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THAILAND TESOL



E-Newsletter



Training students to present at international conferences



How to train students to do peer review

Step by step from experience



Sharpen the saw
Teachers seeking professional improvement

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What's Going On

Farewell to RELO Director

A farewell to Ms. Alice Murray, the Regional English Language Office (RELO) Bangkok Director. During almost 4 years, she has initiated and supported many projects on English education of Thailand. She took an active role in overseeing the Professional Communication Skills for Leaders (PCSL) Project, under the Lower Mekong Initiative, which successfully concluded in 2017. Ms. Murray also supported the English Access Microscholarship Program (Access). She was an executive committee member of Thailand TESOL, who actively joined our annual conferences and provided insightful visions on the English language teaching and learning in Thailand.

Thailand TESOL would like to extend its gratitude to Ms. Murray for her contribution as a key person of TESOL in Thailand during the past 4 years.



The opening of a seminar under the PCSL Project at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute



The closing of Access in Nakorn Si Thammarat



Above: Thailand TESOL International Conference

Below: With Thailand TESOL committees and incoming RELO Director, Ms. Frances Westbrook



Tips for Teachers

Model Teachers Always Look out for Ways of Making Their Students Better Than Who They Are.

by Yusop Boonsuk

In September 2019, my colleague, Eric A. Ambele, and I took the students to present their research projects at the “International Conference on English Language Studies (ICELS) 2019,” Khon Kaen University. Upon receiving the conference’s letter of acceptance, new challenges emerged, and they were to be solved in a limited time.

The first one involved the students’ incomprehensibility of fundamental research. As a result, their initial presentation rehearsals were less than satisfactory. Furthermore, they were not able to explain the overall flows of their studies. The reason behind this struggle was that most of them were too familiar with learning through memorization. To eliminate this limitation, I spent extra hours in and out of class to meet and help them go over key elements of research. I clarified all the doubts that they had to ensure that no question was left unanswered. This effort was to enhance their understanding of research, which noticeably contributed to more efficient presentations in the next rehearsal. After the students began to grasp the ideas and drew relevant connections to their research contents, a significant improvement in confidence and performance gradually followed. One of the vivid indications was the use of more precise wording to

illustrate their studies. This ability suggests that the students were able to employ the new understanding to accurately organize the research ideas.

The next challenge was English being the medium of the presentations. During the rehearsals, the students had difficulties presenting in English. Even the use of a simple sentence could turn into their nightmares. At this point, some confessed that they wanted to quit. Subsequently, I advised them to record their rehearsals for later reviews. We listened to the recordings together and identified possible rooms for improvement in grammar, vocabulary, and word choice. We rinsed and repeated with the reviews until the students were confident with their English. Some spent an entire day presenting to me in English. They wanted to find the best presentation versions for themselves. Furthermore, they also practiced presenting in front of mirrors and took turns mentoring their peers. Countless peer comments were given, and follow-up adjustments were made until they achieved satisfactory outcomes.

Only a few days from the first practice session, significant transformations were evident. Each student was able to present with fairly fluent English. When the language and presentation skills were managed, another new challenge surfaced. This barrier was the Q&A session, where conference participants might ask questions. The session was also tremendous pressure for them. It was observable when I began raising questions during the rehearsals. The students were either not able to provide any answers or a relevant answer to the questions.

During the rehearsal for the Q&A session, I collaborated with other students to prepare questions and constantly took turns feeding the questions. Some questions were left unanswered or partially answered. Therefore, I volunteered to explain further, recommended my answering strategies, and added additional reading resources. Once the students knew enough about the questions, we met again to discuss them and redo the Q&A.

Upon completing the actual presentations, the students were overwhelmed with kind words from the conference participants. Feedback indicated that their presentations were eloquent, and their answers were insightful. These comments reflected that the students were able to apply and refer to classroom knowledge. The positivity was a valid indication that their hard work paid off. The admiration they received was an invaluable prize for the courage they took to step out of comfort zones and stand before the audience of an international stage. This venue gave them an opportunity of a lifetime to set themselves free, unlock their full potential, and prove their worth. From this experience, I learned that teachers should never underestimate student abilities even if they earn poor grades or perform incompetently in class. These factors are not always associated with incapability for excellence. In addition to the classic challenge for teachers on how to equip students with wings to fly higher, another equally critical one is how to help those who lack fundamental knowledge to keep up with learning dynamics. I learned from this opportunity that every learner, regardless of backgrounds, can excel and grow into a quality

global citizen in the 21st century if their teachers believe in them.

