

Sustaining Students' Motivation to Learn

Let students take over the language (or the activity)

Hand over responsibility to the students

Allow students to choose topics for discussion

Have students decide if they want correction and how much correction they want

Direct students to talk to each other, not only to the teacher

Encourage students to use a monolingual dictionary to find information themselves

Provide plenty of opportunity for students to speak spontaneously

Have students do improvised presentations as well as prepared ones

Working Cooperatively

- fosters positive interdependence
- allows a mixed-proficiency group of students to interact
- encourages individual accountability
- promotes the development of cross-cultural social skills
- encourages self-monitoring
- encourages reflections, discussions, and feedback

The teacher's role is to provide clear objectives, explain why the students are being asked to do a particular activity, monitor communication, and provide feedback.

Various student roles within a cooperative group can be:

materials handler

encourager

reader

recorder

writer

timekeeper

illustrator

reporter

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Listening is the integral tool for language learning.

"Without listening there is no language learning." Chapter 18 "Teaching Listening" in *Teaching by Principles* 3rd ed. by H. Douglas Brown, p. 299.

Do you know when your students are listening? How do you know?

Attachment one, from *Teaching Large Multilevel Classes* by Natalie Hess "Quiet Signals" p. 116 - Great for helping control the classroom environment and getting students ready to listen.

Also from the same text, "When Listening is Important" and "Suggestions for Improving Listening", p.168

Attachment two, Laura Janusik's handout from 2013 ILA Convention, *A Research-Based Approach to Teaching and Training Listening through Listening Metacognitions*.

Attachment three, "Board Games" by John Hughes, and "Laughter in the Language Classroom" by Rose Senior, from the *English Teaching Professional*, Issue 42, January 2006, p.15. and p. 63.

Bronia's fun and games activities:

"Everybody who _____ change seats"

Students sit in a circle. One seat is in the middle of the circle. The person in the middle of the circle says the sentence above filling in the blank space.

For example:

Everybody who is wearing jeans change seats.

or

Everybody who has two brothers change seats.

or

Everybody who likes ice cream change seats.

etc.

Communicating about Objects

Use color rods to communicate what you want, what you have. Students must listen to each other. (see "The Silent Way" in *Teaching by Principles* 3rd ed., by Brown p. 28)

For Example:

Please give me a green rod.

Put the rod there. Put the red rod here.

I have two yellow rods.

How many rods do you have?

What color are they?

The red rod is shorter than the blue rod.

etc.

Also, students can communicate about the objects they brought to class either in their book-bags, purses, or their pockets.

Students ask to borrow each other's items, describe the items, ask about the price, etc.

Before the end of the class the teacher needs to make sure that all the items used are back with their original owners.

The Whisper Game

The teacher divides the class into teams. Each team stands in a line. The teacher whispers a sentence to the first member of the team. The first team member whispers the sentence to the second member, the second to the third, until the last member has heard the sentence. Depending on the student's ability, the last student can either write the whispered sentence on the board or on a piece of paper, or the student can repeat the sentence to the entire class.

Teams get points for accuracy, not only in meaning, but also in grammar and pronunciation.

Describe Someone in Class

Students take turns describing a student in the class. The description starts with the general and ends with something very specific about that student.

For Example:

This person is a woman.

She is a beautiful woman.

She has hair.

She is wearing pants.

She is wearing shoes.

Her eyes are brown.

Her hair is curly.

Eventually the student must say something that is unique about that person. For example, her name begins with a B or she is wearing a blue blouse or something that is specific only to that person.

All the students have to listen and stand up if the description matches them. Eventually one by one students sit down when the description does not match their appearance.

Songs

Transcribe songs then sing them together.

Use a cloze activity and listen for specific words in a song.

Play musical chairs while the students are listening to the song.

Ask students to put cut up lyrics in order while they listen to the song.

See, Say, Hear, and Touch

Bring various objects to class. Ask the students to look at these objects, say what they are, and touch them.

