

MOI Working Group

Idea! Ideas!! Ideas!!!

'Memories'. The gift that keeps giving

Last month we introduced the idea of 'Memories' where students play in small groups with matching cards turned over. As they turn over 2 cards in search of a matching pair, they read out loud what is on the card.

This activity is student centered, communicative and fun. Its possibilities are endless. For instance, some of you have approached the English Department asking for ways to teach the language of exam questions, in English. This is a natural activity for you to do this. Gather about 10 sample exam questions from your Subjects exam and print them on cards. On a matching set of 10 cards, print the Chinese equivalent.

First get pairs/groups to match the English and Chinese and check as a class. Demonstrate how the pairs/groups should play the game, with a demonstration, insisting that they read aloud what's on the card, for maximum impact. Then let them play Memories to help them learn these. It's a sneaky way of getting lots of repetition of an otherwise fairly mundane learning task.

Collect the sets you have lovingly made to use them again next year, or as a revision exercise. (e.g. hand out all the sets of Questions to one partner in a pair, ask them to read the instructions to their partner, who translates them in to Chinese....then swap roles).

An alternative to translating is to give an example of a carrier phrase that would fit the question. E.g. QUESTION (Geo): State to what extent urban dwellers affect their environment. ANSWER: urban dwellers have a significant/moderate/slight impact on their environment. This way you feed them the exact words they need.

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Vocabulary: Revision

So much of exam style learning revolves around learning of vocabulary that this month, as exams approach, you may like some fun ways to recycle words learned so far.

- 1. **Hangman.** You against the class. Put the number of dashes your word needs on the board and invite the students to call out letters. If correct, write in the letter. If not, draw a piece of a person being 'hanged'. Do one or 2 as a class, then get pairs to play it together. (There's more active learning this way. Students choose words they think their partner won't remember - or long words - to try and hang them)*
- 2. **What's my word?** Put the class into pairs. Student A in each pair looks away. Student B looks at the board and has to describe the word until student A can guess it. Swap roles, new word or phrase.*
- 3. **The same as 2 above,** only this time, you prepare a list of 10 words and give it to student A, and give a list of 10 different words for student B. They take turns being the guesser and the speaker, as they work their way through the list. Demonstrate the turn taking with a pair to start with, and insist that they don't **SHOW** their list to their partner. You may like to give a few minutes at the start for As to ask other As and Bs to ask Bs about words they can't remember.*
- 4. **Pictionary.** The same as 2 or 3 above, only this time, they have to draw rather than talk. It's amazing how inventive they can be with even the most non-concrete of words.*
- 5. **Stand/sit.** (Good for sleepy afternoons!) Put students into pairs. One standing, one sitting. The standing partner has to recall a word learned recently and say it. His reward is to sit, while his partner stands and does the same thing. Keep swapping.*
- 6. **Crosswords.** Send you students to www.puzzle-maker.com. They have to make up a crossword puzzle, using the target vocab and their own definitions, which they print off and bring to class. They swap their puzzle with someone else and get busy completing it. This way you get 2 bites at it: One at home and another in class.*
- 7. **Slap.** My personal favourite, but you need a controllable class, and a well insulated wall. Cover the board with target vocab. Divide class into 2 teams. Invite one student from each team to the front and give them a fly swat. You describe the word you have in mind and they must be the first to hit the word with the fly swat to earn a point. It's loud....but fun...and memorable. Boys, especially, will love you forever!*

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Last 10 minutes

Do you sometimes have 5-10 minutes at the end of a lesson? Why not make it an English Corner?

Put the students in pairs. Instruct the class: "Let's finish with some revision...in English. Decide who is A and who is B. Now Student A ask student B in English what they have learned today". (To make sure they form the question correctly you could put: 'What have you learned today' on the board.) Student Bs will respond as you walk and monitor their answers and help where necessary. After a few minutes, stop them. Give any feedback about what you heard. "Good. People seem to have mostly understood, but remember that....." (and fix any problem areas.)

Then say 'Now it's student B's turn to ask student A what they learned yesterday. John, can you tell how they should ask this? ('What did you learn yesterday?') 'That's right, off you go'. If there's another, more sensible way to break the task in to 2 pieces than today/yesterday then do so....e.g. A ask B what they learned about parabolas, then B ask A what they learned about the X and Y axis)

Why it works?

It's 'private'. The whole class won't be listening. You are free to monitor that they are speaking in English, to check their answers, and to reply in English in a low key way for yourself, without the whole class pressure, creating an English friendly environment. You might like to do this 'stop and check' mid way through a class too. It breaks up a class that may be getting restless, gives you a chance to check that they are following you, and gives you a break if you've been talking a lot!

