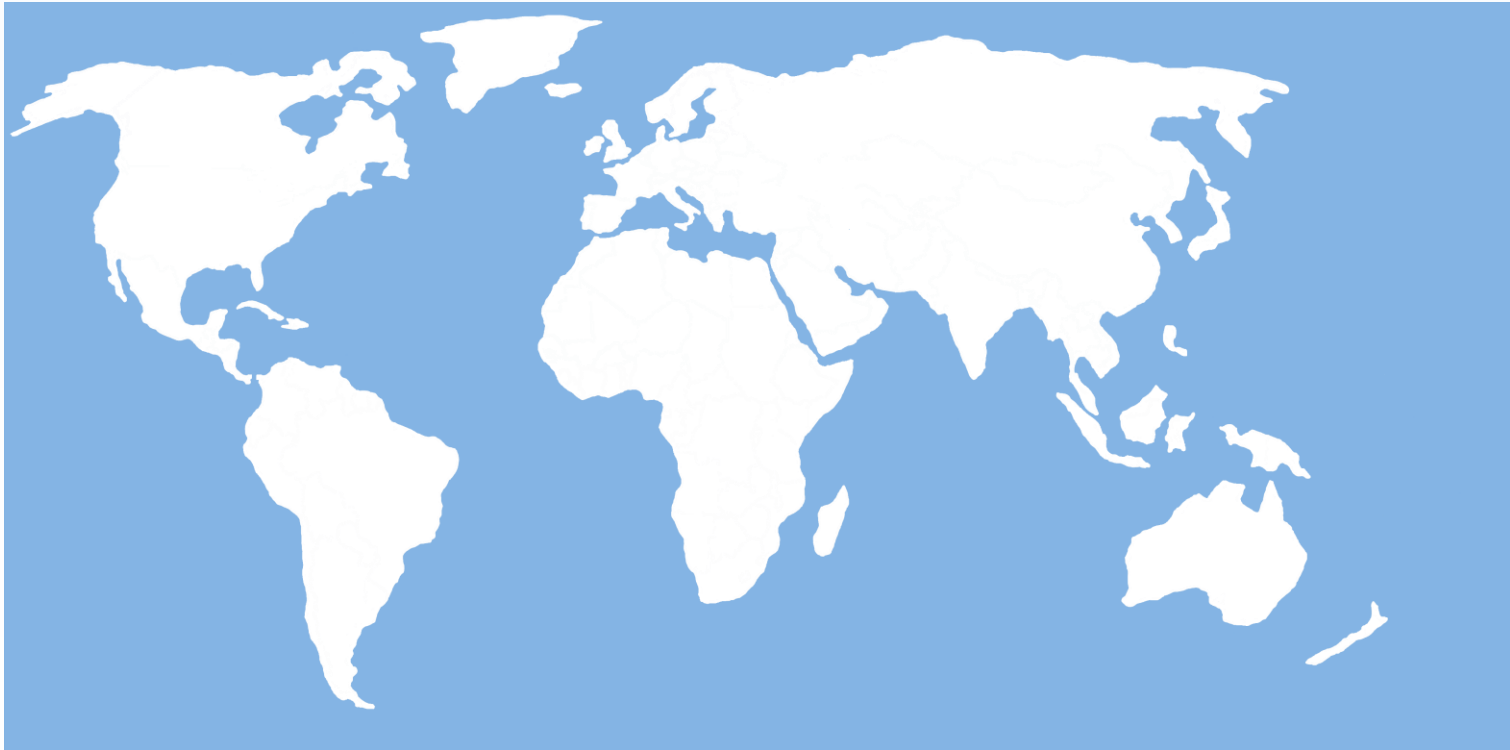
(2016 p. 528)

- Do you teach (or have you ever taught) large classes?



