1. Reflections on language learning

All teachers and learners bring with them a philosophy of what teaching and learning is. This philosophy is more likely to be implicitly rather than explicitly held, especially by learners, and so taken for granted. Such philosophies are formed by our own experiences of education and learning from the earliest days of childhood onwards. We all accept as being the norm those educational experiences which are part of our socio-cultural context. Only when we are able to experience other approaches, are we able to question and evaluate our own.

Pedagogic principles and practice are instilled in trainee teachers and they carry these into the classroom with them. Very rarely are the roles of teachers and learners examined and questioned. In spite of efforts to encourage learner development, learner independence and even autonomous learning, most classroom situations are still teacher-centred. This is not a criticism, simply a reporting of reality from several observational studies. It's not surprising. Traditional approaches provide security for all concerned. However, the richest learning environment will be created by teachers with the range of knowledge and skills to vary their approach to suit individuals and specific groups and contexts.

It is also difficult to measure language learning qualitatively. Language is not a body of knowledge, a set of facts, which can be memorised and regurgitated for the purposes of tests and examinations. It is an innate human ability and as such organic. It grows and develops in favourable environments, shrivels with neglect and is affected by emotional factors. There are various levels of competencies which can be measured but each performance of language will be different from the next. Spoken competence is the most immediate but also the most fragile and volatile. We all know how articulate, erudite and focussed we can be when sitting in a relaxed group of friends and putting the world to rights. But can we do the same in front of an audience? Or at a job interview? Or in the courtroom? Or when we're tired, unwell, in or out of love? Every human factor affects our ability to use even our mother tongue competently and all these factors are carried over into second language contexts.

So, what to do about it? It is paramount to bear in mind the aims and purposes of any teaching situation. Why are people learning the language? By and large, most people learn a second and subsequent languages for one of the following broad purposes:

- Work
- Leisure
- Social Integration
- Academic Purposes

In the context of European youth work, needs will probably cover all these aspects but with less emphasis on academic purposes.

We would guess that many qualified language teachers started their careers as non-experts. Finding themselves abroad and being asked to teach someone their language they just did it - and enjoyed it! Sometimes simply while on holiday, in the bar, at the disco - anywhere! They would be asked 'How do you say this in your language?' 'Tell me what your name is in …..?' 'What does this expression mean?' etc. Some of the best teaching and learning has taken place in such non-formal contexts.

Another level of non-formal learning contexts is where youth workers need to prepare themselves or others for international work, or when they have to go into a situation where they need another language to participate in local youth projects.

Moreover, there will always be many learning contexts where trained teachers are not available, and teaching and learning will be carried out much more naturally. We would suggest that most people would manage to teach their native language to a willing and motivated learner. The purpose of this T-Kit is to give such non-teachers both the tools and the confidence to maximise the situation.

Here we would like to describe the example of a new tri-lateral programme involving Sweden-Italy-UK. The programme is called Work Away (in the UK) and Breaking Barriers in Sweden and Italy. The project managers in the UK are the Prince's Trust, a charitable organisation set up in 1976 by Prince Charles to help young people who have not had the usual pathways to follow in life or who have screwed up in one way or another (crime, drugs, disastrous
relationships etc). The Scheme is targeted at 18-24 year olds 'at risk of being excluded from long-term employment'. The project identifies such young people locally, provides work experience pre-departure, a pre-departure training week (usually residential); on-arrival training for two weeks; job placements in those countries before returning home with enhanced employment possibilities. An interesting project in its pilot year (1999/2000) and running as a demonstration project.

Edwards Language School is the training partner in Britain and provides both pre-departure training for outgoing UK young people and on-arrival training for incoming people from Sweden and Italy.

During the pre-departure training, there are activities to raise awareness of the reality of living and working abroad, intercultural awareness workshops, and language input.

For the language input, native speaker informants in their mid to late 20s were chosen precisely because they were not trained teachers. These informants were briefed about their role by a qualified and experienced language teacher. They were provided with frameworks for four input sessions, broadly covering the 'Waystage level' of language. They had timetabled input sessions but everything was negotiable. It was observed that the learners themselves chose to make these sessions quite school-like, even though they took place in rooms which were not classrooms. Each was offered a learner file and most of them used them diligently and in the manner of real students. They asked for, and were provided with, the language they felt they needed. Punctuality and attendance were excellent.

