Kim Hughes Wilhelm
MACAO

No Books and 150 Students?

A well-known and persistent problem with teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is the lack of resources. Imagine, if you can, teaching without books, having no access to the Internet, a computer, or even a telephone, having no photocopy machine available, and not even having office space. Such conditions are an everyday reality for many teachers around the world. Although the construction of self-access-centers with modern computer equipment, Internet access, and multimedia technology is relieving this situation, in numerous institutions students and teachers still lack even the most basic materials. An additional impediment to effective language instruction is too many students in one class. Many EFL teachers would consider it a luxury to have a maximum of thirty students in a single class, as they customarily have to deal with many times that number.

As an experienced teacher of English in both English as a Second Language (ESL) and EFL settings, I thought I was fairly well prepared when I accepted a Fulbright Senior Scholar Fellowship in Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. I knew that Sam Ratulangi University, my host institution, had a very good reputation and that students came from all over Sulawesi to study there. Because of my experiences in Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Japan I was no stranger to limited resources and large class sizes. Nevertheless, I found the challenges in Indonesia to be nearly overwhelming.

What is a teacher to do when confronted with these problems? Fortunately, resourceful teachers who find themselves in similar situations continually reveal creative ways to successfully teach English with few resources and large classes. This includes implementing quality English learning activities that require no, or very little, investment in materials and adopting strategies that make it feasible to assign homework and give individual grades for exceptionally large groups. The purpose of this article is to share some activities in the hope that they can be used and adapted by others and to encourage teachers in similar situations to develop and share ideas of their own.

An EFL instructional context

While students in my courses at Sam Ratulangi were motivated, active in class, and fairly well-disciplined, the lack of what I had come to consider

"basic" teaching resources was a definite challenge. In one class in particular, I was troubled to learn that the enrolled students consisted of over 150 first-year undergraduates from a variety of majors with English proficiency levels ranging from low-beginner through intermediate. The class was to be taught in an auditorium area covered by a metal roof and open at the walls. There were often not enough chairs for the students, and since there were no fans, the doors at the back had to be left open for air flow. When it rained, I could hardly hear myself talk because of the noise on the metal roof. The open walls and doors meant that I had to compete for the students' attention with noises from outside the class, including shuttle buses, crowing roosters, and singing groups practicing next door in the student canteen.

No materials or textbooks were available, and my only resources were a small whiteboard at the ground level of the auditorium and sometimes a mobile microphone system, which had both a positive and negative side. Although the students—even those at the top of the auditorium—could hear me with the microphone, I was limited to staying within three to four feet of the stereo system since the cord was so short.

To teach in this setting, I realized that I needed special strategies to manage the class, and throughout the year I developed and implemented some activities to successfully get large groups of students involved in learning English. A main consideration was to choose activities that relied on materials that could be shared and would require little photocopying. Following is a description of some of these activities, organized according to whether they are done in class or out of class.

In-class activities

The five in-class activities described below are designed to involve students in English learning with little dependence on materials. It is important to note that these are *in-seat activities,* with students mostly remaining in their seats, as opposed to *out-of-seat activities,* which are useful and important but not always feasible with extremely large groups because it is time-consuming to get the activities under way, the noise level is often quite high, and the teacher has to consider factors such as floor space, desk mobility, and the use of chalkboards and wall space. Interested teachers can refer to the resources in Appendix 1 for a description of out-of-seat games and cooperative activities that can be used for large groups.

Activity 1: One, two, three—go

This activity consists of choral questioning and answering by a large group and is a good way to provide speaking practice when going over homework, practicing dialogues, or conducting question-and-answer drills. The teacher first divides the class into three groups. Group 1 reads a question from the homework, and Group 2 gives a choral response. The trick is to ask each group to respond in unison so that you can hear whether answers are correct or incorrect. Thus, it helps to count "One, Two, Three,—Go" (or "Ready, Steady,—Go") to help them speak together as a group. The role of Group 3 is to respond in the likely case of incorrect or mixed answers from Group 2. In this activity one group is usually listening while the other two are engaged in speaking, but each group knows their turn will come, especially if the teacher keeps them involved by asking them if the other groups gave a correct response. In addition to working on pertinent grammar and vocabulary, this speaking activity is an opportunity to practice facets of phonology, such as important aspects of stress and intonation.