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Vocabulary

Learning vocab is plain hard work, but there's no reason it can't be practiced and recycled in class in a fun way.

Prepare sets of cards for each pair of students. Half the cards have a vocab item, half have a definition. You will need 16 sets for 32 students.

- 1. Ask one student to hold all the definitions and face their partner. They read out the definition and the partner must say what the word is. (For weaker students, or if the words are new to them, you could ask the respondee to hold the Vocab cards, so they have 10 words to choose from. They can place each card as they answer, making each successive question easier). Then partners repeat and swap roles.*
- 2. Place all the cards face down on a table. In 4s or 2s or 3s play 'Memories'. One player turns over a card, says what is on it (insist on this), then turns over a 2nd card and says what's on it. If they match, that player 'wins', picks up the pair and has another turn. If not, move to the next player.*

Why does it work?

You give the definitions, so you know they are correct. (although as an excellent revision exercise, and to save your effort, you could have pairs prepare cards at home themselves!).

They have to read, listen and talk, but they are given the words to use, so they have confidence and built in success. The change of activity and game is fun, motivating and fail proof.

You can store the cards to recycle later.

Or store one set and ask one student to be the 'teacher' and get them to read out the definitions, asking students what they mean.

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Dealing with text.

Reading a text can be boring. This is how to make it into a 'Jigsaw Text', to be read out in pairs. You need to copy the text twice, and blank out say 6 or 7 words in each text. The key though, is to blank out different words in each text (giving 12-13 in total). Start with text A, then a sentence or 2 later, blank out a word in text B, then a sentence or 2 later blank out a word in text A and so on. They will look like this. (extract: *A Level History*, but it works just as well for texts at any level)

Text A. The radical restructuring of society in the early _____ period was mainly concerned with the abolition of feudalism and the centralization of the whole country. It was a very important step to achieve successful economic and _____ modernization, mainly by providing revenues and manpower. In this essay, I will first talk about the measures carried out concerning the abolition of feudalism, then explain how these measures prepared the ground of Japan's subsequent economic and military modernization.

Text B. The radical restructuring of society in the early Meiji period was mainly concerned with the abolition of _____ and the centralization of the whole country. It was a very important step to achieve successful economic and military modernization, mainly by providing revenues and manpower. In this essay, I will first talk about the measures carried out concerning the abolition of _____, then explain how these measures prepared the ground of Japan's subsequent economic and military _____

How it works:

The reader with Text A starts reading aloud. When they get to the gap, A says 'something' and looks to B. The holder of Text B describes the word A is missing, until A guesses it. If they cannot get it, B can simply tell them the answer and A writes it in. B can help with spelling, but A and B must not LOOK at each others texts. Then B continues reading where A left off

Why it works

Reading together is more engaging than reading alone. One student keeps the other 'on track'. They have to work together to make it work, like a jigsaw. They need to use contextual clues, as well as their partners help to get their answers.

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Ideas Ideas Ideas!

It's been wonderful to receive feedback from teachers who have tried some of the ideas mentioned in this monthly forum.

Here's a modified idea that came back to us, which we have adapted still further and return to you for your interest.

So you are starting a new unit of work. Everyone's fresh and eager and on an equal footing of ignorance! Why not cash in on this new energy by making it an English lesson? At the same time, you awaken prior knowledge and find out for yourself how much they actually know about this new topic.

** Print up 20 (numbered) **Question cards** and 20 corresponding (but not numbered) **Answer cards**.*

** Pass the 2 cards around for students to study in pairs? Can they answer the questions? Can they pronounce new words? Do they know? Can they guess the meanings? Do new words look like old words? What part of speech are they? You can circulate and help as questions arrive. Ask them to practice reading the questions aloud, tell them they will need to do this in class soon.*

** Hand out the series of matching Answer cards*

** Ask those with 2 cards to stand and ask their questions. If anyone holding the A cards thinks their card matches the 2 card, they should stand and read their answer out. Teacher judges correctness.*

(note: It's very helpful for later exam answering if you can guide them to look at the appropriateness of the grammar. Does the A match the 2 grammatically? E.g. If the question ask 'How...' or: 'In what way.....?' And the answer card says: 'by...ing', there's a good chance it will match)

It's up to you how much explanation of the answers you give at this stage. It depends on your goals and their interest level. It might range from full to non existent answers.

