

CAPE Alumni Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk

CAPE Internet Talk was started as part of CAPE follow-up activities to continue ties with CAPE alumni and those who are interested in professional development in English teaching. It is hoped that this would increase our bond and aloha among former participants, and that the information in the TALK would help our alumni and friends/members review what they know and deepen their understanding of issues and interest in the ESL field.

Aloha and welcome to this week's Teacher Talk. I hope you are all well and your students are learning a lot. Here at CAPE we are getting ready for our winter program. It's hard to believe how time flies. There are already Christmas decorations up all over town. There is a big Santa Claus on the top of Ala Moana Center!

This week something interesting happened regarding my grammar class. I have a student who is remarkably intelligent. He is at least tri-lingual, a professor and has written papers for the French Review. Needless to say, that alone says nothing about his English skills. However, his English is quite good and I often worry that the class is not challenging enough for him. That's why initially I was not surprised when the director came to my office worried. He had just taken our new computer adapted placement test (allegedly better than our old test) and she said she was worried that he was incorrectly placed into my class. I told her that I agreed. She then showed me his scores. According to the test, he should be in the level below mine. Luckily, my program is very flexible about these things, so she trusted me when I said there had been a mistake. Still, it makes me wonder, how much do tests really tell us? What are we really testing? How much should we trust tests?

Classroom Speech

Speaking of tests, this week's classroom speech will focus on getting students ready to take a test.

Pre-test:

Before we begin the test, are there any quiz	questions? concerns? worries?
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Getting the desks ready:

Please,	separate your desks. turn your desks around. clear your desks. take everything off your desk except for a pencil/piece of paper.
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Instructions for during the test:

During the test, While you're taking the test,	please don't talk. please stay in your seat. raise your hand if you have a question. come to my desk if you have a question.
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After the test:

When you're finished,	please work quietly at your desk raise your hand so I can collect your test. come get a worksheet. read/complete/work on p. #
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To end the test:

Alright class.	Five more minutes This is your # minute warning. That's it. Pass your papers to the front. Time's up. That's all the time I can give you. Class is over. I need your tests. The quiz is over. Please exchange your quiz with a partner so we can correct them together.
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Teaching Tip: Creative testing

I think that most people dread taking tests no matter what their age is. A test is stressful, tedious and can make us doubt ourselves. Despite this, as we all know, well-designed tests are also necessary for teachers and students to track progress and check comprehension and acquisition. Because our primary goal is to check our students learning, tests can sometimes be fun and creative. The following are a few tests that stray from the basic model. These "tests" can also be used as activities.

Test One: The map test

I saw this test demonstrated at a communicative language-teaching workshop. The teacher gave the students a blank piece of paper. Then she told them that she wanted to have the students meet her at her favorite coffee shop. She had them start in the bottom corner of the paper and gave them directions from the school. The students drew in and labeled the streets and specific buildings. The teacher then graded the maps. This activity was good because it engaged the students and the teacher did very little prep for it. Also, all the students finished at the same time.

Test Two: The smiley face listening test

This is something I used with my Junior High Spanish I class. We were practicing emotions. I gave them a piece of paper with circles on them. Then I said things like "She is sad", or "He is happy". The students drew in very simple faces and hair if it was a girl, a hat or something if it was a boy. This test was very simple for me and requires no writing.

Test Three: The listening vocabulary test:

I know that many of the teachers I worked with were very enthusiastic and excellent actors/actresses. This test is similar a game called password. I used it in a conversation class. I either listed the words on the board (easy) or had the students memorize them. Then, I told them a story that would elicit the word, using gestures and expressions. (e.g. for the word cheerful: “My sister is a happy person. No matter how bad her day is she always greets you with a smile...”). The students write down only the word. This also requires very little prep and the students finish at the same time. It is also good for aural learners.

Now it’s your turn. Do you have any creative testing ideas? E-mail them to cape@flex.com

Thoughts to Consider:

In her book *Critical Pedagogy*, Joan Wink says “Having an A team and a B team is only good for the A team.” One of the consequences of standardized testing is that these tests are often used to separate students into higher levels (the A team) and lower levels (the B team). The idea is that this benefits the B team because they have more attention and can work at their own speed. However, this often backfires. The A team often ends up doing the interesting and creative work while the B team does “basic skills”. Also, being the A team makes the A team feel special and motivates them to succeed. Being the B team often makes the B team feel discouraged and feel like what they do will never be as good as the A team. I saw this firsthand at the junior high school I was working at. When I complimented the B team, they told me that they were only the B team and that they weren’t smart. They told me that they thought the A team that I they knew I had first period was probably smarter. In fact, this B team class was much more motivated and I enjoyed class with them much more than class with the A team. Another interesting fact is that the A team got the privilege of having the smaller class size, although, according to the A team B team theory, the B team would benefit more from a small class. What’s your opinion about this? How do you let the B team know they are good enough?

Well, that’s all for this edition of teacher talk. I hope everyone has a great week. Write us at cape@flex.com with any other comments. We love to get mail from you! Thank you to everyone who has written us with comments. You have been very helpful and encouraging.

Mahalo!

Please take the time to give us the addresses of anyone else you think might be interested in receiving this newsletter of the CAPE Internet Connection: English Teacher Talk. And don’t forget to write us with any comments you might have.

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