Activity 2: Chaining

Chaining is an activity that works well when practicing particular grammar issues—such as negative questions, phrasal verbs, and subject-verb agreement—which are incorporated into dialogues of at least four lines. Eight to ten students sit in a row, and the first student on one end is told to begin with the first line of dialogue. The next student listens and repeats the line, then turns and gives the third student the second line of dialogue. This process continues with each student until the end of the row is reached, but it can be continued for as long as desired with new dialogues and different grammar constructions. If a new dialogue consists of only a few words for each line, a prompt can be written on a whiteboard. Alternatively, the teacher can introduce the new prompt verbally.

Activity 3: Opening and closing songs

Songs are naturally motivating, and this activity will have students practicing lyrics on their own and leaving class with a tune on their

lips. To open and/or close each class period the teacher has students sing a song in English. Students can become involved in this activity by researching and suggesting what songs to sing. For large classes, singing in *rounds* work well; that means that one group of students starts the song, and then, at a set interval, another group begins singing the song from the beginning. Different groups are assigned to sing verse one, verse two, and verse three, with everyone joining in for the chorus. For variety, these groups can be selected according to special characteristics, such as gender, month of birth, type of clothing, and so on.

Using songs requires typing and copying the lyrics as a handout; two students can easily share a handout, if necessary. With unfamiliar tunes, I typically begin teaching a song at the beginning of class, and this becomes an incentive for students to arrive on time and find a seat. Aside from practicing oral English, songs are a great way to review social facts about the countries where the language is spoken. For example, the subject matter of songs like *Clementine, Red River Valley, The Streets of Laredo,* and *Bicycle Built for Two* can be the basis for discussing aspects of American culture, history, and geography.

Activity 4: Creative dictations

This activity provides a fun way to work on new vocabulary and listening skills. To begin, the teacher demonstrates how to create a dictation on a specified topic and then asks students to work in pairs to create their own. For example, if the topic is "Body Parts and Health," the first sentence could be "My back hurts today." The first student says and writes this sentence, and the partner listens and also writes the sentence. The process continues with the partner saying and writing a related sentence, such as "I have a stomach ache." The students do this back and forth until each student has heard and written five to six sentences. Both students then proofread their dictations to check punctuation, spelling, and accuracy. Finally, they trade papers and score them before handing in the work to the teacher.

It is best to do this activity using a *pair up* or *pair down* system, where a student's partner comes from the row in front of or behind the student, so that the two students are not sitting right next to each other. This way one student can turn around to work with his or her partner, and they are less likely to see each other's work.

In addition to providing practice of vocabulary and listening skills, this activity offers students a chance to discuss English conversational routines such as greetings, the body of a conversation, and closings. For example, students can consider what would be the best responses to open a conversation, keep the conversation going, and end the conversation. As an assignment, students can work together to produce an original conversation, which can then be traded to other student pairs who role-play the dictation.

Another variation is to use the activity to make students aware of the different levels of formality between speakers. For example, if the context were a discussion about the extremely hot weather, one student pair could create and dictate a conversation between friends, while another pair could dictate a conversation between a professor and a student. A comparison between the two dialogues should reveal an example of different English language styles.

