

# Implementing group dynamics in EFL

## Rosana da Silva looks at ways of making your teaching more relevant to your learners.



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Interaction is the key element in every EFL lesson. When it comes to learning a foreign language we try to make use of certain techniques in order to lead students to a more communicative approach. Group dynamics come as an important tool aligned to language learning, as EFL teachers, who are educators as well, must consider all relevant aspects related to this issue. Therefore, interaction means accepting and refusing, being able to give and receive, respecting yourself and above all, the others.

Nevertheless, are all your students ready for this? This is where the importance of group dynamics lies. The teacher, as an instructor, a facilitator and on top of that, as an observer; needs strategies in order to encourage an appropriate interaction among language learners. However, how can you evaluate more precisely to what extent you can go ahead with a certain activity or not? As far as EFL teachers are concerned, the procedures chosen depend on your students' background knowledge, their level of stress or anxiety, age, expectations and needs.

As has been said by Howard Gardner (2003), people are characterized by multiple intelligences which are closely related to their learning strategies and abilities to achieve knowledge of the world. As a matter of fact, teachers who deal with all these sorts of personality styles are supposed to find paths aimed at getting to know students better and help them do their best respecting their learning styles.

Group dynamics allow students to reveal subconsciously or unconsciously *who* they are, *what* they expect from life, their knowledge of the world and *how far* they want to interact with their peers. As a result, based on the data collected, teachers may understand certain types of behaviour that students demonstrate in class and find easier or more appropriate ways to handle them.

Let us consider the following samples:

1. It is the first time you start teaching a group of 20 pre-teen students. You are going to meet them for a 90-minute class twice a week. You would like to get to know them better quickly for your lesson preparation. You might start the lesson asking them to tell you their names, age and hobbies. Nonetheless, you can go slightly deeper into this activity and ask them to tell their peers about a colour they like, an animal they like, their favourite breed, a famous person they admire, and explain why.
2. The drawing dynamics activity may be done with any level or age. It shows the amount of positive and negative interference of people in a group. For this activity you will need blank paper, crayons of different colours, a CD or cassette player and samples of songs. Ask your students

to pick up one crayon in a bag. Tell them to choose the colour they fancy. You'll be playing samples of different types of song and music and as the music or song changes; students draw whatever they want on the paper and pass it around.

When the round is over, students get their drawings back; they discuss or say how they feel with the modifications of others to their drawings. This activity aims at helping teachers to have a better view of their students' emotions and creativity, as well as their ability to integrate.

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As a result, you may anticipate and avoid certain problems when dealing with group work in the future.

3. Group dynamics may and should also be used to revise language. While students are performing the dynamics some language item may be practiced. For instance: students use 'will' for taking decisions, 'should' for giving advice, conditionals for hypothetical situations, so on and so forth.

How do you plan your lesson? You should always think about what is behind a well planned lesson. How many EFL teachers really plan a lesson based on their students' personality traits? What if you have a group with more than fifty per cent of leaders? This may cause many conflicts when establishing debates or group work. If you manage to gather this data, you may understand the group you are dealing with and implement better strategies for future lessons.

All in all, students will be working productively, more integratedly and you will be better informed about the *human beings* you're working with.

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