

A Fun and Easy Way to Teach the IPA

IATEFL, Glasgow, 2017

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I presented a Poster Presentation at the IATEFL Conference in Birmingham last year. Many of the teachers who attended this suggested doing a workshop this year as they wanted to learn more.

My Poster Presentation was on a new Pronunciation Course for students to help them learn the IPA. The IPA is the International Phonetic Alphabet.

I have been developing this course for a few years to help my own students. The teachers loved the idea but wanted more information and materials for them to be able to teach it too. They, too, have the same problems that I have had over the years.

The problems included lack of teaching materials and training in the IPA. Many teachers do not feel competent enough to teach it. This includes both native English-speaking teachers and non-native English-speaking teachers. Most teachers rely on the "Listen and Repeat" method. I did too as a new teacher of English many years ago.

Another problem is that we teach sounds with the help of words that have the target sound. For example, when we teach the sounds we may start with the sound /p/. We may then use the word pen /pen/ as a sample word with the sound /p/. The problem here is that the word pen has two other sounds in it - /e/ and /n/ but we are only teaching the sound /p/.

I thought what if there was a sound that was also a word. I searched through Adrian Underhill's Phonemic Chart and found one. The sound /aɪ / is also the word 'eye'. So to that I added the sound /z/ to make the word 'eyes'. I continued like this, adding another single sound to make another word. This method is proving a much easier way to teach the sounds because they focus on the new sound only. Each new word contains and revises sounds they have already learned.

This past year I spent developing the teacher's materials for the student course. The materials I developed included lesson plans, worksheets, phoneme flashcards and digital slides.

I brought a lot of samples with me for teachers to try out at my workshop. As it is impossible to know how many people will attend a workshop it is difficult to know how many handouts to make. To avoid running out of handouts I included images of the handouts on my presentation slides. This is the best tip I can pass on to any of you who are thinking of presenting a workshop next year. It also helps to ease the possible sleepless night of worry the night before you present.

So after the brief presentation of my new easy method to teach the IPA, I got the teachers to work in small groups. This was to let them experience being a student in their pronunciation classes back home.

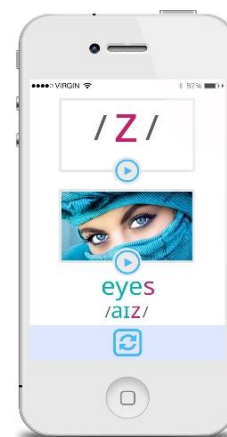
The first task was to make their own flashcards from the blank cards I handed out as they came into the workshop. I held up each of the first 7 sounds showing the front and back of each flashcard for teachers to copy. The front of the card showed the sound symbol and the back showed the word for that symbol: /aɪ/ on the front and the word eye /aɪ/ on the back.

Then they tried out the worksheets which matched the sounds with the words, gap fills and a test. I went around the room to check each group and they all found it very easy and achievable.

The flashcards, lesson plans and digital slides are available to download for free. There are also interactive soundboards and sound audio files to play in class.

Now everyone, anywhere can teach the IPA.

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Marianne Jordan of www.pronunciation.club presenting the new pronunciation course app vouchers for the IATEFL Conference 2017 Raffle to Lisa Duckworth, IATEFL Sponsorship and Exhibition Officer, at IATEFL, Glasgow 2017