

# More Practical Ideas UK Short-term Training Program

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## ABSTRACT

It was indeed a great privilege for me to take Teacher Refresher Course for Young Learners in Bell Teacher Training Campus, Homerton College in Cambridge during Aug. 15<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011. There were 18 English teachers in the group from New Taipei City elementary schools attending the training program in the UK.

During 2-week stay, we took Teacher Development, Language & Methodology Refresher Course for Young Learners. Our main courses included the teaching skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, multiple intelligences in the classroom, integrating English with other subjects, online resources, etc. And we also participated in some topic workshops, plenary talk and cultural talk, from which I learned a lot. Besides, a few out of school activities such as cultural visits, London excursion, Oxford tour and central Cambridge guided tour are very interesting.

I benefited a lot from this program not only the courses arranged but also the social and cultural activities. It was indeed a professional training program for English teachers and a valuable experience.

In this paper, more practical ideas in English teaching as well as my feedback will be discussed.

## How children learn



Being a teacher for years, I found that children are so different, some students benefit greatly from bodily-kinesthetic and others do not. Some students learn best with hands-on activities, but visual learners prefer a variety of ocular stimulation. Therefore, children have different learning styles. According to H. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory, there are eight, possibly nine intelligences. If you can identify your students' preferred learning styles that will help you develop the most effective activities for your students. However, being an English teacher, I have more than three hundred students, including grade 2, grade 3 and grade 5 students. It is out of the question for me to find out the strength or weakness for every student.

Be aware that every student's learning style is not the same, and everyone is born with all the intelligences, but in various progresses. What we can do is to provide with variety, options and choices in our class. The best approach for an English teacher to take is to design a variety of activities with the teaching plan. Understanding the differences between students and using multiple ways allow us to predict the way our students might react and would be helpful for our students.

### **Teaching creatively**

Teaching creatively can have a huge impact on the students' enthusiasm and can fuel their interest and curiosity to learn. Being a teacher for years, I am always striving for creativity in my classroom. I found that few learners could recognize the idea that learning can be enjoyable. I, therefore, always seek to make teaching more interesting, exciting and effective so as to motivate students' learning.

I got a rough idea from the workshop of teaching creatively, and I hereby outline main points that can enhance our creative potential, and illustrate how creativity can be implemented in the classroom. Creativity is not genetic and it is not hereditary. It is a must for language teachers. Everyone is potentially creative. Creativity is not a fixed trait, can

be learned, can be developed.

Creative teachers need expertise in their particular fields. Creative teaching involves risk taking, breaking rules, and divergent thinking. And creativity implies that we should believe in what we do. Thus, creativity is about making decisions, it needs to be embraced, welcomed, and invited. As we know, children are curious about new things, we could stimulate their curiosity and imagination so as to capture and maintain their interest.

Learning to teach creatively is a life-long task and there are many elements involved. Creative teachers must have subject knowledge, inspire students all the time, develop high expectations of students, allow time for students to be creative, encourage students' positive creative achievements, and find your own teaching style.

### **Giving clear instruction**

Giving clear instruction before students start to work is very important enabling the activity to go smoothly. A good instruction should be short, easy to understand and precise. Instructions should be cut in small pieces according to different phases of task so that students can follow accordingly.

The guidance for giving instructions listed as hereunder:

- Get all students' attention before you start giving instructions.
- Stand still at the front where all students can see you.
- Decide whether to move students before or after instructions.
- Use simple language.
- Don't explain more than one step at a time.
- Sequence the steps in a logical order.
- Pause to give students time to understand/process.
- Check students have understood by eliciting an example and/or asking a question
- Demonstrate with a good student if possible.

- Use mime/gesture when possible.
- Make groupings clear.
- Give out the worksheet after the instructions.

Get them to give you feedback on how clear your instructions are. However, the spoken instructions are not everything. For low level students, visuals can support students' understanding. I use body language in my classroom very often, including gestures, miming, facial expression, etc. Making a quick demo in front of the class is very useful. Provide your students with adequate practice and modeling for them to follow.

The guidance for checking understanding of instructions is as follows:

- Identify key steps or possible confusion for students and make questions for these issues.
- Avoid open questions (e.g. What are you going to do?).
- Don't ask, 'Do you understand?' They might think they understand, but the question doesn't actually check understanding.
- Ask closed questions and give choices, e.g. 'Is student A speaking first or listening first?'

Once students are familiar with a specific type of activity, it's easier for them to understand the instruction. And, once the teacher gives instructions in a consistent way, and establishes routines, students will understand what they are expected to do.

### **Why games?**

Children like games. Games allow young learners to focus well enough to learn better. In order to help students learn more effectively, I am used to integrating games in my class. Students are willing to participate as games make learning fun. Making learning fun motivates students and helps them pay more attention. As we know, learning a language requires a great deal of effort, games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.

Games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the class. I usually use games in my class as they provide language practice in the various skills including speaking, writing,

listening and reading. Therefore, games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence. Besides, games encourage students to interact and communicate as they create a meaningful context for language use.

### **Games in the classroom**

Learning a language needs a lot of practice. And students have different learning styles, they need to be taught in multiple ways. Drill with repetition is often boring and is unable to draw students' attention. It is with delight, therefore, when a game comes along that allows students to practice what they're learning in a fun way.

