



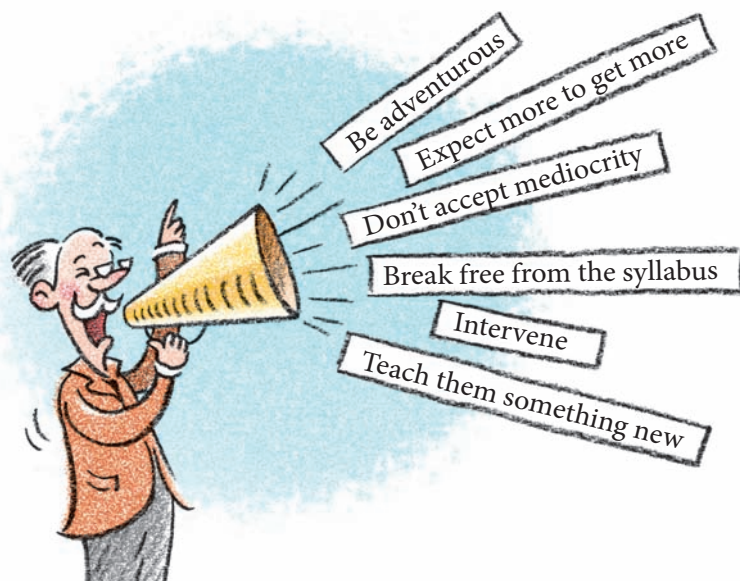
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Demand High Teaching — the old new face of teaching



Two professionals at the forefront of UK pedagogy, Jim Scrivener and Adrian Underhill, got together for coffee and a chat two summers ago. The result was the germ of an idea, not a new methodology, but a way of thinking about our current practice that aims to help teachers shift the focus in the classroom from their teaching to the learning. While it is a new name, in fact, they themselves acknowledge that this idea harks back to Caleb Gattegno and his emphasis on the subordination of teaching to learning. Gattegno originally said that he wanted “to get a maximum yield of linguistic awareness out of a minimal vocabulary”. I believe this has evolved into our modern idea of exploiting material, or as I call it mining activities for learning opportunities. This is where Demand High comes in.

If you look at the chart I have compiled of their main arguments, you can see there are 8 points for us to consider when reflecting on our teaching. But my interpretation is that they are giving us a call to arms, which I am invigorated by.



Much contemporary teaching is
"good enough" but not better



The Communicative Approach has
settled down to a safe, peaceful
dead-end



Most teaching is demand-low
challenge-low — there is a fear of
intervention



We use our students as excuses
"humanistic" = being nice to students
"facilitation" = being nice to students



We no longer know how to work up-
close, in-the-moment, with language



There is a taint of guilt to doing any
demanding hands-on language work



We teach at a distance from learning
rather than getting up-close



We have created systems (in schools,
ministries, international bodies etc)
that encourage, validate, reward
and maintain unadventurous, low-
awareness teaching

In essence, Demand High asks us if we are demanding enough of ourselves, and of our students. We must consider carefully whether our lessons challenge them each as individuals so that they are motivated to do their best. Reflecting on the first four points in Scrivener and Underhill's argument, we may be guilty of having moved away from the primary aim of teaching. As the external demands on our lessons have increased via inspections and curriculums, many of us have taken to the fall back position of the Communicative Approach, some are guilty of 'edutainment' and others now simply turn to the next page in the book. In our defence, we are very much overworked and underpaid but it is likely that our lessons and students are suffering as a result.

In other words, as teachers we need to remember to take a step back from the syllabus or curriculum and seize opportunities to nudge learning forward instead of simply 'covering' pages according to some externally imposed diktat. For learners to achieve the maximum development in any given moment, what is that we can do to nudge them forwards?

On their blog <http://demandhighelt.wordpress.com/> Underhill and Scrivener emphasise that Demand High is simply asking us all to take a look at our lessons objectively to see if we are challenging our learners as much as possible, not too much, not impossible demand but *do-able demand*. This is a concrete idea that we can explore here by taking an example situation and seeing how we could add a do-demand, without adding undoable teaching demands. See *Scenario 1*.

In Demand High **a** would not be good because it doesn't challenge the learners, **b** wouldn't be good because it is too high a demand but **c** and **d** would both be valid. As the teacher, you can choose to either help that pair of learners move on one step or extend the moment to the whole class. If we take the analogy of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, we need to choose the bowl that is not too cold and not too hot but is just right.

Example Scenario 1

You are in a low level class revising before the end of term test. The class have studied a range of grammatical areas such as present continuous, past simple, going to, verb patterns and dummy subjects. You have given them a worksheet with question frames connected to the topics and language of the syllabus.