You could repeat the exercise at the end of the Unit, or just pass the Questions around from pair to pair to answer together in English at the end of the unit. That the cards were used initially will give them some kind of 'legitimacy' to speak to them in English.

Why it works:

It's fun and low key and the new words are supposed to be unfamiliar and unknown, so errors go unpenalised/unjudged. It focuses their attention on the new vocab and there are opportunities for looking at how English skills can help them with their own answers later.

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Ideas Ideas Ideas!

If you are finishing a unit of work or when exams are coming up, why not engage your students in some revision in English?

Ask students to prepare 5 (more if its revision for exams) question cards each with Questions in English, either on something they think will test their classmates, or on something they are not sure about themselves. This could revise a unit, a term or a year's work.

** Arrange the students into groups of 4.*

** Student 1 asks the group the question on their card. The group members give answers and the questioner gives feedback as to the correctness of these answers. Hopefully a discussion can ensue if there's an 'information gap' and you will be free to circulate and 'mediate'*

*(You can demonstrate this process first with one group. Emphasize that the group-mates should **LISTEN** not grab the card from the questioners hands! If they don't get the question the first time, they can simply ask for a repeat.)*

Once groups have finished. They put all their cards together and pass them to the next group who put them in a pile face down. One at a time, one student turns over a question and reads it out. This time there will be no 'expert' (the one who wrote the question) in the group, so you may need to be more available to help out.

Why it works.

When we prepare to teach, we become doubly sure of the content. You can't explain to someone else, or judge the correctness of their reply, if you don't fully understand it yourself. By giving responsibility to them to find the questions, they are revising their notes/course books. When they have to check their groups' answers and explain why they are wrong, they assume the role of 'teacher.'

Also its 100% student focused. They 'own' the content from the beginning to the end of the process, raising motivation.

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October

We told you we would take small steps. The first one doesn't even involve you saying anything in English at all!

Rational

Change is not something a lot of people welcome. It is seen as threatening and it makes some people feel fearful. This seems to get truer as we get older. So, let's make the first classroom change one that the students have to do themselves.

Here's how it goes:

Every now and then, stop. Ask students sitting beside each other to decide who is A and who is B. Ask A to tell B everything you have told them in the last (10?) minutes, but they have to do it in English. All you need to do is walk around to make sure they are doing this. Then ask B to correct anything they got wrong, or add anything they missed out. Repeat 15 minutes later, but this time B can go first.

Why does it work?

Students are engaged with their coursework. ALL students are either listening or talking. Your teaching points are recycled and actively recalled and corrected without you doing anything! They are practicing listening and talking in English, you get a moments break, and they get a break from you, ready for the next part of the lesson.

Try it!

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November

Vocab: New words and phrases

Let's go to the start of a lesson and begin by putting a list of English words on the board. There may just be 2 or 3, there may be 5 or 6 or more. They may be new items. They may be recycled but they should be related to the lesson you are about to teach.

(You may like to catch students' attention by putting them up as scrambled words .e.g. ~~H~~ESLING (English). As they work them out, you write them up normally. Or you may include a spelling mistake that they have to spot.

Then:

1. Ask (in English) 'What does this one mean?' Give feedback, perhaps including whether the word or phrase is a noun, adjective, verb or adverb, and go on to the next one. Until they are all done.
2. Next, describe one of the words e.g. 'This word is a language that many people in Hong Kong speak very well'... 'English!'
3. Now it's their turn. In pairs, A chooses a word, describes it for B, B says which word it is and then they swap. Now it's B's turn to describe. You monitor.

Why does it work?

It's a fun way of getting them focused on some key vocabulary. There's an element of competition, and they are actively involved in either *using* the words or *listening* for their meaning. It's a nice way of recycling concepts that have been covered before. They could all be familiar, except for one: the one you will cover that day. This will focus their attention on this word or phrase. It can be a nice way to review items before a test or exam...the list can be very long...20-25 words and phrases...or you could prepare 2 sets, A and B and they have to go through the list in pairs, taking turns describing and guessing. They do all the work, all the talking, all the English. You just set the rules.

Try it!

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December

Mix it up!!

Fun is a great motivator when struggling with a second language.

This month's idea is to making asking and answering questions fun by making the simple rule:

If I ask you in English, you answer in Cantonese, if I ask you in Cantonese, you answer in English.

Like the previous 2 months' ideas, the majority of the language work is being done by ~~THEM~~, not the teacher. In this instance, all you need to do is ask the questions. You could even prepare them in advance, if this made you feel safer.

