

The expert teacher



Presumably, the aim of all personal development programmes, teacher training courses and in-house improvement programmes is to seek the grail of **expertise**. However, few of these schemes define just what it is they are aiming to achieve. To do that, we have to answer the question: "What makes an expert teacher?" The following does not set out to provide a definitive answer so if you have something to contribute to the discussion, send it to the site. You know how.

Here are some ideas.

Inputs and outputs

It is probably a simple truism that good teachers are open to ideas from outside their own experience and able to apply what they learn to the classroom. Defining what these external inputs are and how they result in output (i.e., application to the classroom) is less easy.

Here, however, is a graphical representation of what is meant.

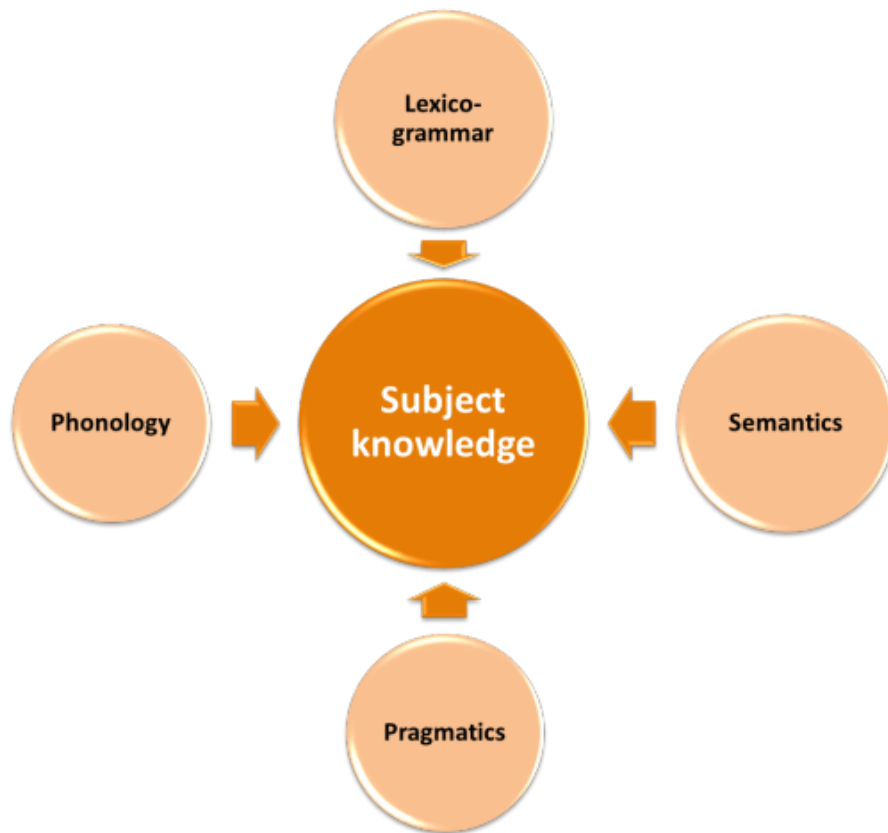


Notice first the directions of the arrows. On the right, we have inputs to the expert and on the left outputs from the expert teacher. There is also some attempt at categorising what these are by colour coding.