Then cover the objects with some cloth and ask the students to describe what is under the cloth.

Eavesdropping to Develop Listening Skills

For homework, practice a few minutes of eavesdropping each day. Go to a restaurant or a coffee shop or the lobby of a busy building. Sit in this busy area where you don't look out of place with a notebook and pen, or a computer that you can type on. Try to write down what you hear.

Observe the people who are talking. Look at their gestures.

Listen with intention.

Share what you saw and heard with a friend.

Congratulate yourself for being so brave and observant.

Listening to your classmates presentation:

Each student chooses a topic and prepares a **two** minute speech about the topic. Each student also prepares ten questions that are related to his/her topic. The questions must be general enough so that the other students can talk about them.

For example:

If the topic is *food*, the student talks about food for two minutes. Then the student has ten questions related to food that the other student in class can answer:

1. What is the most popular food in your country?
2. Who is the cook at home in your country?
3. Where do you shop for food? How often do you shop for food?
4. How often do you eat in restaurants in your country? Here?
5. Are there special foods you eat during a holiday?
6. Do you ever cook with your friends, here?
7. Do you know anyone who does not eat meat?
8. Why don't they eat meat?
9. Who cleans the dishes at your home? Here?

10. What do you like to drink with your food?

Students take turns presenting their topic and questions. One or two students are assigned to present in class each day. After one student presents the two-minute presentation, all the students get into groups of two or three to discuss the questions. After the groups have discussed the questions, all the students communicate about the discussions they had.

Students should submit their topic and questions to the teacher ahead of time, so the teacher can edit the questions and make copies of the questions to distribute to the class.

5.2 The quiet signal

Aim organization, listening to directions, fluency practice

Level all levels

Time 10–15 minutes

Preparation Decide on what your quiet signal (the signal for students to stop the group task and wait quietly) will be. (See Box 62 for suggestions.)

Procedure

- 1 Tell students that since language demands a lot of practice, much time in class will be spent on talking in pairs and in small groups. To do this successfully it is *very important* that everyone knows just when an activity starts, what everyone is supposed to do, and when an activity ends. This is why you will establish and stick with a certain quiet signal that everyone must know and recognize.
- 2 Show the class the quiet signal and tell them that you will spend some time practicing it.
- 3 Assign students a topic to talk about in pairs. (See Box 61 for suggestions.)
- 4 In pairs, students talk until the conversation seems animated and lively.
- 5 Use the quiet signal and time how long it takes the class to get quiet.
- 6 Say, 'Congratulations students. That only took you ... minutes. But since we will have to do this many times during each lesson, I want it to go even faster. Let's see if we can practice one more time, and make the quiet signal work very, very quickly.'
- 7 Repeat the procedure with another topic.
- 8 Again, congratulate students, and if you feel that it is necessary repeat one more time.

Box 60 Possible group work tasks

- Sorting peanuts by size and/or shape.
- Deciding on how many number combinations make 36 (or any other number).
- Arranging loose sentence strips into a story.
- Arranging several pictures into story form and writing the story.
- Doing a crossword puzzle or a word-search.
- Writing a letter of complaint.
- Arranging a list of activities from most to least liked.
- Compiling a list of compliments for other members of the class.

Box 61 Suggestions for pair talk

- My favorite vacation
- A holiday I love
- A film I enjoyed
- My favorite restaurant
- What I like to do on weekends
- Wedding ceremonies
- Funeral ceremonies

Working well in groups

Box 62 Suggestions for quiet signals

- Blinking over-head lights
- Ringing a bell
- Whistling with a whistle
- Ringing a tambourine
- Beating a drum
- Raising both arms upward – as soon as any student sees you do this, they should stop talking and follow suit until all arms are raised and quiet reigns.



Note

Use the quiet signal consistently, and it will serve you well! You will soon notice that students help you to implement it.

7.7 What kind of a listener am I?

Aim improving listening skills

Level intermediate–advanced

Time fluid

Preparation If you have a video of a film and have access to TV/VCR equipment, have it ready (any film will do). If you don't have any such equipment, use any short interesting reading.

