familiar face, not to mention having someone who can work through complicated English jargon.

6. Last but not least, make sure they know you care.

Our students are in a foreign land with limited English, which can be very scary and humiliating. I still remember, vividly, how humiliating it was at times when I was an international student, and that was 15 years ago. Some students are amazed to learn that we do care. This also helps them open up to us, which in return makes helping them a lot easier. If you pay attention and give students the respect they deserve, they will feel a little, if not completely, better. Good luck!

Reference

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Posing Questions and Calling on Students
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Here is the situation: we are standing in front of the class. We are posing questions to our students about a reading, grammar point, listening selection or other language skill we are covering that day. We pose the question in what I term a "call and response fashion," meaning that we put the question out to the group, not calling on any individual student. The students call out their responses and then we give general feedback and pose the next question. There are several advantages to this method of posing questions: it feels lively, it doesn't take a lot of our precious time and can keep the pace of the class moving along quickly. Students who are more verbally adept can shine and feel more engaged than in writing. No one is put on the spot so it can be face-saving for

students who are shyer about answering individually.

There is nothing wrong with this manner of questioning if it is one of many methods of posing and answering questions we use. The problem arises when we use it exclusively.

I have been spending a lot of time observing other teachers' classes over the last few years and have noted that we all use this technique *a lot*. I was surprised to note that despite our knowledge of other alternatives, it seems to be the "go-to" approach for posing questions, my own classes included. Again, there is nothing wrong with it as one of the many techniques we employ. There

are, however, several disadvantages to relying solely on this type of question. For example, it is usually the same four or five students who are calling out their responses, thereby giving us the false impression that "everyone" is participating. These same four to five to six students are getting many more chances to participate, receiving feedback and taking the risks necessary for language learning.

Another disadvantage is that some students who have an answer ready, but for personal or cultural reasons, will never call out that answer. Such students do not get the opportunity to be held accountable like those who do participate and answer.

A third disadvantage is that in almost every class I have ever had, there are always at least one or two students who come to class wearing their "cloak of invisibility," to borrow a term from J. K. Rowling and Harry Potter. They have learned over the years how to hide within the class and avoid getting called on. I have seen it in my own classes and in many others. The question then seems: when does "not putting students on the spot" cross over into denying them opportunities to step up and learn? What is my responsibility as the teacher to make opportunities for all my students to speak up and give it a try? How can I balance the need to draw them out with their need to feel safe enough? How can I involve the most students possible?

By simply adding a few more techniques to our repertoire, we can engage more of our students including those whose personal learning styles do not include the facility of calling out their answers publicly.

One of my favorite alternatives to the

It is such a simple change and yet its effect in my classes has been profound.

call and response approach is really quite simple and effective. I am amazed--and a bit sheepish--that it took me so many years of teaching to stumble on this idea. Here is what I do: when I have a question to pose to the group I do so, but raise my hand in a "stop sign" and say, "Don't answer yet. Turn to the person next to you and discuss the answer. See if you agree or disagree. If you disagree, convince each other. If you agree, say why. You have thirty seconds. Go!" I give them the thirty seconds then signal when the time is up. Next I call on pairs of students to answer. The amount of time I give them to discuss varies on the questions and problems posed.

There is no doubt that this takes more time, so some teachers may see it as a definite disadvantage. But for me, it is an excellent investment of time. Everyone gets the chance to discuss the questions *each time*. It imposes accountability on all the students, not just a few. No one sits back and relies on everyone else to engage and it is *much* harder to be invisible when your partner is staring you in the face expecting you to contribute. Those students who may feel intimidated about answering in front of the whole group can feel much more comfortable testing out their response with just one other student. They may be more likely to hazard a guess, educated or otherwise, if they are speaking up to only one other classmate and not focusing on any potential humiliation in front of the entire class. Those quieter students who always have the answer but will never volunteer unless called on now have the chance to speak up and articulate what they know, which to me, is a valuable piece of the learning process. When presenting to the whole group the partners are acting as a pair and can use the best answer they came

up with and not necessarily the one that initially came out of their mouth. Perhaps best of all, communication is a key ingredient in this model.

