

Back to Basics: Using PC in the ESL Classroom-Pencil and Chalk!!

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Abstract

In the age of computer technology and internet access it is time to get back to basics using PC, that is to say “Pencil and Chalk”! This presentation will focus upon a series of interactive and creative activities for the ESL Classroom which can be used with great success in spite of their simplicity. Often in the ESL Classroom the use of computers and word processors can serve as a barrier between the learner and the instructor. What is needed today is a blended approach where technology compliments rather than overtakes a more traditional and personal approach. The activities demonstrated in this workshop are applicable to both small groups and larger classes and can be adapted to all levels of competency. They are also activities which touch upon all four of the language skills necessary for second language acquisition.

Introduction

The activities presented in this paper are designed for the ESL Classroom and require only pencil, paper, a little imagination and no technology. These activities are meant to supplement a textbook and are not used to replace a class text. They require no tapes, computers or advanced knowledge of technology. Being simple to execute, they can be upgraded or downgraded according to the level of the students. These exercises require involved participation and foster student creativity. They are often simple tasks which require problem solving thus engaging the students to think and interact with other members of the class.

Activity or Game

There are many educators who are opposed to using games in the classroom feeling that they waste time and offer little instruction. Therefore, rather than to call these games it is better to refer to them as activities. The purpose of these exercises is to engage the students in a task which involves listening to directions, following the instructions and executing the challenge.

When to Use these Activities

These activities can be used after a chapter of the assigned class textbook has been completed or as a transition from one unit of a book to another. They can also be used on special days when periods may be shorter or before holidays when students are released from instruction.

I have usually used these activities as a break from the regular routine of teaching. I also find

them useful to engage the students in group or pair work so that there is more interaction among them. Finally, I utilize them as a complement and not a substitute for regular textbook material.

Description of Various Activities

Listed below are several activities which can be used in a class with limited or no technology:

1. Jeopardy Game

This is based on a popular TV show.

How to play:

- a. Divide the class into small groups of four students each.
- b. Have each group choose a topic or category (popular categories for English class are; spelling, time, opposites, definitions, etc.)
- c. Each group comes up with five questions and also the answers.
- d. The questions are placed on one side of A4 sized paper.
- e. The answers are placed on the opposite side.
- f. The questions are given points in up scaled two digit numbers. (e.g. 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)
- g. Class is divided into teams.
- h. They alternate answering questions to gain points.

2. Drawing Pictures

Students draw a square on a piece of paper and the teacher dictates the contents of a simple picture. Objects to be included in the picture are simple figures which can be drawn by an amateur or someone with little artistic talent. (e.g. a house, a tree, a hill, a lake, etc.)

This exercise is useful in teaching prepositions since the students will be asked to draw by putting objects 'into', 'between', 'next to, etc.)

3. Active Group Dictation

Procedure:

- a. Divide the class into groups of three students.
- b. Dictate a passage of moderate length to the class.
- c. Read it ONLY ONCE at natural speed!
- d. After reading have the group members read what they have written to the other members of the group to reconstruct the passage.
- e. Dictionaries can be used to correct spelling.
- f. Groups exchange what they have written until the whole class has been able to piece

together the entire passage.

NOTE: This activity involves all four language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing.

4. Storyboards

This activity requires students to draw a series of pictures which tell a story and then to narrate the story in English. Themes for a storyboard:

- a. club activities
- b. hometown
- c. family
- d. school
- e. vacation
- f. a movie
- g. a song

Storyboards should contain at least four pictures.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY: After storyboards have been constructed and captioned some of them can be expanded into small five-minute plays or even filmed.

5. Word Activities: Odd Man Out?

Students draw the figure of four objects on a piece of paper. Three of the objects belong to the group. One does not. The class must decide which object does not belong and give the reason.

EXAMPLE: a. a bird b. an airplane c. a bee d. a dog

ANSWER: Be careful! Two choices are possible!

