Notes on:

Teaching, and Learning, English as a Second Language   10.6.14

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TVM for your interest in what could be described as **Undergound** ESL..! Anyway, what follows is rather basic, but nevertheless, usually a revelation to those pupils, willing or unwilling, at dodgy ESL schools, even 'good' ones, who have never even been told about Thesauruses, never actually been encouraged to turn off sillifones in favour of consulting printed pages, and/or, who are being bored to tears by the Dreaded Formal Grammar. (I just say that as a native E-speaker, I only know 'naming words', 'doing words' and 'describing words'…..! Formal Grammar is a cruel and unnecessary learning curve, when basic grammer, plus utilisation of those aural pinnate structures called ears, will do so much to achieve the same aim, given plenty of conversational practice. Plus, **ESL must be FUN,** and, humour and puns should also be emphasised.

ESL is not well taught on the whole, even at dedicated schools, often just being a local money-spinner, or, merely a default, and often black, occupation for traveling students of doubtful academic qualifications, or poor flexibility of mind, even regarding English skills of their own..! This is giving English, and thus English-learning, a collective bad name, plus, the rather empty promise that, in an over-crowded world, ESL will actually get you that dream job-for-life. But, you can still set high standards, promote learning English for the fun of it, for personal satisfaction and education, as a common communications medium, etc, even if those putative vocational imperatives are not to be met..?

Moreover, books, newspapers, orderly use of personal lists, good dedicated English texts, plus written notes and records, have strong associative reinforcement. Single words listed via sillifone have no such associations, existing merely fleetingly, and without sufficient context to really aid a less-than-fluent English learner. Constant alphabetic use is lacking with single virtual word listing, unlike paper dictionaries.

Re humour and FUN whist learning ESL, try **The Dictionary Game,** which pits you against your own students, at any level. Just ask them to browse thru their own desk dictionaries and/or thesauruses, and to give you (eg) 20 words that you must record on the BB/WB, as well as give the meaning. This will cause general hilarity, and the expectation that you, as teacher will not be up to the challenge. (Deal with off-colour examples, inadvertent or otherwise, as best you can, and with your own brand of humour, depending on contemporary cultural milieu..!)

The average High School dictionary will pose few problems for a Grad, anything larger will have some surprises, tho if you understand word origins, then the complex words that students will inevitable be presented, will provide their own clues as to meaning, and this will seem magical to students, up to you whether you reveal your secret! Give yourself marks for approximate definitions and laughter, as well!   After which, these new-found words are to be put into sentences, even woven together as a small story, Thus, all participate, the teacher demonstrates personal prowess, new words are learned, and put in contexts,

Also, get students to stand up, read aloud, give impromptu talks, have discussions and arguments over some interesting issue, again with an eye to cultural milieu, naturally! All manner of activities can be used to reinforce ESL, utilized to shed shyness, instilling confidence whilst among peers, and all whilst exercising English-only language usage.

English ubiquity has much to do with its flexibility, including usage for navigation, Air Traffic Control, media, Internet, Science, Medicine, etc, with some 2 million words generally agreed to be in common usage in so many ways, all derived from the deployment of 26 letters, and 10 numerals, plus other borrowings of symbols and letters etc., plus those constant imports, all of which are affecting the mechanics and quirks of the world's largest and ever-evolving language. (Academe Francais, eat your heart out, well spiced with Franglais, of course…!)

Meanwhile, **re professional ESL,** get that proper teacher qualification, and you personally will be qualified at home and overseas, and also, you will have professional respect from schools and students. Those pressure-cooker private fee courses should be avoided, the qualification is nominal only, as well as costly. Apart from which, any bright, imaginative, and enthusiastic graduate, fluent in English, will do a good ESL job, if not a strictly professional one, especially if teaching more advanced students who just require more extensive ESL practice and discussion. Best to leave the more basic levels of ESL to the ESL professional, would be the rule. Anyway, trust you will happily generate your own ideas and enthusiasm, especially if intending to travel, and, any further discussion with NFT, in English, is most welcome..!

