



Teaching When There Is Nothing To Teach With

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- **WARM-UP:**

BrainGym exercises

<http://braingym.org/>

<http://esl.about.com/od/englishlessonplans/a/braingym.htm>

- **ICE-BREAKER:**

Let's get to know each other, and outline the parameters of our talk at the same time...

- **SHORT DISCUSSION:**

What do you identify as your greatest challenge in your teaching context?

- **PERCEIVED PROBLEMS:**

I. Large classes

II. Few (and outdated) textbooks

III. Few or no other teaching materials or resources

IV. Less-than-optimal facilities

V. Multi-level classes

VI. Little contact with students



What to do??

Be creative

Be efficient

Be positive

How do we achieve the above, practically speaking?

1. Crowd control (ie, classroom management):

Bell, 1991: "It can be seen, therefore, that the students should not be categorized simply as strong or weak, but rather by their strengths and weaknesses in particular areas and by their needs and interests."

- Divide and conquer: Identify higher-level students and those who may be stronger in different areas, and have them lead groups; divide students according to talents and interests (i.e. illustration, narration, etc.), use pairs, small groups, larger groups, according to activity and size of class
- Classroom configuration: If possible, re-configure classroom to avoid "peanut gallery" syndrome
- Lights, camera, **action**: Use activities to get students out of their seats (in orderly fashion, of course)
- Group projects: Choose engaging and stimulating subjects
- Use music, use drama, use storytelling, use (in short) the arts - equipment and facilities allowing
- Lay down the law: establish signals for "Quiet!" "Listen!" etc. with consequences for transgressing the rules

~~~DEMO: "Speed dating"~~~



## 2. Foster and reward learner autonomy:

*cf Little, 2006: "autonomy....is a basic human need. It is nourished by, and in turn nourishes, our intrinsic motivation, our proactive interest in the world around us."*

- Have students make and use flashcards
- Student-led lessons: students (this could be a group project) take responsibility for a grammar point, etc. : teach, make posters, etc.
- Student-generated journals (if practicable, depending on numbers)
- Vocabulary logs, student-generated quizzes
- Make "contracts" with students- they check off items (exercises, homework assignments, readings, etc.) as they do them, in a public record at the front of the classroom, with 'rewards' (recognition; 'pass' on homework for one day etc.)
- Establish Student of the Week/Month/Term etc. with picture of student on display at front of class

## 3. Do-it-yourself teaching materials:

*"Teaching a multilevel class demands that you discard a number of preconceptions. The first one is the idea that everything would be easy if you could only find the right material." Bell, 1991*

- Use realia (newspapers, household objects, ads from magazines, etc.)
- No storybooks? Make them yourself: students tell stories, write them down, work on grammar and vocabulary necessary, illustrate them, and end up with a 'book'
  - **Demonstration: Story Telling**
- Portfolios: students collect work– their own, or that of others: could consist of poems, lyrics, stories, etc., connected to a theme - and share with their group, or the class. Themes can include "My Life", "Flora and Fauna of this area" (could be done in partnership with another teacher) "To Your Health", etc..
- Are there NGOs, book publishers, etc. in your area? Are there newspaper inserts, local or federal government publications...? Do they have written materials, pamphlets, etc. that they would be willing to send..?
- Contact schools in the US. Set up pen-pals. Ask the schools to have "Book Drives" and ship donated books to you for your classroom



## QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION



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## WARMING UP BRAIN GYM EXERCISES

### Adapted from:

<http://braingym.org/> / <http://esl.about.com/od/englishlessonplans/a/braingym.htm>

- **Stand up: DRAW THE LETTER X**
  - Making the letter X motion with the arm or hand or finger;
    - Why? This action activates the brain and stimulates right brain/left brain processing;
- **Stand up: CROSS KNEE TOUCHES**
  - Bend and lift the left knee, simultaneously reach, cross the body, and touch with the right hand;
  - Switch hand and knee;
  - Go back and forth. Touch each knee 20 times.;
  - Students count out loud;
- **Stand up: CROSS BACK TOUCHES**
  - Do the same as above, just go to the back;
  - Lift the left foot towards the fanny, cross the back and touch the foot with the opposite/right hand;
  - Switch feet and hands;
  - Count out 20 on each foot;
- **Stand up: HAND CIRCLES – SIMULTANEOUS AND OPPOSITE**
  - Rotate the left fist in circles with movements toward the face;
  - Go the opposite direction with the right hand, rotating the fist out and away from the face;
  - Reverse directions of both hands;
- **Stand up: AIR WRITE**
  - Using the right index finger, have the entire class draw the alphabet in the air as they say the letters aloud;
    - Then, use the left finger;
    - Then, use both at the same time;
  - Spell their name;
  - No paper and pencils? Take spelling tests this way! Teacher stands behind as student write in the air while saying the letters aloud; Or students take turns in groups, correcting each other.



## Different Ways of Grouping Students

- **Number off: 1,2,3,4**
  - Have name tags with numbers  
Pass out as they enter  
Collect back as they exit
  - Or write number on their hands with pen or marker
  - Or students draw a number from a bowl or cup as they enter
  - Or just number off as they enter or as the activity begins
- **Color off: red, white, blue, purple, green etc.**
  - Younger students will like this!
  - Have tags made of these colors for students to wear
    - Hand out as they enter
    - Collect back at the end