Procedure

- 1 Together with students, make a blackboard list of times when listening is important. (See Box 80 for suggestions.)
- 2 In small groups, students talk about what they can do to improve their listening skills. Listen to reports from groups and write the suggestions up on the board. (See Box 81 for suggestions.)
- 3 Ask for a show of hands, when you ask *Who does this?* about various activities on the blackboard list.
- 4 Ask *Is there a suggestion here about something you haven't yet done to improve your listening but you could start doing?*
- 5 In pairs, students talk about how they could improve their listening skills.

Optional follow-up

- Play the opening scene of the film you have brought with the TV set turned around so that the students can't see the film.
- In small groups, students decide what the scene was about. Speakers from each group report.
- Ask *What were the clues (hints) that told you what this was about?*
- Play the scene again in the same way.
- In small groups, students decide whether they have changed their minds about anything.
- Play the scene again, this time with both sight and sound. Students will be very happy if they predicted correctly and surprised if they did not. Analyze the language of the scene by noting the words that either gave correct or incorrect clues.

Variation

If you don't have TV/VCR equipment, you can read a story out loud with your back to the class, and after the second reading, have them look at the text.

Making students responsible for their own learning

Box 80 When listening is important

- When someone gives you directions on how to get to their house on the phone.
- When watching a movie or a TV program.
- When listening to the weather report.
- When listening to a restaurant server telling you what is on the menu.
- In class.
- During a lecture.
- When announcements are given – in school, at the airport, in a bus station.
- When the doctor tells you what medicines to take and when to take them.
- When you get directions.
- During a physical education lesson, when an instructor is telling you what to do.
- When listening to telephone messages.
- When you call up to find out about films.
- When a lawyer explains a contract to you.
- When your landlord tells you about the rules of the apartment.

Box 81 Suggestions for improving listening

- Ask people to please repeat.
- Listen to news programs when you already know the news.
- Re-play your telephone messages several times.
- Go to films that you have already seen with subtitles in your own language.
- For listening to lectures, learn transition words like *First, second, third, the important point is, moreover, to clarify, in conclusion.*
- Watch TV programs about material that you are familiar with.
- Listen to the way people in restaurants or on the bus talk.
- Listen to tourists who speak the native language.
- Listen to songs several times and try to write the words down.
- Get some good book listening tapes from the library and listen to them when you exercise.

A Research-Based Approach to Teaching and Training Listening through Listening Metacognitions

Laura A. Janusik, Ph.D.

Presentation at the Annual Convention of the International Listening Association,
Montreal, Canada, June 2013

Janusik & Keaton Metacognitive Listening Scale (2011)

Factor

Problem Solving

When I guess the meaning of a word in a class lecture or discussion, I think back to everything else that I have heard, to see if my guess makes sense.

~~I use the general idea of the lecture or discussion to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't understand.~~

~~I use the words I understand to guess the meaning of the words I don't understand when listening to class lectures and discussions.~~

Planning-Evaluation

After listening in class, I think back to how I listened, and about what I might do differently next time in class.

Before I start to listen in class, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen.

I have a goal in mind as I listen in class.

As I listen in class, I periodically ask myself if I am satisfied with my level of comprehension.

Directed Attention

When my mind wanders in class, I recover my concentration right away.

~~I try to get back on track when I lose concentration while listening in class.~~

~~As I listen in class, I quickly adjust my interpretation if I realize that it is not correct.~~

~~I consciously make meaning in my head as I listen to class lectures and discussions.~~

3 factor model applied to students in the Midwest. Unidimensional model, containing only highlighted probes, found valid and reliable for 37 colleges/universities in the US, plus students in Finland, Germany, and Japan.

Defined

Metacognitive listening strategies include both self-reflection and self-direction (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, & Tafaghodtari, 2006), and they help listeners answer the question, “Am I understanding what I’m listening to, and if not, which skill or skills can I implement to get back on track?”

