

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 happy New Year (western New Year that is). We hope you and your families are doing well and enjoying the winter. I am lucky enough to be on break so I have the luxury of time to prepare for the Hawaii English Language Program's winter term.

This week, I have been thinking about vocabulary learning. It seems that once students know English reasonably well, they are often most frustrated by their lack of vocabulary. In my writing class, even one of my best writers wrote me that she cannot express her ideas the way she wants to in English. Some teachers solve this problem by giving lists of high frequency or other types of words and others just deal with vocabulary as it is needed. Either way, students complain that it's either too boring to memorize lists or feel frustrated because they don't feel like they are learning vocabulary. Therefore, as teachers we are left with the challenge of helping our students learn vocabulary that is interesting and useful to them, in addition to making them understand what they actually are learning.

Classroom speech: These are some ways to check understanding or expand incidental (or unplanned) vocabulary.

When students don't know anything about a word:

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When you can't tell if students know the meaning:

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To check understanding:

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Teaching Tip

The following are some useful websites for vocabulary words. Now that students know so much about computers, they might prefer to learn vocabulary on-line. This way, they can take control and responsibility for their own learning. This is much easier for older students. I will work on resources for elementary English teachers in the future.

One of the best sites of course, is Dave's ESL café. (<http://www.eslcafe.com>) Here students can explore and learn phrasal verbs, idioms and slang as well as take short quizzes to test their knowledge. Teachers can also use the resources such as teaching tips and link to other sites. It also includes an elementary school English teachers forum.

Another site is called A Word a Day. (<http://www.wordsmith.org/awad/index/html>) The site features a new word each day along with pronunciation and examples of usage. You can also have e-mails sent to you daily that include the new word. It might be good for very advanced learners or even native speakers.

The monthly idiom is a site run by the Comenius English Language Center. (<http://www.comenius.com/idioms>). It features a monthly idiom plus audio and examples. Looks good for intermediate learners.

A really neat site for learners of different levels is at the on-line TESL journal (<http://www.a4esl.org/>) It has vocabulary quizzed, grammar through context, puzzles and bilingual quizzes. Fun to explore

Cool Word of The Day is from the Merriam Webster Dictionary Company. Every day a word is chosen and students can click define to see the dictionary definition. Although this isn't a very interesting or original way to learn definitions, they do have various word games to practice that might be interesting to students.

Well, these sites should get you started. They all have links as well, so let us know if you find any good sites.

Thoughts to consider

How is responsibility for learning shared between the teacher and student? Does the teacher (school system) have the responsibility to dictate the vocabulary words students must learn, just like students in a math class must cover certain points (remember research study in the Teacher Talk from a few weeks ago)? What will happen if teachers don't teach these words? Will students not learn the words we or someone else considers necessary, or will they just learn them in a different order? When I learned Spanish, none of the words my teachers taught me stayed in my head until I was in a situation where I needed to communicate them. What do you think?

Well, that's all for this week. As usual thank you for all your comments. If you would like to write with comments or suggestions, or you know someone who would like to be included on this e-mail list, write us at cape@flex.com
Mahalo and have a nice week,

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. Mahalo!

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