  - Or have color stickers
  - Or students pick a paper/color from a bowl or cup as they enter
  - Or mark their hands with a colored marker
  - Or pass out one crayon per student (collect back)
- **Shape off: circle, square, triangle, rectangle**
  - Same as above
- **Have different sized sticks or chopsticks or pieces of string...**
  - Have students choose as they enter
  - Have them find their partners by finding the ones that are the same size



## STUDENT GENERATED RULES AND SIGNALS

### Rationale:

By allowing students to set the rules and signals used to enforce the expectations, they feel ownership in the classroom. They will hold each other accountable; peer-pressure to behave replaces teacher pressure to behave. Traditional classroom management can lessen student motivation. By involving students in the establishment of rules, the teacher can create a more positive experience and cultivate a community of learners.

- **ASK STUDENTS WHAT THE RULES SHOULD BE:**
  - Brainstorm ideas and write on the board/record on poster. For Example:
    - English only
    - Raise your hand
    - Take turns – switch when it is your partners turn
    - Speak and practice English when it is your turn
    - No speaking
  
- **ASK STUDENTS WHAT THE REMINDERS or SIGNALS SHOULD BE:**
  - If someone speaks Khmer or Cambodian? Clap hands?
  - If someone is speaking out of turn? Palm raised? Thumbs up?
  - If someone is not talking/practicing English? Hand to your ear?
  - If everyone is talking out of turn? Everyone snaps fingers?
  
- **WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?**
  - Again, consequences should be determined by the class;
  - The teacher will need to guide these so that they are reasonable
  - For example, students pay 25 cents in my class for speaking another language than English. Perhaps, it would be the equivalent of 1 cent for your classroom. The money collected bought candy for the entire classroom;
  - Help students think creatively, and a consequence that leads to language processing is always best!



## CONVERSATION CONFIGURATIONS (Controlled Grammar and Speaking Practice)

- **Speed Dating**

- Put chairs in group of two facing each other
- Give students a set conversation to practice like greetings
  - Student A: My name is Kimberly. What is your name?
  - Student B answers: My name is Deborah. Where are you from?
  - Student A answers: I am from Kansas City. Where are you from?
  - Student B answers: I am from Canada. Nice to meet you.
    - \* If you are practicing a grammar point with Yes/No answers, you can require short and long answers, short answers only, long answers only, contractions or no contractions. Mix it up from day to day!
- Time to rotate. Student A stays while student B moves to the right (or left – you decide – to the next Student A). Repeat until everyone has spoken to everyone;
- No chairs? Have students sit on the ground or stand;

- **Inner Circle/Outer circle (similar to speed dating):**

- Half of the students sit in a circle facing out while the other half form a circle around them, facing them. (I usually tell the students to pick a partner from the circle and stand facing them, then the outside circle naturally forms);
- Use a greeting conversation or a “Find Someone Exercise” where the grammar is specific and repeated for practice;
- The outside circle moves one person to the right after both the inner and outer have asked and answered the questions;



- **Tea Party**

- Students walk around the room/mingle with each other and practice a set conversation or share answers to set questions;
- Require that they talk to at least 5 different people in order to ensure that everyone moves
- Record answers if paper is available
- Have student volunteers share/report classmates' answers with the whole group

- **Fish Bowl**

- Students form a large circle with an open middle to allow for students to be picked to stand or sit in the center;
- Put a group in the middle to:
  - Model a conversation/grammar pattern...switch students – outside circle corrects;
  - Spell words aloud or draw them in the air – outside circle corrects;
  - Act out the class story or a skit



## FIND SOMEONE WHO....?

### A “Getting-to-know-you” and Grammar Exercise Through Questions

**DIRECTIONS:** Walk around and ask your classmates the questions, “Do you....?” and if someone says “yes”, then write the name.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ plays soccer.

- Student A asks: Do you like soccer?
- Student B answers:
  - Yes, I do. I like soccer.
  - OR, No, I don't. I do not like soccer.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ believes in God.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ smokes cigarettes.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ listens to music every day.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ likes American food.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ studies every night.

7. \_\_\_\_\_ thinks education is important.

8. \_\_\_\_\_ listens to the news every day.

9. \_\_\_\_\_ eats breakfast every morning.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ goes to bed late every night.

Now, create your own questions to ask and write your classmates' answers:

11.

12.



## FIND SOMEONE WHO....?

### A “Getting-to-know-you” and Grammar Exercise Through Questions

**DIRECTIONS:** Walk around and ask your classmates the questions, “Did you....?” and if someone says “yes”, then write the name.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ played soccer last weekend.

- Student A asks: Did you play soccer last weekend?
- Student B answers:
  - Yes, I did. I played soccer. Last weekend.
  - OR, No, I didn't. I did not play soccer last weekend.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ washed dishes last night.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ did the laundry yesterday.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ listened to music yesterday.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ watched TV last week.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ studied English yesterday.

