

Practical Activities for Managing Large Classes

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Abstract

Learners at all levels have to communicate and interact with each other as well as their teachers. They would absolutely appreciate being encouraged and challenged to further their skills if it is carried out in a way they feel they are participating in formulating it. Thus, activities are crucial as they promote learners to do so cooperatively and creatively. We as educators agree that teachers should not depend solely on course books but should rely on a variety of techniques and materials that help students to learn actively and also to become independent on the teacher. Activities are efficient materials to be adopted inside class as they are used in contexts and consequently serve real learning purposes which call for an integrated use of language. The activities I intend to present are practical in the sense that they can be adopted easily and can be modified to suit most levels. Moreover, most of them take the form of games where students working in groups can do in a competitive way and, thus, learn and have fun at the same time. I assume that these activities are dynamic in the way they encourage students to give up rows and move around and work in groups to do them instead of sticking to tables and just filling blanks or marking letters. I'm not suggesting these activities as an alternative to the casebooks but as additional sources that can be turned to in the lecture because, after all, we all assume that students learn better in a dynamic way, i.e., when they are engaged in tasks than in the traditional way: teacher-led class.

Key words: class management, communicative class, task-based, teacher's position.

It is a commonplace to say that teaching a small group of students is easier, more enjoyable, and less time consuming than teaching a large group. Unfortunately, many schools in Iraq have large classes due to shortage of classes, teachers or budgets. It is beyond dispute that teaching English in a class with large number of students has become a problem for many teachers of English language. Moreover, managing large classes or maintaining classroom

control has become one of the top characteristics of effective teachers. Effective teachers are aware that this cannot be ensured unless certain skills or activities are manipulated to help students learn in an environment that is task oriented. Effective teachers should not depend solely on course books but on a variety of techniques and materials that help students to learn actively and also to become independent on the teacher.

Classroom management is a term used by teachers to describe the process of ensuring that classroom lessons run smoothly despite disruptive behavior by students. The term also implies the prevention of disruptive behavior. Classroom management is one of the most important factors of the teaching process, for both teachers and students as its lack would surely mean that learning is reduced in the classroom. Lack of effective class management can cause unhappiness and stress and eventually force teachers to give up the teaching profession. Good management inside the classroom gives rise to such group functions as: setting standards, maintaining discipline, building team spirit, and ensuring communication and cooperation within group. (White, 2001:9)

Other than adopting effective activities to engage students and ensure discipline inside class, teachers are recommended to employ the following strategies to help them manage their classes in a proper way:

1. Walk throughout the classroom during lectures and activities, and seat work to provide assistance and monitor behavior.
2. Remain calm and composed.
3. Adopt classroom routines and ensure discipline inside class.
4. Avoid speaking too loud, yet make sure that your voice is audible enough to be heard by every student in the class.
5. Create anticipation for lesson and tasks.
6. Provide opportunities for every student or group to participate.
7. Provide help and support for less active or struggling students with a responsible one.

8. Show enthusiasm and commitment.
9. Have extra activities available for students to do when they are bored or finished with their work.
10. Use positive self-talk to reduce stress and help to maintain control.
11. Use stress management techniques such as deep breathing or repeatedly tensing and relaxing your muscles.
12. Address only student behaviour rather than personal traits.
13. Start your lesson in a friendly atmosphere and ensure purposefulness.
14. Make sure that chairs, tables, or desks can be suitably arranged for the purpose and activities of the lesson.
15. Subtly adjust your teaching and class management practices in line with your perception of what is best for the class at any given time.
16. Create a task-oriented environment for gaining knowledge.

Task-based

environment

Teachers should realize that the best policy in maintaining discipline inside classroom is to engage the students in genuine communicative language work. Students enjoy language use provided they are given the appropriate opportunity to do so. To achieve this purpose the lesson should be so well planned that every member (alone or within a group) is given some job to do. In larger classes choral repetition, group work, acting between class sections, games, etc., are useful techniques for keeping up the class interest in the lesson.

It is believed that teachers' position inside the classroom is of vital significance. The golden rule for a good classroom manager and organizer is to move around the classroom, go and sit with your students, and to give instructions whenever it is necessary. Sitting or standing behind the table or the podium would surely put a barrier between himself or herself and the students most of the lesson and consequently, decrease the learners' involvement.

