

Teaching Vocabulary in the Student-Centered Classroom

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An examination of both literature and textbooks in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language shows us that student-centered instruction is the direction in which we are moving. This trend is especially apparent in the area of oral skills. This article will describe techniques which incorporate student-centered learning activities in the teaching of vocabulary.

Student-centered activities vary in the amount of structure required. Low-level EFL students are able to interact with each other but need a structured setting in which to interact. By using student-centered activities, each student spends more time actually practicing the vocabulary and grammatical structures in conversation than when the teacher interacts with the group student by student. The students are motivated because they're actually communicating with another person.

This article will demonstrate a technique using vocabulary items involving occupations. The technique can be used with other categories and grammatical structures.

When presenting occupations as vocabulary in a low-level EFL class, first the vocabulary is presented in statements with third person pronouns: "He is a policeman." or "She is a florist.", etc. As the teacher holds up pictures of occupations, students repeat these statements after the teacher. Next the teacher asks questions, always in this order: Yes/No, Or, and Information questions. The questions are presented in this order because students are not required to produce the new vocabulary item until they have heard and repeated it in a statement and used the items in question forms for both Yes/No and Or questions.¹ Finally, students are asked to produce the item in an information question and, having

¹In both Yes/No and OR questions, students are given the item--they are not required to produce it as in information questions.

heard it so many times, they will probably be successful in answering. In the questioning of students, the teacher should initiate the question formation and then, at the point when the teacher feels the students are ready, gradually shift this responsibility to the students themselves.

1) T: He is a policeman.	S: He is a policeman.
2) T: Is he a policeman?	S: Yes, he is./ No, he isn't.
3) T: S ₁ , ask S ₂ if S ₃ is a policeman.	S ₁ : Is S ₃ a policeman? S ₂ : Yes, he is./ No, he isn't.
4) T: Is he a policeman or a teacher.	S: He's a policeman.
5) S ₁ , ask S ₂ a question.	S ₁ : Is he a policeman or a ___? S ₂ : He's a ___.

Next the teacher gives each student a picture and then asks: "Are you a ___?" and students reply affirmatively or negatively. Gradually, the teacher has the students ask each other Yes/No and Or questions. Now the teacher asks each student: "What are you?" and then asks the class: "What is he/she?". Then the students ask each other the questions. Thus Steps 6, 7 and 8 in the procedure are:

6) T: Are you a ___?	S: Yes, I am./No. I'm not.
7) What are you?	S: I'm a ___.
8) What is he/she?	S: He's/She's a ___.

For the next part of the lesson, the teacher will have prepared a set of small copies of the pictures of the vocabulary being used; each mounted on a card. Also, the teacher should prepare a set of cards with sentences such as: "I am a policeman." There should be one sentence for each picture. Each set of cards is shuffled. Each student is given one of each kind of card at random. The students then must get up and walk around asking each other questions based on the pictures: "Are you a ___?" or "What are you?". When a student finds someone with the sentence card which matches the picture he/she has, the student takes the sentence card and returns to his/her seat.

Now the teacher asks students, "What does a policeman do?" The teacher helps the students formulate sentences describing specific tasks of that occupation. The sentences are written on the board and the teacher then asks the

class/individuals, "What does a ___ do?". Next, students ask each other the same questions. Finally, the teacher divides the class into two teams. One team asks the other questions such as: "What does a ___ do?" or "Who catches thieves?". If the other team answers correctly, they receive a point. No one member of a team may ask or answer twice until every team member has asked/answered a question.

The teacher now passes out two cards per student; however, this time each student receives a card with a picture of an occupation and a card with a sentence describing that job or a different occupation. The students must walk around the room asking each other questions such as "Do you catch thieves?" until they have found a match for their picture. When finished, each student should have one picture and one matching sentence.

If the class is studying the third person singular or the simple present tense form of verbs, here is another exercise: The teacher gives each student a card with a picture. The students do not let anyone see their picture.

T (Pointing to S ₂): Does he/she catch thieves?
S ₁ (to teacher): I don't know.
(to S ₂): Do you catch thieves?
S ₂ : Yes, I do./No, I don't. (S ₂ answers according to his/her picture.)
S ₁ (to teacher): Yes, he/she does./No, he/she doesn't. (S ₁ answers according to S ₂ 's response.)

This type of question and answer interaction continues with another student taking the role of the teacher in the dialogue.

In addition to the above, the same cards may be used by students to play *Go Fish* and *Memory*. To play *Go Fish*, shuffle either two sets of pictures or a set of pictures and a set of sentences together. Each of the two players is dealt eight cards and the remainder are placed in a pile in front of the two players. One player asks the other, "Do you have a policeman?". If the answer is yes, the second player must give the first that card. If the answer is no, the first student must draw a card. If there is a match, the first player has another turn. If not, the second player now has an opportunity to ask a question. Play continues until all the cards are matched and the one with the most pairs is the winner.

To play *Memory*, two sets of cards are shuffled together and all are placed face down on a desk. Any number of people can play. One person turns over two cards. If there is a match, his/her turn continues. If not, the next person plays. Play continues until all the cards have been matched.

These two games are good for review. In both games, any sets of cards may be used--two sets of picture cards, picture cards and single-word cards (such as policeman), or picture cards and sentence cards describing the person ("I am a policeman.") or ("I catch thieves.")

This technique may also be used for teaching adjectives, verbs or categories of nouns. I have used it effectively with *The Oxford Picture Dictionary* which I use with other texts for supplementary vocabulary or by itself with beginning EFL students. If you do not have access to a copy machine, draw or have your students draw the pictures. I have used this technique with students ranging in age from elementary school students to adults. It is successful at any level since the students are communicating with each other in the target language.