Research Basis

The initial 3 factor instrument was developed on a study of 142 students in a midwest college (Janusik & Keaton, 2010). The unidimensional model was developed from a study of 1,445 students from the United States, Finland, Germany, and Japan. The unidimensional instrument was found valid and reliable in each individual country (Janusik & Keaton, 2013).

Today’s Focus

Today focus will target the following:

Planning and Evaluation

1. Google it!

Planning/Problem Solving

2. What’s that Word?

Directed Attention

3. Focus!

Google It! (Building Schemas)		
Planning Evaluation	Time Needed in Class: 15 minutes	Factor Targeted: Planning for listening by building the schema
Metacognitive Strategy(s):	Building Student Schema to Make Meaning of Incoming Information	
Objectives:	To provide the students with a strategy for better “catching” and retaining new information.	
Materials Needed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students need to take notes ○ Instructor needs lecture materials 	
Lesson Outline and Activity:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. For homework prior to the lecture, ask students to Google the topic of the next lecture. You may be as general or as specific as you’d like. For example, “Google Gender and Communication” or “Google how do males and females listen differently?” <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Write down and bring to class 3 – 5 things they did not know. II. At the beginning of class, students should break into small groups of 4 – 6 students. Each student should share the 3-5 things they did not know. III. After all students share, the group should come up with 2 things they still don’t know. IV. Each group shares their 2 things they don’t know, and, if possible, the instructor writes them on the board. V. Instructor Lectures and/or Leads Group Discussion. When possible, tie new information to questions on the board. 	
Debrief:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the lecture, students can either break into original groups or have an entire group discussion on how the questions on the board can now be answered based on what connections they made. 	
Alternatives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of having all students complete the homework, students can be assigned different days to do the Googling and share with their classmates. 	

What's that Word?		
Planning Problem Solving	Time Needed in Class: 10 minutes	Factor Targeted: Planning for listening by defining words for the lecture
Metacognitive Strategy(s):	Planning ahead by defining words that are necessary to understand the material	
Objectives:	To provide the students with the definitions of words critical to understanding the new material	
Materials Needed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students need to take notes ○ Instructor needs lecture materials 	
Lesson Outline and Activity:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. At the beginning of class, ask students to review their notes and/or the readings to identify at least two words that were new to them. II. Place all words on the board. Students can come up to the board to write their words or simply provide them to the instructor who writes them down III. After all words are written down, make sure students understand what each means. See "alternatives" below IV. Instructor Lectures and/or Leads Group Discussion. When possible, point out the words on the board. 	
Debrief:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the end of class, ask if any of the words on the board are still confusing, and further define, if needed. 	
Alternatives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor may define all words, students could get into small groups to define words, or instructor may ask class for which words need further defining. 	

Focus!		
Directed Attention	Time Needed in Class: 5 minutes to explain	Factor Targeted: Directed Attention
Metacognitive Strategy(s):	Regaining attention and concentration	
Objectives:	To provide the students with the self-knowledge of how often they lose focus, where it goes, as well as a means to fix it.	
Materials Needed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students need the "Focus" handout 	
Lesson Outline and Activity:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. At the beginning of class, provide each person with a copy of the handout and have them kept out the entire time. II. Instruct individuals to keep track each time they notice their concentration waning by tallying in the appropriate row and writing notes, where applicable. III. It is not a contest, nor will it be shown to anyone or collected, so individuals are encouraged to be honest. 	
Debrief:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the end of the session, ask individuals to review where they had the most distractions and what might be done to better control them. For example, phones should be turned off and placed in a backpack so they are out of sight. If they are simply turned to vibrate, attention goes to the phone to see what they just missed. 	
Alternatives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If used in a classroom, students might be tasked with identifying a "plan" and how they'll implement it. The plan should last at least two full weeks in all classes. For example, "For two full weeks, I'll turn my phone off during class and place it in my backpack." At the end of two weeks, students should report on the results. 	

Focus!