Teachers' ultimate aim is to guide students to develop communicative competence as well as linguistic competence. One way to achieve this is to encourage students to perform TASKS. Actually, the larger the class, the more necessary it is to depend on task-based learning. Since time is vital in teaching

and monitoring students especially in large classes, the only way to give all students time to speak is by having them working collaboratively.

The principal responsibility in TBL(task-based learning) is to foster good relationships with the groups so as to work together cooperatively and creatively. This often involves giving the students information about the activity, telling them how they are going to do it and putting them into pairs or groups. When students' number gets larger, we can respond by maximizing the use of pair work and group work and maximizing tasks that depend on them. Students in large classes vary in ability; one way is to group them according to ability so that we can give them different tasks or we may mix students of different abilities so that the stronger students can help the weaker ones. Group work is a major formation inside large classes as it increases the number of talking opportunities for individual students, provide chances for different opinions, ensures broader cooperation and negotiation, and encourages learner autonomy. (Harmer, 2007, 166)

Recommended Types of ActivitiesIt is better to get students involved in activities such as problem solving exercises, rehearsing a scene from plays, reconstructing stories, or doing story-circle type activity. These varied activities as they provide a variety of learning styles help students to decide what to do and the best way to do it,how to work with and learn from each other, build self-confidence and in some other way in getting physically involved in the lesson. When they enjoy these activities, their interest in learning will absolutely increase.

Teachers are supposed to come up with engaging activities that keep students interested and anticipating with the goal of improving their communication skills. While there are numerous challenges when it comes to teaching large classes, there are many coping skills and activities that you can use to make your job easier.

1. Interviews or having visitors, colleagues for the class. Live interview is one of the most motivating listening activities inside classroom, especially when students themselves think up the questions. In such an activity, students will no use ready-made questions and answers. They will really listen for answers they themselves have asked for. This activity can be

done within a group or a group with a person from another group. To continue this activity or act it in other circumstances we can take on a different persona to make the interview more interesting or choose a subject we know about for the students to interview us on.

2. Poetic or sentence chase

This activity is to be played with high school students where a teacher asks the students to memorize lines chosen from various poems, i.e. two lines or more from each poem. Group 1 would start with a line and the second group should begin the next line with the same sound or rhyme at the end of the first line and so on. With other levels such as intermediate and primary, a teacher can do it with sentences. Here, a student says a sentence and the next student should begin his new sentence with the same sound or letter that comes at the end of the first sentence and so on.

3. Observation or watching Film Clips. Encouraging students to watch helps students to see 'language in use'. This allows them to a whole lot of paralinguistic behaviour. For example, they can see how intonation matches facial expression and what gestures accompany certain phrases. After watching the clip, the teacher can ask each group to write a summary or s/he may ask them about specific matters in the clips and see which group is the winner.

4. Maps or drawings Students are given copies of a map where places are not named and are asked to write the names of the places on the map. The activity with maps can be played in another way. Ask students to open their books of geography, for example, and let them work in groups to find out: How many maps are there about this country or that? What are they about? How do these maps look like?

5. Pictures Pictures, photographs, projected slides, images from an overhead projector, or projected computer images can be used. Sometimes, the teacher or one of the students can reverse the activity by describing something, an animal, a character and asks them to guess as to what is that thing or person.

6. Proverbs

Proverbs help students to memorize words and comprehend the context they are used in. Moreover, we can use proverbs to encourage students find similarities and differences, i.e. which proverbs have the same meaning and which are in contrast to each other? Or which begin with the same words or letters?

7. Reading Theatre

Reading theatre stimulates students' comprehension and understanding. As its subject matter is a story, students would remember its events easily. This could be done by groups where every group would have a facilitator. Here, the student has to read in a dynamic way, stop often and ask questions and encourage the other students to read whether chorally or in rows. The teacher should be careful in his choice of the story so as not to spoil the activity with a story that does not arouse interest. The teacher can exploit this chance to engage the students as to guess what the story is about from its title or, after reading part of it, speculate what would happen later. In an advanced step, the students might be encouraged to think of an alternative ending.