Personal information	Past simple	At home
What / name? What / do? Who / best friend? What / your e-mail address? How / spell that? Where / live?	Who / with yesterday? Where / go last weekend? What time / arrive home last night? When / start learning English? What / eat for breakfast today?	What rooms / have in your house? Please describe a room. Where / your house? What furniture / in your living room?
Comparatives	Future	Things you like doing
Please compare: Your home / your friend's home Day / night A book / a film Summer / winter Your own idea	Where / holiday next year? Who / visit over Christmas? What / for dinner? Who / see at the weekend? When / take an exam? What / study at university?	What food / eat? What sport / love / play? Which band / enjoy / listen to? Which film / like / watch? Which subject / dislike / study? Your own idea

You hand out the worksheets and ask the learners to mingle asking and answering questions. They are allowed to cross out a box when they have successfully asked a question from it and asked a follow up question.

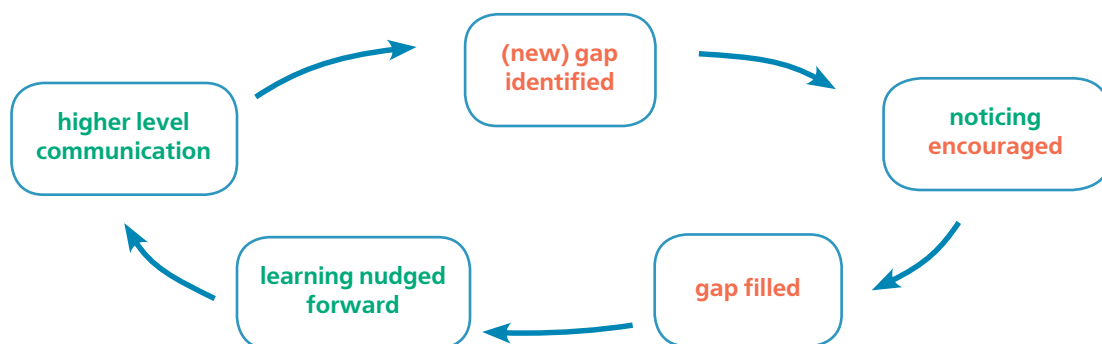
You monitor listening to what they produce. You hear 'How long does he live here?' and you know they mean 'How long has he lived here?' but they have not yet studied present perfect. What do you do?

- Ignore it – they haven't studied this
- Interrupt, repeat the error sentence and try to elicit the correct form
- Interrupt, repeat the error then give them the missing form and ask them to redo the question using the correct form
- Board the sentence and ask the class to guess what is wrong then use it as a teaching point

In fact, the example I have given you arose in my own CEFR A2 class in November 2013 and I chose a blend of **c** and **d** together. In order not to interrupt the flow of the activity for the whole group, I spot inputted the form to that pair during the activity to maximise the value of the activity for them in the moment then at the end, I boarded it and we used it as a springboard into an exploration of the idea of the present perfect connecting the past to the present.

What I feel is that this technique encourages us to challenge our learners at the point at which they are ready. There was a clear gap in knowledge which needed this chunk of language. By having a real personalised context, the learners were ready. With my help, they noticed the gap then I supplied the missing language. I was their resource.

This can be represented in a positively-reinforcing cycle of learning.



In the cycle above, I suggest that the red text represents the teacher's activity, while the green text represents the student's activity. Of course, at all stages the learner is integral but for two stages, the teacher is as well.

Scenario 1 happened to be a grammatical item but it is recommended that this nudging could, just as valuably, happen with other language items. For example, in my lesson, alongside the present perfect leap, individual learners were fed nuggets of language as they needed them during the mingle. There was 'a dental brace' for one, 'a chest of drawers' for another, and yet another needed collocations with the verb *live* — 'in a house', 'with a host family'. In fact, I would argue that a lexical syllabus led by emergent learner needs such as these is one that will be far easier to recall than the lexical sets provided by even the best-designed course book. Scott Thornbury in his address at the International House 60th Anniversary conference on 29th November 2013 said something similar and goes so far as to suggest that an emergent syllabus is the best way to truly meet learner needs. I would agree with him.

Coming back to the idea at the core of this article, so far Demanding High can be extending your learners' vocabulary, or introducing them to a new verb tense. But what about other aspects of the language such as a wider understanding of lexis, or syntax or phonology?

*We can introduce
doable lexical demand
with relative ease.*

Demand High Lexis

Ask yourself whether or not lexis should be more central to your lessons.

