







How to Get More of Your Students Speak English? A Help Sheet for Teachers

Before I am going to introduce some methods to encourage more of your learners to communicate in the target language I would like to point out that it might be relevant to ask yourself what the reasons might be for the fact that it's mostly only a handful of students who are willing to communicate spontaneously in class whereas the rest prefers to adopt a policy of wait and see or just remains silent. Well, speaking from my experiences as a teacher the following reasons should be taken into consideration. They allow us to draw first conclusions about how to teach languages more effectively. However, you should also ask your students what makes it difficult for them to use the target language and what they consider to help them in order to communicate more.

Here are some possible reasons for the complaint that students could communicate more in the target language:

- Some students lack self-confidence to communicate in class.  Provide for learning opportunities that help less self-confident students to communicate in an environment in which they feel safe enough to do so (e.g. presentations in the target language in front of a small group of learners, communicative tasks for small groups of learners).
- Some students know that they have weaknesses in English, especially as far as grammar and vocabulary are concerned.  Provide for additional language support (worksheets with phrases and relevant vocabulary) which these students are required to work with. Let them experience success by assigning tasks to them they can handle.
- Some students do not feel any necessity to contribute to the discussions in class if a few stronger and self-confident students dominate the classroom discourses and always express what the teacher wants to hear.  Pep up your lessons and avoid chalk-and-talk as the predominant teaching method. Make use of pair and group work and ask for each learner's strengths so that everybody feels competent in their special field of interest.
- Some students are simply bored by the contents and tasks chosen by the teacher. His or her tasks are simply not intellectually challenging enough.  Choose contents and tasks that are motivating and a challenge to your students because they are relevant and meaningful to them.
- Some students are making themselves pretty comfortable by claiming not to understand you or by saying that they are not able to say something in the target language.  Do not give in and continue to speak English and demand it from your students, too. Help these students to take the responsibility for their learning process. Assign a learning contract to them in which they are required to set their personal goals for each lesson or teaching unit.
- Some students are simply not interested in English as a school subject. They prefer, for example, natural sciences instead.  Keep in mind that you cannot make every single student sympathize with your subject. Do your best and make them an offer but accept the fact that learners are individuals who have different favorite subjects at school.

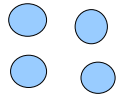
The following cooperative methods provide for opportunities to communicate more in class:

Panel Discussion (two double periods):

Purpose: The main purpose of a panel discussion is to enable students to be critical and to argue in a convincing way.

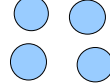
- It takes a double period to get students informed with the help of info-texts, statistics etc. Students take notes, write down their arguments / questions etc. on prompt cards.
- It takes a double period to get students prepared for their "performance", to prepare the setting, to act out and to evaluate the panel discussion with the help of the observer-group.
- The groups are requested to exchange their "actors" during the panel discussion. Those who are not acting are the audience.
- Students need to be prepared to act out their character in a convincing way, that means: as a host, for example, he or she has to be persistent, and an expert must be well-informed and convincing in his or her argumentation. Students should be encouraged to pay attention at non-verbal forms of communication like body language and facial expression.
- Provide for language support, especially for weaker students.

One group preparing the talk show host:



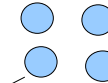
host needs to be generally informed in order to be able to ask questions and he/ she has to be persistent