“I advised them to record their rehearsals for later reviews. We listened to the recordings together and identified possible rooms for improvement in grammar, vocabulary, and word choice.”



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Teaching and Learning during Pandemic

by Manop Pichayos

During the pandemic our school was split into three phases. They were full online learning, split classroom learning and full classroom learning. During all these phases there have been various challenges and success stories. Here is a general overview of each phase.

As the pandemic was in full swing and the country was in lockdown, our school started the year with students 100% under online learning conditions. The average student load is 400 plus students covering 9 plus classes. Some teachers with this instruction load also have up to four curriculums. The major challenge during this first phase was training both the teachers and students on the learning platform. We used Google Classroom and Zoom as the major platforms. While being some of the best tools available for this, both still had many limitations which are to be expected. It's impossible to replace the student classroom experience over the internet. From the student perspective, it was very difficult for them to absorb content and keep up with the demanding workload. This left a defeated and frustrated feeling with many students, in particular those that thrive in the classroom setting. Regardless of these hurdles, the teaching staff maintained a positive approach, listened to the students and adjusted as much as possible. Still, the end result is that these tools can be beneficial as a teaching supplement yet as a primary tool, there

are too many practical things missing that can only be solved in a traditional class setting.

The second phase of learning was a hybrid between online classes and having students come to campus in 50% rotating groups per class. This phase was a major relief for both the students and teachers yet also presented some challenges. The largest challenge was maintaining continuity between the online work and the work being done in the classroom. How to make the work flow as smooth as possible yet also not too lagging so teachers could make their grading responsibilities for each class was the main challenge. Still, overall, this had a drastic positive lift for the students. The quality of content and learning was improved as well as the overall morale for everyone.

The third phase of learning was the full reopening of the school. In preparation for this phase, the school invested in a wide array of health directed initiatives which included sinks all around campus, a strict school entry procedure, testing all staff, an information campaign for students, teachers plus staff and finally a five-star effort to keep all facilities clean consistently. As expected, the complete learning experience was best when things returned to the "normal" learning environment. Content was easier to convey to students and the level of comprehension returned to the traditional normal levels prior to the pandemic.

There are a few major takeaways from this experience that have made this situation more tolerable for our school. The formula is having excellent school leadership, quality staff teamwork and a positive attitude among the

student body. The solution to successfully navigating these difficult times requires all these key ingredients.

“The second phase of learning was a hybrid between online classes and having students come to campus in 50% rotating groups per class...The largest challenge was maintaining continuity between the online work and the work being done in the classroom.”



Mr. Manop Pichayos is an English teacher at Yupparajwittayalai School in Chiang Mai. He has been teaching English for young learners in secondary school for 20 years. He is interested in using technology such as Google Classroom and Zoom to motivate his students in learning English during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Technics of Teaching English Grammar

by Andy Grosbois

Introduction

Language learning is very much linked to grammar learning as it clearly emphasizes on the development of writing and speaking skills. Teachers usually use the deductive approach to explain grammatical rules and patterns without much space for students to practically produce the target language. “Rote learning and memorization are not an effective way to learn a language” (R. Alexander, 2009). Many English learners tend to memorize grammar features for proficiency test which doesn’t reflect at all their communicative abilities. Having a good grasp of the grammar give learners more tools to become better speakers, readers, listeners, and writers. However, many times, students are asked to absorb mass of information and then get tested. Unfortunately, after a short period of time, all those facts become forgotten. Below are three ways to teach grammar that can be adjusted to meet the age and proficiency levels of the students.

Puppets

Using puppets for drama are very fun. Creating short dialogues with simple words and adjectives is a good way of getting students talking and playing with the language in context. Puppets can also be used for vocabulary expansion (body parts, prepositions of places). They can be purchased and used repeatedly, especially if you want to create a

class with many different characters. Those characters can then be part of a regular English lesson by having students interact with the puppets. They can also replace the teacher to some extent and this will allow the shy students to speak out. Short dramas can be settled between multiple characters and the modelling can be facilitated by more confident students who can demonstrate what the puppet should be saying or doing in a particular context. The affective filter will be very low which will encourage class participation and a low anxiety learning environment. Using them can really have a tremendous effect on the young students toward learning grammar in context. “Get the children to create puppets reflecting characters from their English course book or their favorite stories, reflecting themselves or their chosen imaginary characters” (Harper, 2018).