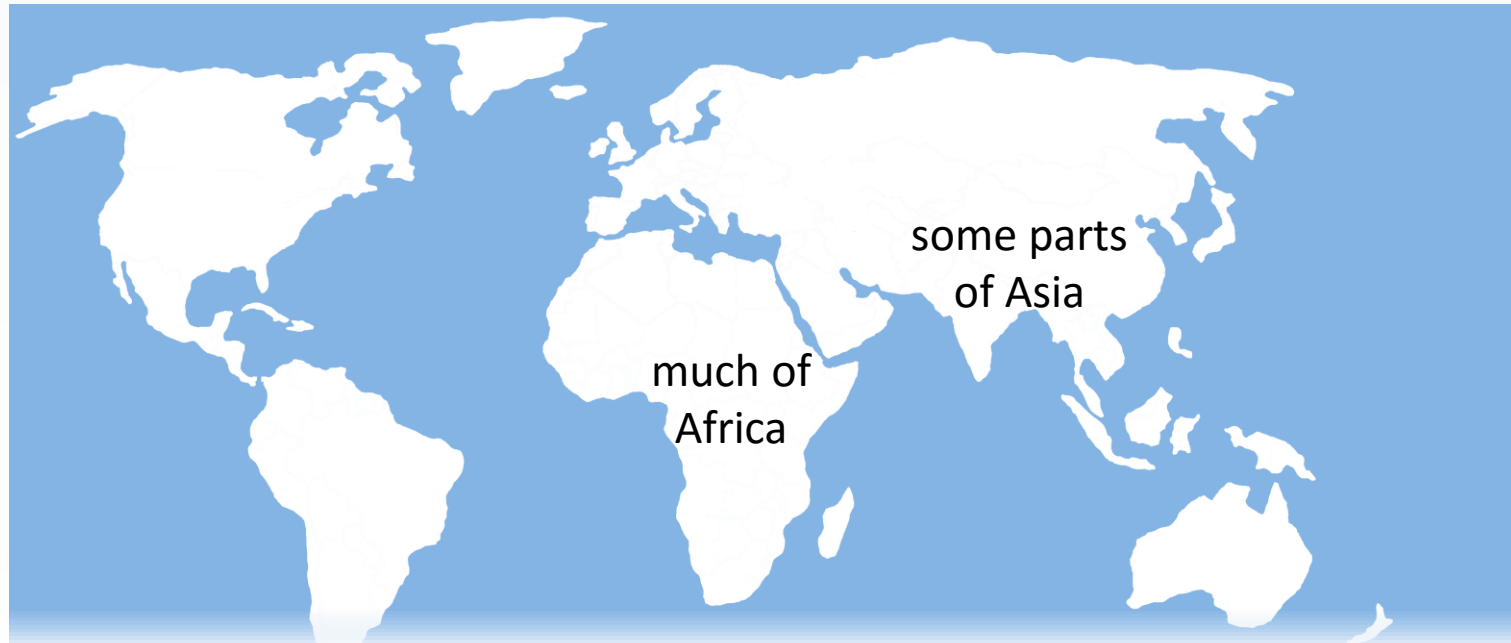
Where in the world do we find large classes?

- Your opinions?





Where in the world do we find large classes?



But the picture is complex. For example:

1. Botswana (Africa) averages well under 40
2. In Eritrea (Africa), rural classes can be well under 40
3. Large classes are common in some high-income countries (South Korea and Japan)
4. Online learning can involve very large classes (e.g. MOOCs)



What are the challenges of teaching large classes?

7 main areas:

1. **classroom management** (e.g. giving instructions, maintaining control and discipline, organising groupwork)
2. **whole class teaching** (e.g. explaining new concepts, question and answer strategies, using the chalkboard)
3. **working with mixed abilities** (e.g. differentiation, getting learners to help each other, mixed-ability groupwork)
4. **conducting summative assessment** (e.g. end of term exams)
5. **(often) limited resources** (e.g. coursebooks, posters, easy readers)
6. **providing opportunities for practice of language skills** (e.g. speaking practice, using audio equipment, library for reading practice, etc.)
7. **providing feedback / formative assessment** (e.g. marking written work, correcting spoken errors, giving individual help, etc.)

Type any other areas in the Comments box



What are the challenges of teaching large classes?

Choose your 4 biggest 'areas' of challenge from the options:

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Type any other areas in the Comments box



Which of these challenges are unique to English language teachers?

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Which of these challenges are unique to English language teachers?

Shared with (most) teachers of other subjects:

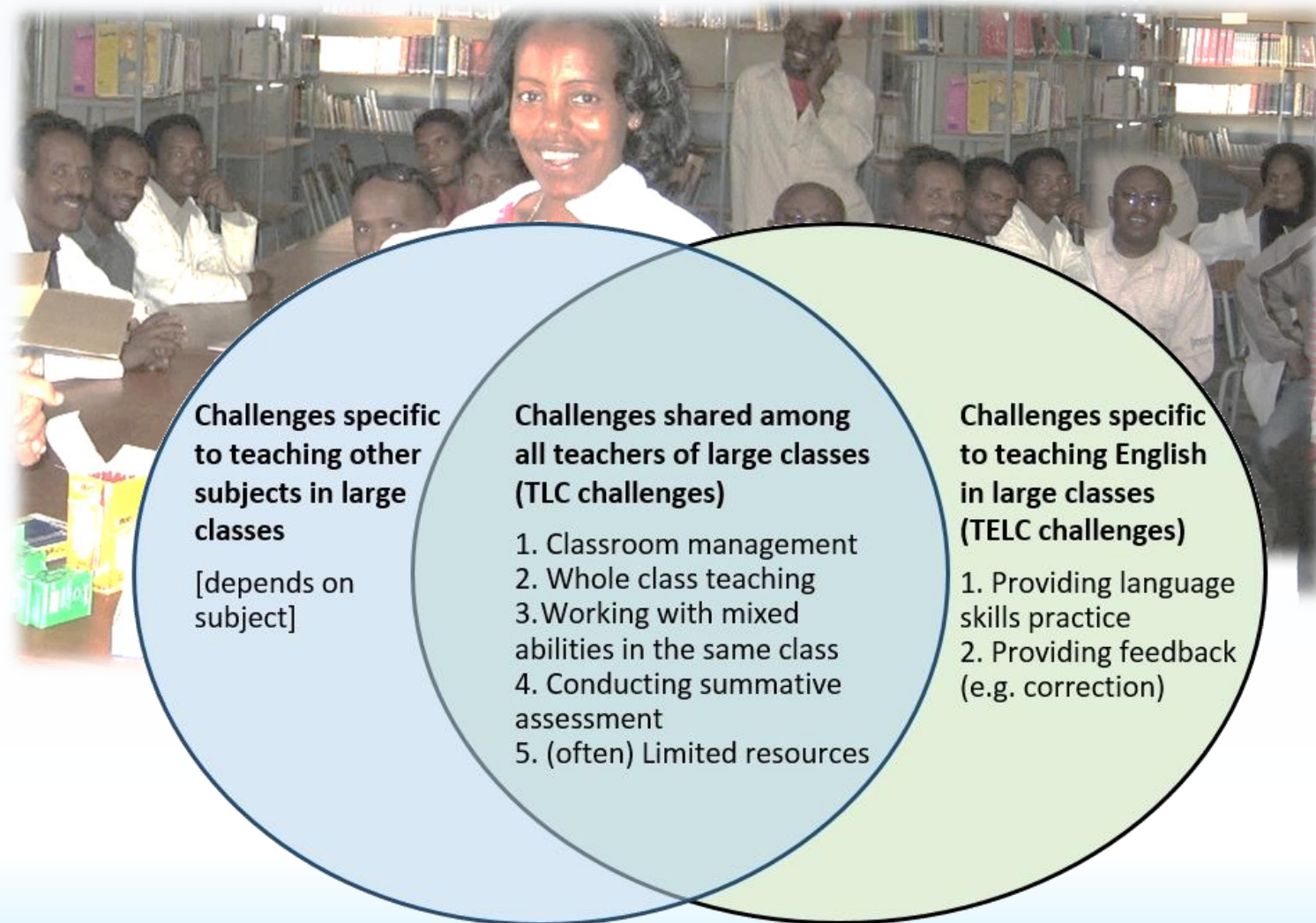
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English only:

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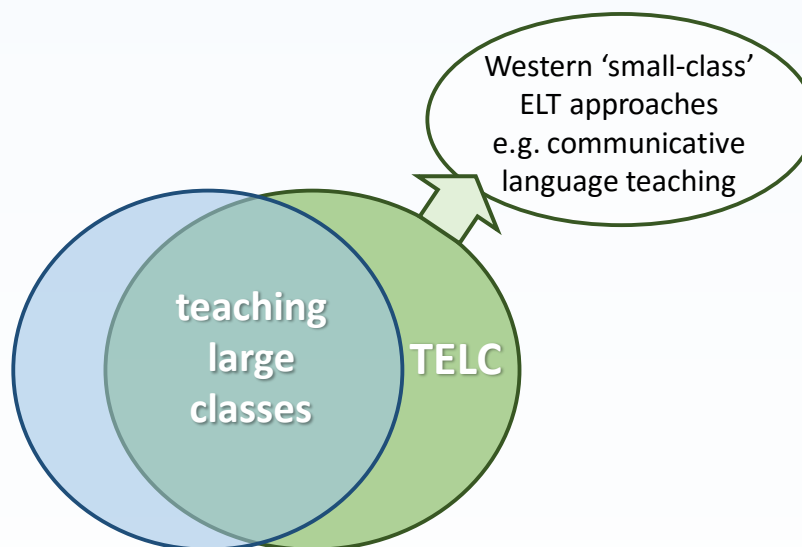


