

ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT OF ENGLISH LEARNERS IN GRADE LEVEL CLASSROOMS

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Engagement is both a prerequisite and an outcome of effective language teaching in English language classrooms.

GOALS OF THE SESSION:

To help you promote active learning in your classroom

- to increase engagement, motivation
- to focus learning time
- to increase enjoyment and satisfaction in learning and teaching
- to enhance English language learning

BRAINS AND LEARNING

- **Positive emotions** open the RAS (Reticular Activating System) to enable input to reach the PFC (prefrontal cortex) (Sousa 2010)
- **The state of “Flow”** for optimal learning can be encouraged by appropriate challenges. (Csikszentmihalyi 1990)
- **Dopamine**, known as a learning-friendly neurotransmitter because it promotes focus, motivation and memory, but only during pleasant feelings. (Zull 2002)

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF ENGAGEMENT

1. **Make learning part of everything -- incorporate routines and activities that engage learners at the beginning of class, keep everyone alert and thinking throughout the class, and summarize and assess periodically. Use movement, questioning, collaboration, surprise...**
 - **Zero Noise Signal:** Zero noise, complete attention, remind a neighbor if needed
 - **Entrance/Exit Ticket:** Learners answer a question or complete a short task in order to be able to enter/leave the room.
 - **Meet and Greet:** Learners walk around the room and mingle. They must find innovative ways to greet one another in English, e.g., nod, fist bump, “yo,” “hey dude” etc. Teacher observes and notes creative responses to discuss after the activity.
2. **Use “warm-ups” to engage learners at the beginning of class**
 - **Handshake interview** (Edutopia video 3:00): Teacher shakes hands with each student as they enter the room. Then he/she asks them a question about what they’re studying. If the student answers the question correctly, they enter the room. If not, they get back in line.
 - **Find the Errors.** Learners work in teams to find the errors, then report on what they found. Example:

Have you ever plunked yourself down on a staff meeting where some of your colleagues were, for lack of a better phrase, not paying attention? Grading homework? Having private conversations? Texting?

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Getting all your students focused, eager, and on task at the beginning of class is challenging enough. Equally problematic, once you have them lock in to the lesson, is watching them zone out. There's nothing unusual about that. After all, anyone who has to sit through a long routine -- including a teacher's presentation -- are bound to drift off at some point.

Still, unless you manage to capture and keep student's focus, whether at the beginning of or midway through class the engine of student learning that you are trying to drive simply is even in gear.

de Frondeville, 2009



3. **Teach expectations and strategies for being successful learners and class participants**, e.g.: **SSLANT** expectations: Smile, Sit up, Listen, Ask, Nod when you understand, Track the speaker.
4. **Use a variety of ways to nominate students to respond**, e.g., **Fairness Can**: Write everyone's name on a stick, put sticks in a can; select one at random to answer questions
5. **Incorporate movement into learning**
 - **Hand Clapping & Sound Patterns** Develop hand clapping routines to teach sound patterns (or number facts):

Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!
Chicken pox, and mumps, and swine flu, oh my!
Rabat and Safi and Marrakech, oh my!
 - **TPR** Learners act out routines/scripts and practice language and actions. Example: "Show me a pencil" (see below).
6. **Have everyone involved at once**, e.g.: **Use Personal Slates for individual/small group responses**
 - Put plain paper in page protectors
 - Provide whiteboard marker and cloth for erasing
 - Have learners (or groups) write responses on the slates.
 - Learners all wait to show slates at a signal, e.g., "slates up!"
7. **Use Cooperative Learning**
 - **Heads Together** (see below).
 - **Lineups** (see below).
 - **Teach learners how to collaborate**
 - **Rubric for effective groups -- How should we behave during a discussion?**
 - **Fishbowl**: inside group participates, while outside group observes and takes notes on how the criteria are being followed. (Edutopia video 1:20)
 - **Sentence Machine**: (see below).
8. **Promote thought and reflection**

- **Quickwrites:** Learners write short pieces in their journals in response to your questions. Have learners mark one piece each week that they want you to read.

9. Provide wait time so that all students have the opportunity to mentally answer questions. Use signaling to allow everyone to answer your questions.