Activity 5: Self-correction and peer grading of homework

Self-correction and peer grading is an activity that is designed to engage the students in language learning while helping the teacher with the problematic issue of reading and scoring large amounts of homework. Many teachers of large classes are not inclined to assign homework regularly since it is nearly impossible to provide quality feedback on a timely basis. I give daily homework assignments, but my philosophy is that homework's main purpose is to identify areas where learners need more help and to enable them to actively learn from their mistakes. If these objectives are met, it is not necessary to collect, grade, and return every piece of homework. It is more productive and learner-centered to have students talk about any questions or problems they had with their homework and to actually allow them to correct it before it is scored. This encourages students to come to class prepared (and even eager) to ask questions. While doing their homework, they are more likely to note the items they are unsure of, thereby building up metacognitive awareness of their problems.

Another good strategy is peer grading, also known as *trade and grade,* a procedure where students grade each other's papers. After trading and grading a homework assignment, the grader

writes his or her name, identification number, and the number of correct items or responses on the top of the paper and then returns it to the original student, who looks at the score and asks questions if necessary. After collecting the homework, the teacher checks it (carefully at the beginning of the semester and just spot-checking it later in the year) and subtracts points from the grader if it is obvious that he or she did not grade carefully or was not accurate. In those cases where it is clear that graders are consistently scoring accurately, the teacher can accept and record the grader's score.

Returning homework to 150 students can be a cumbersome process. For a very large class it helps to make eight to ten piles that are sorted by clearly labeled ranges of ID numbers. If the piles are placed on a table at the front of the classroom, students can cue up at the right pile to retrieve their paper. If this is done before class, students have the opportunity to collect their work, take their seats, and check their scores with the grader. The whole class may then go over the homework assignment as another activity. Self-correction and peer grading are a tremendous help in alleviating the instructor's grading load, but most importantly, they offer immediate feedback to students while encouraging them to examine their work and to learn from mistakes.

Out-of-class activities

In the EFL setting, it is crucial for students to work outside of class as much as possible so they can become autonomous learners. Following are three out-of-class collaborative activities that are motivating for students and manageable for teachers.

Activity 1: Poems for two voices

This out-of-class activity requires students to work in groups of eight to ten as they prepare to perform a poem reading. The teacher works with the students to select seven or eight poems and practices them in class so students understand the language focus, whether it be vocabulary, cultural issues, intonation, pronunciation, word and sentence stress, or another focus. The students then form groups and each group chooses a poem. Depending on the size of the class, two or three groups may be allowed to select the same poem.

After working on the poems outside of class for two to three weeks, the groups are scheduled to perform the poem for the teacher. The groups can also be asked to perform for the entire class, with one or two groups performing at the end of a class period. Poems can be performed individually or as "two voices," with two students reading alternate lines (see Appendix 2 for a sample of a poem for two voices). As for grading, the teacher can simply score each student and mark their problem utterances on a copy of the poem and, if possible, hold follow-up conferences.

I give each group member the same grade, but I ask members of the group to grade each other by distributing 100 "pretend" U.S. dollars (or whatever local currency amounts to a substantial amount per person) among the group members, based upon their judgment about the individual contributions to the activity. When determining how much pretend money to give each person, they can consider who took on leadership duties, who put forth extra time and effort, and who was most dependable, among other criteria. Each student is asked to write all the names of the group members and allocate how much money each (including themselves) should receive. The teacher converts these results to a percentage grade for each individual. For the final individual grade on this assignment, half the total score is from this converted percentage and the other half is the teacher's score given to the whole group. The best six groups are asked to perform for the entire class, with one or two groups performing at the end of a class period.

This activity can be expanded by asking students to write their own poems for two (or more) voices. I announce walk-in times when groups that have finished their poems can come to my office and perform so as to get feedback and assistance before performing for a grade. When groups are ready, they perform before the class and are graded as described above.

Activity 2: Survey project

For this information-gathering activity, groups of four to six students use a survey instrument to investigate an interesting topic. This works best if the teacher has a prepared set of questions (or helps students develop questions) that groups use when interviewing respondents. The best topics for a survey correspond to issues that intrigue students, such as gender roles in the home, child rearing practices, and the pros and cons of school uniforms, among others.