7. \_\_\_\_\_ finished the homework last night.

8. \_\_\_\_\_ listened to the news this morning.

9. \_\_\_\_\_ cooked breakfast this morning.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ exercised yesterday.

Now, create your own questions to ask and write your classmates' answers:

11.

12.



## FIND SOMEONE WHO....?

### A “Getting-to-know-you” and Grammar Exercise Through Questions

**DIRECTIONS:** Walk around and ask your classmates the questions, “Are you ....?” and if someone says “yes”, then write the name.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is going to live in a mansion someday.
  - Student A asks:
    - Are you going to live in a mansion someday?
  - Student B answers:
    - Yes, I am. I am going to live in a mansion
    - OR No, I am not. I am not going to live in a mansion.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is going to play a game with friends after school.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is going to travel in the future.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is going to own a motorcycle some day.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is going to work this week.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ is going to do homework this weekend.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ is going to get married some day.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ is going to go shopping this weekend.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ is going to live to be an old man/woman.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ is going to live in the US after he/she graduates.

Now, create your own questions to ask and write your classmates’ answers:

- 11.
- 12.



## FIND SOMEONE WHO....?

Has a dream!

### A “Getting-to-know-you” and Grammar Exercise Through Questions

**DIRECTIONS:** Walk around and ask your classmates the questions, “Do you....?” and if someone says “yes”, then write the name.

1. Find someone who wants to be famous \_\_\_\_\_

**Student A asks:**

**“Do you want to be famous?”**

**Student B answers:**

**“Yes, I do. I want to be famous.”**

**OR**

**“No, I don’t. I do not want to be famous.”**

2. Find someone who want wants to be a singer or songwriter
3. Find someone who wants to meet the President of the United States
4. Find someone who wants to be worth \$1,000,000 by 60
5. Find someone who wants to be a pilot
6. Find someone who wants to be a game programmer
7. Find someone who wants to travel around the world
8. Find someone who wants to be a teacher
9. Find someone who wants to have 3 boys some day
10. Find someone who wants to live in a different city

Now, create your own questions to ask and write your classmates’ answers:

11.

12.



## CLASS GENERATED MATERIAL STORY TIME

- **STORY STARTERS:**
  - Students draw a picture — use the picture to start a story
  - One picture is drawn on the blackboard and used by the class
  - Bring in a magazine picture
  - Pull item from “grab bag”
    - Grab bag can be donated items from the class kept in a box or paper sack
  - Grammar structure given by the teacher
    - Every day, I wake up at 5:00 am...
    - Yesterday, I was so surprised to find out...
  - Vocabulary words given by the teacher
    - Robber, stash, jewelry, precious, fortune...
- Story begins with one sentence created by teacher or chosen student;
- The entire class repeats the first line;
- Story continues by another student adding another line;
- The entire class repeats line 1 and line 2
- Continue in this manner until the story is complete
  - It can be 5 sentences (a short incident)
  - Or 10 sentences or MORE!
- Have one student record the story as it is created on the board
  - Switch student recorders every sentence
  - Students correct each other’s grammar and spelling
  - If paper is available, all students copy the correct sentences from the board
  - If paper is not available, have one “Hard Copy” on paper
  - If no paper, keep it on the board for the week;
  - If no board, keep stories shorter and rely on students memories;
- Students can illustrate the story;
- Students can act out the story (Use the fishbowl configuration)



- Use the story for:
  - Teaching grammar structures/grammar practice
  - Dictations
    - Read aloud
    - Students write or spell with their fingers
    - Students write and correct their own work
  - Spelling tests
  
- **USE MUSIC**
  - Bring in popular songs
  - Look up words on internet
- Students listen and guess the lyrics
- Record lyrics on the board
  - Students record in their class-made books or journals
- Repeat phrase by phrase
- Students illustrate
- Students can act out the song (Use the Fishbowl configuration)
  - Students can create additional dialog
  - Students can create a story from the song...more detail, more information. Who are the characters? What happens after the song ends?
- Use the song lyrics or expanded story created by the students for
  - teaching grammar
  - vocabulary development and vocabulary logs or journals
  - spelling tests
  - dictations
- **VARIATION:**
  - Use the music, have students create a new song with new lyrics;
  - Use the same method as creating a story, just have students sing the material once created.



# CLASS GENERATED MATERIAL

## CLASSMATE INTERVIEW FORM

**DIRECTIONS:** Interview a classmate. Write down question #1, then ask each other question #1. Go back and forth – you ask a question; your classmate asks you a question. Write down each other's answers. Then, continue like that with the rest of the questions.

**INTERVIEW TOPIC:**

**INTERVIEWER:**

**NAME OF PERSON YOU ARE INTERVIEWING:**

QUESTION #1:

ANSWER:

QUESTION #2:

ANSWER:

QUESTION #3:

ANSWER:

QUESTION #4:

ANSWER:

QUESTION #5:

ANSWER:



**ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PARTICIPANT CONTACT  
INFORMATION:**