As the course was residential, the informants spent social time with participants and so input and learning continued at all times.

Although the pre-departure training took place over only five or six days, with many other issues to be addressed apart from language, we felt it was an excellent example of how learning takes place in a non-formal context. Learners' needs and interests were paramount; teachers were not authority figures; and fear, which is the most negative emotion for a language classroom, was totally absent.

An essential ingredient, when using non-qualified informants, however, is the background preparation of a professional and experienced teacher, who prepares worksheets, provides frameworks and suggestions of functional tasks and is there in the background to monitor the learning process.

This publication is intended to be the background teacher for the many native speaker informants or facilitators who find themselves called upon to teach their own language in non-formal contexts. Section 1.2 on "the roles of learners and facilitators" gives more information for further reflection.

1.1 Language learning and language teaching

A background to modern language learning

The roots of modern language teaching and learning grew and developed in the twentieth century. The century saw travel by land, sea and air become ever more accessible to greater numbers of people, initially in Europe and North America but eventually on a global level encompassing all continents. No longer was foreign travel the domain of pious pilgrims and missionaries, intrepid explorers and conquerors, and the rich and leisured who travelled with an entourage of servants. Increasingly, foreign travel became accessible to the majority in the developed world. Alongside this, the discovery of electricity and the birth of the age of wireless communication enabled peoples to have contact with each other, wherever they lived or worked.

In previous centuries only the classical languages of Latin and Greek had been studied as foreign languages by the minority who had access to formal education. Later, French, which had been the language of the upper classes in, for example, Russia and England, was included. Native speaker nannies and teachers were employed to tutor children in their own home.

In the 20th Century, Europe was the arena for two world wars. In addition, and maybe as a result, other sociological phenomena took place. Women became more equal citizens, claiming

Waystage level (‘Threshold level’ Vantage level) corresponds to a scaling of communication skills in a target foreign language set up by the Modern Language Project from the Council of Europe. The waystage level corresponds to the basic communication skills.
their right to education and suffrage; the need for peaceful co-habitation instead of barbaric territorial battles became paramount. By the end of the century, most countries in Europe had developed democratic systems of government.

Provision of universal basic education became a reality. Working conditions were improved alongside social benefits for the poor, sick and underprivileged. By the second half of the century, widespread travel for work and leisure became the norm. With greater life expectancy, even people in the third-age were able to travel in a way that had been denied them in their youth.

In the wake of these sociological, political and economic changes, education policies developed to include modern languages in state school curricula. The transition of language teaching and learning from classic, dead languages (which had been studied as a means to enter higher education and the professions) to modern vivant languages is set out in the overview below.

**Grammar translation method**

In Europe, the 16th century saw the foundation of grammar schools, where pupils were given a rigorous introduction to Latin grammar rules, study of declensions and conjugations, translation and practice in writing model sentences, mainly by using parallel bilingual texts and dialogue. After a grasp of the basics of the language pupils went on to study advanced grammar and rhetoric. This discipline was seen as the necessary mental gymnastics to equip pupils with the mental agility for all forms of higher education. No wonder, then, that when modern languages entered the curriculum of European schools from the 18th Century onwards they followed the same method of teaching and learning.

This grammar-translation approach to modern language teaching remained the only one in use well into the 20th century and is still prevalent in modified forms in many contexts around the world. This approach works well enough when the purpose of knowledge of the language is to have access to literary texts, which need to be discussed only in mother tongue. However, in the main, what worked for the study of a dead language, where no oral interaction was needed, imposed severe limitations for modern language learning. Pupils acquired a knowledge of the syntax and rhetoric of the target language and until the 20th century were hardly ever called upon to actually use it for spoken interaction. The focus of learning was on reading and writing, with little or no attention given to listening and speaking. Critics of this method believe that learners finish up knowing about the language rather than knowing the language itself; in other words, the old argument about theory and practice.

