



# Module 1

## Contextualizing Language

### Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

**Video Length: Approximately 8 Minutes**  
**Notes to the Trainer**

For best results, have participants go through the readings for this module prior to viewing the video. As you work through this module, try to use pairs and group work whenever that might be effective. After each group activity, debrief the answers and use them for further discussion. Refer back to the main points when appropriate. It is important that teachers apply the concepts in the module to their own classrooms and situations. The goals for this module are to create an understanding of the need for contextualizing language and to suggest ideas for realizing those concepts in the language classroom.

See Appendix A for additional handouts that can be used for general observation and discussion tasks with any of the modules.

#### **Before Viewing**

Work as a whole class or in pairs or groups. Read out loud or copy and distribute the following information to trainees. Trainees can respond verbally or write their answers down and use them for discussion. The following is adapted from *National Geographic's* web site *Xpeditions Activities, Ancient Greece*, <<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/activities/17/>>. For activities on other topics, see <<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/activities/matrix.html>>.

Imagine this: You're a construction worker digging a hole in the ground for a new subway system, when you suddenly come across a beautiful painted bowl. It is obviously very old and probably very valuable. You have never seen anything like it before! What would you think? What would you say? Would you take it home for a decoration? Would you tell the media? What's a bowl doing down there, anyway?

Something similar happened several years ago in Athens, Greece. While digging a new subway system, construction workers found 2,500-year-old items and works of art. As they dug, they also uncovered ancient roads, shops, baths, and water systems.

Would you like to be involved in this exciting discovery?

Here's the task: The city of Athens has selected you to design a new subway station, and to include a museum where travelers can enjoy the long lost wonders of their underground ancient city. Decide what artifacts, artworks, and architectural ruins you might include. Then draw a floor plan of the subway station, showing where you will place everything.

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## Extension Ideas

- Have students write a dialogue between themselves and one or more of the other construction workers at the time of the discovery. Or, between the archaeologist on the dig and a newspaper reporter.
- Have students act out the discovery. What are the events and actions? How will characters resolve the ethical question of whether or not to keep the bowl?

## Debrief

Ask and discuss with students:

What kind of language skills did you use in this context in order to complete the task? Was it formal or informal language? Did you find yourself seeking particular vocabulary? What verb tenses did you need in order to express your discovery? To explain your plans for the future? This, in essence, is an example of language in context. It is communicative. It engages learners in real-world scenarios. It draws on integrated language that is meaningful *in that context*.

## Preview Vocabulary

Terms	Definitions
Background knowledge	What each individual knows about the world as a result of his or her own experience.
Chant	Words or phrases that are repeated again and again, in a rhythm.
Constructing language	Deciding what language to use for what purpose in a given situation to meet particular social needs.
Context; contextualization	The situation or environment in which language is used.
Content-based Instruction	The use of content to structure curriculum or lessons around central themes or topics.
Genetic testing	Examining a person's DNA (genetic code) for an abnormality that shows a disease or disorder.
Integrated skills	Language skills (reading, writing, speaking, etc.) used together for communication.
Motivate	To make someone want to do or achieve something and be willing to work harder in order to do so. Motivation ( <i>n.</i> ).
"Put on your thinking caps."	"Teacher talk" to instruct students to quietly think and reflect for a moment on a particular problem or point.
Rain forest; rain forest canopy	A dense evergreen forest in a tropical region, with an annual rainfall of at least 2.5 meters. The canopy is the upper levels.
"Real world"	The world in which we live—outside the classroom.
Themes; topics	Main ideas or subjects around which a curriculum can be organized. Language instruction is directly related to the context and content of that theme or topic.

Now start the video. Listen to the introduction. Complete the guided observation and reflection tasks for each of the video segments. The next part of the manual is for trainees and is available on separate pages for ease of copying.

# Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

## Module 1, Contextualizing Language

### Introduction, Expanded Narrative

Contextualization is the meaningful use of language for real communicative purposes. It helps students understand how language users construct language in a given context. Language learning in context in the classroom can be expressed in such ways as:

- Working with real or simulated situations.
- Paying attention to the physical setting of exchange.
- Knowing the purpose of the exchange.
- Using language that accounts for the roles of the participants.
- Using socially acceptable norms of interaction.
- Paying attention to medium, tone, genre, and register.