Some students need more time to process a question and formulate an answer. We all know this and it is well documented. Using this technique can certainly slow things down, but in a positive way, so that those students needing more time actually get it and so that I, as teacher, wait more than the requisite one-second before I start expecting an answer to my question. It is such a simple change and yet its effect in my classes has been profound. I have used this in both ESL and teacher training classes and I encourage all the teachers I observe and work with to give it a try. Nearly all report a decidedly positive effect on class participation and I am happy with the rigor it helps me impose in my classes. Each question posed becomes an opportunity for everyone to discuss and learn. More bang for my buck.

> *Nearly all report a decidedly positive effect on class participation.*

Many teachers both here and abroad call directly on students. In my observations I see this done often and it is another excellent way to engage students. Calling on them randomly is a great way to keep students on their toes and makes for a useful tool to add to our teaching toolbox. But one problem is that, as humans, we have a natural gravitation toward certain individuals, for whatever reason, and some students simply get called on more often than others unless the teacher is taking great care to be sure everyone gets their turn. Some teachers go around the room, following the seating chart to address this, but a possible disadvantage is that many students will not actually pay attention to all the other answers and will instead prepare their own answer ahead of time, which defeats the purpose. How then, can we call on students randomly and make sure we are getting to everyone and not allowing anyone's eagerness, charisma or cloak of invisibility to get in the way?

I draw here on something I used in my K-12 days, which is a funny and inexpensive tool readily found in craft stores and supermarkets: popsicle sticks. Each term I have one stick for each student and write her/his name on it. These I keep rubber-banded in my backpack throughout the term and use when needed. I find it helpful in making sure I am calling on everyone evenly and not accidentally giving certain students more turns than others. I ask a question then pull a stick with someone's name from the pile, laying it on the desk when finished. I ask another question and reach back into the pile again, knowing that I will not unintentionally gravitate to the most willing students or the ones I am most drawn to. When my mind is freed from this classroom management task I can focus less attention on the asking and more on their answers and my feedback.

The sticks have also proven excellent tools when it comes time for students to give presentations. Usually there are several students who volunteer to go first but towards the middle of the group the volunteers sometimes dry up. Valuable class time is wasted in waiting for more people to volunteer and if I pick randomly at that point, some students may wonder "why me?" So I let the popsicle sticks do the choosing and the dynamic is changed completely. I reach into the bunch wagging my eyebrows, draw one out and voilà, the next presenter is chosen.

The students always laugh at this, no one feels picked on, it takes only seconds, and the entire process becomes one of our many class jokes, solving the problem and strengthening our classroom community all at once. Small index cards or notes with their names written on them can be used as well, but I like my popsicle sticks for the element of humor they seem to add. Some terms I have the students write their own names and personalize them on the first day and pass them back with short personalized messages as souvenirs of the class at the end of the term.

Just as I look for ways to hold my students more responsible for their own learning, this is something I can do to hold myself more accountable in making sure they all receive meaningful opportunities to learn.

As I search for more ways to actively involve my students in class, one other technique I use is to allow my students to call on each other. A "Koosh" or other soft round ball is good for this. I pose my question then toss the ball to someone to answer. When I pose the next question, I tell the first student to "call" on someone by tossing her/him the ball. The students take over the "calling on" piece of the class. I remind them to give everyone a chance and not call solely on their friends. Depending on the activity I may ask them to step in and pose the questions as well. It's very hard to fall asleep in class when a Koosh ball may be headed your way at any moment. It is

unexpected and lively. I did not think up this technique but I have used it with great success for decades as one of many ways to keep students actively engaged in their own learning process and to find ways to energize and liven up my classes.

The above practices will seem alien and strange to many of our students at first. But by the end of the first week they are engaged and participating at a level we are all comfortable with. Plus, the feedback I get from them is almost always positive. I urge all the teachers I work with to have a look at our practices and note how often we rely on one approach or another. Chances are we can balance our routines further in order to reach even more students. They do not require a complete retooling of our practices; rather, they are a simple tweaking of what we already do and if you try it, I think you will find that these small changes can lead to a dynamic effect in your classes.

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