Books like those listed below are on the Nofrillstech desk, and, life-long English learning continues:

A History of the English Language, A. Baugh & T. Cable, 4th Edition, Routledge 1993, **ISBN 0415093791**

The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language, D. Crystal, CUP 1993, **ISBN 0521596556**

Dictionaries and Thesauruses, by Oxford, Collins, Webster (US),

Oxford Dictionaries of Foreign Words in English, and, of **New Words,** plus,

Collins Easy Learning in English, The Complete Plain Words, Usage and Abusage, **Proverbs, Idioms, Quotations, Cliches, Style, Etymology, Crossword, Punctuation, etc,**

.....and the list goes on, all based, in general, on 26 letters, 10 digits, plus some other character and number imports, allied with a cultural and linguistic willingness to constantly welcome, absorb, and further expand..!

Dictionary Game for ESL Learners and Teachers:

This is a dictionary game to promote, and, encourage, rapid, frequent, and competent dictionary referral, plus, verbal interaction, blackboard skills, and, word-skill activities, which should also work for any languages that have printed dictionaries, as well as just for English.

The game should, of course, be pitched at levels that reflect age and stage of ESL, eg, a high-school school dictionary should provide enough words for the average ESL student on a bridging course, and, the native-speaking and well-read ESL teacher should know, or be familiar with, most of the words listed therein. A Concise Oxford, or similar, would be a good test for both aspiring tertiary students and their ESL teachers. The use of more technical or scientific dictionaries would reflect additional teacher knowledge, as well as student or pupil aspirations.

No portable IT devices should be used for word referral, this dictionary game is all about printed words, alphabet exercises, and, intense pupil involvement. Also, students are encouraged to freely participate, at both verbal and written levels, thus, overcoming shyness in front of peers is a necessary part of the exercise.

The starting-point of the game is that the teacher is to then be put to the test, as to their verbal fluency, by a quick word test, thus:

1) Suggest that students take turns in finding, and then listing, 20 words on a board, taking turns individually. All students are actively encouraged to participate, at both verbal and written levels.

2) The class as a whole also lists these words, pronunciation, and their meanings, at their desks.

3) A challenge is then made to the teacher to give quick off-the-cuff verbal and written meanings, and/or contextual examples for each word. Optimal results for both parties would be achieved if the word list is first fully assembled, as the students have then completed their own recording tasks, and, the teacher has had some time to scan the words before giving their meanings.

4) Marks are provisionally awarded as follows, 5 for literal meanings plus, basic etymological details, 4 for general meanings, 3 for contextual examples, 2 for 'family' (animal/vegetable/mineral, etc), connections, 1 for basic root identification. Thus, a mark out of 100 can be obtained.

5) The game is repeated, depending on class enthusiasm, as well, the students make up sentences, and/or short stories that involve these listed words. Younger students, at least, tend to respond enthusiastically to the prospect of 'beating the teacher'. Pupils judge marks to be awarded, which also reflects and aids their own understanding of the words and contexts. Contextual word meaning aid may also be obtained by students' use of a thesaurus.

6) The students will tend to look for long and complicated words, which will aid the teacher in elucidating meaning. If the teacher repeatedly scores highly, then, a native speaker can be enlisted to supply words, (thus being 'onside' with the students), because they will be more aware of uncommonly-used words that will be more difficult for another native speaker to define.

8) The whole game should promote interest in dictionary TEXTBOOK hunts that will improve word-skills, interactive speech and participation, thus helping to overcome shyness, while promote vocabulary enlargement and dictionary skills. Regarding ESL, origins of English, and its words, can be invoked, as well as drawing attention to foreign words that are continually being absorbed into the main body of the language. Some of these foreign words could well be from some of the students own native languages, adding more interest to the activity.