TLC and TELC – noticing the shared challenges



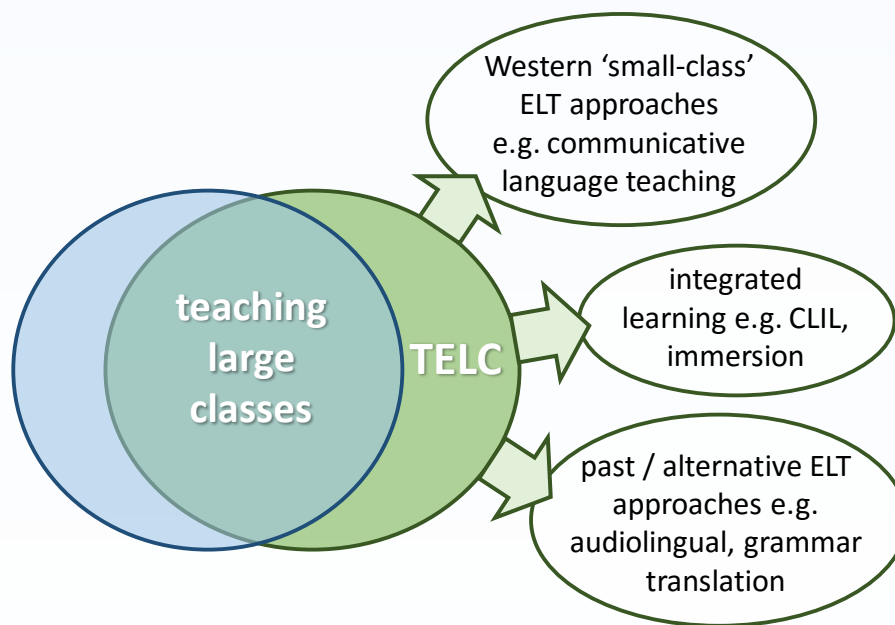


Possible sources for potential solutions



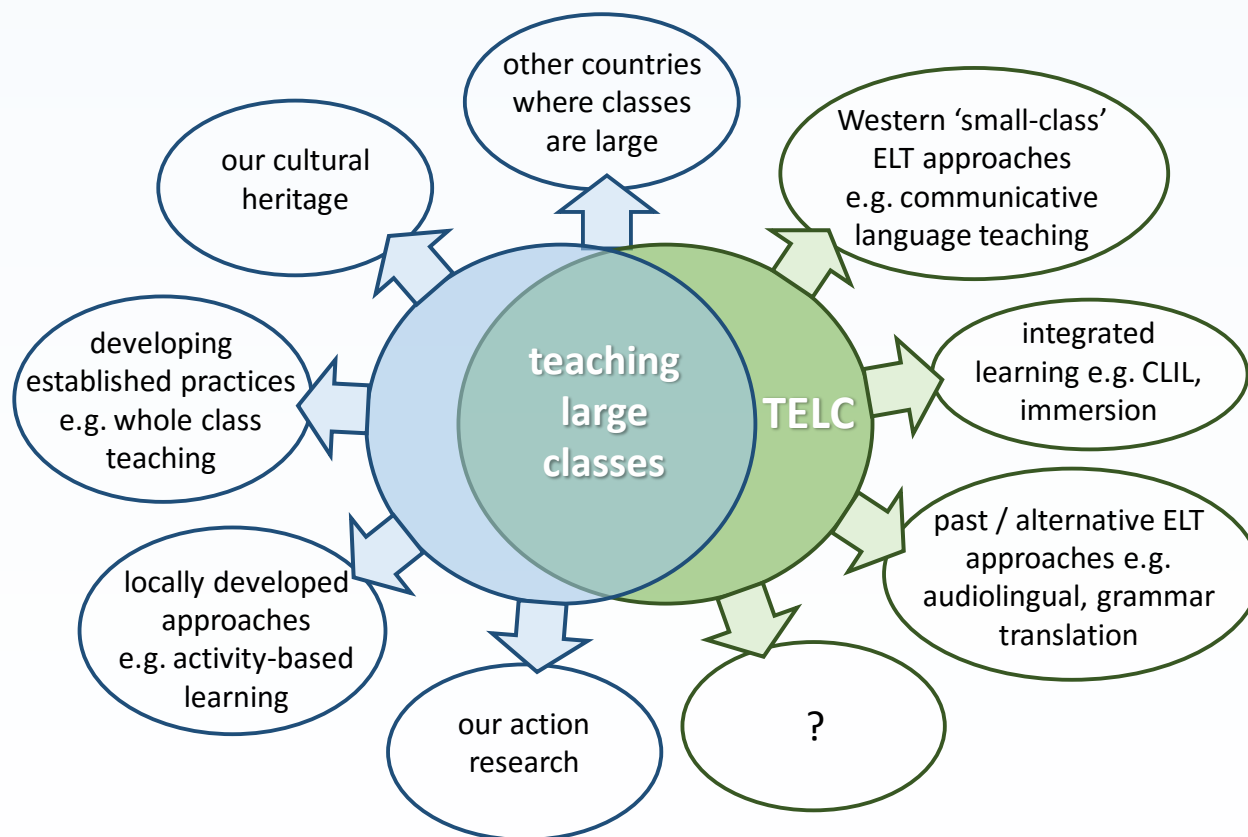


