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The University Grapevine

For University English Language Teachers

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STRUGGLING WITH MIXED - LEVEL ENGLISH CLASSES?



GIVE THIS A TRY

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From the Editor

I'm very happy to be sending out another wonderful issue of the newsletter. I can honestly say that I have felt extremely motivated by all of the authors, readers and new friends that I have been able to connect with through putting these articles together over the last two months. Please continue to motivate yourselves and each other!

If you are new to *The Grapevine*, please also feel free to follow it on YouTube (NEW!), LinkedIn and Facebook to be a closer part of what we are doing together.

Good luck to you all with whatever you are focused on at the moment. Please remember that the Grapevine community is here to help you feel a part of a positive movement taking us towards a brighter future for both us and our students.

Robert Stroud (TUG Editor)

Feel free to e-mail me. You can also find me on LinkedIn, ResearchGate and Academia.



Engaging Latecoming Students in Online Classes

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Teaching Goal

In online classes, I experience difficulty engaging latecoming students as they may join at different points of a class. Some might miss out on the instructions for a task, so they may wait idly as the others are busy working on it. Some may enter the session when the students are in breakout rooms working on a task, so the latecomers may become disoriented and lose time while waiting inactively. They cannot view notes made in the chat box before they enter the session, so they cannot peruse over the previous notes. It is time-consuming and distracting to keep informing the latecomers about the task at hand verbally one by one, as it breaks the flow of the lesson for the rest of the class. To address these difficulties, I started to employ simple unobtrusive procedures to orient latecomers to the lesson and was pleasantly rewarded by students who were ready to learn about the topic or task at hand as soon as they joined the session. After some time of systematic use of these strategies, I noticed that I started to encounter fewer incidences of latecomers acting as idle participants in online lessons.

Approach

I employed strategies for different cases. I will list the strategies I employed for each below.

Strategy 1. Use the waiting room: To be aware that a student would like to enter the main room during the lesson, a good idea is to turn on the "waiting room" option in the video-conferencing platform before the meeting starts. When the students' names appear in the waiting room during the lesson, you can take note of the latecomers and the stage of the lesson when they have arrived. This gives you a chance to think about giving the right instructions to these students regarding what they are expected to do at the time.

Strategy 2. Send individual messages in the chat box: Send a greeting message to the late-comer individually and give information about the topic and the stage of the lesson. Tell them what you expect them to do. A sample message is below:

"Hello, Isabella. We are working on some new words. Follow my presentation on screen. Any questions?"

Ask the latecomer a question at the end of your message so that you know that they have read and understood your instructions.

If, at the time, you have assigned a reading task to the class, then the latecomer will face a silent meeting room with all the students looking at a text on the screen. In such a case, a sample greeting and instructions would be the following:

"Hello Isabella. Read the text and answer the questions. Time: 5 minutes. Then we will discuss the answers. Any questions?"

In doing so, we not only acknowledge their entry to the lesson, but also assign the responsibility of engaging in the present classwork to them.

The latecomer may have arrived at a time when you have started to play an audio recording. In such a case, the latecomer enters the room when the recording is playing, but gets disoriented due to missing the context, the purpose or the entire meaning of the task. In such cases, send a message in the chat box with the information about the task. A sample is below:

"Hello, Isabella. We are listening to a dialogue between two friends discussing online education. Make a note of the pros and cons mentioned. Any questions?"

The task that the latecomer might be able to perform may change depending on the time that they join the class. You might ask them to do a prediction activity as different from the rest of the class. A sample is below:

"Hello, Isabella. We are watching a couple discussing something. Watch and predict these: How are these people related? What are they talking about? OK?"

Make sure that you get this student to answer these questions in class, so that doing the task is perceived as useful and purposeful.

If the latecomer arrives at the time when the class has worked on a set of exercises, but very short

time is left, you may ask the latecomer to work on the last two or three items only.

The idea is to help the latecomers engage in the task and be a part of the rest of the class soon after they have entered the session.

Strategy 3. Use the breakout rooms: In some cases, the latecomers arrive just after you have completed presenting input and assigned a task based on that input. In such cases, the latecomers need the input that they missed before working on any task. After these latecomers join the session, write a welcoming message to them, set the rest of the class on task, and inform the latecomer to meet you in the breakout room. Create a breakout room and move this student to this breakout room. Now, you can talk through the main points of the input and assign the task. Then, go back to the main session. If the task requires the students to discuss and compare their answers, place them in breakout rooms. At this point, you will need to decide whether to place the latecomer with the rest of the students or not.

- If there are more than one latecomer, place all the latecomers together to discuss. Visit their room as they are discussing their ideas to see if they need help.

- If there is only one latecomer, you may choose to get together with this student in the breakout room to discuss the topic and the task again. Alternatively, you might consider placing this student with two or three of the other students who can provide support to the latecomer.

In some cases, the latecomers arrive when you have already sent the class to the breakout rooms. What you might choose to do will depend on the nature of the task and the timing of the arrival.

- If the latecomer arrives at the beginning for a discussion in the breakout rooms, then you might simply talk through the instructions in the main room before sending the latecomer to one of the breakout rooms.

- If the latecomer arrives towards the end of the discussion in the breakout rooms, then assign them a different task that will be meaningful. You might ask the latecomer to listen to each group's ideas and evaluate their ideas according to a set of criteria.

Pros and Cons

The use of the waiting room helps me to follow up on the latecomers and prevent the likelihood of them getting lost during the lesson. I noticed that I no longer get the response "Sorry, teacher. I came in late and I do not know what we are working on right now," at the time when I am trying to check the answers to an exercise. It also prevents the students from turning off their cameras and engaging in other tasks with the idea that they have lost out on a certain portion of the lesson anyway and that they might as well do something else online.

Using the chat box and the breakout rooms to inform the latecomers of the current task in on-going lessons upon their entry opens up a dialogue with the teacher and connects the students with the class. This also personalizes the instruction, helping the student to relate to the lesson.

There might be times when the latecomer does not respond to your messages or fails to perform the tasks that you have set for them. You might need to talk to your latecomers after the lesson about what they have missed that day and what they may need to do to catch up.

In the beginning, you might feel that writing in the chat box during your presentation stage is distracting for you. I suggest that you prepare standard responses in a document to fit the possible cases. In this way, you can cut and paste from your stock of responses and modify according to the situation at hand. In time, the class and yourself become accustomed to this practice. The same can be said about arranging breakout rooms. To build confidence, you might need to practice opening up a breakout room, moving one student there and returning to the main meeting room a few times. A good strategy is to ask a few of your colleagues or students to join you after class hours to practice this skill.

As these strategies become part of teaching, the teacher and students tend to internalize the steps, which helps the smooth running of your classes online.

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How to Publish a Teaching Article

Please follow the guidelines to submit an article to the newsletter:

Content:

Ideas that help ESL/EFL university teachers around the world improve their craft are warmly welcome. Some topic suggestions are: online teaching, student motivation, classroom management and teaching material design.

Language of Submission:

All articles will need to be submitted in English.

Length of Submission:

Ideally, articles should be longer than 500 words and no more than 1500 words.

Editing:

Please check your spelling/grammar carefully as it cannot be corrected for you (and the article may not be published).

Citations:

Citations/research data are not necessary. If you do want to include some, please keep them to a minimum.

How to Submit:

Submit your article by completing the boxes in the template and sending this file directly to robertstroud@hosei.ac.jp.