

# ED333713 1991-06-00 Creative Activities for Teaching English as a Foreign Language. ERIC Digest.

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## Creative Activities for Teaching English as a Foreign Language. ERIC Digest.

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One of the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) abroad is the lack of state-of-the-art instructional materials. A solution to the scarcity of effective materials is the implementation of creative classroom activities that move beyond reliance on textbooks. These activities can enliven instruction, and can be developed using realia or other authentic materials from the target culture. Some activities introduce students to cultural information or characteristics, while other activities can make up the backbone of the language component of an EFL program.

The following activities have been used successfully to teach English as a foreign language to students in Czecho-Slovakia and could easily be adapted to EFL teaching situations in other countries.

## USING MUSIC TO PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH CHALLENGING LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Using this technique, the teacher plays a song and then has the students participate in one or more of the following activities:

- \* Cloze Procedure--Selected key words are removed from the text of the song and are placed in a word list that precedes the song lyrics. Students fill in the missing words as they listen to the song.
- \* Word Bingo--Students select words from the text of the song and place them in a bingo grid. Individually or in small groups, students then mark off the words as they hear them in the song. The first student or group to check off all the words is the winner.
- \* Reordering--Particular phrases of the song are listed in an incorrect order. Students must number the phrases in the order that they appear in the song. An alternative activity is to write the song phrases on sentence strips. Students must then organize the strips in the proper order.
- \* Retelling--Depending on the language capabilities of the students, retelling can begin with a simulation of the action within the song. Then, the students retell the story of the song in their own words, in a round, with each student contributing as much as he or she can in one sentence. As an extension of this activity, students could work in groups to illustrate scenes from the song. The groups could then retell the story using their illustrations.
- \* Discussion--The students begin by identifying the characters and their actions within the song, and then discuss the issues or meaning present in the song.

## HELPING STUDENTS TO RECOGNIZE CERTAIN

## ASPECTS OF THE TARGET CULTURE

Explaining how laws are passed in the United States Congress can be a very difficult task when all of the students in the classroom are from a country with a totalitarian regime. One activity for helping students to understand the system of government in the United States (in a simplified fashion) is to split the classroom into two groups, one that represents the House of Representatives and the other, the Senate. Each group will elect a speaker. Most students will assume that the speaker will be the sole voice of the group. The exercise, if properly run, will teach students about how laws are passed and about the role of leadership in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. To facilitate the process, the teacher will serve as the President. The President informs the two groups that they must make the rules governing the class for the day, or for the semester. When a student from one of the houses makes a suggestion, the speaker of that house will ask for a show of hands of those students who support the idea. These supporters then form a committee to decide on the wording of the bill. When the committee presents the written bill to their house, changes may be suggested by other members and voted on. Finally, the entire house votes on the passage of the bill. If passed, the bill is sent to the second house, discussed, and voted on there. If passed by both houses, the bill goes to the President for signature. If the President signs the bill, it becomes law. If the President vetoes it, the bill may return to the House and Senate for another vote. If two-thirds of each house vote in favor of the bill, it becomes law. If not, the bill is defeated.

During this process, potential problem words such as "veto," "vote," "pass," and "bill" are written on the board and clarified in order for all students to fully understand their meanings. At all stages of the process, students use English to act and react in these situations. This activity also provides students with the opportunity to see lawmaking in action. Because the students will encounter problems in their discussions of a particular bill or idea, they will be better able to ask questions about how lawmaking functions, to discuss the results of the lawmaking process in their house, and to prepare an outline of the procedure of lawmaking. Then, after students have completed this activity, they will be prepared to read a newspaper article or view a video clip dealing with the passage of a controversial bill in the United States legislature. Students can then discuss the issue, decide how they would word the bill, and vote on the bill in their different houses based on the procedure they have already learned.

## BUILDING AN EFL PROGRAM AROUND SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

An EFL program can be designed around certain language learning activities. For example, parental concerns about the level and quality of English teaching at an elementary school in Czecho-Slovakia prompted the development and implementation of two courses aimed at enriching the EFL program at the school. The first two-week intensive summer program, entitled "The Child and His World," and the second

seven-day intensive winter course, "The World Around Us," both concentrated heavily on introducing the 54 participating students, aged 10-12, to ways of learning English other than the traditional grammar translation methods.

To minimize the influence of students' native culture, the courses took place in a chalet in the mountains. The chalet was the "new world," in which each of the bedrooms, occupied by 2-3 students, was considered a separate country. (Each country was chosen by the students in that particular room.) Children designed passports for themselves, immigration stamps, and signs to welcome visitors.

Students were then divided into four teaching groups (10-14 students each) based on their level of knowledge of English. During evening programs, each of the four groups was responsible for particular activities, including reporting on their countries, exchanging pen friend letters with another group, presenting fashion shows, teaching songs that they had learned, and organizing and running both summer and winter Olympic games.

These courses proved to be very enjoyable for course participants, and provided them with a new and exciting way to further develop their English skills.

## REINFORCING STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF BASIC VOCABULARY OR FUNCTIONS

Teaching students to associate new words in English with the concept represented by the word and not with the word equivalent in their own language can be very challenging. An example of teaching about the family offers one possible approach to this situation. By drawing a stick figure family tree, the teacher can introduce students to both the descending family relationships (e.g., son, granddaughter) and ascending family relationships (e.g., mother, grandfather) using down and up arrows on both sides of the family tree. Intragenerational relationships (e.g., brother, cousin) are drawn across the bottom of the tree. Students are all asked to copy the picture, and to assign the correct relationships to family members. After students are able to describe the relationships with minimal referral to their notebooks, they are asked to draw their own stick family tree. Next, two students sit back to back, and as one student describes his family, the other draws it, asking any necessary clarification questions. At the end of the hour, students are each given a card with some information about members of a large family. For example, "You are Bob Smith, your cousin is Betty Jones. Your sister is Jane Doe." Students work together to form the family tree that they are all part of, using questions such as "Do you have a brother?" When students assert that they are all standing in the correct order of relationships for their family tree, the teacher shows them the correct family tree. To check the relationships, the teacher can then ask the students to describe their relationship to individual family members.

## CONCLUSION

For EFL teachers working abroad, language learning activities can serve as a viable substitute for traditional instructional materials, while introducing students to various enjoyable ways of learning a foreign language. Such activities can provide students with the opportunity to use their imagination and creativity, and can motivate them to learn English.

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