

Teaching English to Large Classes in Developing Countries

Energy Break Host: Janet Orr

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Issues

Many developing countries are trying to meet the United Nations call for “Education for All” by 2015, as a result there are often too many students in classes.

- How large is large?
- Class size has increased with expanded access to free public education
- Reducing class size is one of the most costly and controversial acts
- Teacher training time has been reduced to mobilize teachers quickly
- First graders are dropping out or losing interest in school Maintaining the attention of all students is difficult
- Structuring communicative activities is a challenge and noisy
- Administrators need to recognize that there is a relationship between class sizes and effective language learning
- Instructional strategies used in large classes are generally aligned with the local cultural values and instructional “habits”
- Teacher morale has an effect on learning
- Teacher certification and achievement are positively linked to student test scores in developing countries, but not in developed countries
- U.S. Research found that 15 students in a class maximizes learning. (Department of Education, 2003)

A Few Classroom Activities

Newspaper Headlines can be collected over times. Cut headlines (large print) from the newspaper and divides them into single word strips of paper. Do not include hard words, names of people or abbreviations. Put the word strips in a small (shoe) boxes. Groups of students can use these words as sentence starters by selecting a word then saying or writing a sentence that uses the word.

English Clubs can be established at internet cafes. Meetings can be weekly on specified topics that are determined by the members, possibly, on a topic that one or more members want to know about prompted by a web search or web content.

Read aloud to the class. Big Books are the answer for big classes but they are not available everywhere. First a teacher can read the little book to the whole class, standing in front of them and showing the pictures. Second, the teachers can make a big book by writing the text of a little book on large sheets of paper. Third, as each page is done it can be given to a group of students to read the page then draw a picture to illustrate the text on that page. Fourth, the teacher posts all the pages on the class walls then reads the story aloud again from the pages on the walls. The students who illustrated that page should read it aloud with the teacher.

An **English Scavenger Hunt** can be conducted over a week or week-end. Find something written in English and bring it to school. Possibly visit British Council or the American Center and ask for literature; a travel agent with literature in English; a newspaper or magazine article; a restaurant with a menu in English, or the label from a tin of food.

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Single students often do **presentations to the whole class**. It is often observed that the rest of the students are inattentive, but they would be more attentive if they had a task to do. Before the presentation, ask students to decide on a rating scale for each presentation – 4-5 yes/no questions are enough, example: Does the presenter continue to talk about the same theme throughout the talk? Does the presenter present facts? Is there a conclusion? Does the presenter look at the audience? Is the topic interesting to the whole class? By using a score sheet, all students in the class need to pay attention to the presentation. A group of students can be asked to summarize the results, and then present them to the class for all presenters.

Resources

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