

Teaching Tip 1: Pair work-Group work

Many times teachers try to pair an ELL student up with a bilingual buddy so that they can better understand what is going on in the classroom. While this is a great idea, it only seems to work for a short period of time. Sometimes the bilingual buddy is hesitant to help out, and other times the bilingual student needs to pay extra attention to what the teacher is saying because his or her skills are not that good either. Other times the new student feels uncomfortable because he or she feels “stupid” because no one else is paired up.

To avoid these kinds of situations, try pairing up ALL students in your classroom. Have the pairs switch up occasionally so that the students don't become complacent.

How:

1. Make a list of pairs of names before the lesson starts or while the students are coming in or just tell them when the time comes ‘Gianni, you work with Paola; Chiara, you're with Stefano this time.
2. If there is an odd number of students make a group of three but break them up later in the lesson and put them into pairs with someone else so they get more chance to speak.
3. You could put them in small groups to start with if the activity allows. You could even make the activity a competition in small teams if the activity allows, seeing which team gets the most answers right. Use the board or a piece of paper for keeping score.
4. Change the partners quite often so that the students don't get bored with their partner. This is especially important if there is a student who isn't very popular with the others.

Why:

1. It's good for the students to speak to each other in English.
2. It's good for the students to work with another student sometimes rather than alone.

Extra Info:

I don't put my students into groups bigger than 3 because I don't think they get enough chance to speak in such a large group so they switch off, start fidgeting, get frustrated, let the hard-working students do all the work, fall asleep etc.

In a pair, one student is speaking and one is listening and formulating a response, in a group of three, one is speaking, and usually the other two are listening and formulating

responses. In a group of four (or more), one is speaking, one or two are listening and formulating responses and the other one is asleep, aware that s/he hasn't got much chance of getting a word in edge-ways. Or of course, in a group of four, two speak to each other while the other two often either fall asleep or end up speaking to each other too, in which case you might as well have put them in pairs in the first place.

If you have an odd number of students, don't pair the extra student up with yourself. Make one group of three. I used to take on the 'odd' student myself when I started in ELL, but I found that it didn't work. The other students realized they were missing out on the teacher's attention and I realized they were right - I was short-changing them by not monitoring them as I should.

If you've got some talkative and some quiet students, pair the quiet ones together for the fluency activities (as opposed to the vocabulary/grammar activities) to encourage them to talk more. I used to put one talkative student in a pair with a quiet one, thinking that the quiet one would speak more if his/her partner was the chatty type. I was wrong . The talkative one monopolizes the conversation and the quiet one is happy to let this happen.

If you only have one student, simply 'pair up' with your student.