

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 you know and deepen their understanding of issues of interest in the ESL field.

In Doing, We Learn

Nahm-Sheik Park President, International Graduate School of English

Applied to ELT (English-language teaching), the implication here is that we must use English to learn English, not the other way around. This line of thinking is succinctly epitomized in “By writing, we learn to write.” Given this adage, (plunging into) speaking English arguably is the best way to learn to speak the language.

Using English live involves handling functional chunks of the language in the interactive heat of real-time communication. English thus experienced tends to be so seared into our psyche that it is not easily erased from memory.

Real-life use of English thus dramatically upgrades our communicative command of the language. That said, our current ELT may be headed in the wrong direction. Its focus on classroom teaching leaves no room for live engagement with the language. The way out of this hole is to be found in maximizing real-world use of English, cutting formal instruction down to the absolute bare bones.

We may consider taking a number of different routes that comport with what is suggested here. First and foremost, English may be adopted as the sole medium of communication for all English-language classes. Secondly, each classroom may be seeded with a few international students, for whom English is the communication medium of choice. Thirdly, homework may be so assigned as to necessitate tons of e-mailing and on-line search through the medium of English.

Still another option may involve karaoke sessions, where we may enjoy losing ourselves in English-language songs. In a more serious vein, we can also consider teleconferencing sessions to meet and chat up our peers in other countries. Also capable of going a long way toward taking our English to another level are extracurricular activities, such as debates, that trigger live-context utilization of English-language communication skills.

English-language “happy hour,” too, is a possibility worth exploring. We can also set up weekend or seasonal English-only camps. Organized around areas of interest like sports and music, these sleep-away camps should preferably be co-ed and international. They could feature talent contests and lively sing-along sessions with campfires, marshmallows and all. Working holidays abroad can provide an even better opportunity to work and pick up English in real-life settings. Seasonal employment as an au pair, for one, is an interesting possibility. NGO work abroad, too, can involve plenty of real English inserted into charitable volunteering.

With due respect to all hardworking ELT practitioners, we learn much more English outside the classroom than inside. For we get to use far more English outside the classroom than inside. So we might as well cut ourselves loose from the stifling confines of the classroom.

Forced to sink or swim in a sea of English, we will all somehow manage to not just survive but also thrive. This school of hard knocks may be the best school of English. Thinking outside of the classroom may be thinking outside the box.

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