**The direct method**

This method evolved around the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries and followed on from the ideas of the Reform Movement led by French and German linguists in the mid-1800s. The approach also became known as the Natural Method and its principles were to use only the target language, to speak slowly and clearly to learners, to see learning as the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing; language should be heard first and seen later; grammar rules were given only after practice of them; translation should be avoided.

This method is still widely used today, most notably by the worldwide Berlitz Schools. Critics of the method say that it is too limiting, boring for teachers and learners, and can only work well for those whose learning style exactly matches this approach. It also leaves little space for meaningful exchanges, or going off at a tangent, which happens all the time in natural language interaction.

**The situational approach**

This method contains elements of the Direct Method and evolved from it. Language is taught in situations at the station, in the restaurant and so on. New language is drilled orally in sentence patterns. Vocabulary needed for the situation is taught and tested. Most modern language textbooks for secondary schools still contain elements of this approach. It uses the tried and tested PPP methodology (Presentation, Practice, Production). The teacher presents new language, learners try it out in controlled practice, such as mechanical drills, followed by so-called free production, when learners produce their own sentences using the model initially presented. This will be the approach and methodology most recognised by teachers and learners of modern languages.

**The audio lingual method**

This method was developed for military purposes by the USA during World War II. It consists...
of listening to dialogues on tape and responding accordingly. The aim was to enable espionage personnel to assimilate spoken language and be able to infiltrate enemy offices and pass themselves off as native speakers. Native speaker informants were also used to provide models of the language and linguist coaches advised individuals on how to learn and assimilate. The method worked for the linguistically able and motivated who went on to become top spies and infiltrators. It might be said that if your life were in danger, you too could very quickly become fluent in Russian, French or even Martian!

This method spawned the use of language laboratories where learners sit with head-phones and ‘listen and repeat to their hearts’ content – often just waiting for the bell to sound the end of the lesson!

The communicative approach
This approach arose out of the needs within the member countries of the Council of Europe to find an approach to teaching and learning the major European languages, so that adult learners could take advantage of the many opportunities open to them in the new European Union and Council of Europe countries. As the name suggests, this approach emphasised learning language for mainly spoken communication.

Using the approaches which preceded it, communicative language teaching (CLT) encouraged oral competence without too much attention to the teaching of structures (grammar rules) and vocabulary. It was felt that these would be implicit and learnt by osmosis, much in the way that children learn their mother tongue. Naom Chomsky’s belief that he had discovered an area of the brain containing a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and his theories on a Universal Grammar gave rise to a confidence that everyone who wanted to learn another language would do so.

Included in this broad and somewhat difficult to define approach is Wilkins’ Notional Syllabus which was used to develop the European Framework for modern language learning, which now defines six distinct levels from the survival Waystage level upwards. Foreign language learning in Europe was quite carried away by CLT for much of the 1970s and 80s. It was seen as being the way to learn French without tears. Communicative competence was the aim of the method – it did not encompass academic rigour and examination success. The classroom was to be a rehearsal room for real-life oral interactions and CLT undoubtedly underpinned some very creative teaching materials and classroom practices.

However, it was not the answer to all language learning problems. Many teachers and learners felt uncomfortable at the lack of any formal, structured, step-by-step, bricklaying elements to CLT. As with the Direct Method, CLT suited only those learners whose learning style matched this approach.

Total physical response (TPR)
This approach was developed by James Asher in California. The method uses imperatives and requires learners to be listeners and performers. Asher based his approach on the observation of child language learning, where he saw adults using imperatives to young children, who then reacted to them. Critics might say that it is like training a dog! The teacher gives a command e.g. ‘Stand up!’ ‘Walk to the door!’ ‘Give the book to John!’ etc and learners obey!

The Silent Way
This is another humanistic approach developed by Gattegno in New York in the 1970s. Like TRP it claims to be non-threatening and stress-free and enables basic learners to feel confidence from the beginning. Learners simply listen to the native speakers conversing and only speak when they feel ready and moved to do so. The US Peace Corps, which provided native-speaker volunteers to give language instruction, mainly in Eastern Europe and South East Asia, from the 1970s onwards, used this approach extensively, but little is documented about their experiences.