Project Activity

Project activities provide plenty of opportunities for learners to learn. Those activities can be completed individually or as groups. Learners need independence in planning and realizing the work but they also need the teacher to act as a driver in ensuring it is carried out in a way that meets learning aims. “Also, a comic strip project is an alternative to the typical creative writing assignment” (Show, n.d.). Designing a comic story is a good way of engaging students. Therefore, it requires strong classroom management skills. It requires teacher to be well prepared and give enough time in class for the students to complete the project. Particular tenses can be focused on for a comic story. Students will be divided in groups and design a

short story according the guideline given by the teacher. At the end of the project, all the stories will be combined together to create a comic book.

Dictogloss

In a dictogloss, the teacher has a text prepared to dictate to the class, but instead of dictating it slowly to ensure students write a faithful copy, they read it at a more natural speed two or more times. Prepare a text of no more than 100 words (fewer for lower-level students). Read it out first for content, and check comprehension. Then tell students to write down keywords, such as nouns and verbs, as you read it out again. Explain that even though they will not be able to write every word, they should keep writing as much as possible. Using their notes, students in pairs or small groups reconstruct the text in complete sentences. “The idea is not to reproduce the text, but to focus in on certain aspects of the language used” (Barber, 2018). Dictogloss helps in developing listening skills because students have to focus on the meaning when listening to the text. By doing this, they become more conscious of grammatical rules and it encourages them to use them productively.

Conclusion

Activities listed above offer a chance for language learners to experience grammatical structures in context with meaning driven. The acquisition of grammar is a long and complex process that has to be taught with a variety of approaches. Only when grammatical rules are taught using different sociocultural context, learners will be able to achieve communicative

fluency and accuracy which is the main aim of language teaching and learning.

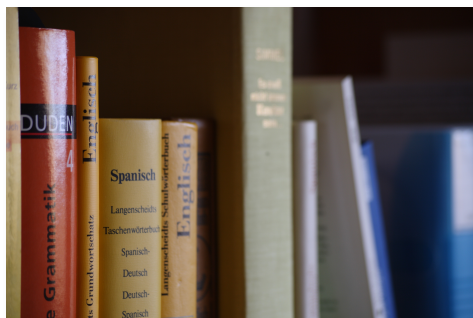
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Tips on Distance Teaching

by Sunisa Inpeng and Chakrit Yippikun

Under the circumstance of COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing has been strictly emphasized in terms of educational administration. Online classes are still conducted through various platforms in the Thai higher education. The technological literacy and related skills are being called for from teachers in order to deliver English contents effectively. Below present some main factors of and guidelines for the challenging experiences when operating online classes.

First of all, the new technology attributes are unexpected strangers to those previously unfamiliar with it. Most English teachers face the unacquainted functions initially and anxiety potentially visits. Comprehending the selected platform functions is crucial for designing English class activities; therefore, training workshops from the workplace is an effective tip to boost technological skills. For senior teachers and inexperienced ones, they might conceivably ask for skillful colleagues as consultants. It could be said that the digital skills fully awaken teachers in the sense of cooperation during this time. Additionally, only one platform seems inefficient for online instruction. Relevant sources should be considered to integrate with English content accordingly such as software, applications, and even websites--these also should be available on numerous devices.

Apart from English teaching, English teachers and learners potentially come across miscommunications especially due to words with similar sounds. English is used as a foreign language in Thailand, sound pairs such as B – D, C – Z, M – N, S – H, and CH – SH are possibly unobvious sounds through the mediated channel. The chat box is the choice of solutions and this might facilitate conversations smoothly. However, this should be temporally utilized in terms of difficult handling. In case of listening tests, few learners may encounter problematic issues due to unclear audio or weak internet connection. With clear proof, teachers may tell them to resit the test; thus, teachers have to prepare two sets of listening tests.