Currently, the lexical needs of students are subordinated to historically popular verb-based course designs. Putting this in perspective, when you realise that a C1 level learner is supposed to know 6-7000 lexical items, it is arguable that current course materials aren't necessarily meeting their needs in the best way.

Having on hand a good range of lexical resource books alongside your verb-based course book to mine for sets of language that meets your learners' needs can result in highly-engaging memorable lessons with very little effort on the teachers' part and, potentially, reap huge rewards for them.

For those of you who are interested in exploring the idea of a more lexically-driven course, it is worth exploring the CEFR level word lists.

<http://www.englishprofile.org/index.php/resources/wordlists>

For example, if you take the word *green*. According to the data, at A1 students learn the colour; at B2 the political party; and at C1 the metaphorical use e.g. *green-fingered*. There is no reason why this range of meaning couldn't be exploited below C1 as we can introduce lexical do-able demand with relative ease.

A teacher who wants to challenge their learners may take an opportunity to extend their knowledge of a word like green even at A2. My A2 learners know that if one says 'I am very green' it means that person cares about the environment. But they only know this because the context arose and they were ready to understand this meaning. It was a do-able demand.

The lesson here is **don't be afraid to challenge your learners**.

To illustrate do-able demand using writing, let's take a look at the feedback I gave a B1/B2 borderline learner who had written a review of a website.

As review writing is about your personal experience of something, I used a task-based learning (TBL) model for the lesson. Additionally, I wanted a real context to give validity and purpose to the text so I asked the class to have a go at using a couple of websites that can help improve English skills. This was accompanied by a worksheet which ensured students fully explored the site in order to report back to someone about their findings.

The homework was to write a review of one of the sites for new students joining the school. And the learners knew that all the reviews were going on the computer room wall once complete. See *Scenario 2* in the box.

In my comments, you can see that I used a range of techniques and the majority of my comments don't simply give correction. Instead, they ask the learner to notice the error himself and then take the appropriate steps to change it. Depending on the error, this is a do-able demand.

- Comment [6] directly asks him to find the error himself
- Comment [5] offers him a choice
- Comment [4] is purely positive feedback

In this way, despite the number of corrections, the learner is encouraged and in charge of his own development. My learners know that they are expected to work on writing at least twice and the second time is never simply rewriting and copying my corrections. They must research using dictionaries and grammars in order to take their own learning forward but I guide them in various ways to ensure that the challenge is do-able. I strongly believe that this type of constructive criticism builds learners' knowledge and develops their language skills while traditional correction offers the learner little to extend their learning from the process.

Dogme in Demand High

Some of the techniques suggested in Dogme can give us other ways of introducing do-able demand. Reformulation is one of the key ways in which teachers using dogme can scaffold their learners' development. If we take the learner's sentence:

"Here are some advices on how to use it wisely."

Example Scenario 2

The Internet has become one of the most important things within technology on which most of the people spend their time on. Although you can find massive number of amazing websites which can be helpful, lots of people waste their time exploring useless websites. For the last few years, I have looked over some websites and I found the most interesting and helpful one for training is the BBC website. Actually, it has a variety of helpful sections, such as grammar, listening, reading, writing etc. Here are some advices on how to use it wisely.

Comment [2]: Within *the field of* technology

Comment [3]: If you place the preposition with the relative pronoun, do not also place it at the end of the relative clause.

Comment [4]: A well connected sentence. Good.

Comment [5]: Either **a** massive number
[no plural s] of
Or
[no article] massive numbers of

Comment [6]: Is this countable? Which form of be should you use?
You are correct to use 'some'.

It is normal to focus on the grammatical error and reformulate to correct that.

*“Here is **some advice** on how to use it wisely.”*

But, if that is all we do, we are missing an opportunity to develop this learner lexically as well as grammatically. As we all know, the set of grammatical structures taught from levels A1 — B2 do not encompass the range of ways in which a native speaker might choose to express themselves. Often, B2 learners are held back from moving up to C1 because they do not have the control of the language necessary to take that next step. Again, I suggest you look at the word list link I provide in lexical section. It is not that the students are lacking in knowledge of verb forms but that they do not have the breadth of knowledge of the structures and lexical range we use to communicate with. Adding these items can significantly enhance their ability to communicate effectively at any level.

In my example, we can see that this learner is strong because he already knows that *use wisely* is a collocation so let's offer him an alternative collocation. He is likely to be receptive at this point in his learning as he has invested effort in this piece of writing.

