

WAYS OF MAKING UPPER-LEVEL UNIVERSITY ENGLISH CLASSES MORE INTERACTIVE

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English has now acquired the title of the world's leading "global language" because it is used for business, science, and politics. [2] Teaching English as a Foreign Language sounds the perfect way to make some money while visiting or living in another country. There are natural teachers - born communicators who have the ability to explain easily, instantly modifying their own vocabulary, rephrasing and effortlessly incorporating actions, gestures and even pictures so that the person on the receiving end 'gets it', even if they do not speak the same language. But these gifted individuals are in a tiny minority.

Many new teachers begin (or are persuaded to begin) by teaching "conversation" in the belief that this is an easy option. What often happens is that you end up doing most of the talking, that conversation dries up altogether or that you start translating, if you happen to speak the student's own language. The most crucial things to remember about conversation classes are that they should be well prepared, with stimulating material that interests the student (not only you) and that they are pitched at the correct level. Conversation is not just talking about the first thing that comes into your head as you walk into the classroom, it's not about correcting the student the minute he makes a mistake and it's not a teacher (or student) monologue. Discover your students' interests - remembering people are always better at talking about their pet subjects, even in another language - then think of ways to prompt conversation: a newspaper article, a picture, a song, a film extract, ... For example, on the Internet teachers and learners can access the International Corpus of English (www.ucl.ac.uk/english/usage/ice) [7], which provides samples of many national and regional varieties of English. Students and teachers can also access World-Newspapers (www.world-newspapers.com) [8], which provides links to English language newspapers from around the world.

Classroom technology is not only the sign of improvement of today's technology but also an efficient and effective way to provide the students, an excellent and creative education. To improve the quality of the studies, you should have to insert some latest technological tools and terms in the classrooms to make the teaching more meaningful.

A student's brain would capture the concepts rapidly if it is explained with related images, pictures or videos. So prepare presentation slides using power point or other presentation software and explain the lessons using it. You could include related pictures in the slides so that the students could understand easily. Also you could list out all the important points with bullets or numbering and highlight the important points using different colors. This will make the students feel at ease to study and thus create an interest in them to learn.

Another important classroom technology to implement is presentation tools. The basic thing for a student to study well is the way of presentation that is provided to him by his teacher. So presentation plays a major role in teaching and learning. The way the teacher presents the lessons should be clear and informative and should be related to the topic taken by him/her. According to Willis D. and Willis J., “writing complements oral activities and provides opportunities for language focus because: speaking is a real-time activity, in which there is normally no time for careful consideration of language. Writing, on the other hand, allows time to think about language”. [5]

Music has the magic power to improve the mood of any person. It has the ability to create pleasant surroundings. So create a nice environment to freshen up your student physically and mentally. A relaxed person can involve in his/her studies well. Add Background music to the presentation slides or videos while you take lessons; it should be soft and mild.

Information sharing is the best way to contribute your knowledge to other people and also gain new information that you may not know. So the network helps you gradually in this regard. Create online community or blog and make your friends to join. Share your views and thoughts about anything you are interested. It could be something related to your studies or general stuffs like current affairs etc. You could also create a community among your students in which you could clear their doubts online when you are not in class. So that there will be good interaction between you and your class students.

Due to the fact that the students sometimes are naughty and not motivated and are not willing to undertake studies seriously the teacher has additional problem of controlling and motivating such students. His role becomes very challenging as he has dual task of taking measures to ensure that such students are encouraged to undertake studies and at the same time they do not disturb the class where most of the students may be interested. Joan Sedita, a teacher trainer and literacy specialist, reminds us that” there are some students who need direct, systematic instruction to develop the organizational skill”. [6]

Such students tend to take advantage of any situation to demonstrate their power and their unwillingness to study. They also tend to create such situations in the class by which the teacher is not allowed to proceed any further with the curriculum; few of the situations can be as follows:

- Create noise whenever the teacher faces the board.
- Asking questions which may be irrelevant and not connected to the current topic.
- Saying that they did not understand what has been taught or arguing on something wasting the valuable time of the class.
- Coming late deliberately and asking for permission to enter thereby disturbing the class.
- Throwing chalk pieces or flying paper airplanes whenever teacher is not facing them.
- Not attending the classes in general.
- Complaining to university authorities about the teacher and his behavior or the way he teaches.