Possible sources for potential solutions



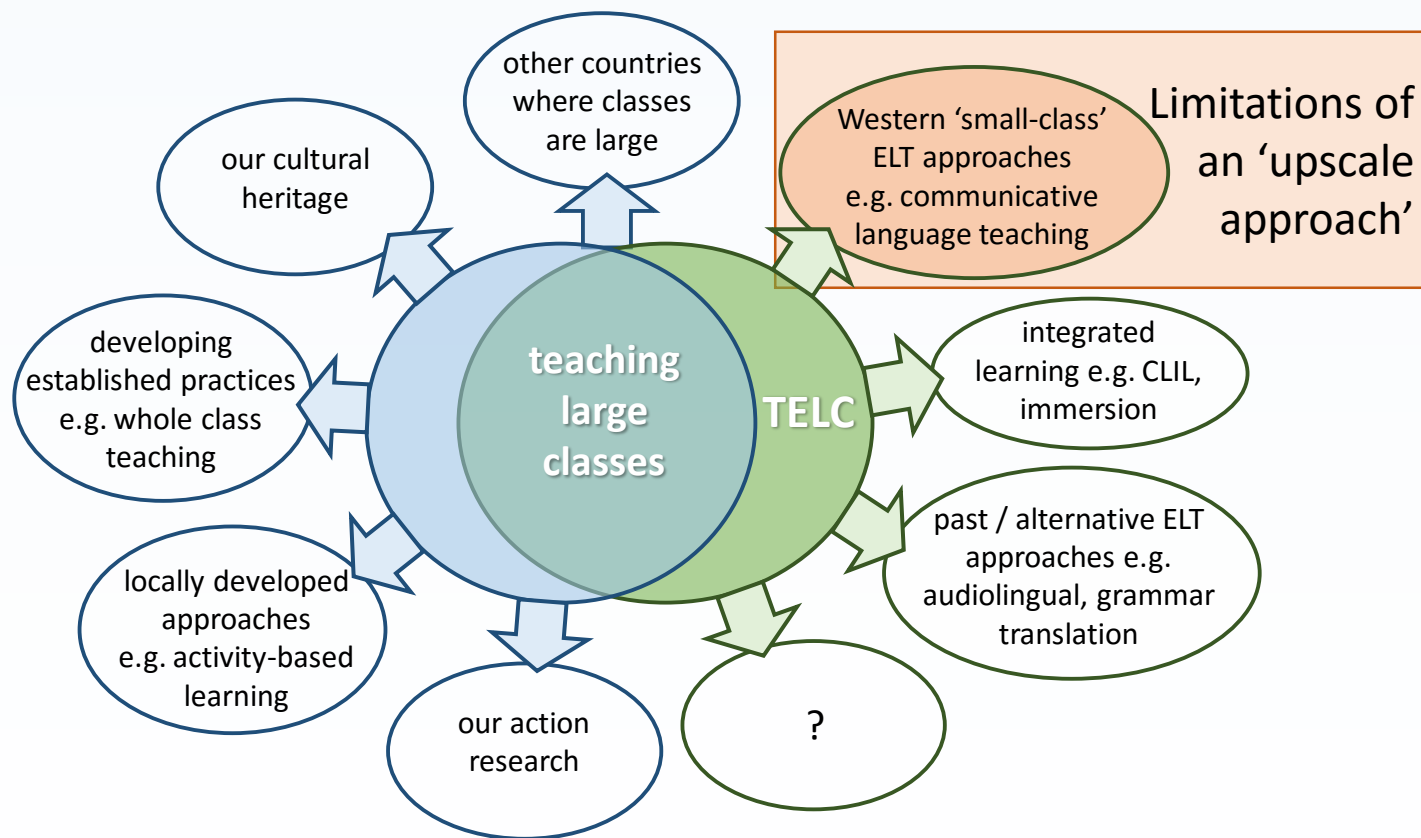


Possible sources for potential solutions



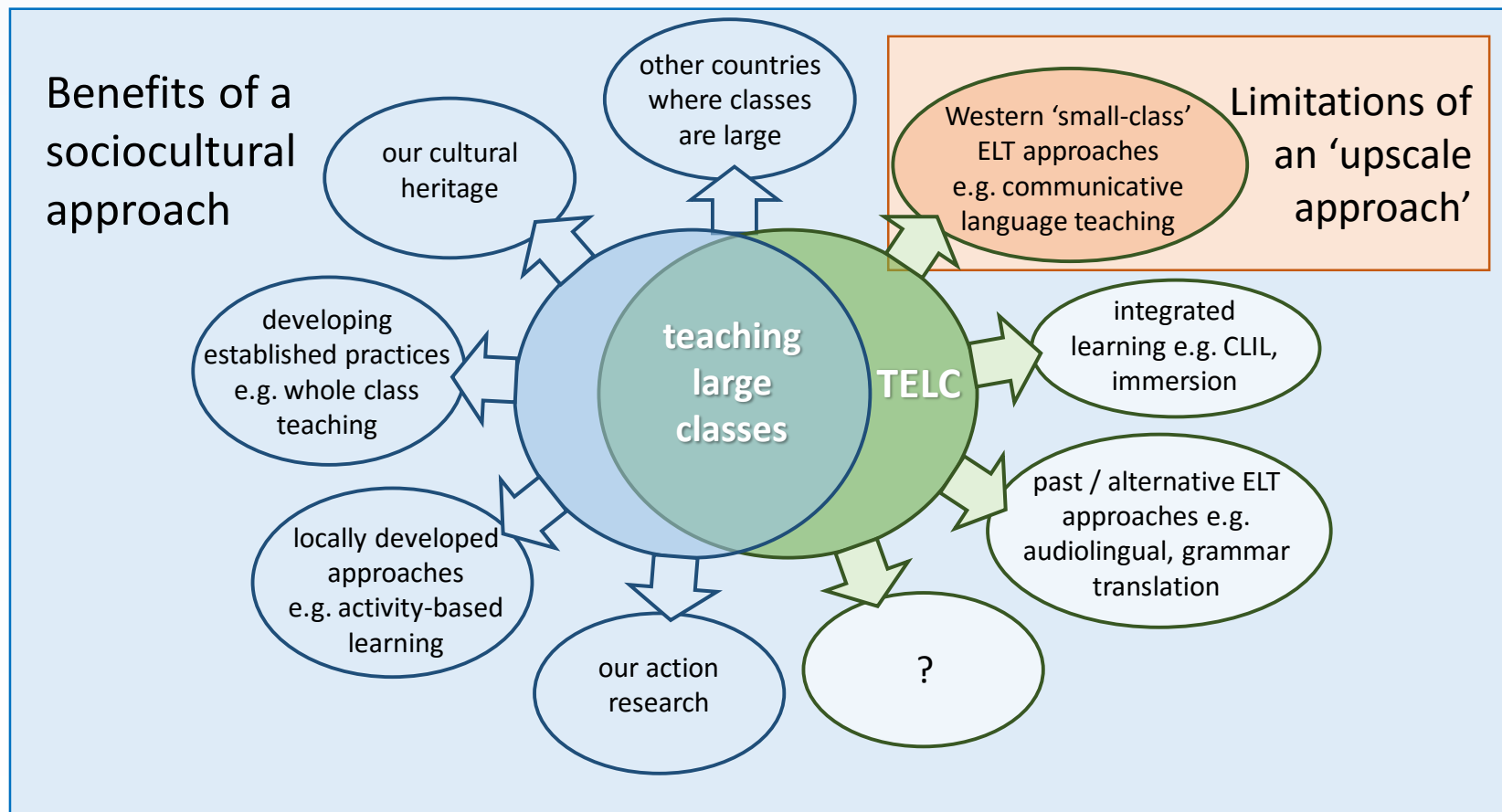