Inputs: one by one

Subject knowledge

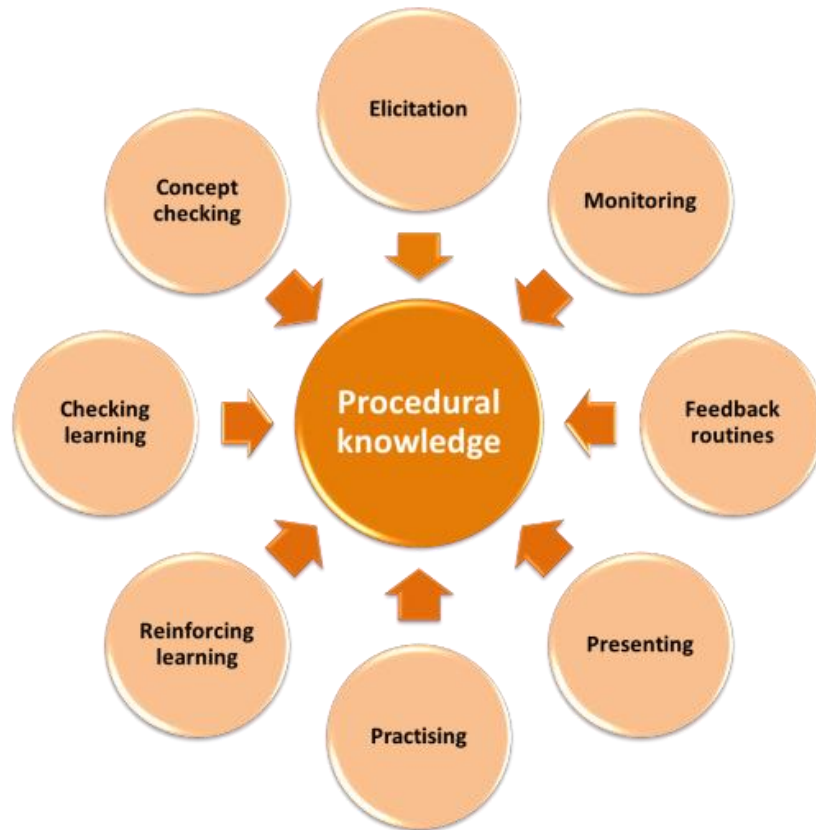
We can take each of the inputs and outputs in turn and think a bit more about what they consist of.



Expert teachers need a sound grasp of language. For that, they need to understand the grammatical, phonological and semantic systems of the language and the pragmatics of its use. Not everyone needs to be a master of all four areas but the knowledge to know where to look for theoretical insight is essential for all of us. Much of this site, especially in the training sections, is designed to contribute to this area.

Procedural knowledge

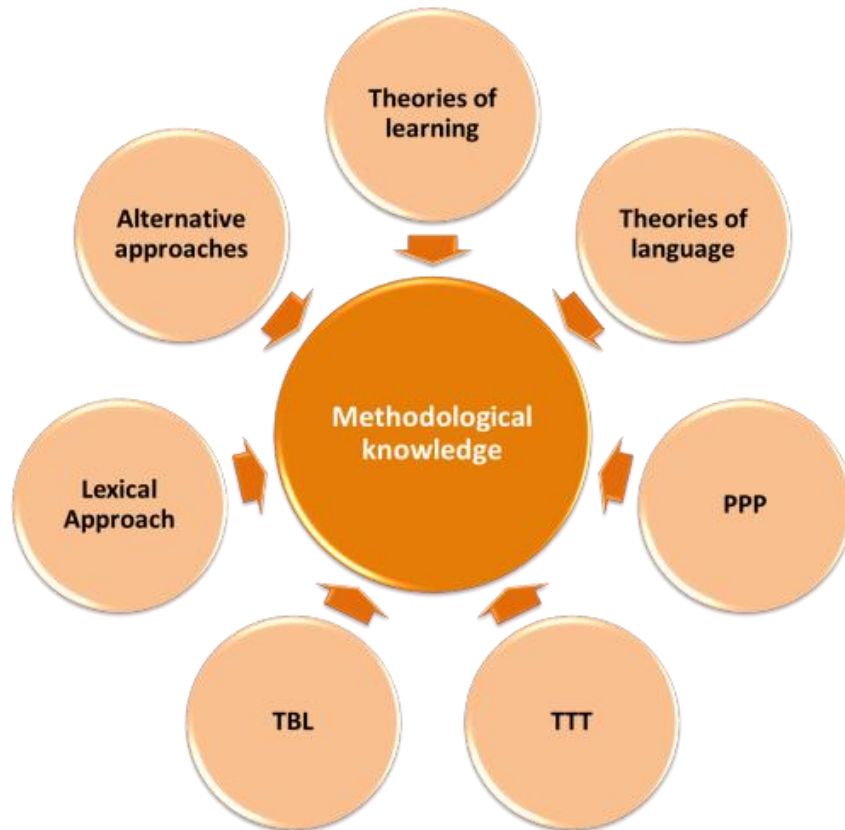
Procedural knowledge refers, simply put, to the knowledge of what we actually do in the classroom.



Reading about, hearing about and discussing what these procedures are in the classroom and what their intended purposes may be all contribute to teacher expertise. We are not talking here about applying them but of recognising their function and knowing about them. You cannot apply that which you don't understand. Obviously.