Teachers can contextualize language instruction by organizing the content of the language curriculum according to themes or topics. These themes or topics work best when they are threaded throughout the course of study.

For an interesting online example of theme-based instruction on the topic of the first people in the New World, see the Journey to a New Land Web Site <<http://www.sfu.museum/journey/>>. You can choose your journey by clicking on the primary level, elementary level, middle school level, secondary level, or post-secondary level buttons.

### Module Focus

Here are some reasons for using contextualized language:

- Language is constructed through a blend of purpose, situation, and social needs. Classroom learning experiences that incorporate these dimensions are more likely to lead to better learning outcomes.
- A contextualized approach to instruction also supports the use of integrated skills, and pair and group work.
- It can foster a deeper level of use of the language, especially when the themes and topics are high-interest and motivate students.

### Video Segment #1, Classroom Techniques: Observation Guide

**[Read before viewing.]**

You will see several short examples from classrooms that use contextualized language and themes. Look for examples of these kinds of activities:

- Games and interactive activities.
- Storytelling, dramatization, or the acting out of language (may also involve singing or chanting).
- Student presentations.

Use the following Observation Guide to help identify the four different classroom activities and themes. The first class example, with body parts as a topic and the song “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” as an activity, is filled out as a model. Fill in the missing parts for the other three classes. Some class scenes may contain multiple topics or sub-topics, and / or more than one activity type. Make your description as detailed as possible. The scenes are short but rich in information. Watch the video as many times as necessary in order to complete the task.

# Module 1: Contextualizing Language

## Observation Guide

Type of Activity	Topic / Theme	Language Level / Focus	Materials Used
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Song</li> <li>• Prescribed movements</li> <li>• Warm-up or transition activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body parts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low-level learners</li> <li>• New vocabulary</li> </ul>	(No extra materials needed)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rain forest</li> <li>• Animals; monkeys</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dramatization, skit</li> <li>• Presentation</li> </ul>			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced-level learners</li> <li>• Oral skills</li> <li>• Reporting on research</li> <li>• Vocabulary; defining key concepts</li> </ul>	

### Reflection

[Read and answer after viewing.]

For each of the four classrooms, also ask yourself the following:

1. How were you able to identify the language context (topics, themes, situations)?  
What did you pay attention to in order to do this?
2. How are the activities that you saw related to each of the contexts (the content areas)?
3. What kind of language naturally evolved as an extension of the activities and context?
4. How might the activities be adapted for different ages? Different topic areas? Levels?

# Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

## Now You Try It—An Action Plan

### Step 1

Think again about your own class(es). What are some themes or topics already in your curriculum that your students enjoy and are motivated to know more about? Can you identify, or ask your students to help identify, some related or new themes or topics?

You can read some of the articles on the topic of contextualizing language (see the Module 1 Reading and the List of Additional Readings and Resources below). Using the video, you have seen a few examples and ideas from other teachers' classes. Now, using the themes and topics you have identified from your own curriculum, think of some ways you can accomplish these goals:

- Introduce some authentic tasks and activities in your lessons.
- Motivate students to get engaged in a role play, a project, a problem-solving task, a puzzle, or an imaginary setting.
- Review lesson content (stories, characters, vocabulary) in a new way through a game, a song, or a performance of some kind.

Talk about your ideas with your group.

### Step 2

By yourself or with a peer, design a portion (for example, a 15-minute segment) of a lesson that includes the use of some of the techniques and activities you listed.

### Step 3

Share your plan with your group. Explain what activities would come before and after your segment. Get ideas and feedback from your group.

### Step 4

Rewrite your design. Try it with your class. Share your results with others, as applicable. If you are not teaching, ask the trainer or another experienced teacher for feedback. Think about how you will revisit key content and language concepts in later lessons.

# Module 1: Contextualizing Language

## Answer Key to Module 1, Contextualizing Language

### Observation Guide, Answer Key

Following are some suggested answers for the observation guide task. Viewers may have additional details and observations on their charts.