Also, pedagogical awareness is highly necessary in an online class since the unstable internet connection may interrupt the classroom conversations and interactions. English teachers should flexibly extend the time of activities or even repeat what they say when the message is important. Furthermore, how to form questions is the first priority for teachers when learners rarely participate in online classes. Uncontrollable issues, such as silence in classroom, can be transformed into understanding. These are online class strategies which may lead to the relaxing atmosphere to learners as well as language achievement.

The challenges of distance teaching possibly appear on different aspects which come undeniably. As such, well-preparing self-learning, technological use, and psychological skills are continuously vital parts for teachers because dynamic educational transformation is

being required in the context of COVID-19, and English lesson plan along with activities should be set systematically and flexibly. If teachers always reflect on their instructional methods regarding value fulfillment and adapt themselves fluidly, language learning outcomes will be meaningfully approached in the online education.

“Dynamic teachers can create a learning ecology through all situations.”



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Training Students to Conduct Peer Review

by Bee Chamcharatsri

When I was an undergraduate student, I was introduced to peer review activities and that changed my life. I was excited to receive my friends' comments on my draft because I know that their comments would make my paper better. As a writing teacher, I always incorporate peer review activities in my classes. In fact, peer review is one of many integral activities in my writing classrooms. Yet, many writing teachers avoid introducing this to their students. This may be because they have not been properly trained or have negative experiences when they were students. In this article, I would like to share successful tips in incorporating peer review to students in writing classrooms.

Early in the semester, I usually take a poll from students whether they have positive or negative experiences when we talk about peer reviews. Many indicated that they have negative experiences because they felt that they were judged in their writing skills. After discussing their experiences, I proceeded to a peer review training activity in which I projected a 2-page paper on the screen and asked them what feedback would they give to the student. Slowly but surely, students started to give written corrective feedback or sentence level feedback in which the comments focused on grammatical issues. I marked the paper as the students continued to discuss the feedback. After that I asked them whether they would like to receive this type of feedback on their papers. The

majority of them indicated that they would not like it because those comments made them feel bad about their writing abilities.

After that I projected the same draft without any markings on the paper, I shared with them that this was a second draft of the paper. Furthermore, students would be adding more content to the paper. Giving sentence level feedback would not be helpful at this time because the students would revise and add more content to the paper. I started to provide feedback on the projected draft with the following statements:

- “I understand what you try to say here. Can you rewrite?”
- “This paragraph seems to have multiple topics. Would you mind reorganizing the paragraph by grouping each topic together?”
- “This is a great story to share but make sure you make a connection to the topic you are writing about.”
- “I would like to hear more about this, could you provide an example?”
- “This is important to the paper. Would you consider moving this to the opening section of the paper?”

I asked students whether they prefer to have these feedbacks in their drafts. Many agreed that these comments would help them improve their drafts. Students have opportunities to conduct peer review activities. Some of them had to be

reminded of the types of feedback to be provided in their peers' drafts.

By training students to provide written feedback, the activity can be a powerful tool for students to learn and be motivated to revise their papers. Additionally, students who are properly trained in peer feedback tend to carry positive attitude to writing and can be developed to better writers. Students reported that their final drafts were better crafted because of their peers' comments.



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Learn Better

Reflection on my study-abroad sojourns: English learning and identity trajectories

by Itsaraphap Moonthiya

I see the challenges I faced with regard to my language learning and identity trajectories as insane cat's cradles that I have been trying to disentangle ever since. Never have I felt absolutely comfortable with who I was, who I am, and who I aspire to become as an English learner, teacher, and user. Perhaps what researchers say is true that identity is a site of struggles. It wasn't until recently that I found the idea of delving deeply into my identity trajectories intriguing. I started to reflect on my study-abroad sojourns, the experiences of which have reshaped who I am and how I think of language learning.

At sixteen, with a pocket full of dreams, I hopped off the plane to the land of the free as an exchange student. I distinctly remember back in the day when my only goal was simply to speak English fluently. Everything else was secondary. My English was rudimentary, and so was my understanding of personal selves. All I ever wanted was to speak like a native speaker, so I did everything possible to acquire it, from emulating American friends to refraining myself from using Thai – you name it. After a year of total immersion, fortunately, I did not sink and my English was steadily flourishing, but little did I realise that the pursuit of a new language, and by extension a newly-forged identity, would

come at the expense of losing a sense of my existing identities. On my return home, I was not the same person who had left in the first place. I felt as though I had grown to become a “banana”: yellow on the outside, white on the inside.