Each group should decide how to proceed when interviewing respondents, but in general, the final set of responses should include people who have different ages and genders. The interviews are conducted in the local language (whatever is most comfortable for the respondent), and after data are collected, the group meets to collate and organize the results.

This activity is an opportunity for students to compile interesting and complex information and report it in English, including numbers and percentages in the form of tables or charts (see Appendix 3 for a sample survey instrument on the topic of marriage). Each group presents their results to the teacher outside of class and receives feedback and suggestions before they make their presentation to the class.

If the class is very large, the teacher can divide the room into different sections and four or five groups can present the research to smaller audiences of about 20 students each. If possible, each group can present at least twice to different audiences. This gives students a chance to improve or revise their presentation. I typically assign students to audience groups and also have them rate the presentation on a scale of 1 (unacceptable) to 5 (superior). I sometimes designate certain students to ask questions of the presenters.

As with the poem activity, group members may pay each other pretend money, basing the amount on the quality of individual contributions.

Activity 3: Travel project

In this activity a small group (four to six students) plans a two-week trip to a different country. They must decide their travel itinerary and specify where they will be each day and what they will do. Students work out a prospective budget with imaginary funds, to include costs for transportation, food, lodging, and entertainment. They discuss what they will see in each city or region they visit.

It works well to have students prepare a scrapbook as the final product. Many groups create a scrapbook that highlights events on "Day 1," "Day 2," "Day 3," and so on. Another possibility is to have each group act as travel agents trying to "sell" their trip to an audience of students. Four or five groups of "travel agents" can present in the classroom at once, with the audiences rotating from group to group, and, at the end, ranking each trip (1–5).

Students typically respond well and become quite excited about this project, which exposes them to a large amount of English vocabulary and functional and notional material. Some students may visit travel agencies to ask questions and get information. Newspapers and magazines are also a good source of material for this activity. If resources are limited, students can interview people they know who have traveled to the target location.

One key to success is to have the students start on this project early, as they will need a minimum of four to five weeks to do a good job. The teacher should also schedule two to three progress meetings with the groups or have them submit at least two written progress reports to ensure that they are working steadily. For this project, the teacher can score it and give the same grade to all members of the group, while also considering the audience scores and ratings from individuals within the group when figuring the final grade.

Conclusion

The activities presented in this article work equally well in ESL or EFL settings and are not dependent on resources in the form of computers or textbooks. They require little in the form of handouts or materials from the teacher. Instead, students are encouraged to use English as they work together outside of class.

I hope that the ideas discussed here will generate some new ideas for teachers who work in these settings. I also hope that teachers have some ideas that they are prepared to share with others, drawing upon their personal experiences and successes as teachers working with limited materials and large groups.

KIM HUGHES WILHELM has taught English in Hong Kong, Macau, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United States. She has conducted teacher training courses in Honduras, Israel, and Austria and has worked as a curriculum coordinator in intensive English programs in the United States and Malaysia. She is currently an invited associate professor at the University of Macau.

APPENDIX 1 | RESOURCES FOR PLANNING OUT-OF SEAT ACTIVITIES

No Books and 150 Students? • *Kim Hughes Wilhelm*

Hadfield, J. 1984. *Elementary communication games.* Harlow, England: Longman.

Larimer, R. E., and L. Schleicher, eds. 1999. *New ways in using authentic materials in the classroom.* Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Lewis, M., ed. 1997. *New ways in teaching adults.* Alexandria, VA: TESOL

McClure, K. 1995. *Putting it together: A conversation management text.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Shameem, N., and M. Tickoo, eds. 1999. *New ways in using communicative games in language teaching.* Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Wallwork, A. 1997. *Discussions A–Z: Intermediate.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Webster, M., and J. DeFilippo. 1999. *So to speak: Integrating speaking, listening, and pronunciation.* Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Wilson, W., and R. Barnard. 1998. *Fifty-fifty intro: An introductory course in communicative English.* Singapore: Prentice Hall Asia.