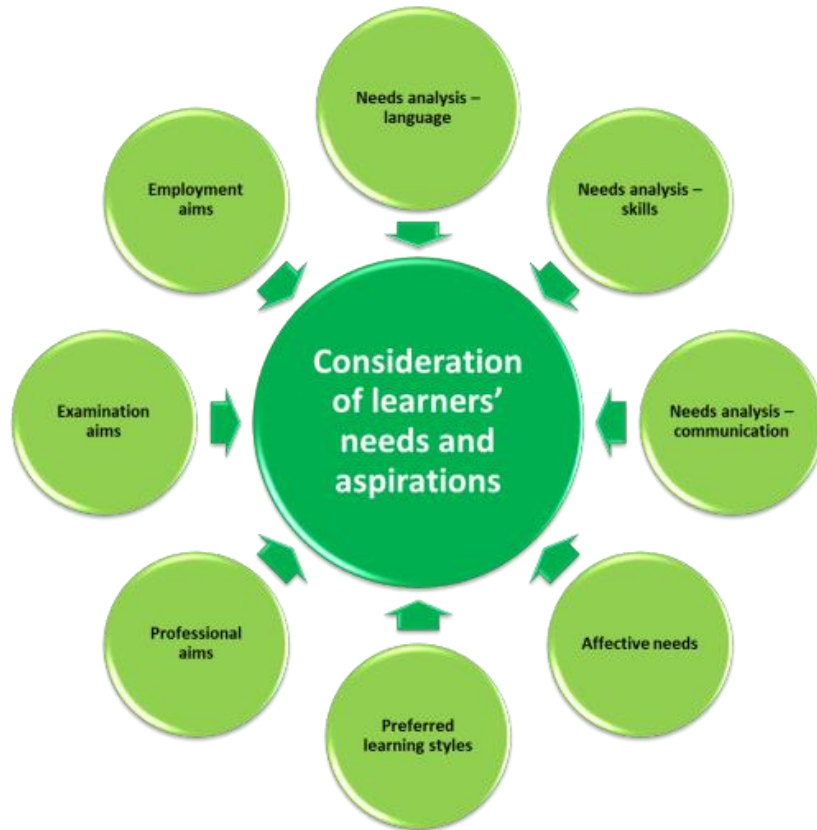
Methodological knowledge

What falls under the category of Methodological knowledge?



You may want to include other pet approaches and methods here but the diagram above only contains the most obvious of these. The most important are a knowledge of theories of language and theories of learning. From these, all else flows. If we don't know the underlying theory of a technique or approach to teaching language, we are unlikely to be able to apply it consistently, flexibly and skilfully.

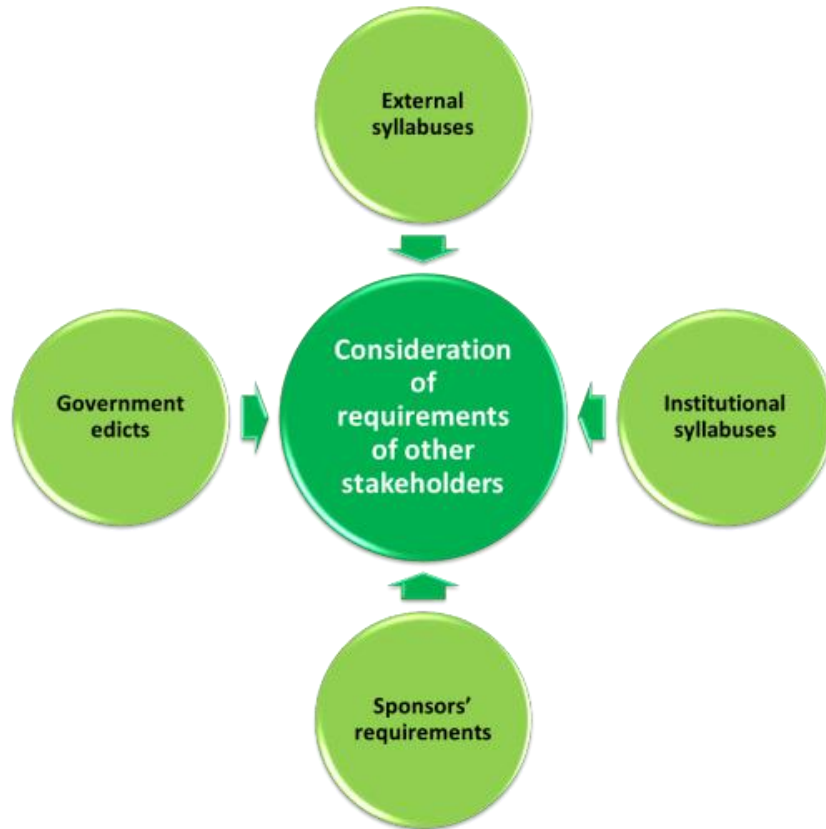
Consideration of learners' needs and aspirations