8. Writing summaries

Have students choose materials such as magazines, short stories or newspapers ask them to write summaries, main ideas or themes of articles they have chosen. This would help them to think of what to include and to exclude and also how to arrange events and join them.

9. Incorrect and scrambled sentences It is a good activity when the teacher steps aside allowing the students the chance to lead or at least to act on the stage. This could be done very easily by using scrambled sentences or incorrect sentences and asking the students in groups to put them in the sequential order in make them correct. Such an activity would assure them that they not only share in finding the correct answer but, in fact, they are able to do so.

10. Writing scenarios Many students love to talk about cartoons, movies, or series they like. The teacher can manipulate this by asking students-working in groups according to their common interests-to write what they remember or to write something new. Forming groups of students according to interest is a good opportunity to have a new formation of groups.

11. Story Chain In this activity which can be done in a written and spoken format, one of the groups begins with the first line of a story. After a period of time (1 minute), a second group has to continue the story. Then a third group must continue until the story is finished or time is over. Which group begins the story and which group follows can be arranged according to a bag that has the names or numbers of the groups. If the teacher decides to add more time on such activities in the same day or within a week, this could be done in a competitive way by giving additional marks for the best parts of the story or extracting marks from the group that fails to continue the story within the given time.

12. Find someone in class whoIn this activity, the students are given papers with certain statements and they have to find the person who is mentioned or described in these statements and have them to sign next to the statements. It could be about aspects regarding their names, hobbies or anything that is not shared by two or more. The winner is the first person whose paper has all statements or categorizes signed.

13. Spelling mastersPrepare a list of most frequently used words in a module or unit. Divide your class into groups and ask these groups to spell the first set of these words. If a group misspells a word, this group is eliminated from the game. The winning group is that which spells the whole sets of words correctly.

14. Who will be the week champions? A teacher might, at the end of a week or a month, review the material of a week or a month through a game which is similar to a competition where teams represented by groups are given papers where they answer questions. Then groups that get about 70% or more would go to the next round and then to a third round till we have one group winning at the end.

15. Line up according to...It is such an interesting activity that can be played continuously as we change the item according which students are to line up such date and place of birth, place where they live, alphabetical order of names, hobbies, subjects and topics they like...etc.

16. Question-answer tennisDivide the class into two groups, A and B. Group A serves and B returns with an answer. To settle this game, a teacher can fix a time and the group that gets the highest number of points is the winner. At this moment, the teacher can have the two groups ask and answer respectively or let

the group whose question is not answered to continue asking questions and winning points till time expires. To encourage more participation and team work, the activity could be played with a tennis ball. A student from the group who asks the first question throws the tennis ball to the other group. The student who receives the ball can move around and consult his friends to guess the right answer but within a limited time. Such away would not embarrass the students if one of them gives a wrong answer since all the members of the team shared in the answer whether it is correct or incorrect.

17.Vocabulary chess. This activity can be played in several ways and it can be about synonyms, antonyms, and a word in a sentence or change a word into a noun, a verb, an adjective ...etc. This game can be played with two or more groups. A clock and a sheet of paper can be used where each group writes down the words it answered according to a fixed time. If one group fails to provide the wanted word, the other group wins the game.

Conclusion

The afore-mentioned activitiesurge the students to play an active role in the learning process which means not just be given information, but to take the opportunity to internalize information in meaningful ways. As they assume more responsibility for their learning process, they are no longer seen as simply passive receivers into which knowledge is poured but an active participator who will gradually take the hold inside the class.

In a task-based learning environment, students must do more than just listen;they must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. Most important, to be actively involved, students must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Within this context, it is proposed that strategies promoting active learning be defined as instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing. Use of such activities in the classroom is vital because of their powerful impact upon students' learning.

It is generally assumed that learners are not empty vessels, which need to be filled with knowledge. Rather, they are individuals who are equal in a process of genuine two-way communication. (Spenser, 1990)Thus, teachers are recommended to do the following:

- Learn to use games, activities and practical techniques to enhance creativity and learning across the curriculum, encourage group co-operation and have fun!
- Discover how they can use activities to meet statutory learning objectives as they pave the way for an integrated skills environment where students are practicing speaking and listening, and even reading writing
- Learn that their major roles are to think, guide, initiate, facilitate, and encourage the learners into becoming a community of collaborative inquirers.

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