

## It Works in Practice

**More tested lessons, suggestions, tips and techniques which have all worked for ETp readers. Try them out for yourself – and then send us your own contribution. All the contributors to It Works in Practice in this issue of ETp will receive a copy of *Blended Learning* by Pete Sharma and Barney Barrett, published by Macmillan. Macmillan have kindly agreed to be sponsors of It Works in Practice for this year.**

### Secret story

This activity for elementary-level students will encourage them to use their imaginations when they create stories.

Divide the class into groups of seven. Each group has to write a story by answering these questions (adjust the number of questions for groups of different sizes):

- 1 Who was he? (the name of a well-known man)
- 2 Who did he meet? (the name of a well-known woman)
- 3 What were they wearing?
- 4 What did they do?
- 5 What did he say?
- 6 What did she say?
- 7 What happened then?

The first student in a group writes the name of the well-known man and then folds the sheet of paper so the other students can't see what has been written.

The next member of the group answers the second question and then folds the paper again.

In turn, each student in the group answers a different question and folds the paper before passing it on to the next person.

At the end, each group reads the story aloud. The most amusing story with the least number of grammar mistakes is the winner.

When I tried this activity with a group of ten year olds, I modified the questions slightly and encouraged them to use their imagination to produce crazy answers. This is one of their stories:

- 1 Who were you? I was Christina Aguilera.
- 2 Where did you go? I went to Saturn.
- 3 When did you go? I went in the Prehistoric age.
- 4 Who did you meet? I met Brad Pitt.
- 5 What did you do? We played tic-tac-toe.

Olga Méndez

### Good advice

This activity is useful for practising ways of giving advice (*You should..., If I were you..., Why don't you ...?* etc).

Before the class I cut out pictures from magazines showing problem situations and I paste them in the middle of big pieces of white paper.

I place the pictures around a big table in the middle of the classroom and I ask the students to get into pairs.

With a pencil in hand, each pair stands in front of one of the pictures and writes one piece of advice. Students then move clockwise around the pictures, providing pieces of advice for each situation.

At the end of the activity, each pair reads what has been written under one picture, and they decide on the most imaginative and useful suggestions. Later, I correct any grammar mistakes and we focus on the form of suggestions and advice.

Daniela Venencia

### Playing with puppets

Use puppets in storytelling and retelling activities to *encourage* effective communication. Simple puppets can be made from pictures cut out and stuck on to lollipop sticks. Once you have told a story using the puppets, let smaller groups of children retell the story using the puppets themselves – or they could use them to tell stories of their own. The atmosphere of play brings spontaneity and a sense of openness to this speaking activity.

### Timed vocabulary lists

You can use *timed vocabulary* games to start off a lesson as well as to activate recently-acquired vocabulary. Divide the class into groups of four or five and give them two or three minutes to come up with as many words as they can related to a particular topic. For example, after teaching a lesson on *work*, you can ask students to write down as many jobs as they can. With older students you can create more of a challenge by asking them to list synonyms of a word you have been teaching. For example, they could be asked to list words with each letter of the alphabet that can be used in place of the word *said* – *answered, begged, claimed, denied, etc.*

Saheen Subhun

### Disappearing conversations

When studying a structured conversation with beginner-level students, we usually want them to practise the conversation several times in order to help them to internalise the language. One way of doing this is to use a speaking circle where students change partners after practising the conversation once or twice, they thus get the experience of talking and listening to more than one person. To make the activity more challenging and more fun, we can also use the time-honoured technique of slowly erasing the conversation from the board.

Start with the whole conversation written up. Then, when the students change partners, erase a few words, then a few more; and continue until all the words are erased. Let them practise a few more times with no hints on the board. This works well in smaller classes, too, where students may only have the opportunity to talk to a couple of other students. Interest remains high despite having fewer partners.

### Intensive communication

Put the students in groups of four. Give four reading passages to each group so that each student in the group has a different text to read. The passages can be about any topic you wish, such as customs in a particular country or an environmental issue. The activity works less well with narrate texts, but these can also be used if you wish. The texts should be on the same topic but should give different information.

The students read their passages, take a few notes if they want to, check with you if there is anything they don't understand and then hand their papers back to you. They then form pairs within their groups and take turns to relate the content of the passage they have read to their partner.

The listening partner each time should make sure they completely understand what they are being told and should ask questions, ask for clarification, and so on, when necessary. When both students have spoken, they switch partners with the other pair in the group and repeat the activity. Finally, they switch partners again. At the end of this stage, all the students in the group should know all the information.

Finish with a team quiz, specifying that each question you ask can only be answered by the students who heard about, rather than read, the relevant information.

This activity forces students to express themselves well, to use communication strategies for getting across and acquiring as much information as they can, and to listen actively. By the third time of explaining their text, students have really improved their way of relating the information and improved their strategies for understanding the information.

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From "English Teaching professional"