

### 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.*

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A warm Aloha from CAPE!

Aloha English teachers. I hope you and your families are well and your students have had a productive week. We in Hawaii are fine. It's becoming winter, so it's been a bit windy but other than that it's still beautiful.

Yesterday, I went to a teacher development meeting with my colleagues from the Hawaii English language program. We were talking about teaching grammar, which seems to be a difficult area for many of my colleagues. Their real frustration was finding texts that used the grammar points in a realistic way. We looked through several grammar books and found two things. Either the grammar is over-represented in the text (i.e. so many examples of the target language that students may over-use the structure) and often presented in a "silly" context or the text is realistic but the grammar point may be under-represented. Many people seemed so focused on using authentic materials from the beginning that I was surprised. It reminded me of Dr. Day's article from a few weeks ago. In my mind, the most important thing is comprehension. This whole experience reaffirmed what we already know: if you want something done right do it yourself.

#### Classroom Speech

I chose this excerpt of classroom speech because I am teaching my students the difference between "will" and "going to". In order to discuss "willingness", it seems we must also discuss ways to make requests.

The first section focuses on asking students to clean the blackboard, but naturally could be adapted for whatever you need done.

To find/nominate a volunteer:

Please	can would will	you someone	clean	the blackboard? the whiteboard?
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Would	you someone	mind	cleaning the board, please.
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To specify which part:

Just clean Leave Don't clean Only Not	this that	half. section. part. side.
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Could you clean the	top bottom	left-hand right-hand	corner, please?
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Please could you	erase the	words sentences drawings	on the	left right	at the	top bottom
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To clean the whole board:

Erase everything, please. Clean it all, please.	Thank you. Thanks.
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In conclusion, as you know, there are many ways to get things done and many linguistic strategies to accomplish this. Plus, not only does having students clean the board make your arm less tired, it's also a kind of TPR. In fact, you could turn it into a game by having different students erase different parts of the board with only verbal clues (outgoing students) provided by you or (even better) the other students.

**Teaching Tip:**

This is an activity I did with my own students several days ago. I'm afraid it's not very original, but it gave me a chance to talk about the pragmatics of excuse making (discussed in the first newsletter).

Materials: The students had a blank weekly schedule with columns for days and rows for hours. I copied mine from the AZAR Fun with Grammar book, but your students would probably need a schedule that emphasizes afternoons/evenings and weekends.

Procedure:

Step one: The students were told to fill out their schedule for the following week using a notes style that would be common for an appointment book (e.g. "lunch with Jennifer", "play tennis"). If they were not doing anything in the time slot, they were instructed to write "free".

Step two: I gave a mini-pragmatics lesson. I explained to the students that Americans will expect a no, then a long excuse and an apology. This helped to make the activity (which was close to pattern drilling) seem more natural.

Step three: Students were told that they needed to make hour-long appointments with as many classmates as possible and write them in their schedule. I gave the some scaffolded questions and responses. (give students 10 minutes + depending on level, interest and attention span).

A: “Can we meet (day) at (time)?”

Response 1: affirmative

B: “Sure. Where should we meet?”

A: “How about (place)” (students then negotiate place)

Response 2: negative

B: “Oh, I’m sorry. (day) at (time) I’m going to (activity from schedule). How about (day) at (time)

A: (Checks new day and time and responds).

Response 3: flexible

B: Well, I was going to (activity from schedule), but I can change my plans. Where should we meet?

A: How about (place)? (student negotiation)

Step four: because I had participated in the activity, I was confident that students had the idea. I just went around my classroom and had students tell me one person they were going to meet and where they were meeting. If I’d had more time or younger or more distracted students, I would have turned the response time into a dictation where students took turns answering while the rest of the students wrote what they said.

**Thoughts to consider:** When teaching something like grammar, it seems more important than ever to consider emergent knowledge (the knowledge that comes from the place where the student is at). We all know that language learning is a process of building, but it seems that for external reasons we often don’t consider where the student’s real level is. We feel compelled to teach on and cover what we have to regardless of whether the students have mastered the concepts. The opposite can happen too. When I was studying Spanish abroad, I was in a class with one other student. We had language needs that required more difficult grammar and vocabulary than the text presented. For whatever reason, the teacher kept using the text although it would have been possible to go outside the text because we already knew the material. Maybe it was institutional pressure to use the text or she didn’t have time to develop other materials. Regardless, we felt cheated. How do you deal with the emergent knowledge of your students? How do you assess it? What kind of balance do you create in your classroom?

Well, that’s all for this week. I hope you all have a nice week. Remember, if you have any comments you can write us at [cape@flex.com](mailto:cape@flex.com) . We love to receive your comments.

Mahalo.



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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