

## Script - Myths of English language teaching (ELT)

Hi, I'm Guru from IT for Change. In this video, I'm going to be discussing how English language teachers have some false beliefs or myths about English language teaching and how this leads to practices that are not helpful for language learning.

Stephen Krashen, a Linguist studied second language acquisition. (Second language means any language that is not a home language. He said that there are two basic principles of second language acquisition. He basically mirrored second language acquisition based on how the child learns her first language, that is the home language.

So he said the first principle that we must follow is called input hypothesis, which means the child should have a lot of input.

1. He said the child should be immersed in comprehensible input, that is it should listen to a lot of the language that is being spoken.
2. And it has to be understandable (comprehensible) by the child
3. He calls this caretaker language, such people who are taking care of the child will always speak to the child in a manner that the child can understand. Also they are always speaking to the child, so the child is immersed in the home language.
4. And he said that similarly, if you can immerse the child in English by providing it a lot of input, but in a way that it understands what is being spoken, then that will facilitate the learning of English.

The second principle he said was the affective filter should be low.

1. By that he meant that the emotional context of learning should be supportive.
2. It should not be one filled with anxiety or fear, but it should be one where the child feels confident, has no anxiety, and has a desire to learn.

So if you take both these factors, we find that our practices in language teaching learning are wrong, based on the beliefs that we have.

The first myth that we have is there is no need to give adequate input for the child in the language.

1. Listening opportunities for the children in English language are very limited, because the child primarily listens to the teacher speaking and the teacher reading from the textbook or explaining the textbook most of the time.
2. There is very little other listening that the child does for learning English.

3. Similarly, it is a textbook that is available for reading. There are no other materials available.
4. So very limited input in terms of listening and in terms of reading create an impoverished learning environment which does not support language learning.

In addition to that, teachers have some beliefs that interfere with the learning of the English for the child.

First is there is a **premature focus on production**. So Krashen says that for learning a language before the child can start producing the language, that is speaking the language, it requires a long period of silence where the child is only listening, the child is only consuming but is not able to speak. But in schools we encourage and we even persuade and force the children to start speaking too soon, and that it affects their confidence level and makes them anxious. So children should never be forced to speak, they should speak when they can speak, they will speak what they want to speak, but the teacher's responsibility should provide a lot of opportunities for the child to listen to the language.

The second myth is, **pronunciation and spelling are given a lot of importance** in the schools by the teacher. Krashen says that it is very important first to learn the language as a means of communication, and in this process the structure of the language and aspects of pronunciation and spelling are not important.

Because if the child is corrected in terms of pronunciation and spelling, the child is going to develop anxiety with respect to language learning. He says very clearly that fluency is much much more important than accuracy. Accuracy can come later on once fluency has been acquired by the child.

In the same way, focusing on grammar, syntax, structure of the language, premature and over focus is a very important feature of Indian language teaching. And **premature focus on grammar, over focus on grammar**, deprives language as being a meaningful exchange in the classroom.

And when meaning making possibility is reduced in the classroom, the child's interest, the child's confidence and desire to learn language reduces. Grammar is typically learnt by usage and therefore the belief that there should be a lot of focus on grammar comes in the way of language learning.

A very important myth that we have is **we can teach English without speaking in English**. So there is a translation approach that many teachers favour where they translate the entire textbook, chapter, contents from English into the regional language and teach in that language.

They enable the child to understand the story but the child will not learn English. So there is a need for a judicious mix of home language and English while teaching English. The teacher needs to communicate in a manner that the child can understand. So some element of bilingualism, multilingualism is certainly useful but this should be used very carefully like a scaffold and wholesale translation will not support English language learning.

Another myth that teachers have is **repetitive work, drill work is helpful** for language learning. So teachers give a lot of homework in which the teacher has to make copies of the same text. Krashen says that such drill work which is not meaningful for the child is certainly not going to help in language learning because the child will develop a kind of a negative attitude or a dislike or a disrespect for the language. And the child's desire to learn language is extremely important so drill work is not effective. So teacher's belief in drill work is one of the reasons why language learning does not happen.

Another myth that teachers have is that they have the knowledge of English and the children do not have the knowledge of English so therefore they have the primary role in the classroom. But it ends up with them speaking almost all the time and providing inadequate opportunities not only for individual children to express themselves but also it allows very little options for peer learning. All children come to the classroom with their own language as their resource.

And peer learning opportunities where children are talking to one another in different languages can actually help the English teacher in promoting English in the classroom because it increases children to engage more with the process of language learning.

So what happens because of all these problems is that students actually write the exam and pass the exam but they do not learn communicative skills and they also do not acquire academic language proficiency in English in most cases. These myths come in the way of language learning.

So the teacher has to move from a traditional pedagogy based on these myths, avoid drill work, avoid premature focus on structure and grammar, avoid focus on pronunciation and spelling in the beginning. On the contrary the teacher should provide lot of opportunities where the children can immerse themselves in language, listening to language as well as reading language.

Much much more focus on listening is required and this can come in the form of storytelling, it can come in the form of seeing videos and listening to the stories in them and also listening to audio podcasts.

The more we allow the child to listen to language the better the child will be able to grasp it and understand it.

Of course it's important that the content of what is being spoken should be comprehensible because incomprehensible input is of no use.

Secondly the teacher has to reduce the affective filter, allow for confidence and motivation to be there in the classroom and make sure that there is very little anxiety and fear.

So punishment, drill work should be avoided as much as we can, should be avoided completely and also the teacher must take recourse to different kinds of pedagogy.

Chalk and talk and teaching in a directed manner is certainly one way that the teachers can use but in addition to allow for greater possibilities of immersion and exposure and to reduce affective filter.

Many teachers have successfully used methodologies like theatre, like music, like sport, games, puppetry etc, group activities, word games.

So every teacher must try to use some of these different methods of language teaching so that children start enjoying language classes, children cooperate fully in the process of teaching learning and not only do they enjoy theatre but they also acquire language as a part of it.

So diversifying the pedagogical repertoire of teachers is an extremely important.

So if teachers are willing to give up or teachers give up their myths on language teaching and also enable themselves to acquire more pedagogical methodology opportunities then certainly there is no reason why all the children in the classroom should not acquire communicative competencies in English.