APPENDIX 2 | A POEM FOR TWO VOICES

No Books and 150 Students? • *Kim Hughes Wilhelm*

Instructions: To perform this poem as two voices, one student reads the lines in column 1 and a second student reads the lines in column 2. Note that both students will read the words in italics together.

Poem Title: Soccer		
Column 1		**Column 2**
----------		School's out!
Work's over.		----------
Time to play!		*Time to play!*
What shall we do today?		----------
----------		Soccer, of course.
Running, kicking, tripping, and falling...		----------
----------		Shouting, waving, cheering them on!
At the soccer field!		*At the soccer field!*
Look out, goalie!		----------
----------		Don't let him score!
Oh no, here comes one more!		----------
It's a goal!		*It's a goal!*
Hooray for my team!		----------
----------		Too bad for mine...
Let's try again!		----------
----------		Don't listen to that fan…
Penalty kick, oh no!		----------
----------		Yay! Way to go!
My team will win today!		*My team will win today!*
Oh, no! What's that you say?		*Oh, no!* ----------
----------		Rain! And lightning.
No more today…		----------
At the soccer field.		*At the soccer field.*

APPENDIX 3 | SAMPLE SURVEY WORKSHEET

No Books and 150 Students? • *Kim Hughes Wilhelm*

Survey Topic: Marriage

Group Members: _____

Total # of Respondents: _____ Total # Men: _____ Total # Women: _____

% of Men: _____ % of Women: _____

Age Range of Respondents:

Total # age group A (17–25): _____ % age group A: _____

Total # age group B (26–35): _____ % age group B: _____

Total # age group C (36 & over): _____ % age group C: _____

Question 1: Are you married?

% YES		% NO	
% Men _____	% Women _____	% Men _____	% Women _____

YES			NO		
% Age A	% Age B	% Age C	% Age A	% Age B	% Age C

Question 2: If yes, at what age did you marry?

Under 20		20–25		26–30		Over 30	
Men___	Women___	Men___	Women___	Men___	Women___	Men___	Women___

Question 3: Is there a "right" age to get married for men?

% YES		% NO	
% Men _____	% Women _____	% Men _____	% Women _____

YES			NO		
% Age A	% Age B	% Age C	% Age A	% Age B	% Age C

Ages considered "right" for men: _____

Question 4: Is there a "right" age to get married for women?

% YES		% NO	
% Men _____	% Women _____	% Men _____	% Women _____

YES			NO		
% Age A	% Age B	% Age C	% Age A	% Age B	% Age C

Ages considered "right" for women: _____

Question 5: What factors should be considered when deciding when to get married?

_____

_____

Question 6: What are the most important qualities to look for in a spouse?

_____

_____

Question 7: Do you think arranged marriage is a good idea?

% YES		% NO	
% Men _____	% Women _____	% Men _____	% Women _____

YES			NO		
% Age A	% Age B	% Age C	% Age A	% Age B	% Age C

Question 8: Should a son or daughter always marry the person his/her parents choose?

% YES		% NO	
% Men _____	% Women _____	% Men _____	% Women _____

YES			NO		
% Age A	% Age B	% Age C	% Age A	% Age B	% Age C

Question 9: Should a son or daughter marry a person even if his/her parents disapprove?

% YES		% NO	
% Men _____	% Women _____	% Men _____	% Women _____

YES			NO		
% Age A	% Age B	% Age C	% Age A	% Age B	% Age C

Question 10: Is it acceptable to marry a person of another culture?

% YES		% NO	
% Men _____	% Women _____	% Men _____	% Women _____

YES			NO		
% Age A	% Age B	% Age C	% Age A	% Age B	% Age C

Question 11: What problems do mixed marriage couples face?

_____

_____

Question 12: In these modern times, what are the major difficulties that married couples face?

_____

_____

Question 13: What are the most positive aspects of marriage?

_____

_____