Distractor	# of Times	Notes
Cell Phone		
Computer		
Other Person		
Food and Drink		
Personal Objects		
Daydreaming or Future/Past Thinking		
Other		

Instructions: During today's lecture, tally the number of time you lose focus. Take the time to identify where your focus goes. The 'Notes' column might offer a personal explanation that makes sense only to you. For example, "milk" might mean you are reminding yourself to pick up milk on the way home.

Materials design made easy!

John Hughes proposes some practical procedures for you to do it yourself.



Board games

Rationale

Imagine you have been teaching students the language they'll need for socialising and meeting people. To practise and review the language, you could write the following list of tasks on the board, put the students into pairs and tell them to practise each task in turn:

- 1 Introduce yourself to your partner.
- 2 Offer your partner a drink or something to eat.
- 3 Talk about your favourite music.
- 4 Say goodbye.

However, the board game shown on the next page also practises and extends the language needed for socialising in the context of a party. Furthermore, with the tasks re-packaged as a board game, the students are suddenly presented with something more inherently interesting and motivating. As classroom material, 'language board games' manage to be all of the following:

Fun and competitive

Activities like board games are social and fun. The idea of winning and losing appeals to many students and increases motivation.

Generative

Not only does the board game encourage students to use target language, but other language can be used in order to complete the task, such as explaining rules and the language of playing, eg *it's your turn*, *it's my go*, etc.

Flexible

Board games offer flexibility in terms of both controlled and free practice. Certain tasks on the board game will require very fixed language (see square 6 on the 'At the party!' board game on page 16), but you can also introduce more open tasks which allow students to draw on all their English and be more creative (see square 4).

Supportive

Even though players are supposedly competing to win, the board game brings three or four students together in the common struggle of suggesting ways to complete the task on a square. The most interesting board game tasks will automatically involve other players anyway.

Revision

Board games allow you to revise language from a series of lessons and provide tangible evidence of how much has been taught and learnt.

Common design considerations

When designing a board, there are a number of features you can include. Here are the most common:

Layout and route

The example given on page 16 is the common rectangular format where players begin on *START* and follow the squares in an anti-clockwise route to the *FINISH*. However, there's no reason why your board can't take the form of a circle, a grid, a winding path or a wheel with alternative routes to follow (as in the famous *Trivial Pursuit* game).

Counters

Players will each need a counter, which represents them, to place on the board. Coloured counters can be bought from toy shops, but any small object will do, such as a key or coin. A dice is the obvious choice for deciding how many squares to move but sometimes it allows players to finish too quickly and not practise the language. One alternative is a coin which can be tossed. If the coin lands on 'heads', a player moves one square and if it lands on 'tails', he or she moves two squares. This has the drawback of being slow and, with groups of three or four, players tend to land on the same square. Another option is a spinner like the one shown on page 16. Cut it out, mount it on card and put a pencil through the middle circle. Spin it and whatever edge it lands on is the number of moves a player must make. Only being able to move one, two or three squares is useful for a small board game like mine which has only 15 squares.

Chance squares

A board game needs variables or elements of chance which slow down or speed up the progress of the players and affect the final outcome. The simplest way is to include squares which provide a reason for the player to move a counter backwards or forwards or even to miss a go. (See squares 5, 8 and 15.)

Language production

Virtually any spoken language can be practised with a board game. Here are some ideas for generating typical language practice:

Communicative squares

Each square contains a communicative task which requires one player to talk to another player in the group. For example, *Ask for another player's opinion* or *Find out another player's favourite hobby*. This will prompt the use of plenty of functional language.

New words

To revise vocabulary recently taught, simply write a new word on each square. When a player lands on a square they must produce a sentence using the word given (or perhaps even give a definition).

Question words

Write one question word such as *When ...? Why ...? Did ...? Who ...? How ...?* on each square. When a player lands on a square they ask another player a question using the question word given. The other player has to answer.

