

Tutor Talk: Wednesday, March 14, 2018

Attendees: Ruth, Elizabeth, Debra, Megan, Linda, Joyce, Jon

Results of the recent Focus Group:

Joyce opened the meeting with a discussion of the takeaways from the focus group.

Outreach:

1. We need ESL signage outside the church. (Annemarie is designing a banner.)
2. When they Google “ESL near me” St Brendan’s doesn’t show up. (Annemarie and IT are working on this now.)
3. Outreach flyers should include a greeting in other languages to get the attention of those who need our help. (Megan is working on this.)

Classes:

1. They are ok with games, but not too long and not too easy. They prefer games that make them practice speaking.
2. They would like to role-play and debate in class. This can be done so everyone can take part, with topics like whether it is better to shop at malls or online. Everyone understands a topic like that.
3. For listening comprehension, they suggested listening to a recording together and then discussing what you heard. None of them can listen to the news in English. They can’t follow the speaking.
4. They seem to want to be challenged to express themselves with more details and complete sentences.
5. They like the picture-description practice but would like to try it with everyone having to add another sentence to the description, including the volunteers so the students can hear American expressions and speech. They stressed descriptions should be in complete sentences.

Tutor Talk Discussion:

1. Ruth explained how she set up the Jeopardy game by writing the questions on cards with the dollar amount on the back and taping them to the whiteboard. Students played in teams of two (or three.) When a correct answer was given, the team got the card.

We agreed having the answer in the form of a question is not a good idea; Use straight questions. Factual questions about the EEN article or the USA are good, as are having them state several things in sentence form.

To increase difficulty in the questions as the dollar amounts got higher we had several ideas: Answers should be in sentence form. (i.e., the sky is blue; New York is a state in America.)

1. **Easier Questions:** Name three things that are blue; Name three states in America; name three foods that start with “B,” What are the names of the three Pittsburgh sports teams?
2. **Medium questions:** Name three things that are too hot to touch? Name three US presidents. What does the vocabulary word, “sacrifice” mean? Who are the immigrants known as “Dreamers?”
3. **Harder questions:** Name three state capital cities in America; Give three sentences about the weather; What was the woman called who fought for union rights and against child labor in America in the early 1900’s? What holiday is celebrated on March 17? (Or, on what date is St. Patrick’s Day celebrated?) NOTE: THESE ARE JUST MY IDEAS OF DIFFICULTY; YOURS MAY BE DIFFERENT.

Two Great Ideas:

Ruth told us of how she used minimal pairs (two words that sound a lot alike) with her class. She gave each student a card with five words on it. Each student's card was different. Two words that sound alike were not listed on the same card; either one or the other.

Examples are: (You can google "minimal pairs," look in the pronunciation book on the shelf in Ellen's office, or use A URL from the "Links to websites with pronunciation info" on our website.)

rich ridge
full fool
bed bad
lock luck
with wit

Each student then reads the words to the others, who write down the five words they hear. Ruth then asked each one to read what they had written as the student spoke.

Debra has noticed that when the students are read to, they take notes and try to get all the facts, possibly missing out on the sound of the reading itself; just picking out facts.

She plans to read them a short story or article and then ask them how the story made them feel. (It would probably be good to tell them not to take notes because we won't be asking them about the facts.)

You could also do this by reading something and then asking why they thought the person/company/animal did what they did; what else could have been done; how would a change of action have changed the story?, etc.

MISC:

It was suggested that the notes-takers include in their class notes the specific words that were discussed, explained or used to teach synonyms, homonyms, word usage etc, so the others know and can review these words if they'd like to. (Ex: used vs used to; medal vs metal; "track" as verb and noun, etc.)

We discussed using an iPhone or iPad to play a video or song and have them listen and talk about what they hear. The volunteer can stop and go back as needed.

News articles about the students' home countries really seem to spark discussion. Again, don't have them read aloud in class but use the alternate method described below, which was also sent in a recent email. (Remember, the articles in EEN are there as a suggestion; you can chose any discussion topic you wish.)

Remember to send out the topic and discussion questions when appropriate.

Linda is thinking of reading a Dr. Seuss book to them as part of her class that uses EEN's article that mentions *The Cat in the Hat*. I like the idea because the story has a good cadence and rhyme and the character pops up often in our culture.

Change in class structure (from email)

While the "shadow reading" technique probably works well for one student at a time, (Jing loves it and does it online) it isn't as useful for the group. Laureen tried it yesterday at my request and it didn't seem to do what we'd hoped it would. (i.e., help the students to listen and hear the correct tempo, stress and rhythm of native speakers.) It's too messy in a group. Many thanks to Laureen for giving it a go so we could make this decision.

The way we would like to try handling the reading of the EEN articles is a simple 5-step process:

1. Leader reads the article before class and writes a few discussion questions. (See step 5)
2. In class, List the bold vocabulary words on the board along with any other new or interesting words in the article.
3. Discuss these words and their meanings and usage as appropriate. (Feel free to show them words that sound the same but have different meanings, synonyms, etc.)
4. The volunteers take turns and read the article aloud to the class. Students can each choose whether to read along silently or just listen.
5. Leader and volunteers ask open-ended questions (Not answered by a simple yes or no) about the article. Instead of asking them for facts from the article, consider asking what they feel about an event in the article, could they ever do what the person in the article did, what events in your country are similar or very different from the event in the article, etc. (to get them talking about their own knowledge or experiences)

Try to get in the habit of going around the table so each student gets a chance to participate and can judge when it will be their turn. Some of them have a very hard time just jumping in when others dominate or speak more fluently than they do.

Let's give this a try and see what happens. It seems that once we introduced the newspaper articles as topics, we got stuck on reading and not on discussion. All the students read well. Rainbow spoke up last week, before class began, and told me that when she reads English she understands it but when we speak to her she can't.

We need to remember we have to teach them how to listen, not how to read.