Four groups of max 4 students, each preparing one expert

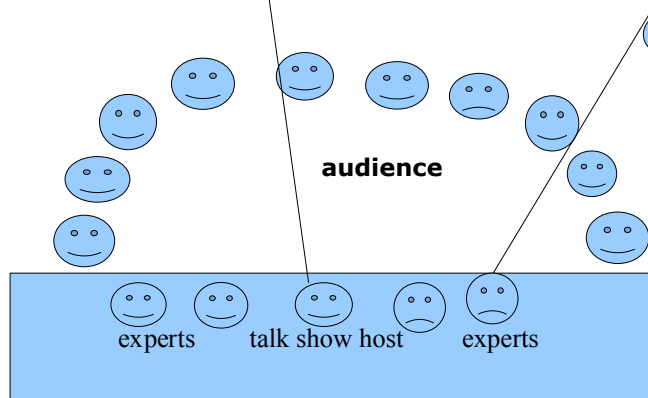


expert needs to be a specialist in his or her field

One observer-group



observer-group needs to be generally informed and develops an observation sheet

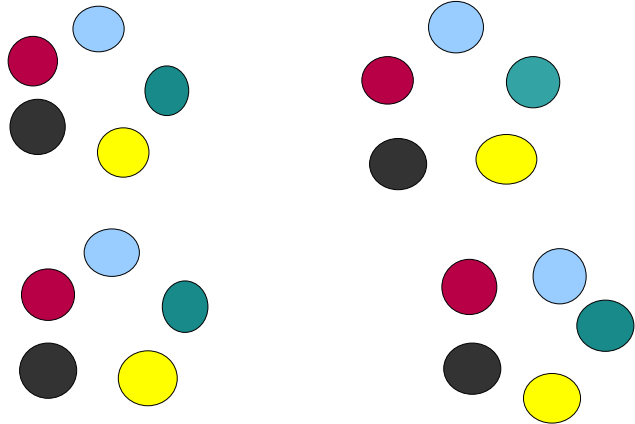


Group Puzzle (one double period)

Purpose: The main purpose of a group puzzle is to enable students to inform themselves about a certain topic, to make them better comprehend and understand the contents by explaining them to others and to enable learners to better listen to their fellow-students.

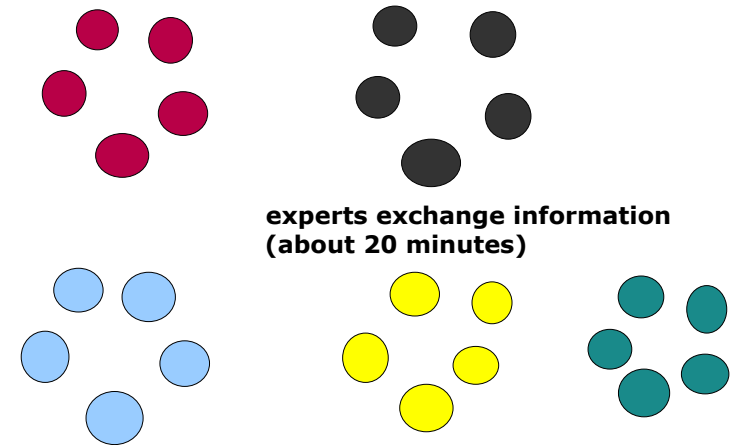
- It usually takes a double period to get students informed, to make them better comprehend the contents by speaking about them to others and to evaluate the outcome.
- Each member of the "original group" gets different contents/ material. Students read the material and take notes.
- The members of the different "original groups" who have dealt with the same contents/ material get together in "expert groups" to check whether they have understood the contents and to discuss which contents need to be reported to the other members of the "original group" who do not know the themes of the others.
- The experts get back to their original groups and the group members tell each other about the contents they have dealt with.
- Provide for language support, especially for weaker students.

Step 1: Original Groups (max. five students per group, five different contents)



students individually read texts and take notes (about 20 minutes)

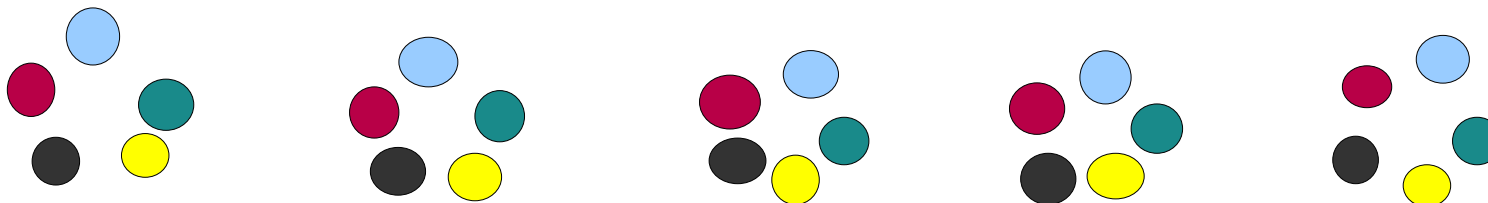
Step 2: Expert Groups (same contents)



experts exchange information (about 20 minutes)

