

Power Tools for the Teacher's Toolbox

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Tool kit #1--Cooperative Learning Strategies

Effective Cooperative Learning structures have P.I.E.S.: Positive Interdependence, Individual Accountability, Equal Participation, and Simultaneous Interaction.

Learn more at Kagan Cooperative Learning: http://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/

C.L. helps “build the will” in the classroom by offering opportunities for team building, class building, communication skills, mastery, thinking skills, and information sharing. “Cooperative Learning in the Foreign Language Classroom”

<http://inet.dpb.dpu.dk/infodok/sprogforum/Espr25/Stenlev.pdf>

Blind Pictures: Students work in teams of four and will need their own paper and a marker or crayon in a color different than their teammates. With eyes open, ask them to draw a form of what will be used for the activity, i.e. the outline of a human body, a house, a table, the inside of a refrigerator, a store window with a mannequin and a table, etc. Tell them to close their eyes as you describe the first object. Have them open their eyes to admire their work. Close eyes again as they pass papers to the left. Repeat previous steps as you give another clue. As students become more comfortable with the vocabulary, they may be asked to give clues to their team. Another variation is that at the end of the activity, they receive a text of the clues and compare the drawings on their original form. *A fun team building activity that allows practice of vocabulary in context.*

Team Poster: Students work in teams of four and draw with marker in a color different than their teammates. Team also receives one large sheet of paper and instruction sheet. Students rotate through role of reader, reading aloud one of the descriptions on the sheets that indicate a color or colors in which it is to be drawn. Teammates listen to description and draw only the items mentioned in their color(s). *Good team building activity providing strong input through reading and listening practice.*

Agreement Circle: Students form a circle with the teacher in the center. The teacher will read a statement. If students agree with it, they take steps forward to indicate their level of agreement. If they disagree, they take steps backward to show their disagreement. Be sure to indicate areas of the classroom that are “off limits” i.e. the teacher’s work area, computers, etc. during the activity. *I like this structure as a way to present and practice new vocabulary in context.*

Inside/Outside Circle: Students work with a partner and face each other as they make an inside and an outside (concentric) circle. The teacher will designate either the outside or inside circle to begin. Students may read material to each other, practice verb or vocabulary drills, or ask each other interview questions. After x minutes, give directions to move one or both circles in opposite directions. Sometimes I instruct them to change papers before they move. As they rotate, students will count in Spanish or can move by days of the week, months of the year, or count by tens or hundreds. This structure can be used to check homework quickly and interactively.

Inside/Outside Circle for Presentation of Reports: Instead of having the entire class passively listen to one report after another, as has been traditionally done in the classroom, consider using Inside/Outside Circle. The advantage is that it dramatically cuts down on the time needed for presentations which will also keep up interest. Students will end up presenting their report several times to their peers through this structure. This allows them the advantage of editing their material and becoming stronger in their presentational skills. The teacher should pass throughout the circle continuously to evaluate students' oral work with a simple rubric. Students' written work will also be used for evaluation.

Tool kit #2--Information Gap Activities

Information gap activities are good for 100% participation and can be written to target specific vocabulary or grammatical structures. They also are fun for students.

Lógico / Ilógico--Students work with a partner and receive a handout with two different versions of the activity (Student A and Student B). Student A will note that the first sentence on his paper is italicized indicating it is the first part of a sentence. Student B then will read the corresponding statement (not italicized). Students will either write or orally indicate if it was logical or illogical. Student B then will read the second sentence on the page because it was italicized. Student A responds with their part and they continue throughout the activity. Often, I'll write offbeat statements about teachers in the school and/or celebrities. Debrief quickly with the whole class by calling on sets of partners to only read the 2-3 funniest combinations and ask classmates to answer together with "lógico" or "ilógico".

National Enquirer--I lead off by talking about how good reporters must always check their facts. I then ask students to name news sources that may not always be the most reliable. And in tongue in cheek fashion, I jokingly say that if something appears in the *National Enquirer*, than of course it can be believed. Students work with a partner and receive handout with two different versions of the activity (Student A and Student B). Students will take turns reading headlines or statements from each other's papers. The headlines can feature vocabulary or grammatical structures. If the same statement shows up on both papers, it has been corroborated by another source. It is true. If it doesn't, then it is false. To keep students carefully listening to an entire statement, you can make some almost the same except an adverb or adjective may be different which would render the statement untrue.

