

CAPE Alumni Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk

CAPE Internet Talk was started as part of CAPE follow-up activities to continue ties with CAPE alumni and those who are interested in professional development in English teaching. It is hoped that this would increase our bond and aloha among former participants, and that the information in the TALK would help our alumni and friends/members review what they know and deepen their understanding of issues and interest in the ESL field.

A warm Aloha from CAPE!

Aloha English teachers and welcome to another edition of teacher talk. I hope you and your family are well. We at CAPE are fine, but are praying for a more peaceful solution to the problems the United States is having.

This week I started two new classes at the Hawaii English Language Program. I am teaching advanced writing and high-intermediate structure. I'd like to talk a little about the structure class. Although all of the students have studied structure before and actually speak English quite well, we are starting with the present and present continuous tenses again. It feels funny that these students have come so far, yet ended up in the same place. On the other hand, this phenomenon shows the truth about acquisition orders. Beginning students are just not ready for the subtleties that distinguish one tense from the other. Your young students may not spontaneously produce that third person "s" for many years and it's okay.

Another interesting aspect of my class is the students' attitudes towards grammar. We did an opening activity where they had to brainstorm what they thought about grammar. Some examples are: "sleep-inducing", "mixed-up", "confusing", "difficult", and "very difficult". The only positive answer was "useful", which doesn't seem to show much enthusiasm. Those of you that met me last summer know that I strongly believe grammar does not have to be this way. Grammar can be fun instead of "sleep-inducing". If students use grammar to communicate real life ideas, it doesn't have to be "confusing". I hope to establish strong form-function relationships so grammar is not so "mixed-up". However, these are just my goals. We'll see what really happens over the next 9 weeks. I'll keep you posted.

Classroom Speech

Grammar and other activities don't have to be individual activities. I try to use a lot of group work in my grammar class because it breaks the image of the lone student hunched over a grammar book, sweating as he or she fills in tiny blanks with the right combination of letters.

The following language will help you organize your students into groups.

Announcing group/pair work

I want you in Now we're going to work in Can you get into	. pairs groups of #	please.
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Giving instructions on how to form groups.

Turn around Move forward	And	face look at	your neighbor. the person next to you.
Can you face	The people	behind you. in front of you.	

Dealing with an uneven number of students.

Oh. Oh dear. Uh-oh.	You	Are	by yourself on your own the odd one out	aren't you?
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What about How about Would you mind	joining this group? making a threesome? turning around and working with them?
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These are just a few things you can say. You can probably think of more, but at least this is a start.

Teaching Tip

Because I'm thinking about grammar teaching, I have included an activity to practice the present tense.

GRAMMAR: Present simple to express habitual action

LEVEL: Post-beginner to lower-intermediate

TIME: 30-40 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Have the students brainstorm the names of all of the animals/birds/fishes they can think of for several minutes.
2. Ask one student to come to the board to be the class secretary. He or she writes the names of all of the animals the students can think of. It can be in a jumble.
3. Ask each student to choose one animal he or she associates with. Tell them not to choose common ones like dogs or cats. Have the students draw pictures of the animal and hold them up and make the animal sound (*you might want to skip the drawing for older students, although they might have fun being silly).
4. Give out completion sheets. The students work on the completions individually- they are writing about their animal in the first person. *For students who cannot write, go to step 5 and 6, skipping the reading part.

Completion Sheet:

I normally eat.....
At night I.....
I am afraid of.....
When I have to move I usually.....
If I want to find a mate.....
I don't eat.....
.....is/are afraid of me.
During the day I.....
I live in.....
My mother taught me to.....
My young usually live in/on/under....
I normally live for.....

5. Ask the students to get up and walk around. Have them find the most suitable partner and read their completions to each other. (e.g. it might be dangerous for a cat and a mouse together, but not a cat and a lion).
6. Have students find the most dangerous partner and read their completion form.

Note: This is the original activity from Grammar Games by Mario Rinvolucri. However I don't like parts of it. In steps 5 and 6 the students read each other the sentences but the listener has no purpose to listen, which may be problematic. For my class, I am using the completion sheet as a warm up and making it a guessing game (e.g. students read sentences to partners and partners guess what animal they are).

Thoughts to consider:

I have heard it said many times that teachers teach how they were taught as students. I'm not sure what evidence there is for this, but I find it inaccurate for me. Perhaps I teach the way I was taught to teach. Even so, I read the Cambridge teaching manuals and find myself critical of parts that I accepted when I was a new teacher. Now, when I take a language class, I am always comparing the teacher's style with my own teaching philosophy. I internalize the interesting parts while rejecting and criticizing the methods I dislike. For me, it seems like teachers evolve, or at least we have the agency to do so if we want to. Think back to your English language classes. How were you taught? Did you have good models or bad models? Do you teach the same way you were taught? What parts have you rejected? If this interests you, discuss it with a friend or colleague. If you are a mother, encourage your own children to reflect critically on the way they are taught a foreign language in school. Ask them what they enjoy most and least. Let us know if you find out anything interesting at cape@flex.com.

Well, that's it for this week. We have received many useful comments from many of you. Thank you! Keep sending them in.



Please take the time to give us the addresses of anyone else you think might be interested in receiving this newsletter of the CAPE Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk. And don't forget to write us with any comments you might have.

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