Task-Based Learning
This approach puts the task to be completed at the centre of the language learning session. Learners are given problems to solve, using the target language, and tasks to complete, individually and collaboratively. The teacher supplies whatever language is needed to facilitate the successful outcome of the task. Learners need to actively seek the language and practise the skills they need to achieve a successful outcome. This approach pre-supposes confident, adventurous language learners, willing to take risks with language and to take responsibility for their own learning. It is intended to be far removed from traditional teacher-centred approaches, where control (supposedly) resides
with the teacher for all facets of the learning process. Learner independence is encouraged and successful task achievement the only reward.

**Topic-Driven approaches**

With this approach, the topic is paramount. Learners select (or the teacher offers) a range of topics which are of interest and relevant to them. The language around this topic is provided by the teacher. This would include structures and lexis, consideration of style and register as appropriate. The essence of topic-driven approaches is that they contextualise language. In addition, if learners have a choice of topics, learning is more motivated.

**Intercultural Language Learning (ICLL)**

This approach believes that language learning and intercultural learning are integral parts of a whole. It is impossible to learn a language thoroughly without being aware of intercultural issues. Conversely, it is impossible to be aware of intercultural issues without being aware of the intrinsic linguistic elements at play. These ideas are supported by the chicken and egg arguments about concepts and language. Does a concept produce the language or does language spur the concept? It is undoubtedly true that although all humans come with the innate power of language, concepts are by no means universal. So we can never assume that what I mean by a word that I use will match what you mean by a word when you use it!

Intercultural language learning explores language interculturally. The approach involves exploration of cultural concepts, stereotypes, generalisations, assumptions and the murky depths beneath surface language. It involves confrontation, and the aim is to clear the air interculturally so that we can truly live tolerantly, contentedly, and constructively in a ‘vive la difference’ Europe!

This T-Kit concentrates on the latter three approaches, as they are the most appropriate for non-formal contexts. However, as with all approaches to teaching and learning, these have grown organically from those that have gone before. The emphasis is on the learner and learning, rather than the teacher and teaching. Thus, we are able to go forward into the 21st century using the skills and knowledge of past centuries, choosing eclectically the approaches most suitable for our time and place.

**1.2 Roles of learners and facilitators**

This section will consider the roles of teachers and learners and how each side of the teaching/learning equation may need to examine and re-evaluate their roles and behaviour in order to maximise learning opportunities. This is particularly relevant in the context of non-formal education.

During the Seminar on ICL in Language Learning held in Strasbourg in November 1998 this subject was examined and four broad classroom cultures were defined. These were the ultra-didactic, didactic, learner-centred, ultra-informal. Pages 47-49 in the Report [CEJ/TC ICLL (98) 2] of the Workshop summarise the activities and the chart below describes the main features of four classroom cultures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom 1: Ultra-didactic</th>
<th>Classroom 2: Didactic</th>
<th>Classroom 3: Learner-centred</th>
<th>Classroom 4: Ultra-informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal classroom layout; authoritarian teacher, strict hierarchical system, no opportunity for learner initiatives; learners as empty-vessels; teacher as source of all knowledge; passive learners essential; all power resides with the teacher.</td>
<td>Teacher-centred classroom layout; teacher in control; lip-service only to learner participation; fairly rigid hierarchical system; control lies with the teacher; passive learners preferred.</td>
<td>Task-based learning; classroom layout flexible - teacher to set up classroom according to the task in hand; learners encouraged to work collaboratively; learners encouraged to find out for themselves first and use the teacher as a final arbiter; varied activities to suit all learning styles; active learners preferred; relaxed hierarchical system.</td>
<td>Haphazard approach; anything goes; teacher as fellow-sufferer in life; learners usually dictate classroom practice; teacher needs students to boost own morale; affected friendships; no hierarchical systems; anarchy rules - OK?!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intercultural language learning explores language interculturally. The approach involves exploration of cultural concepts, stereotypes, generalisations, assumptions and the murky depths beneath surface language. It involves confrontation, and the aim is to clear the air interculturally so that we can truly live tolerantly, contentedly, and constructively in a ‘vive la difference’ Europe!
The classroom culture that is required for the context of non-formal education necessitates a collaborative approach to teaching and learning. The teacher has the role of facilitator – helping and encouraging learning to happen. He/she will not feel that learning can only happen as and when specific items are taught.