To tackle above listed problems following methodology is suggested:

1. Do not give a chance to the mischievous students to be not under watch. There are number of ways to do that;

(a) Saving time on board work: The thing that a student is most afraid is coming to the board and facing the class. Use this to your advantage. Call students on the board to write what you otherwise would have written. Most of the time it may be possible to write on the board while still facing the students. However in cases when there are long spells of writings to be done like in case of drawing a diagram or making a table which forces the teacher to face the board, it may be good idea to call a student on board to draw the diagram on the board.

(b) Eye to Eye contact: Maintaining eye to eye contact is one of the most important means for controlling the students. With little practice one can read the eyes to know what is the status of his mind, is he thinking of creating some mischief or something else. The first step is to identify such students who may indulge in such activities. May be such students are sitting in a group, in such cases the teacher should attempt to break the group. The teacher should be very particular to give some extra attention to identified students by maintaining eye contact and asking occasional questions. Normally teachers have a tendency to ignore such students which amounts to running away from the problem. Making the student to feel that he is important to the teacher will control him to quite an extent.

2. Lectures should not become monologue. Emphasis should be to involve the students in class participation. Following are some suggestions:-

(a) For example instead of giving a direct answer for some topic under discussion the teacher may ask the students to suggest some answers themselves, he may even nominate some students to suggest answers. The important thing to remember is that the students who are not willing to participate should invariably be thrown upon some questions and they should be encouraged to participate even if they give wrong answers. By criticizing them for giving wrong answer they will shy away to give answer next time and will distance themselves further away from the class. The teacher can discuss the answer given and diplomatically correct them as the answer is discussed with the class. “The verbal of the ideas also gives the teacher the opportunity to provide positive reinforcement, which further enhances the students’ confidence”. [3]

(b) One more technique that may be very powerful is that any question thrown by the student to the teacher may not be directly answered by the teacher himself and the teacher throws the same question to the class for any one to answer. Any one answering such question may be suitably rewarded by the teacher. This will keep the interest of the class and motivate them to involve themselves and at the same time the teacher will come to know the extent to which the students have understood the subject.

3. Never attempt to speak over the group. It is far more important to identify one particular student who may be the king pin and target him. If you need, stop whatever you are doing or saying and stare at the student creating problem. Keep your mouth closed and simply watch them. Natural instincts give us all the ability to recognize when someone is staring at us and to react to it. Make certain that your eyes focus on each student in the group which was talking until they cease. You can tell the target student that it is either you or me who can talk, you can also add that there must be some thing very important than the subject, so important that you have to discuss, even at the cost of the lecture, so please go ahead and whole class will wait for you to finish.

4. It is not difficult to remember all the names in a class. The best way of remembering the names is that you call the attendance by name instead of calling them by their roll number and each time you take some name make sure that you look at that particular student. Whenever some student makes some noise it is better that you call him by name, it will be very effective measure for controlling him. Even out side the class if you see such students, call them by name this is bound to inculcate some sense of discipline and fear in them.

5. Group and pair work are indispensable to task-based teaching. This type of classroom arrangements creates a completely different atmosphere from that of a traditional teacher-centered class; instead of strictly

controlling the students, the teacher coordinates their work. According to Brown, “group work creates a favorable climate for communication by relieving students of the anxiety of having to talk in front of the whole class”. [1] Group work makes students more responsible and autonomous—they have equal responsibility for performing a task.

6. It will be good idea to use huge resource of manpower at your disposal to your advantage. Remember that every individual has some unique quality. The trick is to identify this and strike a personal rapport with the individual students to use his quality to your advantage. It may be possible to identify the leaders in the groups with little attention. Next step would be to woo them to your side to control your classroom through them. The class leader is not necessarily the best student or the most socially acceptable student, but is one that others follow. Find a way to win them over and to use their abilities to your advantage. Always acknowledge the strength of each student in the class.

7. Never reveal any weakness that can be used by students against you. It may be useful to watch your own video recording of the lecture which you may have delivered. It may happen that one is using some of the phrases excessively or may be making some gestures very often which can be mimicked by the students.

8. It is important that the teacher is always well dressed, is ready with the subject and has acquired in-depth knowledge of the subject and is sympathetic towards the students. If a student makes an odd remark, there is no hurry to answer back. Time will come when one will catch the same very student on wrong footings and correct him while reminding him of his earlier remark.

We can never fully ensure the academic success of our students. However, it is our job to prepare them to be successful. Using these task-based activities in my upper level classes have really helped to encourage my students to communicate in English and made my lessons livelier.

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