My recent journey to the land Down Under for postgraduate studies a decade later is different, however. Having experienced first-hand the rich diversity in Sydney through engagement with international interlocutors and having realised the intricacies of Englishes, I have a change of heart. I have become more aware of my own selves and am apt to retain my identities in multicultural societies. Instead of “melting into a pot”, I began to embrace the linguistic and cultural diversity Englishes have brought to me, but persist in being an identifiable ingredient in a “salad bowl” as a way to maintain my identities. In this sense, as Lamb (2004) speculates, I have developed a bicultural identity: a desire to be globally-involved yet preserve national identity. Unlike my younger selves, I no longer wish to sound like anyone else, but have grown to cherish my own voices and identities.

The idea to encourage language learners to delve into their second language identities is not new, but perhaps the “road less travelled”, especially in such EFL contexts as Thailand where traditional views of language learning and teaching appear to predominate and thrive. Nevertheless, it is worth giving it a go. As depicted in my sojourns, learning a language is not simply a process of acquiring and developing language skills and knowledge, but

to a large extent, an experience of identity transformation (Wenger, 1998). Consequently, we should trace, reflect on, and critically examine the trajectory of our identities in relation to our language learning. This self-appraisal process is fundamental for us to make well-informed decisions about our language learning. The ways in which we position and perceive our current selves and our desired selves influence the courage we muster and the investment we make in the language learning process (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007).

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Sharpen the Saw

by Kandaporn Jaroenkitboworn

Did you ever hear this story growing up?

A woodcutter strained to saw down a tree. He had been working for hours to cut it down. A young man walking by stopped to watch him, and then said,

“You look so exhausted! Take a break. Sharpen your saw.”

The woodcutter replied, “I don’t have time to sharpen the saw. Can’t you see I’m too busy?”

The young man answered back, “If you sharpened the saw, you would cut down the tree much faster.”

In “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People”, Steven Covey begins his chapter on Habit 7 “Sharpen the Saw” with a parable which is a powerful explanation of this habit. Sharpen the Saw means seeking continuous improvement and renewal, both professionally and personally. The philosophy behind this habit is to take some time out and invest it in ourselves. To sharpen the saw is to increase your capacity to be more effective in handling difficulties or to add value to yourself.

As an English teacher, I agree that we all need to sharpen our metaphorical saws, or to increase our knowledge of the English language. We cannot rely just on the linguistic knowledge we have gained by earning a degree, particularly a PhD. You might, just like the guy trying to fell

a tree with a dull saw, complain that you are too busy to study more after graduation. However, if you follow the young man’s suggestion, not only will your English improve, but your teaching strategies might also be better.

During the pandemic in which all the universities were closed and teachers had to teach online from home, instead of being paranoid, I have spent more time learning English thanks to many YouTubers that still provide good sources for learning. Although there are many choices available for learning English, I personally have enjoyed learning from English speeches, particularly the commencement speeches given by famous people at Harvard University and Stanford University, which are both renowned worldwide for their excellence.

Some may say that giving a speech is quite similar to other forms of public speaking and that it should be audience-centered. However, I was so surprised when I watched the video in which J.K. Rowling delivered her commencement address at Harvard University. Unlike other previous guest speakers who mostly talked about success, J.K. Rowling talked about failure. Let us consider an extract of her speech.

“I am not going to stand here and tell you that failure is fun. That period of my life was a dark one, and I had no idea that there was going to be what the press has since represented as a kind of fairy tale resolution. I had no idea how far the tunnel extended, and for a long time, any light at the end of it was a hope rather than a reality.”

I have often heard the saying that talks about a metaphorical *light at the end of a tunnel*, but this was the first time I had ever heard someone question *how far the tunnel extended and for how long the light at the end of it would remain a hope*. Moreover, her life and her success were described as a *fairy tale resolution* by the media. In this extract, we can see the conventional metaphors -- as well as how to violate the convention but still be relevant, i.e. *the tunnel can extend and then the light at the end of it will be far from becoming a reality*.

Other speeches are also useful for learning English in other areas like vocabulary, pronunciation, and formality. Let me end this article with another saying from a celebrated former president of the US:

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe”

Abraham Lincoln



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