

How to Make Sure That There Is Something Learnt

Sibporn Sihsobhon

Chulalongkorn University Language Institute

One way to make sure that students understand what teachers are saying is to have teachers constantly get a response from learners.

I still remember when I first started teaching I put all my focus on the textbook. Wasn't that the reason we all went to class? By the end of the term there were chapters to be covered, so I'd better start teaching them; otherwise, by the end of this period I wouldn't cover what I had planned to cover. So there I was, talking to myself for two hours.

It wasn't until one day when I sat in class, as a participant in some lecture I don't even remember the name, did I realize how irrelevant I felt listening to someone talking about something I didn't understand.

One easy way to assure teachers that students understand what they are saying is to ask them to repeat what he or she has just said. This should work with a wide range of classroom activities. Instead of asking "Do you understand what I said?" which rarely gets any response back, be it because they don't know what's going on or they know the answer but they are just too shy to act differently from their classmates. Asking learners to repeat what you said, you'll know instantly whether they understand you or are completely lost.

Moreover, constantly asking learners questions is a good way to keep them alert.

Bear in mind that they need some time to understand the question, think about the answer, and put words together so there should be a pause after the question before calling out anyone's name. Teachers ought to tolerate some silence in class. This will also allow learners some reflection time. However, there will always be some students who never raise their hand, so keep the student list handy or use name tags. Calling those sitting in the back is an effective way to keep the pace of the lesson lively.

Even taking attendance at the beginning of the class can be turned into a warm-up exercise. I found this activity from **Creative Questions** by *Natalie Hess and Laurel Pollard*. The students are asked to grade how they really feel from 1-10 as their names are called. Ten is like that feeling when their true love agrees to marry them; one means they almost want to die. After the teacher goes through all the students' names, invite learners to ask you questions. Now, you'll know their moods and energy levels before you start your lesson. Should there be any response that elicits interest or amusement in class, the teacher can encourage classmates to ask, but they never have to discuss the reason for their number unless they want to. On some occasions, a particular student may provoke some interesting points in class, the teacher can encourage the other students to ask

questions. The teacher should not be afraid of losing control of the class. I have found that in the absence of teacher-student control, students can relax and begin to enjoy the learning experience.

When it comes to reading, I recently discovered that one of my classes started to enjoy reading even some rather difficult texts after I asked them to keep a reading journal. I ask students three questions before assigning a reading exercise. *What have you learnt from this article? What do you think about it? And how do you feel about it?* I find this assignment helpful in terms of helping students come to grips with the ideas or content of the text rather than focusing on the structure or organization all

the time. This reminds them about what they have read as they write about it; and most importantly, they have a chance to reflect on what they have read. So reading and keeping a journal, I found that students, even weaker ones, understand more and felt more comfortable reading difficult texts. Keeping a journal automatically offers learners a good opportunity to improve their writing as well.

Sometimes wanting too much to get ahead makes us rush without enjoying the journey. However, the faster we wish to get through the task, the slower we go. Slow down, get more responses, hurry less, and allow time for real learning.

The Author

Sibporn Sihsobhon is currently an English teacher at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute and the Head of the Extra Curricular Activity Unit, organizing various activities encouraging students to enjoy learning and using English outside the classroom.