



Getting Your Students Talking

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Sion, Chris. *Creating Conversation in Class: Student-Centred Interaction*. First Person Publishing / English Teaching Professional and Delta Publishing, 2001. ISBN# 0-953-30988-6.

Taylor, Jon. *The Minimax Teacher: Minimise Teacher Input and Maximise Student Output*. First Person Publishing / English Teaching Professional and Delta Publishing, 2001. ISBN# 0-953309-89-4.

Are you looking to expand your bag of teaching tricks? You can find 87 creative activities to choose from in *The Minimax Teacher*, by Jon Taylor. Do you want to get your students talking and keep them talking in English? In *Creating Conversation in Class*, Chris Sion, author of *Recipes for Tired Teachers*, gives teachers basic tools and ideas they need to do just that. These two books are part of the Professional Perspectives series, published jointly by *English Teaching Professional* and Delta Publishing. While the specific approaches and formats of these two books are somewhat different, both follow a welcome trend of aiming to reduce teacher input and prep time, and at the same time maximize students' learning.

Virtually all the activities in *The Minimax Teacher* are short—most take 20 minutes or less. They are grouped into six chapters: Starting Off, Personalization, Student-Generated Activities, Exploiting Materials, Inspiring Writing, and Dealing with Diversity. Most of the activities include, in addition to the basic procedure and notes, one or more possible variations. Though the focus is on speaking, skills such as listening, reading, and writing are also covered in some activities.

In contrast, *Creating Conversation in Class* is designed more specifically for speaking or conversation classes at the intermediate level and above, and allots more time per activity (30 to 90 minutes). Among the 50-plus topics are favorites such as holidays, safety, and personality, as well as often used functions such as comparing and describing. The first section, Getting Started, is particularly useful because it has lists of starters, questions, and lead-ins which a teacher could use in any type of class to warm up the students and gain their attention.

Rounding out the remaining five sections are: Breaking the Ice, Talking to Each Other, Talking About

People, Focusing on the Family, and Playing Games. The book makes extensive use of grids to organize discussions, and of surveys to stimulate interaction. Also included are five learner training units that address issues such as learning strategies and skills, exams, and thinking in English.

What sets *The Minimax Teacher* apart from Sion's book and many others is the four to five pages of helpful insights for teachers that begin each of the six chapters. Each introduction provides a valuable theoretical framework for the specific activities that follow, covering issues such as what to do about early and late finishers, the teacher's roles, dealing with different learning styles, and more. These section introductions alone make the book worth reading because of the wide variety of teaching strategies they discuss.

One of the only drawbacks to *The Minimax Teacher* is that it contains only a general table of contents. No index or chart is provided to overview the specific contents, which makes activities difficult to locate quickly. Thankfully however, *Creating Conversation in Class* does have a such a table to help teachers easily pinpoint activities according to topic, function, level, and time. A plus for both books is that they include photocopiable worksheets which correspond with selected activities (*Creating Conversation in Class* has more of these).

If you are interested in a book that will not only serve as an activity bank but also aid your professional development, *The Minimax Teacher* is a good two-in-one combination. And for the teacher who wants to explore different conversation topics more freely and fully, *Creating Conversation in Class* should prove to be a helpful asset. With both books, the fact that a majority of the input comes from the students themselves is motivating and engaging. But be warned—once students get their mouths and minds going, you may find it hard to stop them when the time is up!

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