Learners, too, must acknowledge that theirs is the more active role; they have to do the learning! They need to be aware of their own learning style and be willing to adapt and expand their learning strategies.

There are as many teaching styles as there are teachers and likewise as many learning styles as there are learners! The most important resource that teachers and learners bring into the language learning environment is themselves. From now onwards we shall refer to facilitators and learners as this best describes their roles in our context.

### Roles of facilitators and learners might be considered as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Facilitator’s Role</th>
<th>The Learner’s Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To raise awareness of different learning styles</td>
<td>• To become aware of learning styles and be willing to try new learning strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To supply accurate and appropriate models of the language as needed for the activities and tasks in hand</td>
<td>• To be an adventurous learner, willing to take risks, be a good guesser, and take every opportunity to learn, using the facilitator and all other sources available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To encourage learners to adopt adventurous learning strategies</td>
<td>• To work both independently and collaboratively to achieve good language and task outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To help create a good learning environment, without fear or inhibition</td>
<td>• To monitor their own and others’ language progress and become aware of common errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To monitor learners’ use of the language and correct errors when appropriate</td>
<td>• To keep records of learning and review them constantly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To be positive and encouraging about outcomes and see all outcomes as successes</td>
<td>• To acknowledge their active role as learner and be willing to negotiate aims and working methods with the facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To see learning as a collaborative process with constant negotiation between facilitators and learners to define aims and working methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.3 What are learning styles?

Learning styles are partly innate and partly learnt. We are all born with abilities and aptitudes and then we are exposed to education in all its forms, at home, in society, in formal education and in non-formal education. The biggest influences will probably be home and formal education. In the family we are patterned into the childhood role assigned to us – ‘eldest’ ‘youngest’ ‘only’ ‘late’ ‘difficult’ ‘wilful’ ‘beautiful’ ‘ugly’ ‘sporting’ ‘gifted’ ‘lazy’ and so on. In school we imbibe the learning norms of our cultural context. We will learn to respect, obey, fear, hate, question or rebel against authority. Authority comes in the form of teachers and School hierarchies. During these formative years we will learn to be more or less competitive; to think in terms of success and failure; to experience fear in the classroom; to know what we can and can’t do; to accept our limitations; to try to reach our potential; to enjoy or hate tests and exams (depending on our ability to do well or badly in them!) to learn how to cheat the system; to avoid doing things we dislike or find difficult; to shine and be a star; to work with or against our peers – this is the process of formal education. The roots of the word education seem so often to be forgotten. They are the Latin *ex* and *ducare* which means to lead out – not to cram in!

When we finish with this stage of life, as we reach official adulthood, we can take control of what and how we learn. Non-formal learning contexts provide us with opportunities for lifelong learning. Long ago, Freire (The Pedagogy of the Oppressed – 1972) spoke about de-schooling. His seminal work still has value. A more recent series of essays on these themes can be found in Power, Pedagogy and Practice (ed. Hodge and Whiting, 1996). But the message is optimistic – we can empower ourselves as learners, take responsibility and stop blaming other people, systems and circumstances for our lacks.

The graphic below shows the Learning Style Spectrum with an explanation of styles. We can reflect on where we fit along that line at the moment and know that the best learner is one who converges towards the middle, combining abilities to learn studially with abilities to learn experientially, and the flexibility to adapt style to situation.
Obviously, those are the two extremes and the best learner, of languages or anything else, is the one who can experiment with styles from both ends of the spectrum and reach a style somewhere in the middle to maximise their learning.

### 1.4 Errors!

**Accuracy and fluency in spoken language**

Most learning situations (that is, any context with teachers and learners) include a clear concept of errors and error-correction. At its most extreme errors can be seen as crimes and error-correction as punishment!

