

# DEVELOPING CREATIVE AND COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM<sup>1</sup>

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## **Summary of the proposal**

The main objective of this proposal is to encourage teachers of any subject or any level to uncover the great possibilities of resources they can create for their students. Although, the focus of the proposal is the teaching/learning of a second language teachers from other areas who attend can adapt the content to their classrooms. Nowadays, there is an abundant number of sources where a teacher can obtain materials; nevertheless, our classrooms seem to always have special and very specific needs. Besides, we are neighboring a period of time where authors, as well as the government laws are prohibiting teachers to reproduce copy righted material deliberately without the pertinent permissions. Moreover and most importantly, when teachers create their own material they are studying their classrooms, they are showing concern for their students, they are breaking the barrier of the classroom teacher, going beyond and becoming researchers. The teacher/researcher is a feature that every educator should try and develop. Hopefully this proposal plants a seed in the heart of some of the attendants and they make the decision of using all that built-in powerful ability to create, to innovate and to refresh their own professional lives and the ones of those students they have in their classrooms.

One very important consideration is that most teachers educate perhaps the most difficult population to please, that is, young people. Today youngsters are being bombarded with a lot of technological devices and information, their minds are more fast-paced than we teachers imagine. As teachers we need to understand that that is a real element of a new generation. Teachers can not trust that the same strategies, material, activities used ten or twenty years ago can generate the same results with a totally different population.

During this article/proposal we will give readers and participants pertinent and valuable advice and tools that can serve as a starting point to develop their own materials, adapted to their own classrooms and to their own students.

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## **Introduction**

We are living in what is called the *era of communication*. Most things can be obtained in front of a computer with Internet connection. Regarding the learning of languages there is a plethora of information and resources. There are a great number of languages that can be studied by means of the computer. Nonetheless, students are still in need of a classroom with a professional teacher to practice and thus learn a foreign language. This is a relief for those of us who are in this career and were concerned that technology could sweep away our jobs.

Our own experience as teachers as well as plenty of research, carried out by experts, have taught us that when teachers know what motivates learners toward the learning process, both teachers and learners have more possibilities to be successful. That is why this proposal intends to shed some light on the way of teachers to find the kind of teaching activities that make learners enjoy the class, and learn more efficiently.

Despite of the fact that this topic of teaching/learning activities and materials has been deeply studied, it continues to be one of the most relevant for novice teachers and one of the most interesting for experienced educators. There is no formula or textbook that contains the right activities to use in a classroom to ensure success. Instead, every class a teacher initiates is different. Experienced teachers have a clear idea of which are the activities, strategies and techniques they should use to be successful, however, this belief can mislead them because they can develop paradigms that will keep them from seeing the real interests of the learners. One of the main goals we have in this proposal is to challenge the readers and attendants own beliefs as well as those stated by some authors in the bibliography consulted.

## **Common teaching techniques**

Which are the most appropriate techniques to put into practice in class? This is the never-ending quest of teachers. Some teachers attend seminars; take courses to up-date their knowledge, because they feel they run out of ideas, of what to do in class. Others believe they already found the highest point of expertise, and do not worry about improving or changing their techniques. There is still another group of teacher that accept they would like to get deeper into new strategies, techniques, and activities in their classes, nevertheless, do not do much to get better. Many teachers and researchers are aware o this situation and thus, have advocated to do something about this issue. This study is an attempt to find out which activities make students feel more comfortable, more secure that they are giving steps towards the goal of learning a second language.

Subsequently, we have a summary of some previous studies that describe different class activities, included the ones used for the study, and propose teachers and researchers what they can do in order to be successful. Something important to consider is that every activity

has its pros and cons. The following part tries to show both sides of some activities and techniques.

## **Common teaching activities**

### *Lecture*

A lecture is a speech or a talk offered by an expert on a specific field given to an audience of students. Normally, the lecturer is not the teacher, but a guest speaker invited by the official teacher of the class.

### *Strengths:*

- presents factual material in direct, logical manner
- contains experience which inspires
- stimulates thinking to open discussion
- useful for large groups

### *Limitations:*

- experts are not always good teachers
- audience is passive
- learning is difficult to measure
- communication in one way

### *Preparation:*

- needs clear introduction and summary
- needs time and content limit to be effective
- should include examples, anecdotes

## **Lecture with Discussion**

These activities can be very interesting to groups of students. The success of this activity depends a lot on the rapport the speaker establishes with the audience. If the topic is attractive for the students and the lecturer is knowledgeable and approachable, the class can be wonderful, and learners can feel extremely motivated.

