

What Makes a Great English Class?

Many parents today still mistakenly equate their children's good results in English examinations with mastery of the language. Yet, many of them who performed fairly well in their English exams fall short of expectations when it comes to real-life situations. They are unable to use the language to express themselves properly or confidently. Many students cannot even write a proper sentence, and let alone speak a grammatically-sound sentence! By the time they reach tertiary level, it is normally too late to rectify the mistake: our students will then find it difficult to cope with their academic demands and thus suffer in low self-esteem. The situation will get worsened when they graduate and enter the workforce.

The declining standard of English among young Malaysians is a matter that has received much public attention. There is certainly no lack of desire to master English among our students – ask any of them and they will tell you that they want to master their English. However, the reality is, they often find it difficult to learn English the right way. Students are often hampered by unsuitable teaching goals or they are placed in a non-conducive learning environment. What makes a great English and effective class then? And how do we as teachers foster the joy of learning in classroom and letting our students realize that mastering the language is far more rewarding than scoring an A in the examination?

Like in any effective classroom teaching, a great and fun English class is greatly contributed by passionate teachers. Teaching is as much about passion as it is about reason. Teachers not only motivate their students to learn, but facilitate them how to learn, and doing so in a manner that is relevant, meaningful, and hopefully fun. When teachers themselves are having a passion in appreciating the beauty of the world of English language and also the truest goals in educating the young minds, their intentions are easily conveyed to everyone, and most importantly to their students.

Good English teachers are of substance and treating students as consumers of knowledge. They must be doing their best to be the subject specialists, reading sources from inside and outside of their areas of expertise, and being able to adapt to the needs of students and the society at large. They have to bear in mind though, that knowledge is not confined to scholarly journals. Good English teachers must know how to bridge the gap between theory and practice in English learning and teaching. It's about leaving the ivory tower and immersing themselves in the classrooms, talking to, and constantly upgrading the effectiveness of whatever method they are using to teach their students the language skills. And needless to say, effective English teaching must come with experiences dealing with students of all levels and background. Rather than focusing in solely in academic achievement, students on the other hand must be guided patiently to discover the true joy of learning.

No one can agree to the only one best way to learn English. However, teachers and academicians agree to one thing; students are different and they learn better in different ways. Students have different personalities, interests and learning styles. The teachers must acknowledge this fact and address these diversified needs. Hence, an English classroom that incorporates activities that appeal to a variety of learning styles can do wonders to help facilitate language learning effectively. To start with, teachers should be aware that students especially the younger ones take in knowledge of the world through their senses, and their learning styles include visual, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic. It will be beneficial then if the English classes are supported with a wide range of illustrations, photos and graphics for the visual learners. Auditory learners perform better with opportunities to both hear and repeat key learning target, while tactile and kinesthetic ones are provided with sticker activities, routines and games using touch and movement in the English lessons. By doing so, all students will be motivated to learn more as the mastery of the language is made possible with every little and helpful step.

Another crucial factor in making an English classroom effective would be when the teachers take a balanced approach that can strengthen the development of the students' communicative competency through exposure to and practice with language as it is used in real life. Students need to see put into practice the relevance in their English language learning to their daily life. A syllabus that ensures that all students become active participants in every lesson by activating their prior knowledge of topics and concepts and by encouraging them to share and express their personal experiences, ideas and opinions in English will tremendously help. They must be given the opportunities to be involved in fun activities that allow them to find out more about themselves, each other and the world beyond. In short, effective and fun English lessons should focus on getting these aspiring students to enjoy communicating in English in their daily life' and take a highly integrated approach to developing grammar, vocabulary and the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The key to all the factors mentioned above is the fact that English classes can be made effective and fun with the active role of the teacher. Teachers should not only to teach English for daily communication purposes and examinations, they must also help students to become independent learners. This is fundamental for building students' confidence and thus for their future development. While mastery of English is the objective, wholesome personality still remains as top priority. Have fun teaching and learning! For further information log on to www.atcenlearningcentre.com or contact us at ATCEN Learning Centre 03-3325 7115 (Mak) / 03. 7806 4998 (Irene) for more details.