Hear/Circle: (posted by Cherice Montgomery, FLTeach Listserv)

Students work with a partner and receive one paper that has words written in English and Spanish. Words appear all over the paper sometimes right side up, sideways, maybe even upside down. Each student receives a different colored marker or crayon. The teacher will call the word in English and students look for it in Spanish and circle it. If the teacher calls it in Spanish, they circle it in English. The winner is the person who has circled the most words. If they make a mistake, they can cross it out. Cherice finds it to be a great vocab. review before a test and uses it with direct object pronouns, stem-changing and reflexive verbs. Try it with pictures instead of words.

Lisa's variation: I have used this activity to provide lots of exposure to commonly used commands. I'll explain a situation, and sentences must find the most logical command that corresponds to that situation. Sometimes there is more than one possibility.

For more ideas:

FLTeach posting on paired activities from Cherice Montgomery, Sept. 1997:

<http://tinyurl.com/3ssdr9z>

Match Mine is another favorite activity and is explained here:

<http://www.ncfb.com/aitc/gardenInt/matchMine.pdf>

Tool kit #3--Activities With Little To No Prep

Partner Practice--Students work with a partner and receive a handout with two different versions of the activity (Student A and Student B). The handout is written in two columns with questions in the left hand column and answers in the right hand column. Instruct them to fold the paper down the middle and then hold up the paper so that their partner only sees the questions in the left hand column. A student will verify that his partner has answered correctly by being sure that his answer matches the one written in the right hand column which is visible only to him. Depending on the degree of difficulty, students switch off after every three or five problems. This activity works for vocabulary and especially for verb conjugation. For a sponge activity as well as to put the words into context, I'll tell partners that when they finish, they should randomly point to one of the problems and their partner must put the word into a sentence that makes sense. Take turns and keep going until time is called.

La Espalda--This is a rote activity and should only be used occasionally but it can be an effective warm up or way to fill in a few extra minutes at the end of class. Students work with a partner of their choosing. They will write a word on their partner's back between their shoulder blades which their partner must identify. Because of the physicality of this activity, it is important that they choose a partner with whom they feel comfortable. They take turns until time is called. I've used this especially for stem-changing verbs where the receiving students sense that a spelling change has or hasn't happened.

Story Boards / Story Sequencing: Students write a simple story with 8 to 10 events and create a story board with drawings that correspond to each event. They cut up the drawings, mix them up, and give them to a partner who will lay them out on a desktop. As the story is read aloud to them, the partner sequences the pictures into the correct order. I use the Inside/Outside Circle structure to give students multiple opportunities to practice with different students. After a few rotations, they will be able to tell their story without looking at their paper.

Variations: When a partner has successfully sequenced the story squares, I sometimes ask them to retell their partner's story too. And I often throw a big curve when I ask them to shuffle both of their pictures together and place them face down. They'll use the story board squares to create a new story by taking turns in selecting a picture from the stack that must play upon what their partner just said.

O la una o la otra: Ask students to imagine there is a line dividing the classroom. The teacher says two items that often are a hard choice such as "hamburguesa o pizza" or "la música clásica o la música country". You may also wish to project photos of the two items to reinforce the vocabulary (and make the food items appear even more delectable). Students must go to one or the other to show their preference; they may not straddle the line. To keep students from blindly following their friends, tighten up the activity by asking them to write their preference on an index card or sheet of paper as proof of their answer. *This is favorite team building activity I use in the first few days of classes regardless of level as we learn more about one another as well as work to create an accepting class environment.*

Art Bubbles: Find famous artwork by Hispanic artists and insert dialogue bubbles. Students are to write dialogue for the person(s) depicted using target vocabulary and/or structures. The activity can work well for lower as well as upper levels and is an easy way to incorporate art into lessons. See a few I have created at <http://lisalilley.wikispaces.com/> (go to "Resources for Teachers" page)