Teachers are trained to monitor learning and apply correctional procedures. Teachers know, learners don’t so they make mistakes and have to be corrected! Error correction in language learning has a long history of debate with clearly defined and justified pedagogical reasons for one methodology or another. However, for the purposes of this publication, let’s create our own approach to errors and corrections. (See also Bartram & Walton 1991) for further commonsense procedures.

Errors will always occur in language learning. Learning is done by trial and error. You try something, if it achieves the outcome you need, it is considered correct and if it doesn’t, it’s obviously incorrect! If you ask for a newspaper when you need a ticket, you will get a newspaper. You will then realise your mistake and try to remedy it. If you are lucky, there will be someone around who can tell you that the word you need is ticket. In the process you will also have learnt how to buy a newspaper!

This trial and error approach, being adventurous, not being afraid to take risks and appear stupid are essential ingredients for language learning in a non-formal context. The role of the learner is to behave as above; to learn from mistakes made; to share this learning with others; to monitor their own and others’ mistakes; and to enjoy the adventure.

The role of a facilitator in error correction is to observe mistakes being made and to correct them at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way. That’s the tricky bit! If the aim of learning is to achieve communication, error correction must keep a low profile and only be seen by both sides as a means to negotiate meaning.
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The facilitator helped the learner to negotiate a successful outcome. The learner took risks, carried on until he/she achieved the successful outcome he/she had in mind. Errors occurred on both sides and were dealt with implicitly. In a learning context, it would probably be beneficial to deal with the learner’s specific errors explicitly at a separate time. This can be done by rehearsing conversations in the form of contextualised role-plays so that the learner pre-plans and pre-learns language necessary for the exchange. This is pre-emptive error correction or avoidance.

If we reflect on our language learning experiences, error correcting by teachers has usually occurred during tests which usually reveal how much we haven’t learnt during lessons, which just shows us how silly we are.

In non-formal contexts learners are encouraged to monitor and self-correct or peer-correct whenever they can. The best learning takes place when the learner is aware that the error has been made.

When asked, most language learners put correcting my mistakes as one of the most important attributes for a good teacher. However, if we followed this through, we would do little else in life!

In any case, when the main aim of using language is for spoken communication, constant interruptions to correct errors, great and small, will simply create a barrier to communication, rather than facilitate it. Statesmen and spokespeople representing various international organisations are often interviewed in English on radio and television. I am always full of admiration for the fluency with which most of them manage to communicate their messages. If I wanted to be pedantic, I could find errors in almost every utterance, either errors of pronunciation, stress or usage. However, the only errors that would need to be dealt with would be those which create a barrier to communication – which are usually very few. Communication of ideas and information is also a two-sided affair. If you do not want to understand, you won’t and if you do, you will! The English saying ‘there’s none so deaf as he who doesn’t wish to hear’ encapsulates this phenomenon. (Do you have such a saying in your language?)

The facilitator in our non-formal contexts should always correct sensitively, clarifying meaning and providing correct forms only as necessary; monitoring and noting common errors and dealing with them in a group at a later stage; monitoring and noting errors specific to an individual and enlisting the help of the group in assisting that learner to use the correct forms; fluency will always be paramount but accuracy must not be neglected.

The importance of accuracy in written language

Error correction for written English is different. Writing is a higher form of language and a more advanced, academically learnt skill. All human beings use spoken forms of language but globally, only a minority achieve literacy, that is the skills to read and write. Writing requires higher levels of accuracy. It is necessary to think of purpose and audience when writing. Reasons for writing are, broadly speaking, for

- Work
- Study
- Pleasure

Look at the following dialogue and then reflect on the ‘error-correction’

L = learner and F = facilitator.

L. ‘One paper please.’
F. ‘One piece of paper?’ (Offering a sheet of paper to write on.)
L. ‘No, one paper for London.’
F. ‘The Times?’ (Offering the newspaper.)
L. ‘No, no, no. One paper go London.’
F. ‘Oh! You need an application form to apply for a visa to go to London’
L. ‘Yes, thank you!’