1. b - An airplane because it is not alive, It is a machine.
2. d - A dog because it cannot fly.

NOTE: Students have great fun with this activity and it enables them to formulate reasons.

6. Alphabet Vocabulary Practice

- a. Divide the class in groups of three.
- b. Give the students pieces of paper which contain single letters of the alphabet but excluding the vowels. Therefore, 21 letters excluding a,e,i,o,u.
- c. The letters are place face down on the desk.
- d. Each member of the group alternates choosing a consonant.
- e. When finished each member of the group should have seven letters.
- f. Each student makes up words with the letters using only the letters he has chosen.

- g. Vowels are FREE. He can use as many vowels as needed to make a word, but he is confined to use only the consonants he has chosen.
- h. Students try to make as many words as possible.
- i. Dictionaries may be used.

7. *Alphabet Sequences*

Have students create a sequence of five letters, numbers or geometrical figures. Then have the class guess the sixth in the sequence. For example:

1. A 2. E 3. F 4. H 5. I 6. __?__

Guess the next in the sequence is not the object of this activity. Explaining why is what is important. Students enjoy this activity very much.

8. *Tell Me.....*

- a. Divide the class into groups of three or four but not more.
- b. Each group has two piles of cards in front of them
- c. One pile of cards contains the 26 letters of the English alphabet
- d. The second pile contains questions pertaining to categories. (e.g. “the name of a fruit”, “something you take to the beach.”)
- e. The students go through the two piles choosing a letter and a category and must make a match.
- f. For example, if the letter ‘T’ is chosen and the category card says “something found in the kitchen” the answer would be “a toaster.”
- g. Students may use dictionaries
- h. This exercise is good for vocabulary practice.

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Creative Group Activities for ESL Workshops

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Abstract

An ESL workshop can provide the atmosphere for a creative learning experience for small groups in a relaxed atmosphere. In this presentation I will demonstrate several individual and group projects which can be used in workshops to engage the student in the creative process and can challenge the students to become autonomous learners. Some of the activities involve the making of travel brochures, the creation of flash cards and the designing of board games to suit every occasion. All of these activities should be spread over a period of several weeks and involve extensive planning and design. Complete projects can be displayed at school festivals to reinforce the students' sense of accomplishment. Projects can be adapted to various levels of competency and the general language ability of the class.

Introduction

Over the past years I have conducted workshops with students which are part of the elective curriculum. They are intended as informal class gathering with certain objectives to be completed by the end of a term. While difficult to clearly define in itself a workshop is an opportunity for both students and teachers to work collectively on a project using the language skills acquired in other classes.

Rather than defining a workshop I prefer to list several characteristics which they may share in common. A workshop may be:

1. An elective class which meets once or twice a week.
2. A club activity which meets after classes.
3. A group which has a specific goal which involves creativity.
4. A class where the four language skills are used but the members are focused on completing a project rather than passing an exam.
5. A group whose size may ideally be less than ten students.

Grading, Size and Atmosphere:

The grading in a workshop should not be based on test results but rather on the participation and attendance of the members. The size of the class, therefore, should be small and allow for plenty of interaction. The class, furthermore, should be divided into groups of three or four students to allow for greater participation.

In a workshop the atmosphere of the class should be informal and less academic. The focus

on activities should be on the completion of a designated project and not the pursuit of high TOEIC or TOEFL scores. Less academic, however, does not mean that learning is not accomplished but the context of the class requires interaction among students and between students and teacher.

Extended Activities and Class Projects:

The activities of a workshop are usually spread over a period of several weeks and may even last a term. The teacher should model the activity and present samples of work done by former students. This gives the students a clear view of what is expected of them. The role of the teacher is crucial to the success of a workshop. The teacher should play an active role in supervising the work in progress and give direction to make sure the class understands what is expected of them.