Pictures

Choose a selection of pictures and paste one on each square. For example, the pictures might be of famous people or cities. When a player lands on a square, they have to describe the picture or think of a question they'd like to ask the person in the picture.

Sentence completion

Provide the first half of a sentence on a square (such as the first half of a conditional). The students have to complete it in their own words.

Over to you ...

As a first step, try designing a board game for your next lesson by using the blank template provided on page 17. ▶▶▶



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11

Ask another player for directions to the bathroom.

10

Offer the person opposite something to eat.

9

Ask someone about their job.

8

You meet an old friend. Move forward one square.

12

Ask the person on your right if you can have another drink.

At the party!

Instructions:

- 1 Place your counters on START.
- 2 Turn the spinner. The player with the highest number goes first.
- 3 Turn the spinner and move the number of squares. Follow the directions on the square.
- 4 If you are the first player to land on FINISH, you are the winner. (You have to spin the exact number to land on FINISH; you can't go past it.)

7

Ask another person about their favourite type of music.

13

You arrived very late for the party. Explain why.

6

Ask someone where they are from.

14

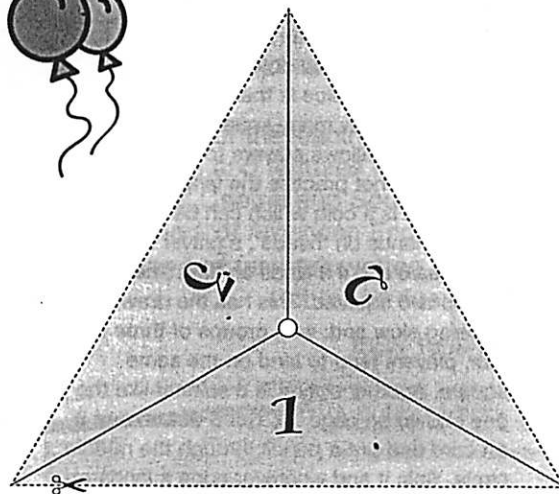
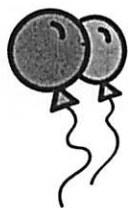
It's time to leave. Say thanks and goodbye to everyone.

5

You spill your drink on the carpet. Move back one square.

15

You can't get a taxi home. Miss a go.



4

Ask another person a question.

FINISH

1

Arrive at the party. Introduce yourself to the other players.

2

Introduce the person on your right to the person on your left.

3

Offer the person opposite a drink.

START

At the party!

Instructions:
 1 Place one counter on START.
 2 Turn the spinner. The player with the highest number goes first.
 3 Put the spinner and move the number of squares. Check the instruction on the card.
 4 If you are the first player to land on FINISH, you are the winner. The last to finish is the loser.
 5 Number of cards: 24. FINISH: you can't go past it!

1 Write at the party. Introduce yourself to the other players.

2 Introduce the person on your right to the person on your left.

3 Clap the person opposite a drink.

4 Ask another person a question.

5 Move back on the card. You still your drink.

6 Ask where they get their address.

7 Ask another person about their favourite type of music.

8 Move forward on the card. You meet one person.

9 Offer the person opposite something to eat.

10 Ask someone about their job.

11 Ask the person on your right if you can have another drink.

12 Explain why you spent your late for the party.

13 It's time to leave. Say thank you and goodbye to everyone.

14 It's time to leave. Say thank you and goodbye to everyone.

15 Ask the person on your right if you can have another drink.

16 Offer the person opposite something to eat.

17 Ask someone about their job.

18 Ask the person on your right if you can have another drink.

19 Offer the person opposite something to eat.

20 Ask someone about their job.

21 Ask the person on your right if you can have another drink.

22 Offer the person opposite something to eat.

23 Ask someone about their job.

24 Ask the person on your right if you can have another drink.



In this column **Rose Senior** explains why certain teaching techniques and class management strategies are effective, and identifies specific issues that can assist all language teachers in improving the quality of their teaching.