Step 3: Original Groups

experts inform the other group members (everybody is an expert on his or her field) (about 20 minutes)



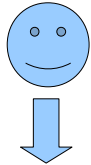
Think -Pair - Square - Share (minimum: one period)

Purpose: Apart from the intention to enable students to better comprehend and understand contents by cooperating in small teams the main purpose here is to make students communicate in an environment where they do not feel exposed to too many people. However, the themes to be dealt with should be controversial and lead to heated discussions.

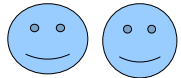
- There are different ways how to do it. Here is just one example.
- It usually takes a period if not more, depending on the question how difficult to understand the information material is and if you want to add a "square- phase".
- Provide for language support, especially for weaker students.

Step 1: Think-Phase

- Students individually think about a certain topic/ controversial statement etc. and write down their associations/ thoughts/ ideas.



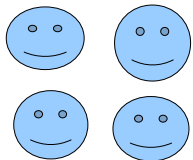
Step 2: Pair-Phase



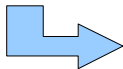
- Students get together in pairs and exchange their views.
- They get some information material, read it and make sure whether they have understood the new contents; they relate them to their initial thoughts.
- Pairs might get different information material so that they will receive a new input while working together in a group of four in step three.



Step 3: Square-Phase



- Students get together in groups of four, exchange their views and different information and come up with a solution to a problem or an interesting idea which is being presented afterwards in class



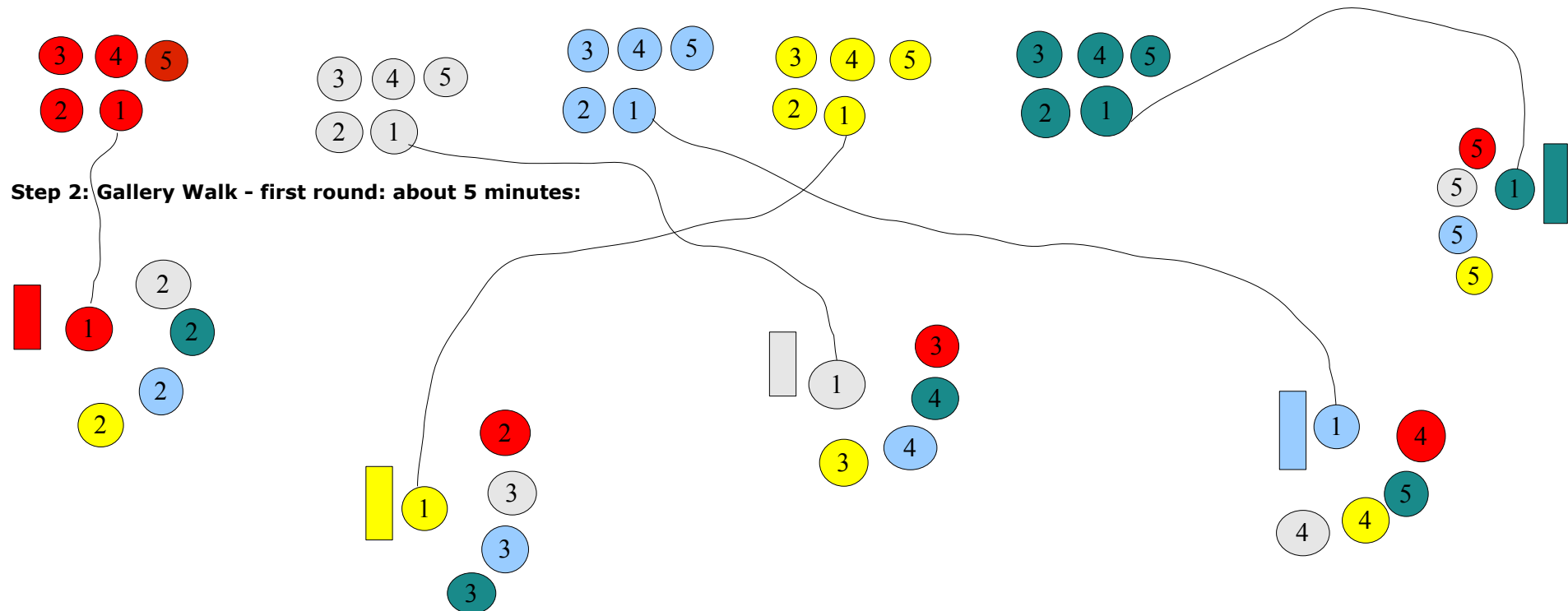
Step 4: Share-Phase * Each group presents their ideas or solutions in class and gets a feedback.

