

Speaking to Other Students in English

How:

1. Put the students into pairs or small groups.

Why:

1. Making students speak to each other instead of the teacher maximizes STT (Student Talking Time) and minimizes TTT (Teacher Talking Time). This is a good thing because the students are the ones who need to practice their English - you, hopefully, don't!
2. A lot of students will be using their English to speak to non-mother tongue speakers anyway so they might as well start getting used to it. For example, my students are mostly Spanish-speaking, and they often need English to speak to other students. Some of them never use English to speak to mother-tongue English speakers at all!

Extra info:

Students like talking to the teacher because it makes them feel important and that they are getting value for money. While this is fine in a one-to-one lesson it is no good in a group because while one student is monopolizing the teacher/conversation everyone else is losing out.

When I encounter students who want to talk to me all the time in a lesson (flattering though it is) I advise them (politely) to consider having individual lessons if they want the teacher's full attention all the time. If that doesn't work I explain like this: 50 minutes divided by 5 students = 10 minutes each; so they can each talk to me for 10 minutes, and I will listen to each of them for 10 minutes which is sad really when they deserve a 50 minute lesson. And, let's face it, it wouldn't really be 10 minutes because you have to take time off for taking attendance at the beginning of the lesson, giving everyone time to hang their coats up, sit down, get settled, receive their worksheets, read the instructions, listen to the teacher presenting grammar points or whatever, do a listening exercise or a role-play, go through homework together, receive more homework, get ready to leave etc. Five minutes would be more realistic. So there you have it, deserve 50 minutes and get 5. Where's the logic?

Sometimes students tell me that they want me to talk to them (individually) because they will learn correct English through listening to me (by osmosis, presumably!) They can't see the benefit of talking to each other because if they make a mistake the other student won't be able to correct them. (Actually, the other students often can correct them, and do correct them, and that's what they don't like!)

In such cases I explain like this: Learning English is like learning to play the piano/to drive/to swim etc. When you want to learn to play the piano/drive/swim is it enough just sit and watch other people doing it or do you need to have a go yourself and make mistakes and practice a lot until you get it right? Speaking together gives you that chance to have a go yourself and the time to practice.