The students, therefore, should be kept on a strict time schedule. Once student projects are completed they should be displayed either at a school festival or on a bulletin board for the rest of the school to see. It is important for students to have their work on display. This not only reinforces self-esteem but also encourages other students to join future workshops.

Creative Projects for Workshops

Below are listed eight projects which can be used in an English workshop. I have also included the necessary steps to be followed for the completion of the task

Project 1: Brochures of Hometown

1. Students collect brochures of hotels, restaurants, cities, resorts, vacations.
2. The brochures are analyzed for content and design.
3. A list is made of items included in a brochure: e.g. maps, telephone numbers, websites, food, accommodation, entertainment, etc.
4. Students use the brochures as models but create their own brochure of their hometown.
5. The class can be divided into groups of students who share the same hometown for brainstorming but each student is responsible for his own brochure.
6. Allow several weeks for completion of project.

Project 2: Puzzles and Riddles

1. In Japan a riddle is called a *nazo nazo*. One person gives clues and the others guess the object being described.
2. Students select an object and four clues are given.
3. The clues given should include words which have more than one meaning. E.g. trunk,

bark, keys, ring, pedal, etc.

4. Each clue should be in the first person. E.g. “ I can swim but I am not a fish...”
5. Students prepare cards. On one side is a picture of the object and on the other side are the four clues.
6. Each student prepares four riddles and is asked not to show the other members of the class.
7. When completed the riddles can be shared in class.

Project 3: Jazz Chants

1. Practice several jazz chants with the students to familiarize them with the rhythm and form.
2. Beat out the rhythms of each chant.
3. Divide the class into small groups and assign them a jazz chant which they practiced in class.
4. Have the students change the words while maintaining the rhythm.
5. Have each group teach their chant to the class.
6. Percussion instruments can accompany their work. E.g. drums, cymbals, chimes, etc.

Project 4: Board Games

1. Introduce several board games to the students. (Many games involve dice, and information cards and moving back and forth in spaces.)
2. Divide the class into groups and have them play the game.
3. Using the game as a model assign the project for each group to design a game of their own.
4. Students need to design the board and accessories, make up the rules and supply directions.
5. Once completed the games can be featured at special class festival days.
6. Since this is an ambitious project allow several weeks for completion.

Project 5: Designing a Children's Book

1. Collect several children's books for different levels and age groups. Many of these books are about words and sounds and are interactive.
2. Display them to the class and describe the different features.
3. Once again divide the class into groups and have them choose a book which appeals to them.
4. The group designs a children's book using the book they have chosen as a model.

5. This project involves a lot of planning. Students will need several weeks to complete the project. Completed books can be displayed in the school library.

Project 6: Creating Surveys and Interviews

This is a comparatively easy project which involves little more than pencil, paper and collation of responses.

1. Divide students into groups and have them choose topics for a survey. Ideally each student should have a different topic for their survey.
2. Topics should reflect student interest.
3. Each group brainstorms questions for the survey or interview. A list of 15 to 20 questions would be maximum.
4. Distribute surveys among the students and later collate the results. Interviews should be done individually.

Project 7: Disc Jockeying

1. This project will depend upon the school situation and approval from the administration.
2. If approved, it can be challenging and fun.
3. Once a week during the lunch period the workshop class presents a program of music, interviews and commentary which lasts a half hour.
4. Students plan the program, choose the music and write the commentary.
5. This project requires rehearsal and planning as well as students who can express themselves verbally in English.
6. The program is broadcast over the school's intercom system.

Project 8: A Class Newspaper or Bulletin

This project requires a lot of planning and group work.

1. Introduce the varied features of a newspaper (e.g. Interviews, editorials, general news, comics, book reviews, film reviews, photos, etc.).
2. Divide class into groups and assign one of the features to the group.
3. The group gathers material for their article.
4. The material of each group is collated and assembled.
5. The workshop newsletter need not be in competition with a school publication.
6. A newsletter of four pages appearing four times a year is sufficient but depends upon level and size of the group.