

## MEDIATION SKILLS IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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We all face the need to take in information, understand it, and then explain it to others. While this may come naturally to many, it requires a special set of skills to successfully complete such a task. For example, you are a university student and your professor has asked you to read a research article in English and retell it to the class in your native language. Or you are at work and need to relay a complex safety briefing to your colleagues. Other everyday examples: explaining your schedule to a new student or relaying the latest gossip!

### **A Key Skill for Language Learners**

Being able to take in information, summarize it, and communicate it is an example of what linguists call mediation, and it is an important skill for language learners at any level. This is the subject of the latest Cambridge Paper in ELT research paper, 'Mediation: What it is, how to teach it and how to assess it', which looks at the best strategies for teaching and assessing mediation skills – and it can all be quite fun!

Delia Kidd, Applied Research Manager, was part of the team that worked on the paper. She says:

'Mediation is a fundamental skill we use in everyday life and is essential for students learning English for real-world communication. An example would be when staff are asked to explain complex information to non-expert colleagues, or when children are on holiday translating the menu for their parents – that's mediation.'

The research reflects a current trend in language teaching: a move away from the traditional four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) to four communicative modes: perceiving, producing, interacting and mediating. The importance of mediation in language learning was further highlighted in 2020, when the Council of Europe released the Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR is an international standard for assessing language skills, and the new supplement places greater emphasis on mediation.

"The good news for teachers is that if they teach real-world communication skills, they are likely to be working on developing mediation skills already," says Kidd. "But we recommend going further and implementing effective strategies in the classroom."

So how do you develop such strategies? A good place to start is by understanding what mediation activities are. The CEFR describes them as:

text mediation, such as conveying specific information;

concept mediation, such as collaborative discussion in a group;

communication mediation, such as acting as a mediator in an informal situation.

Teachers can turn these ideas into practical activities in the classroom. For example, students can watch news or movies in English and then retell the main points to the class, either in English or their native language.

**Conclusion:** Mediation skills are becoming an increasingly important part of English language teaching, going beyond the traditional skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Mediation helps students use language confidently in real-life situations, whether retelling complex information, helping others communicate or brainstorming ideas. Teachers often develop these skills in real-life situations without even realising it. However, deliberately incorporating mediation strategies into lessons can significantly improve the effectiveness of learning. Using materials, CEFR guidelines and practical mediation tasks makes the learning process more alive, useful and realistic.

## References

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2. Kidd, D. (2022). Insight Application Manager, Cambridge English. Cited in Cambridge English (29 September 2022).
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## Mediation and Cambridge English

Graham Seed, a senior research manager at Cambridge and the author of the paper, says that mediation has long been an important part of Cambridge's approach:

"Our courses already include activities designed to develop mediation skills in English language teaching. We believe that these activities help to improve learners' confidence, as they practise skills that will be useful to them in real-life situations, whether at school or at work."

The document also provides guidance on assessing mediation skills in the classroom. Teachers are advised to use the relevant mediation scales and descriptors presented in the CEFR Companion Volume 2020, adapting them to the context of their students. This will help to identify which aspects to focus on when creating classroom assessment checklists.