There are some interesting games listed as hereunder:

#### **Grammar auction:**

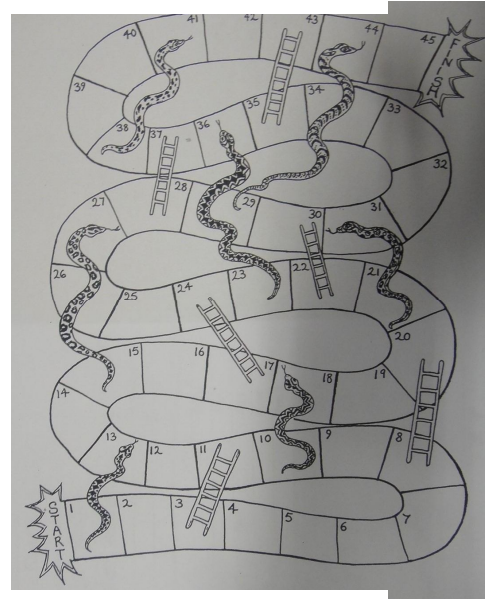
Teacher gives each team a worksheet with sentences, some of the sentences are grammatically correct while others are grammatically incorrect. Set a limit on how much the bids can be raised each time. Students bid for the right sentences. The team with the most money outbidding the other teams wins the bid. Win the money they bid if they are right, and lose that money if they buy the wrong sentence.

#### **Guess who?**

A question and answer game that requires students to determine who the mystery person is. There are several faces on the board, the faces are all different, including men and women. They have different hairstyles. Some wear glasses. Some have big eyes. Each player chooses a mystery person for their opponent to guess. The opponent asks questions, e.g. "Has he/she got \_\_\_\_\_?" The player answers the questions. It is a good way for students to practice yes/no questions, the skills of observation and memory.

### **Snakes and ladders:**

It is a board game. It is played between two or more players on a game board having numbered, gridded squares. A number of ladders and snakes are pictured on the board, each connecting two specific board squares. The object of the game is to move one's game piece from the start to the finish. If you answer questions correctly, you get a chance to roll the dice. If you land at the bottom of the ladder, you go up. If you land at the mouth of a snake, you go down.



### **Sentence charades:**

One student chooses a sentence and acts it out without speaking or noises, the others take a guess.

### **Kim's game:**

Arrange the class into small groups. Make sure that all desks are cleared and no student has pen or paper to write anything down. Explain that under the cloth there are a number of items and show them for 60 seconds. After that each group must write down the name of as many objects as they can remember.

### **Ostrich game:**

Two students face each other in a pair to play the game. Choose several pairs of students to play. Stick a card to the back of each student. Players are not allowed to touch others with hands. Each other in a pair have to dance like an ostrich (with background music) and try to see what the card is on his/her opponent's back. When they peek at the card, shout it out.



**Forehead game:**

Write a profession or the name of famous people (singer, teacher, cartoon character, etc.), and stick one on each student's forehead, so they don't see the name but everyone else does. The students must go around and try to figure out who they are by asking yes/no questions, e.g. "Am I at school? Do I study at school?"

**Children with learning difficulties**

Between 15 and 20% of learners are known to have learning difficulties. They are all different to each learner. If we want these learners to be successful, we need to have ideas on how to manage our classrooms and course content to meet not only their needs, but all the needs of young learners in class.

Learning difficulties are unique to each individual. They involve significant difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, and understanding. Consider the followings might help:

- Be consistent in the language of instruction
- Take small steps towards your goal
- Change the way you test and monitor the student's output
- Help your students notice connections, similarities and differences between first language and second language

Effective practices in the EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom will often be equally effective with children with LDS (learning difficulty students). The strategies of effective teaching/practices for slow learners are listed as follows:

- Define basic vocabulary
- Use plenty of visuals
- Use hands-on activities
- Use lots of repetition

- Model activities
- Allocate different students different tasks to promote self esteem
- Think carefully about classroom layout
- Use different teaching aids
- Give clear instructions – one at a time
- Speak slowly, clearly, and naturally
- Face your students and avoid putting your hand in front of your face
- Be careful using idioms
- Alert your students when something is important
- Provide written notes if possible
- Lower the level of background noise
- Allow a long pause between your questions and your students' answers
- Focus on key vocabulary
- Give plenty of opportunity to practice
- Use or adapt readily available games and activities
- Grade and personalize your activities where appropriate

As we know, slow learners need more practice, teachers should be patient but consistent. Repetition and drills are important, I usually vary the repetition and review the lessons frequently. Repeat instructions for activities are necessary, I always have them repeat or check their understanding before doing the activity. Show pictures and videos, conduct games and group activities and provide hands-on tools that can reinforce learning.

Many slow learners suffer from low self-esteem and lack confidence. Allow for success and praise small achievements will promote their self-esteem. Changing their seats to promote their attentiveness, sometimes, is necessary. The average students have no problem to pick up information and ideas naturally in the classroom, however, slow learners



need a mediator who can help them for each learning step. I thus adopt mentoring system in my class and assign the intelligent students to be peer student teachers to help those slow learners, it is a useful way to help them.

## **Conclusion**

The training program in the UK was indeed a significant and unforgettable experience for me. I deeply appreciate New Taipei City Government, Zhuwei Elementary School and British Council Taipei arranging such a valuable course for English teachers.

The refresher course for young learners, topic workshop and plenary talk arranged provide us with teaching skills and professional guideline that benefit me a lot. We shared our teaching experience during the main course and exchanged teaching ideas with foreign teachers in the



workshop that was an unusual experience. Moreover, the cultural exchange and talk with foreign teachers around the world in the dining hall during the meal time is valuable.

Especially, it was amazing for me to see such a modern city with historic buildings and cultural heritage surrounded in London. I got culture shock. The beautiful architecture and world heritage sites in London impressed me most. Unsurprisingly that London has a long and interesting history from its old and modern architecture. It told me that the ancient monument and historic heritage are valuable and need to be entirely preserved.

Through cultural visits, weekend excursions and after-class activities I learned something about British culture, which was rich enough for me to remember and share with others.

It was indeed a precious journey and a memorable experience for me. I, myself, benefit a lot from this program with many thanks.