*Strengths:*

- involves audience at least after the lecture
- the audience can question, clarify & challenge

*Limitations:*

- time may limit discussion period
- quality is limited to quality of questions and discussion

## **Panel of Experts**

This activity consists of inviting a group of experts on one field, and have an organized discussion in class. This activity requires a moderator, this moderator need to be a person with leadership capacity and ability to summarize thoughts.

*Preparation:*

- requires that questions be prepared prior to discussion

*Strengths:*

- allows experts to present different opinions
- can provoke better discussion than a one-person discussion
- frequent change of speaker keeps attention from lagging

*Limitations:*

- experts may not be good speakers
- personalities may overshadow content
- subject may not be in logical order

*Preparation:*

- facilitator coordinates focus of panel, introduces and summarizes
- brief panels

### **Brainstorming**

Brainstorming is an activity used to generate ideas in small groups. The purpose is to generate as many ideas as possible within a specified time-period. These ideas are not evaluated until the end and a wide range of ideas is often produced. Each idea produced does not need to be usable. Instead, initial ideas can be viewed as a starting point for more workable ideas. The principle of brainstorming is that you need lots of ideas to get good ideas. (<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FACDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/comteach.htm>)

Brainstorming has a wide range of applications. Since 1930, it has been used successfully in business for invention and innovation (Van Gundy, 1981). In the language classroom, brainstorming is often used in teaching writing. Activities such as free-association and word-mapping are often included as part of the pre-writing or warm-up phase (Richards, 1990: 112).

#### *Strengths:*

- listening exercise that allows creative thinking for new ideas
- encourages full participation because all ideas equally recorded
- draws on group's knowledge and experience
- spirit of congeniality is created
- one idea can guide to other ideas

#### *Limitations:*

- can be nonspecific
- needs to be limited to 5 - 7 minutes
- people may have difficulty getting away from known reality
- if not facilitated well, criticism and evaluation may occur

#### *Preparation:*

- facilitator selects issue
- must have some ideas if group needs to be stimulated

### **Videotapes**

Video in class is recommended because it combines visual and audio stimuli and provides context for learning. It can be controlled, (stopped, paused, and repeated). It can be presented to a group of students, to individuals or for self-study. It allow learner to see facial expressions and body language as the same time as they hear the stress, intonation, and rhythm of the language. Videos as a listening tool that can enhance the listening experience for our students. Videos generally present real language that is not simplified and is spoken at a normal speed with genuine accents.

*Strengths:*

- entertaining way of teaching content and raising issues
- keep group's attention
- stimulates discussion

*Limitations:*

- can raise too many issues to have a focused discussion
- discussion may not have full participation
- only as effective as following discussion

*Preparation:*

- need to set up equipment
- effective only if facilitator prepares questions to discuss after the show.

## **Class Discussion**

Class discussion is an activity that can be performed especially with students from intermediate level and up. With beginning levels it is difficult because they have a lot of ideas, but it is difficult for them to express what they are feeling and thinking. Personally, I think it is important to use this technique in class because it resembles real-life functions.

*Strengths:*

- groups ideas and experiences from group
- effective after a presentation, film or experience that needs to be analyzed
- allows everyone to participate in an active process

*Limitations:*

- not practical with more than 20 people
- few people can dominate
- is time consuming
- can get off the track if teacher is not careful

*Preparation:*

- requires careful planning by facilitator to guide discussion
- requires question outline

## **Conclusion**

Getting materials as a teacher is quite simple, these days. There are plenty of textbooks in the libraries and bookstores. There is also an abundant number of authentic material you can utilize. The proposal points out that we need to be careful when designing materials; it offers the steps stated in the oval above. We do believe that making the materials created by the teacher match with the likes, needs, interests of the learners is a challenge though a powerful tool and very rewarding. We recommend applying one activity with its corresponding material, and then, evaluating it and applying it again until you feel it is efficient. The recommendation we give colleagues is to test their materials and select the best and reuse them. The problem is that sometimes we spend years and years inventing new material and not really polishing the one we already have. If we for example developed some competent material, we could be more efficient and save a lot of valuable time. For example, in the past, I extracted all the vocabulary from the first units of the textbook my students use and created a bingo with the vocabulary, after sometime of applying it I polished it and then; I have used it with many groups. I know the material is good quality because it reaches the needs of the learners and at the same time, it saves me a great deal of time.

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