Laughter in the language classroom

All of us know from personal experience that laughter is a powerful force in any group situation. This is especially true in language classes, where there is so much scope for spontaneous laughter. As they struggle to master the target language, students can find themselves stumbling over the pronunciation of new words, fumbling as they search for the right word to express what they want to say or making statements – either accidentally or on purpose – that sound quite hilarious to those around them. Students can also generate laughter by their actions, reactions or gestures – or by facial expressions ranging from those that show amazement or surprise to those that convey embarrassment or panic. Many teachers have developed personal strategies, including stock gestures, reactions and asides, that they regularly use to generate laughter. This serves to give the atmosphere of their class a quick 'lift' or 'boost'. There are no end of ways in which laughter can be generated in language classes.

How should we as teachers deal with laughter in our classrooms? Should we encourage it, discourage it or simply let it occur naturally? Should we laugh along with our students when something amusing happens or remain distant and aloof? Are there different kinds of laughter in language classrooms and, if so, which kinds are beneficial and which are not? Can there ever be *too little* laughter in language classrooms – or *too much*?

Provided that it's used wisely, laughter functions as a positive force in language classrooms. In the early days of each new course many language teachers make a point of creating a relaxed tone in the classroom, often doing so through humour. For example, if they accidentally misspell a word on the board, they may laughingly point out their slip to the class at large. By

so doing, they not only help students to feel more comfortable and less nervous about the prospect of performing in front of their peers, but also convey the message that making errors is part and parcel of language learning and is nothing to be ashamed of.

As courses continue, some classes become increasingly ready and willing to laugh spontaneously and in unison at the smallest occurrence, ranging from an insect buzzing around the room to someone's books slithering to the floor. In classes with friendly atmospheres, in which the teacher and the students feel comfortable with one another,

quick bursts of laughter (which don't even interrupt the flow of the lesson) serve to reaffirm that a positive group atmosphere prevails within the class as a whole. In such classes increasing numbers of students gradually find themselves pulled into the overall class 'fold'. These include not only high-profile students who are happy to be the focus of class attention, but also quieter students who prefer just to smile or laugh quietly along with everyone else. In classes in which a feeling of vitality and ready responsiveness prevails, teachers report 'lifting' their performance and planning more interesting and dynamic lessons.

The opposite is also true. We've all had classes in which students sit like sacks of potatoes, appearing to find our teaching dull and our humorous initiatives unfunny. Such classes are uphill work. Sometimes one funny incident can break the ice, making a class more responsive from then on. But at other times classes can remain stony-faced for the duration of their courses. Under such circumstances we are denied access to that vital barometer (laughter), which provides us with feedback that our students are alert and responsive to our teaching initiatives. So yes, there

can definitely be too little laughter in language classes.

There can also, of course, be too much laughter. Sometimes, particularly when they're completing a learning task they find too easy, too difficult or too dull, students can take matters into their own hands and start messing around. When this happens, we need to step in quickly. We don't want the development in our classrooms of frivolous, birthday-party atmospheres in which students have a lot of fun but do precious little learning.

We must also remember that laughter in language classrooms falls into two broad categories: 'good' laughter and 'bad' laughter. We must make it crystal clear from the outset that, while we encourage and value friendly, supportive, 'laughing with'-type laughter, in no circumstances will we tolerate unkind, teasing, 'laughing at'-type laughter. While the former is a positive force that draws classes together,

the latter is a negative, destructive force that divides classes, causing cliques to solidify and individuals to feel isolated and demeaned. One of the worst things that a teacher can ever do is to side

with their class against an individual, making cruel jibes at their expense.

In sum, humour is a powerful factor in any group situation and has the potential to be used in ways that can make a positive contribution to classroom language learning. We should, therefore, show our students that we value spontaneous bursts of collective laughter and are happy to laugh alongside everyone else when humorous situations occur. Humour, however, cannot be forced: simply telling jokes to get a laugh is not the answer. **ETJ**

Laughter functions as a positive force in language classrooms

Can there ever be too little laughter in language classrooms – or too much?

Dr Rose

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