The benefits of a sociocultural approach



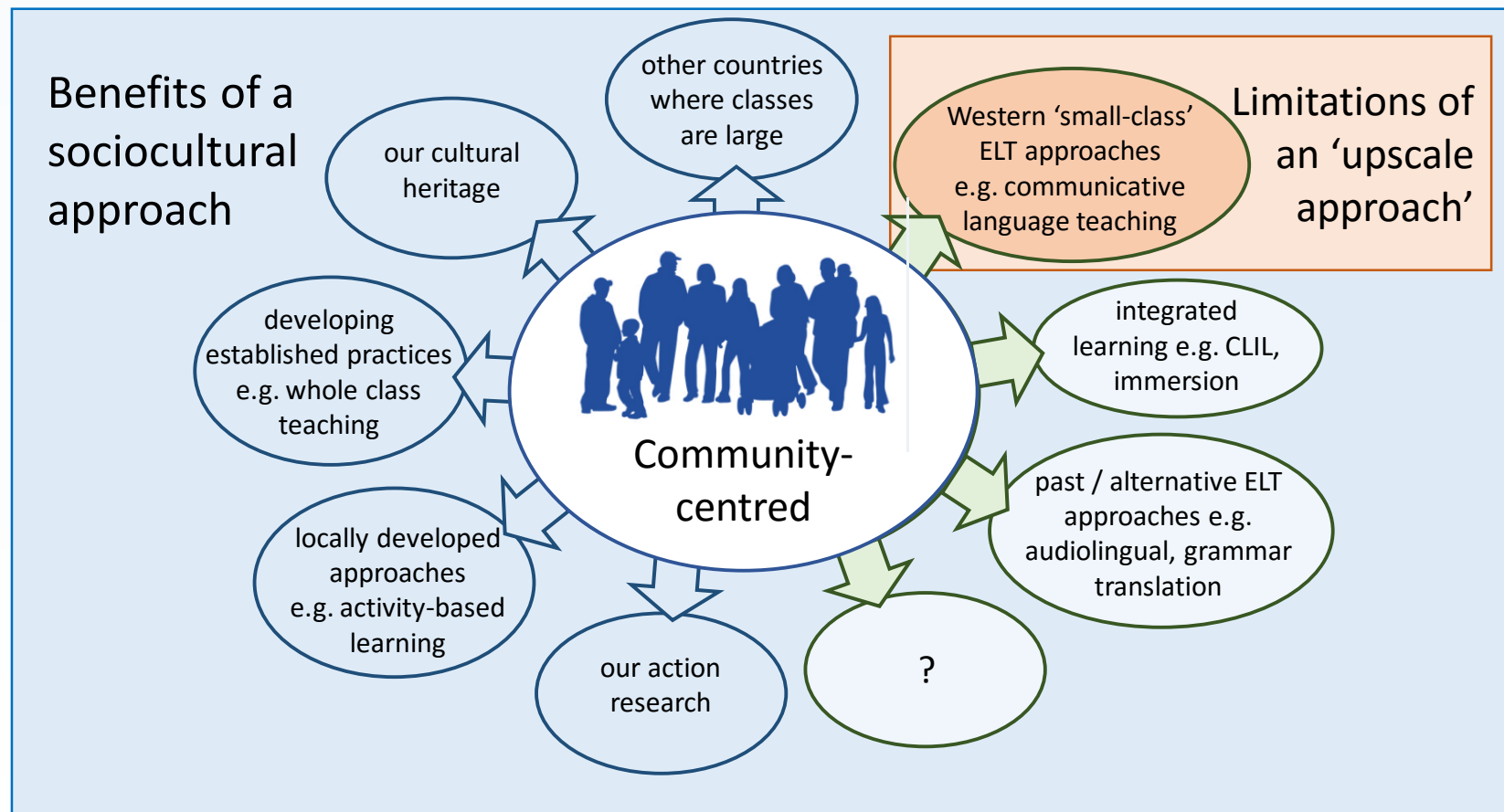


The benefits of a sociocultural approach





The benefits of a sociocultural approach





The search for solutions...