Flyswatter: This activity is similar to Hear/Circle above but in my version, students receive coins from Spanish speaking countries and one paper that has a variety of words (see format used in Hear/Circle above) or drawings. I have even used transparencies from textbooks that feature lots of activity going on in a scene. Students sit side by side with their desks moved together and the paper placed in the center of the two desks. They put their "outer" hand behind their back when the teacher says "manos atrás". The teacher calls out a word or describes an object. The first person to click upon it with the "outer" hand, wins a point. Students can keep tally on a scrap sheet of paper. (We keep points only out of a sense of competitiveness and rarely play for anything; the activity is fun enough that no reward is required.) After the students have played for a while, I like to bump up the degree of difficulty by describing two or sometimes even three objects. They must listen carefully to all before they can move. *This is a noisy activity but a fabulous way to "build the will".*

Tool kit #4--Performance Assessment

I have linked several resources on Performance Assessment on the wiki I maintain below for my district's teachers:

<http://spsfl.wikispaces.com/3.++Performance+Assessment>

Ideas for performance based assessments:

En el restaurante--Students alternate between role playing a waiter and clients using an authentic menu. Waiters must describe the items and clients will comment on how the food tastes. Problems may arise as clients complain about food or express the need for a service item.

En el mercado al aire libre--Turn your room into a market using the Inside/Outside Circle configuration. For part of the time they will rotate in one direction as a vendedor and the clientes will rotate in the opposite direction. At some point, the teacher will direct them to change roles. In this activity, students describe and haggle over items. Your realia (borrow from your colleagues too) and play money will make it an even more realistic experience. One of my colleagues has a terrific set of fake credit cards that seem to come in the mail all the time. Teacher's Discovery has a set of fake euros: <http://www.teachersdiscovery.com/Item--i-04-EUROS>

Rubrics: I always had difficulty deciding between a 4 and a 3 or a 2 and a 3 on a rubric until I heard it described this way: a "4" is a "Yes and more", a "3" is a "Yes", a "2" is a "Yes but..." and a "1" or "0" is a "Not yet" or "No".

For a good discussion of rubrics see:

http://www.carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/evaluation/p_7.html

Tool kit #5--Tech Tools

StoryJumper: Students create their own storybooks with this very easy program. They can use it to write and illustrate a synopsis of a literary work they have already read or can create a story of their own.

<http://www.storyjumper.com/>

Mis Cositas: Lots of FREE resources for Spanish, French, Chinese and EFL including downloadable books and video clips. I especially like the link to Flickr photo sets that can save students time in creating projects. Need to check this one out if you haven't yet! <http://www.miscositas.com/>

Students can visibly share their opinions with polleverywhere.com and Padlet

<http://www.polleverywhere.com/> [padlet.com](http://www.padlet.com)

Make interactive posters: <http://www.glogster.com/>

Make word clouds to review vocabulary or ideas contained in a reading:

<http://www.wordle.net>

<http://www.tagxedo.com/>

Chatterpix for easy way to animate student work and capture what students can do. Look for it on the iTunes App store.

Tool kit #6--Pacing/Classroom Management

A good offense is the best defense through though planning which involves:

Culture can be a motivating factor because it is inherently interesting. Capitalize upon that interest in the creation of your lessons.

Share the purpose for each and every part of the lesson.

Personalized Activities are one of the best classroom management strategies around! If a lesson involves names and events known to students, they aren't going to tune out. Think about switching out the names in your standard activities/worksheets with celebrities or popular teachers in your school. You can even use students' names provided they are referenced in situations that would make them feel really good about themselves.

Proper Pacing is developing a sense of how much time to allow for an activity, how much homework really needs to be gone over, slowing down or moving on

Variety and the Element of Surprise are very effective tools to keep things on track. Think about adding variety to bell work. Can it sometimes be oral instead of written? Visuals can be great to provoke discussion and keep up interest. These two elements also help with pacing of a lesson.

Transitions are key to maximizing time on task. Take time to teach procedures to students i.e. how to pass out papers, where to turn in papers, repeating page numbers no more than twice, etc. If something doesn't go right, don't scold but realize that your students need more training.

Movement should be built into the lesson as well; some days it may be no more than just getting up to pick up the next set of handouts but those few moments of activity get blood flowing and keep the brain engaged. Allowing for movement is also related to pacing which will keep a lesson on track.

End the class on a positive note in the last couple of minutes even and especially if everything seemed to go wrong in the rest of the class period. This is what students will walk out with and where the class picks up the next day.