Type of Activity	Topic / Theme	Language Level / Focus	Materials Used
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Song</li> <li>• Prescribed movements</li> <li>• Warm-up or transition activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body parts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low-level learners</li> <li>• New vocabulary</li> </ul>	(No extra materials needed)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Song</li> <li>• Spontaneous movements</li> <li>• Enactment based on previous sentence pattern and writing activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rain forest</li> <li>• Animals; monkeys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed-level learners</li> <li>• Parts of speech</li> <li>• Sentence structure</li> <li>• Integrated skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large yellow parts-of-speech chart at front of class</li> <li>• Rain forest effects around the class (group animal names; paper rain forest canopy, etc.)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dramatization, skit</li> <li>• Presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Television viewing habits</li> <li>• Problems and solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intermediate-level</li> <li>• Speaking</li> <li>• Listening</li> </ul>	(No extra materials needed)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genetic research, testing</li> <li>• Ethics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advanced-level</li> <li>• Integrated skills</li> <li>• Reporting on research</li> <li>• Vocabulary; defining key concepts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overhead projector</li> <li>• Research materials (articles, books, Internet, newspaper, etc.)</li> </ul>

# Approaches to Language Teaching: Foundations

## Module 1, Video Segment #1, Classroom Techniques

Here are some suggested directions for answers to the questions for this module. Actual answers may vary depending on local context and the kinds of experience that viewers bring to the task of interpreting and applying video and text concepts.

1. Some clues to the content and context included teacher instructions or behavior; student speech and performance; materials in the classroom, on the walls, on the overhead projector, in students' hands, on the blackboard, etc.

2. The activities in each case were directly related to each of the contexts (the content areas). In the first class, students touched their body parts as they said the words and sang the song. Movement combined with speech, singing, or chanting can provide a strong reinforcement for remembering vocabulary or concepts. Physical movement activities can be done standing in place and help release extra energy. They are good for warm-up and transition points in the lesson.

In the second class, the students were immersed in the rain forest concept. They were in groups and had chosen rain forest animals as their group identifiers (serpents, toucans, monkeys). There was a paper rain forest built in one corner of the room. The teacher was teaching parts of speech using rain forest animals and actions. Students had fun creating wild sentences about the rain forest and animals. We saw a song about one student's humorous sentence on "poisonous monkeys." The teacher noted that this was "fiction," as monkeys (unlike snakes or some insects) are not generally poisonous. Note that the teacher used a form of "teacher talk" when she asked students to help her. This is a way to get students to join in solving a problem or making a point about an item.

In the third class, students were exploring some of the issues around mass media, and television viewing habits in particular. They acted out situations and came up with their own solutions to the problems. We saw a skit in which the students played the roles of a son, mother, father, and friend. The son gives up his television viewing "addiction" and makes the healthier choice to play soccer with his friends instead. He feels happier because of this change in lifestyle.

In the last class, students presented their interpretations of concepts around the topic of genetic testing. They looked at scientific and ethical angles. We saw a student "teaching" at the front of the class with an overhead transparency that her group had prepared. The topic was one that interested them and they had varying opinions about the pros and the cons. The students were sharing real-world information with each other and the teaching was authentic. That fact that it came from them, and not only from the teacher, made the students more motivated to learn and listen to one another.

3. Language in the lower-level classes was naturally more limited to concrete concepts and objects. In the more advanced classes, students were able to express more abstract ideas and use a wider range of grammatical constructions.

4. Younger, lower-level students can do role plays effectively as well. They may need more practice and more preparation with key vocabulary and language constructions. Simple props (clothing, hats, food, household items, masks, etc.) can enliven improvisations and simulations.

Likewise, older and more advanced students may enjoy activities with a physical dimension. Instead of a song, this might mean building something, leading a how-to session, or standing up and moving around as part of an all-class game or activity. As for topics, with a little imagination, nearly anything is possible!

## Module 1: Contextualizing Language

Here are some additional techniques for contextualizing language:

- Reading and/or listening to authentic text (e.g. fiction, documentaries, films, news, radio broadcasts, lectures, dramatic enactments).
- Written and/or oral storytelling.
- Problem solving tasks, riddles, role-plays.
- Games (bingo, hangman, spelling bees, word recognition “concentration” style games, games that follow the formats of familiar TV game shows, scavenger or treasure hunts).
- Projects (bulletin boards, models, community events, research and presentation projects, performances, etc.).
- Use of realia and authentic materials.

For more ideas on creative lesson plan ideas, see the web guide at:

[http://oelp.uoregon.edu/teach\\_lessonplans.html](http://oelp.uoregon.edu/teach_lessonplans.html)