Business Cards for the Communicative Classroom

コミュニケーションスキルのための名刺使用

Michael Seko, マイケル・瀬古

Tamagawa University, Center for English as a Lingua Franca (CELF), Japan
mikeseko6@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Students' names are often foreign and unfamiliar to teachers in second language classrooms, and the importance of remembering and correctly pronouncing them is vital to establishing an effective discourse. This paper will introduce a cooperative learning structure (Kagan, 1989) to be used in an initial lesson that allows the students and the teacher to efficiently learn the names, biographical details and personal interests of each individual in the class. In addition, it provides the teacher with a useful classroom management tool to be used throughout the duration of the course.

KEYWORDS: Cooperative Learning, Classroom Management

1. INTRODUCTION

In an earlier issue of this journal, Dimoski (2015) presented a detailed report on ways in which student nameplates can be used for effective classroom learning and management. This is a less ambitious attempt to collect and store some of the same information through the use of smaller and more easily manageable student "business cards".

First impressions are important and can last at least as long as a fifteen-week university course. Business cards are a real world tool that can be used in language classrooms to make lasting and positive impressions. This paper will detail how they can be used in both the first and in every meeting of a university level communication course.

2. APPLICATIONS

2.1 Exchanging Identities

This is an icebreaking activity which can be done in the first minutes of the first meeting of a 15-week course. Each student receives a 55mm x 91mm blank card and is instructed to print both given and family names in English on one side (with a hole punch on the left). The reverse side of the card can be used for students to list their likes, dislikes, interests, or objectives. The teacher prepares a card as well. After every student has prepared a card, the teacher gestures for one student to stand in order to demonstrate the activity. The teacher and student introduce themselves to one another by giving their names and one or two details (from the back of the card). The two then exchange cards. The teacher then invites a second student to stand. This introduction proceeds as the first with the teacher adopting the name and interests of the first student. The teacher then invites all students to take their cards, stand, and practice "exchanging identities". Students are encouraged to introduce themselves to as many people as possible in five minutes. The teacher collects all cards at the end of five minutes and may quiz the class on details they remember about their classmates. The activity has proven to be an enjoyable and effective building block for a friendly, interactive classroom environment.

2.2 Attendance

The teacher keeps all cards for one class between clear plastic covers of the same size on a metal ring. An additional "cover card" with the course title, meeting time, and classroom location is recommended if the system is used in different classes (and at different institutions). This cover allows the teacher to easily identify the correct cards for each class. The cards can be removed from the ring at the beginning of a lesson and the teacher may take attendance by calling out names and making eye contact with each student present. Students will enthusiastically help the teacher with any pronunciation problems and will often offer explanations for any classmates who are late or absent. The cards of those students not in class on a particular day can be separated from those present and can be used to mark attendance on an official attendance sheet at any point during or following the lesson. The cards of any students who may arrive late can be added to the stack of those present.

2.3 Grouping

The cards can be used to quickly group students for small group or pair work. The teacher can shuffle and divide the cards into the number of small groups desired. If groups are to work together beyond one lesson, they can be asked to name their group and this name can be added to the back of the individual cards. This will help the teacher to later arrange new groups that will allow students to work with the different classmates than they have worked with previously. The group names on

the back of the cards will help the teacher to manage this task.

Cards can also be used as "place settings" that the teacher puts on desks or tables prior to the beginning of a lesson. This can help the teacher to manage the individual strengths and weaknesses and to further encourage cooperation amongst classmates. Strong speakers can be matched with careful listeners to achieve a desired balance, or outspoken and soft-spoken small groups can be created to encourage the former to listen to one another and the latter to speak out more.

2.4 Participation

Teachers can shuffle the cards during a lesson and use them to call on students randomly. Sliding the top card to the bottom of the pile insures that the teacher pays equal attention to all students and encourages students to stay involved and active in the lesson knowing that they may be called on at any time. It also gives teachers additional practice at name and face recognition.

3. CHALLENGES

The quality and clarity of student (and teacher) handwriting and printing varies widely and can cause confusion or attract attention. Without receiving any instruction or asking any permission, a few creative students in each class will invariably add calligraphy or sketches to their cards to personalize them. The cards can also stick together or be mislaid which can lead to a disparity in turn taking. Students will most often, but not always, call this to a teacher's attention. Additionally, a teacher's failure to bring an entire ring of cards to a lesson can lead to a disruption of reliable and familiar routines. One teacher has likened this to forgetting to bring a textbook to class. A lesson can continue, but without the help of a reliable aid. It is advised that teachers keep rings of cards together with institution identification badges and other vital materials to avoid this problem. The teacher has not had opportunity to use these cards in classes larger than twenty-five students, but would be curious to see what the results would be.

4. CONCLUSION

The use of these cards has proven to be a fun and effective method of class and small group management for one teacher at three different universities in Japan for the past five years. In classes at the Center for English as a Lingua Franca at Tamagawa University where first year students meet twice a week for one hundred minute sessions, the teacher reported being able to learn students' names and faces within the first month of instruction. The same teacher had opportunity to use the cards with elementary and junior high school students at three-day intensive courses this past summer. In addition to the above uses, the teacher was able to return the cards to students with individual feedback added to them on the last day of

the course. The students were observed receiving their cards with care, comparing cards and comments with one another, and showing their cards to other teachers in the program.

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