- **Thumbs:** Show thumbs up or thumbs down to answer a question
- **Numbers:** Hold up a number of fingers to answer a multiple choice question
- **Cards:** Hold up or display red, yellow, green cards to show level of understanding
- **Eye contact:** Use (and expect) eye contact to maintain attention, to show readiness

First-Day TPR Rap (Show Me a Pencil)	
	
<p>Show me a pencil. Show me a pen. Show me some paper. Show me your friend.</p> <p>Open the window. Shut the door. Hands on the table. Feet on the floor.</p> <p>Point to the ceiling. Point to the ground. Stand up. Sit down. Look around.</p> <p>Show me a chalkboard. Show me a book. Show me a chair. Give me a look.</p>	<p>Point to your teacher. Point to yourself. Point to the trash can. Point to the shelf.</p> <p>Raise your hand high. Take it down. Give me a smile. Never a frown.</p> <p>Out to the left. Over to the right. Stand up. Sit down. Show me the light.</p> <p>Show me a pencil. Show me a pen. Show me some paper. Show me your friend.</p>

COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Ask Three Before Me: Learners understand that before they ask a question of the teacher, they should ask 3 or more other students if they know the answer.

Heads together. This versatile structure can be used effectively for both memory-level and higher-order thinking activities. Instead of answering questions, learners can brainstorm ideas, solve a problem, draw a diagram, invent a product, etc.

- (1) Have students, in groups of about four, number off from 1 to 4. (If groups have 5, two students take turns as one number; if groups have 3, one student has two numbers). The teacher (or a student, after students have learned the strategy well) asks a question about the reading and gives a time limit.
- (2) Students take a few minutes to “put their heads together” to find and agree on an answer. (This may include looking up the page citation in the text.) Teacher calls a number to designate which student will answer for the team.
- (3) Students with that number give their groups’ answers (verbally, on paper, or on the board).
- (4) Teacher gives feedback as appropriate: teams may receive points for correct answers, creative answers, correct spelling, etc.

Line-Ups. This activity provides for authentic use of language learned, repeated practice of structures being studied, along with opportunities to move around and interact.


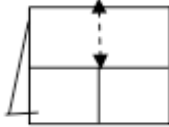

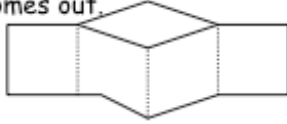
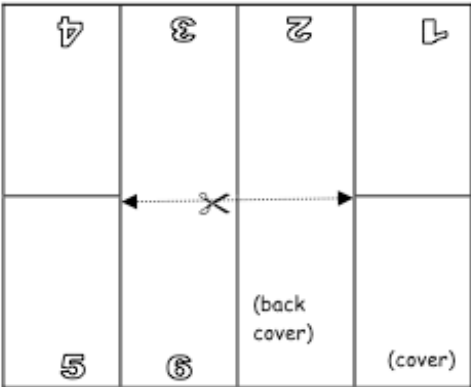
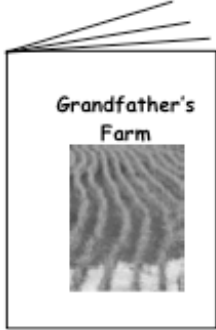
- (1) Tell learners they will line up in order along some continuum, e.g., day and month of their birth, alphabetical or numerical order, etc. Teach the language they will need to determine the order, e.g., what month and day were you born? What number do you have?
- (2) Learners then ask and answer questions in order to form the appropriate line. (You can use the line they made for a following activity, e.g., fold the line in half to form partners.)

Sentence Machine. (McCloskey & Stack, 2011). In Sentence Machine, learners cooperate to form sentences using key content vocabulary in response to questions created by the class. It can be used to review and “cement” concepts and language being developed in their studies.

- (1) Display a list of key review terms related to the concepts/topic being studied.
- (2) Have learners work in groups of about 4. Assign terms to each group and ask them to construct questions, each including one of the terms assigned to their group.
- (3) Each group sends one person to stand in a line across the front of the class. Introduce the process by having the front group practice the process of answering questions with sentences, each person speaking one word at a time in order. When an unfinished sentence gets to the end of a line, it “wraps” around back to the first person. Use general questions to help students get started.
- (4) Class members then take turns asking their group’s questions, one at a time. Learners are to answer questions, using the key terms correctly, in the same way -- each learner speaks only one word of the answer at a time. The teacher and peers are available to prompt or suggest the correct form when a student gets stuck and requests help.

Make Your Own Little Book!

Fold-It Books (McCloskey, 1999)

8-Page Fold-It Book	
<p>1. Fold paper 3 times.</p> 	<p>2. Open. Fold the fat way. Cut halfway in from the fold side.</p> 
<p>3. Open and re-fold the skinny way.</p> 	<p>4. Push the ends together so the middle comes out.</p> 
<p>5. Pages will look like this.</p> 	<p>6. Write and draw in your book.</p> 

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de Frondeville. 2009

Resources:

Classroom Management Video Tips for Teachers from Edutopia <http://www.edutopia.org/classroom-management-teacher-tips-video>.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper and Row.

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Sousa, D. (Ed.). (2010). *Mind, brain and education: Neuroscience implications for the classroom*. Solution Tree.

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