This idea is useful in a revision lesson, or you could just make it a fun context for a whole lesson. 'Today, every time I ask anyone a question in Eng, you must answer in Cantonese, and vice versa' Teachers ask many questions during the course of the lesson. If most of them are in Cantonese, GOOD! They will be busy thinking and answering in English. If this slows down the whole painful process of waiting for an answer too much, you could simply ask the whole class and get them to answer in the appropriate language with the person beside them.

Why does it work?

Because its not normal and this keeps it lively and fun. You could include some kind of forfeit...if you mistakenly answer the question in the wrong language, you have to xxx. . It's also easy on the teacher. If you can, ask in English, if not, just use Cantonese and they still have to think in English.

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February

Revision

Prepare some Question cards in advance. You will need half the number of students in your class. If you have more, that's fine (and helpful in case you get 'road blocks' around slow pairs)

Give each pair a question card: one person in the pair has to ask the question, their partner has to answer it. (The 2n is best if it's in English...but if you can't manage it, that's ok, just tell the questioner to translate it). When they are finished, they simply hand the question on to the next pair. The cards will circulate around the room, up and down the aisles, in a circuit that you have explained before they start. If there is a 'road block' where questions are piling up, just move them to the next desk, or feed in some of your 'extra' questions.

Why does it work?

It frees you up to move around and help out with trouble spots. You can either join in, in English. (You should be getting more confident about using English in the classroom by now. Your students have created an environment where they are having fun with English, and hopefully you are relaxed enough to join them. Remember it's not important that your English isn't perfect. It's all about communicating a message effectively, improving your fluency and listening skills as you go)

With this activity, for 15 minutes or so, your room will be full with the noise of students talking to each other in English on the topic of your choice. Wonderful! Well Done!

Try it!

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March

Time to reflect!

How's the amount of English being spoken in your class going? Have you tried out some of our ideas? If you have tried each one out a couple of times each month, you may now like to start mixing and matching and ~~CHANGING~~ them to suit your style and imagination/creativity.

The focus until now has been on getting students to translate, re-word, listen to other students and answer in English. You have not needed to say much at all.

Hopefully, you are enjoying this new approach to creating an English environment. Hopefully you have seen how it can help your students consolidate ideas, be active learners, and help you assess their understanding of what you have taught.

Maybe you have read these notes as they have arrived on your desk each month, but not actually tried any of them out.

If that is the case, this month it's time to look back over the ideas from October to December. Choose the one you can see working in your class and give it a try. The chances are that by now they have been in a class with a different teacher who has already tried this technique, so they will be very comfortable and confident with it already.

If you have given some of these ideas a try, now start using more than one in a lesson, and make changes to them. Adapt them. Use groups. Teams. Competitions. As our students are exposed to these methods in a variety of different classes their attitude to English will change: it will be positive and open and we hope this will also 'infect' you and the way you teach in a positive and healthy way. These are great ways to revise for test and exams.

If you haven't got started yet, now's the time to

Try it!

(If you have, you are a HERO!)

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May

Appoint a 'Panel'!

Find 2 or 3 or 4 students who are strong in English (use English Society members if 74 or 75: they are the ones wearing 'Speak to Me in English' buttons on a Friday).

Tell them and the class that for that day, they are your English Panel (of Translators).

At any point during the lesson you can stop and ask them to translate what you have just said into English.

Why does it work?

*This is the sixth month of ideas we have brought you. None of these ideas have required very much actual production of English by the teacher. If teachers are confident users, then of course they can simply go ahead and take a lot of the lesson in English, but when teachers don't have these skills, they can actually empower their students to develop them instead. This is the real gift of an effective teacher. Helping your student go **B**EYOND your own level of ability, this can release student potential to limitless levels! By handing over power and control of things in your classroom, you become a very effective educator. (Instead of a panel, you could simply get students into 4s and ask the most competent English speaker to be the 'Panel Chair'. This way you have more people talking!)*

Using a 'panel' like this does 6 things:

- A. It provides a great role model effect.*
- B. It gives those with good skills a reason to use them and will stretch them further*
- C. Because they too are learners, they will use simpler structures and likely talk slower, therefore giving the 'audience' a better chance of following.*
- D. Your material gets a '2nd airing'. Those who may have missed your point earlier, get a 2nd chance to hear it.*
- E. You can check to see if what you have taught first time around has been understood by some of the more able students, (the 'Panel') and can remedy this if there are misunderstandings. This creates an instant assessment tool.*
- F. It will ensure that your 'Panel' are **REALLY** attentive!*

Try it!