Depending on your context, you may want to include other things you need to consider. Notice, however, that conducting a needs analysis is something we may well need to do first.

Consideration of the requirements of other stakeholders

Other stakeholders may include sponsors, parents and governments. What else?



These requirements are rarely considered overtly at the classroom level but, in many circumstances, they control the syllabus and the approach to teaching. Expert teachers won't ignore them.

Outputs: one by one

Planning

If you have followed the guide to planning on this site, you'll be well equipped to know what should go into this section.



That's not all we consider, of course, but the expert practitioner will make sure that lessons are planned to make them relevant, interesting and coherent and that they will include a point or points at which learning is carefully checked.

Procedures and techniques

These will mirror the elements of procedural knowledge which was one of the key inputs into developing expertise.



Here, we are less interested in knowing *about* these procedural issues but having the ability to *use* them, barely consciously, in the classroom. They go hand in hand with the planning, of course.

Classroom management skills

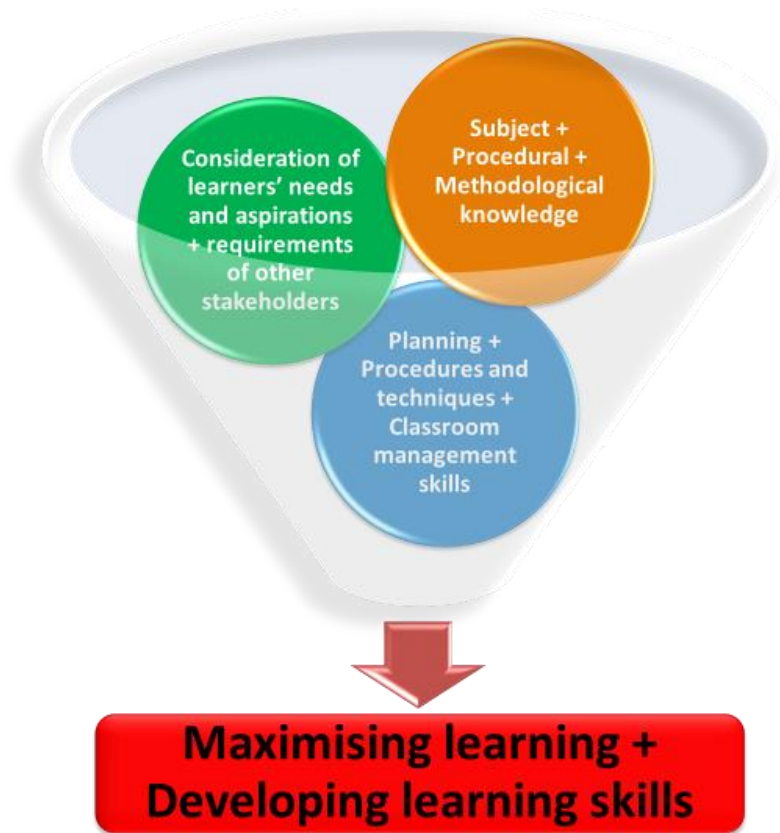
These, too, are the product of procedural knowledge and professional practice. And again, many of these skills are applied in the classroom almost unconsciously by expert teachers.



Some of these management skills (such as presence and rapport) are hard to measure but easy to recognise.

Maximising learning and Developing learning skills

These are the outcomes of all of the above. Expert teachers combine all the inputs from training, research, discussions, workshops, conferences and reading and reflect on how they deploy the procedures and techniques which arise from the input. Here's the summary.



The remarkable thing about all this is that expert teachers barely think about what they are doing but manage to combine all of the above into a seamless display of expertise.