With all the teaching aids and materials currently available, the E.F.L. teacher is in some respects spoilt for choice. In an attempt to be creative, original and inspiring, many teachers prefer to produce their own materials at home or photocopy relevant pages from books as handouts, rather than presenting new material on the blackboard. This can clearly be a useful and highly effective means of imparting information and prompting language, but perhaps there is a general tendency to rely too heavily on the photocopied sheet and the results may be, at times, counter-productive.

The photocopy has now become an intrinsic part of a student's academic life, and what was once alternative and original, has now lost much of the novelty value it once might have had and is now taken for granted, and at times treated yawningly as yet another "papelito" to be filed on top of the wardrobe. At best classified under: "To be looked at some time soon", but more often forgotten, lost or used as scrap paper. Students normally start English courses with good intentions armed with a new A4 exercise book, so these loose photocopied sheets present filing problems for all but the diligent few who paste them in. There is still something to be said in favour of students taking down their own notes from the blackboard. The act of writing often aids comprehension.

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1. When I say blackboard I, of course, include chalkboards and penboards of all colours.

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of print.

For the blackboard to be used effectively, a certain amount of thought and organization is necessary. The board should be divided into sections. The standard pattern of "rugby posts" drawn in the middle effectively breaks the area up into four working sections\(^3\). The laterals can be used for vocabulary, which can be subdivided into areas for verbs, nouns, adjectives etc. Coloured chalk may also be used as a coding system. Headings should be written whenever possible, as it aids organization and comprehension. The bottom central section can be used to present, practise and develop material as well as for pictures. The top section is reserved for permanent material which should not be rubbed out until the end of the class. This may contain grammar rules and structures, a summary of the most important items taught, recurrent mistakes which you wish to draw attention to, reminders etc. Material may be transferred from the bottom section to the permanent section when necessary. It is important to be organized, neat and concise.

The biggest problem to overcome when using the blackboard is that writing tends to be slow and laborious. Teachers complain that student attention tends to waver once their backs are turned. Clearly writing time should be restricted and long dialogues are normally better suited to photocopies, unless built up line by line with student participation. Teachers should try and talk while they write, looking round as much as possible and asking questions and eliciting suggestions from students. Deliberate spelling mistakes and grammatical errors are a good way of maintaining and checking student alertness. Writing should be as neat and concise as possible and it is a good idea to introduce a recognizable personal shorthand made up of letters, symbols and drawings which students can incorporate into their own notes. Obvious symbols to use are arrows for example to indicate various tenses and directions, a stick-figure man to symbolize "somebody" and a box to symbolize "something", thereby facilitating the concise annotation of prepositional phrases and phrasal verbs for instance. Clearly abbreviated forms should be developed by each teacher for his or her individual needs.

Abbreviated forms can be reduced to the minimum to elicit the maximum from the students. Simple letters can be used on the blackboard with the emphasis on the students to decipher your meaning. When teaching "comparatives" for example, practice exercises can be set up by simply writing letters on the board and obliging students to guess who or what they refer to, and then make comparisons.

\[ \begin{array}{ccc}
\text{E.g.:} & (1) \text{ RR VW} & (4) \text{ NC CS} \\
& (2) \text{ RR PN} & (5) \text{ CS IP} \\
& (3) \text{ FG JA} & (6) \text{ RM AM} \\
\end{array} \]

Confusion leads to attention and interest. Students make suggestions and language is generated until the initials are deciphered. Some might guess your meaning immediately, while most may need help. Invariably once they know the first name or object of the pair, the second follows logically. Therefore in

\(^3\) See Hubbard et al. (1983) "A Training Course for TEFL". O.U.P.
the first example if RR is Rolls-Royce then Volkswagen will follow. In the second example RR now becomes Robert Redford. FG is Felipe González and NC is Naomi Campbell and in the fifth example CS becomes Carmen Sevilla. In the last one RM is of course Real Madrid! I will leave you to work out the other pairs for yourselves.

I have found this "minimalist" form of teaching to be effective and popular with students. It is easy to set up and it captures the student imagination and attention. As well as providing controlled practice of a given grammatical item, it also generates a variety of language, and can be adapted for a variety of uses.

The talk I gave at the GRETA "Jornadas" in September 1995 was basically a practical workshop on successful blackboard techniques. Because of the practical and visual nature of its focus, most of the ideas are impossible to convey adequately on paper, especially as the emphasis was on quick and easy drawings as a means of presenting and practising language. I must therefore limit myself here to a brief outline.

Those present at my talk would have appreciated my artistic limitations. My talents are minimal to say the least! For those like me who are not fortunate enough to be blessed with drawing skills, the key is to make this inability work in your favour. My drawings are at times not easily recognizable, to put it mildly! This used to be a constant source of frustration and embarrassment, until I realised that it can be an advantage. Bad drawings tend to generate more language than good ones, as students try and guess what you are trying to depict. All my drawings are made up of circles with a few lines thrown in for good measure. I tell my students that I belong to the "Spherical" school of art (a reaction against Picasso!), and present myself as a frustrated artist. Student derision is jokingly countered by claims of being a misunderstood artist, citing Van Gogh as another "genius" who was not fully appreciated in his lifetime!

For example, to present and practise indefinite articles "a/an", a circle is drawn and the teacher asks what it is. Students make suggestions.

St: It's a ball.
T: No, of course it isn't!
St: Is it a plate?
T: No.

The suggestions continue until the object word is guessed (an apple). Another similar circle is drawn until "an egg" is elicited or revealed with disbelief! The process is repeated for "an orange". A semi-circle with two converging lines forms "an ice-cream and a semi-circle with a single line is "an umbrella".

Circles can also be used to draw faces, eyes, noses, mouths, bodies etc. and the same drawings can be used for different language structures. Modal verbs of deduction, for example, can be practised in the same way.

(a circle is drawn) "It might be a clock"
(circular eyes are added) "It must be a face"
(long straight lines of hair are added) "It might be a woman or a hippy"
(line added under the nose) "It can't be a woman because .......

This can be developed in many different ways and directions. Thought bubbles can be added, again using circles, for future plans, sad faces (reversed semi-circle) and black eyes to elicit deductions in the past ("He must have had an accident").

Picture story-boards can be built up easily and quickly in the same way, and can
be developed for various tenses. Drawings should be built up bit by bit, with
students offering suggestions. Although clearly best suited for young learners
and low levels, they can be adapted effectively to all levels.

The blackboard, if used with thought and planning, can be a dynamic tool at
the teacher's disposal. Of course it has disadvantages, but as I have tried to
show, it can be used in a creative and rewarding way. I finish with a checklist
of 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' which are nothing more than common sense, but often
overlooked.

(1) Clean the board before and after class (messy boards create a bad impression)
(2) Plan your board work before the class.
(3) Make it visually appealing with colours and headings.
(4) Make sure your writing is legible and big enough to be read by the students
at the back.
(5) Give students enough time to copy.
(6) Don't stand in front of the board!
(7) Decide what you want students to copy.
(8) Try not to get chalk on your back.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Hubbard et al. (1983) "A Training Course for TEFL." O.U.P.