Gallery Walk (two double periods)

Purpose: A Gallery Walk makes it easier especially for reserved students to present the results of their work since they do so in front of a small group and not the whole class. Additionally the method is likely to attract more attention of the listeners because the presentation takes place among a very limited number of people (maximum of five students) who cannot escape the presenter's attention as easily as it is the case if contents are being presented to the whole class.

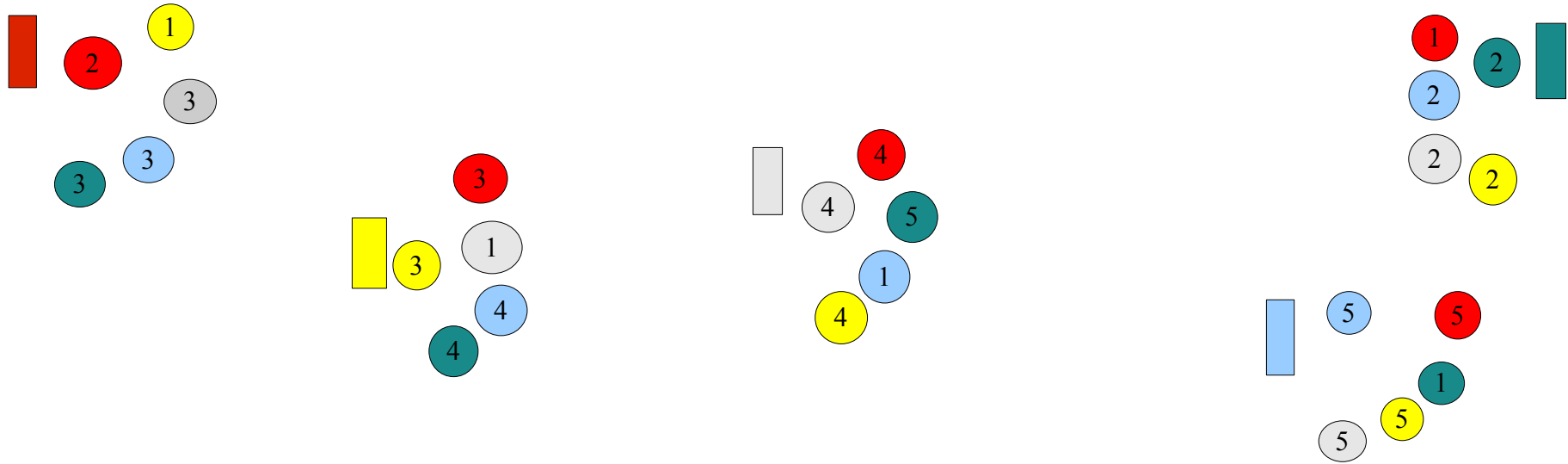
- Since the Gallery Walk is a teaching method to present group results it goes without saying that information material has to be read and contents to be discussed and visualized on a flip chart by each group prior to the presentation (one double period). The Gallery Walk itself takes another double period of time if it is followed by the evaluation of its effectiveness.
- As far as the command of English is concerned the groups should be heterogeneous so that weaker students can profit from the stronger ones and are able to present the group results to other students who are not familiar with the contents to be presented.
- Provide for language support (also discussion phrases) and encourage everyone to ask back and to take notes during the presentation.