From Richard Smith and Amol Padwad's (2016) webinar: [English Teaching in Difficult Circumstances:](#)

From problems to questions:

Problem: My students aren't motivated to speak in English.



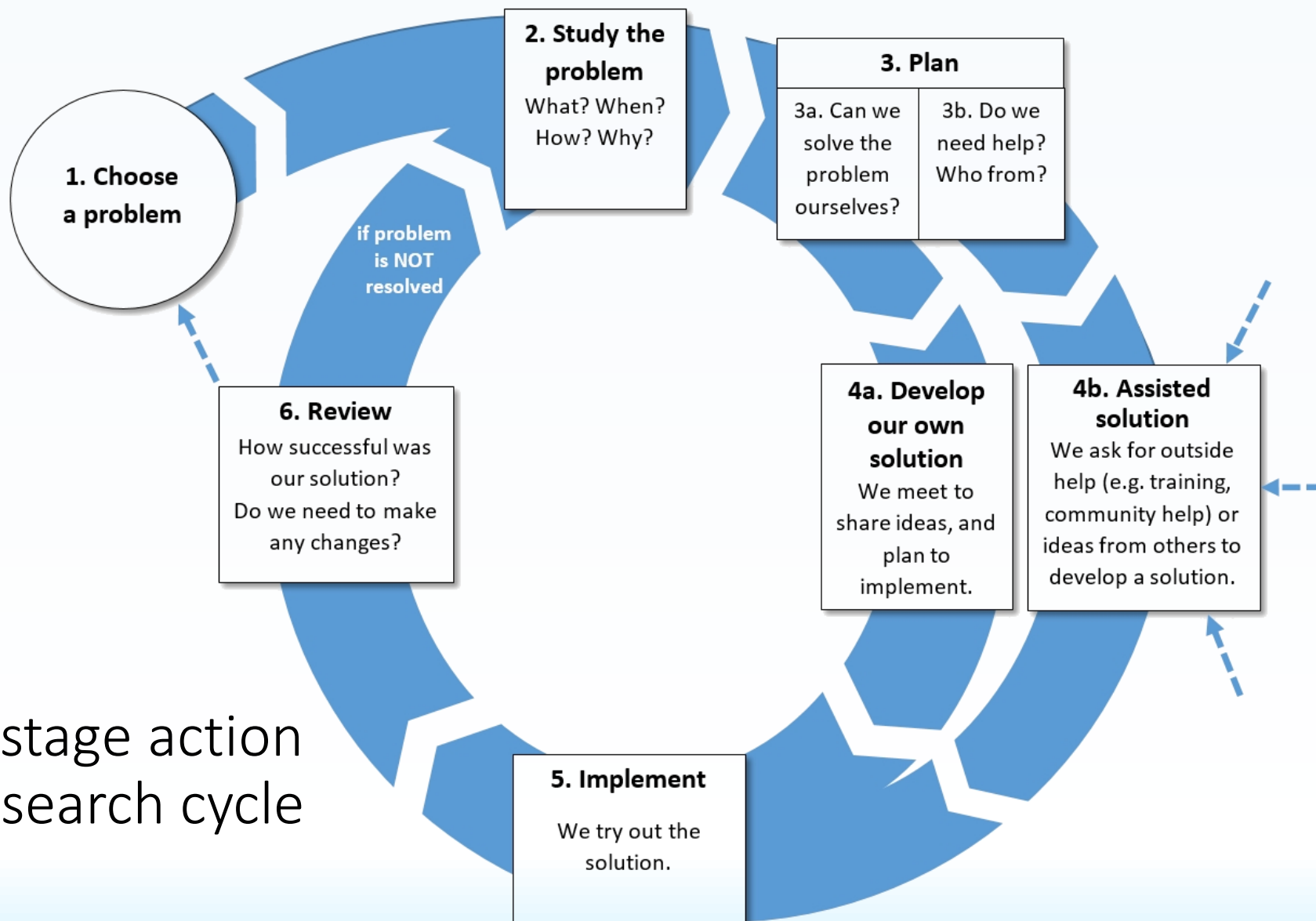
Question: What can I do to encourage my students to speak in English?

not so helpful

the first step towards the solution



6-stage action research cycle





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What might large class solutions look like?

1. An approach: Activity-based learning

effective differentiation

2. A strategy: Think, pair, share

effective whole-class teaching

3. An activity: Back translation

useful feedback on writing without teacher marking



An approach: Activity-based learning

- Activity-based learning (ABL) was first developed in Rishi Valley, India -> context-specific solution.
- Each child moves at her/his own speed through units of a syllabus, completing activities and then a self-assessment task at the end of each unit.
- Teacher can work with individuals or small groups while others work on activities.
- Whole class work also possible.