17
Those who write for pleasure are authors, dramatists and poets, although sometimes this overlaps with work!

Work and study purposes are the main reasons for writing. Writing tasks around work include filling in forms, applying for jobs, written communications in the form of letters, memos, reports, proposals and, increasingly, all of these in e-mail format. Writing tasks for study include form filling, note taking, summary writing, essay writing and dissertations.

The main difference between written and spoken communication is that the former requires a much higher degree of accuracy to be truly effective. Spoken language is ephemeral and, unless it is recorded and analysed, mistakes in spoken language pass unnoticed much of the time. Written language is a permanent form and there in black and white for everyone to see. You cannot retract the written word, or deny having said it or use any of the other disclaimers which we rely on when we simply speak.

When communication is spoken there is always the possibility that the hearer got it wrong, or simply misunderstood, and nobody can do anything about it. That is why, for legal purposes, you are asked to 'put it in writing'!

### Some contrasting features of spoken and written language are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spoken language</th>
<th>Written language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Spontaneous and unrehearsed (unless a pre-planned speech or lecture, which is usually reading a written form of language)</td>
<td>• Planned and able to be revised before use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ephemeral (unless recorded!)</td>
<td>• A permanent record (unless destroyed!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Full of false starts and uncompleted sentences, half-said allusions etc so no need to think and speak syntactically</td>
<td>• Needs awareness of style, register and rhetorical patterns of written communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No problems with spelling and handwriting!</td>
<td>• Can encounter problems of spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meaning conveyed with voice quality (pitch, intonation, volume etc)</td>
<td>• Has the added dimension of legibility if handwritten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If face-to-face, has advantages of body language, eye-contact and other paralinguistic features to aid communication (this is why telephone conversations are usually more difficult)</td>
<td>• Requires knowledge of syntax and its accurate use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Needs no special materials</td>
<td>• Needs more time and effort to produce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Betrays emotions</td>
<td>• Needs writing materials (pen, paper or computer and printer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Needs to be aware of pronunciation and prosodic features of spoken language</td>
<td>• Can only be effective in a context of literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can mask emotions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A corollary to this table would be to say that fluency is more important in spoken language and accuracy is paramount in written language, therefore more error-correction is necessary for written language. But in non-formal contexts we certainly do not want the ‘red-pen approach’ to correcting written forms of the language.

Formal written communications are generally quite formulaic. This means that model examples can be adapted for specific use. Form filling is usually standard; letter-writing has certain conventions – forms of address, set phrases, closing sentences and salutations and so on – and can be learnt as a set of possible sentences. Report writing can also follow a formulaic structure using headings to divide it into sections. Minutes of a meeting are very formulaic in English and can be learnt this way.

The facilitator’s role should be to produce model examples of these standard written communications and then assist learners to personalise them for their specific needs.

The planning stage is the most important when writing. At this stage, the facilitator will help writers find the language for their ideas; help with putting ideas into logical order; help with suggestions for overall form, e.g. – introduction, main ideas, summary/conclusion/recommendations – check spelling or encourage use of dictionaries if available.

The facilitator needs to be around to answer queries during the drafting stage too in order to produce immediate assistance.

Then finally, the facilitator will check the first draft, make suggestions for improvement and ensure that the final form is accurate, succinct and ready for the reader.

A good way to deal with writing is to build up a bank of commonly needed written communications to use as models. This task will belong to the facilitator, who should rely on their own native speaker skills to produce simple and accurate pieces of writing. In time, these examples of good practice will become a useful resource for the learning context concerned and can be added to by subsequent learners and facilitators.

Informal types of writing do not usually cause problems. These include letters and postcards to friends and so on. Here, the rules of formal writing simply do not apply as they are just write-as-you-speak communications. The recipient or reader will forgive you all transgressions, which makes them more manageable and pleasurable for the writer to produce!

We would add a note about e-mail communication. This form of written communication seems to be liberating us from the conventions of writing inasmuch as it tolerates inaccuracies. In its electronic wisdom it allows even quite formal communications to be delivered in informal style, without causing offence.

This can only be a good thing and should encourage people to write more freely. However, it would be a pity to lose the richness of traditional written forms, which are able to influence, persuade and inspire the reader.