*“Here is some advice on how to **exploit it fully**.”*

With this suggestion the learner can take a verb (exploit) that is often used in a negative sense and add another meaning/context for it. But why stop at offering an alternative verb? Why not offer an entirely new sentence that shows him a different way to express his idea.

“See below for some ways to get the most from it.”

As you can see, this reformulation has changed the sentence structure to a use of the imperative that is not commonly explored in course books. It is a very personal, informal use of the imperative and it is a use that might not be obvious in this context. Therefore it is a chance to nudge this learner forward and enrich his range of options in a situation.

Reformulation as Demand High?

If we are simply inputting options and not asking the learners to produce something more or better themselves we might wonder where the challenge for the learner is. What can we do to reformulation to add demand. On an individual level, Demanding High might be to send back a good sentence to a learner and ask them to think of ways to make it better or to take good sentences and do this in a whole class environment. Working with the group, it is easy to see that while we are used to pulling sentences with errors from students work and asking the class to work together to identify and correct them, we can simply adapt this process by asking the class to then improve the corrected sentences or to improve already 'good' sentences.

I see this type of activity as a manageable response to the criticism Underhill and Scrivener lay at our door in point 7 of their arguments that we no longer know how to work up-close and personal with the language. Spontaneously scaffolding student's utterances whether in writing or speech, helping them manipulate the form and content to improve their range and capabilities is what I consider to be one of the coalfaces of learning.

*It is here that we find
learning gold.*

Moving on from a 'learner-centred' approach

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePXmeK1BvYk> Watch the full session at this Youtube address.

In recent years, I have worked alongside new Celta graduates who don't seem to know how to give learners input. The influence of then-current theories of learning on their training has resulted in teachers who don't get stuck in, don't get involved but seem to stand back when I would be itching to get hands-on. These teachers do not provide board records as standard or guide learners to the grammar because their training has all been about the learners noticing the language themselves. While I agree that noticing is vital, where I feel this idea fails is that real students are not always capable of making the leap from noticing to understanding themselves. The influence of prior learning styles on their classroom expectations can also mean they do not always want to work out the rules for themselves by looking at some examples in a textbook. This can result in a frustrating experience for everyone in the room.

In my opinion, by teaching this method alone to new trainees, we risk them not being able to help the learners when they fail to assimilate the learning through the book. These teachers have not been taught how to teach, but how to guide and there is a big difference. When Scrivener revealed that he thinks “It’s okay to teach” and we should be giving input, I and many of my colleagues were relieved. Finally, here was someone whom the industry regards as a key thinker on methodology telling us what we had thought all along. The Learner-Centred Approach is well-intentioned but, in reality, it is often produces clear examples of a demand that is not do-able.

But, and it’s a big but, Demand High is not asking us to give up a methodology, whether that is one of those described here or something else. If something works for you then continue but, when you leave the classroom each day, ask yourself if your learners achieved all the learning that could have been possible in that session. Do not slavishly follow the rules of a method as it might not be right for that moment on that day. Refocus on your best practice and see if it can be improved.

Demand High within a curriculum or syllabus

In essence, if we are going to expect more from our students we need to seriously reassess our entire approach to teaching from the minutiae of the discrete learning opportunity in the classroom all the way to the systems that our schools, countries and international organisations have in place. If the best teaching occurs when we are free to take the lesson where the learning needs to go, then the effect a local, national or international syllabus or curriculum has on that learning should be reassessed.

Having recently undergone both British Council and OFSTED inspections, I feel strongly that external demands on what teaching should be are a straitjacket to excellent teaching. In their defence, they are an attempt to relegate poor teaching to history. But in their bureaucratic need to predict and plan lessons and courses then measure ‘success’ against whether or not those planned aims have been achieved, they fail to allow the breathing room necessary for excellence.

Unfortunately, in my country, government restrictions mean that accreditation with OFSTED or its alternative ISI, is a prerequisite for admission of students under 18 and this age group is the lifeblood of many institutions. As is often the case, institutional pedagogy seems to be far behind the forefront of current thinking and this is to the detriment of best practice. I would be interested to hear what effect you think national systems have on your teaching practice and how much you feel you are able to influence the direction of the learning that takes place in your classroom.

Points to consider

The main points to remember are:

- It’s okay to teach.
- Find the do-able demand so that each individual takes away their own learning nugget.
- Believe your students can do more and they will too.
- It’s okay to work one-to-one in a whole class situation to help one learner improve.
- Think constructive criticism, not pure praise or simple correction. Your strong learners should still be trying to do more.
- Break out of your rut so the learners break out of theirs.

Source:

<http://www.slideshare.net/jimscrivener/demand-high-elt-11869524>.