Step 1: Heterogeneous groups informing themselves and preparing the presentation



Step 2: Gallery Walk - second round: about 5 minutes:

The groups move clockwise to the next presentation flip chart / the presenters from each group take turns so that listeners become presenters and vice versa.



Step 2: Gallery Walk – third, fourth and fifth round until every group member has presented (time limit is, for example, five minutes)

The groups move again clockwise after five minutes for the presentation and the teacher gives the signal to do so. This is to be continued until everyone has presented!

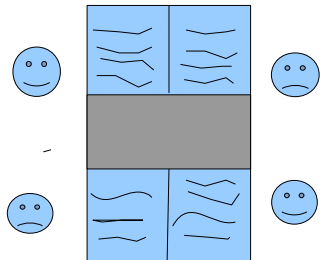
Step 3: The Gallery Walk is being evaluated by the teacher and his or her students.

Placemat (1 period)

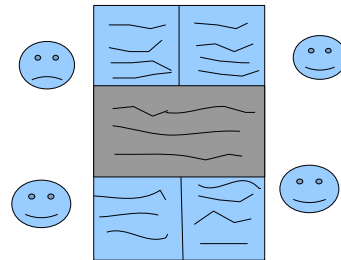
Purpose: *Placemat* is a very good brainstorming method which allows students to jot down and communicate their first associations or ideas while being confronted with, for example, a new topic. It also requires from them to come to an understanding with their fellow-students about a certain issue or even to reach an agreement.

- It doesn't take more than 45 minutes to do it including the presentation of ideas in class.
- Four students are working together.
- First, students individually think about a certain issue and take notes on a spot reserved for them on a flip chart.
- Second, students exchange their ideas/ views.
- Third, students come to an understanding with their group members and jot down the ideas which they share in the middle of a flip chart.
- Eventually the flip charts of each group are being presented and the ideas discussed in class.

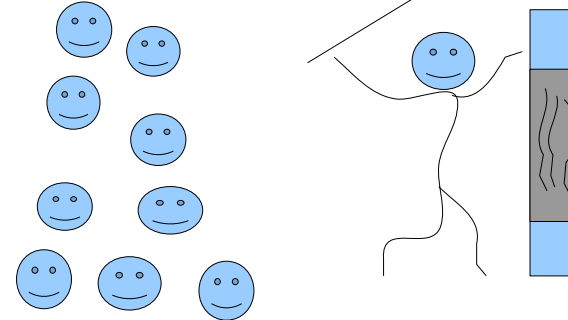
Step One



Step Two



Step Three:



Speaker`s Corner (3 to 5 minutes)

Purpose: The main purpose of the *Speaker's Corner* (which is in the Hyde Park in London) is to offer people the chance to get attention by having the chance to express their views on a certain issue. In class students are to be encouraged to express their views spontaneously or after having prepared a certain topic in advance.

There are many different ways how to do it. Here are some suggestions:

- *Speakers Corner* should be ritualized so that it takes place at the beginning of each English lesson.
- One student or two students are talking about a certain topic or controversial statement. Encourage your students to come up with a topic or controversial statement. It is also good to link it with the topic which is currently being dealt with in class.
- Students are expected to keep talking for a minimum of three minutes or five minutes if it is two students. Ask another student to check the time.
- The teacher - or better one of his/her students - rolls the dice (with at least 29 numbers on it) to determinate the student/s whose turn it is to do the talking. However, students can also be offered the chance to prepare a topic of their choice at home and to introduce it to the class.
- If two students are involved provide for a controversial statement to be spontaneously discussed (e.g. "Abortion should be legalized." *Do you agree or disagree?*)
- To pep up the "three-minutes-talk" and to help the speaker the teacher can write words or phrases on the board the speaker has to integrate into his or her talk.