Activity-based learning project
(ECL) in Bangladesh, 2015



An approach: Activity-based learning

Advantages

- Allows learners in mixed-ability classes to study effectively (differentiation).
- Learners learn to study on their own and self-assess their work, which reduces classroom management challenges.
- Learners have plenty of time for skills practice (e.g. reading and writing).

Disadvantages

- ABL require more resources than are typical in large classes.
- It becomes increasingly challenging as classes get bigger.



Activity-based learning project
(ECL) in Bangladesh, 2015



A whole-class strategy: Think, pair, share

Comes from mainstream teaching. Not well known in English language teaching.

Useful for checking reading and listening comprehension, and understanding of new vocabulary or grammar:

1. Teacher asks question, but doesn't accept answers yet. Says: "Think, pair, share."
2. Learners think silently for a few seconds.
3. Learners tell their partner.
4. Teacher selects a learner to share their answer.



A whole-class strategy: Think, pair, share

Advantages

- More 'wait time' for all learners to think
- Learners have a chance to check ideas before answering
- Motivates weaker learners to answer
- Increases the chances of success
- Involves communication between learners

Disadvantages

- Takes (a little) longer



More student responses and more success after 'think, pair, share' in Rwanda, 2010



An activity: Back translation

Comes from ‘translation studies’, but useful for teaching writing skills in large classes:

1. Learners study a model text in English.
2. Learners translate the text to L1 (their first language).
3. The model text is hidden. Learners translate their L1 text back to English.
4. Learners compare their English text with the original model text, noting differences, self-correcting errors and even assessing work.



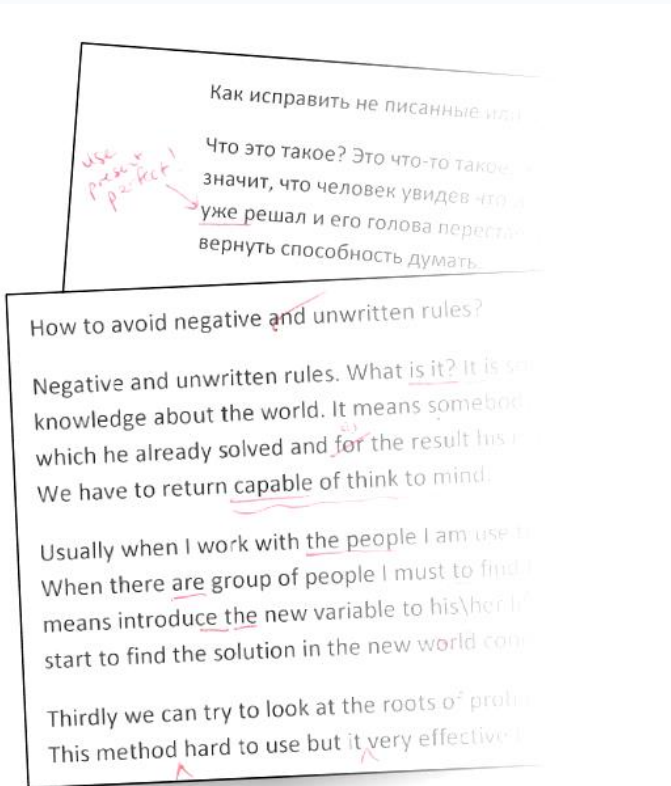
An activity: Back translation

Advantages

- Learners can get feedback on their work without the teacher
- They can learn to self-assess their own work
- The use of translation helps them to understand the English text
- The teacher has less marking 😊

Disadvantages

- It may reduce creativity



Russian English back translation text
self-corrected by student



Further resources for TELC

1 network

- TELC Research Network, Warwick University:
telcnet.weebly.com , [Facebook group](#), [bibliography](#)

3 free booklets

- **Maximising learning in large classes** (2007) by Shamim et al. – incl. Activities:
<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/ELT-16-screen.pdf>
- **Teaching large classes** (2015) by J. Anderson – For action research:
http://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/Anderson_2015_Teaching_large_classes.pdf
- **Crazy animals** (2012) edited by F. Copland and S. Garton – Activity book for younger learners by primary and secondary teachers:
https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/B369-Young-Learners-Activity-Book_v10.pdf

2 longer books

- **Teaching Large Multilevel Classes** (2001) by N. Hess:
https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=kEyHZ_DiVVkC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false
- **Teaching English in Africa** (2015) by J. Anderson:
https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=GD8iDAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

and...



Further resources for TELC

Useful webinars available from the British Council:

- [How to manage the correction of writing in large classes](#) by Fehmina Qaiser and Mohammed Rejaul Karim
- [English teaching in difficult circumstances](#) by Richard Smith and Amol Padwad
- [Using multilingual approaches](#) by John Simpson



Thanks for listening - questions and comments?

Click here for...

My slides: http://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/telc_slides.pdf

My references: http://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/telc_refs.pdf

My accompanying article on TELC for the British Council 'Voices' website:
<https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/what-consider-when-teaching-english-large-classes>

Please send feedback, comments, ideas to: jasonanderson1@gmail.com

My website (lots of other free resources): www.jasonanderson.org.uk

My blog: <https://speakinggames.wordpress.com/>