

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS IN AUTUMN!?

What odd lives we teachers have

For one thing, we make New Year's resolutions in autumn, the start of the academic year for many of us. By then, other people's good intentions about being punctual, staying off junk food and keeping up that regular exercise programme have long been forgotten. But as teachers, we all know the importance of a good start with a new class. The first few days really do set the tone for the rest of the year... and that's where realistic New Year's resolutions come in. By all means set high standards, but impossible targets will only lead to disappointment. We need resolutions we can keep.

What you should know

A teacher must get to know her students' names, personalities, and strengths and weaknesses as learners (in that order!) as quickly as possible. Names are easy - the others take a little longer.

Try giving each class 10-15 minutes in class to fill a sheet of paper headed "What you should know about me". Tell them to decide what to include, and not to worry too much about mistakes...it's amazing how much data you can get in this short time. Meanwhile you can start learning those names...

Using English in class

Encourage your learners to use English to solve problems in class wherever possible. Create a 'Classroom English' poster with phrases like:

"Could you repeat that?"

"What does X mean?"

Refer students to it whenever you need to.

Class dynamics

There's no one way of creating good rapport: we all know our strengths and play to them. But making students work effectively with each other can be harder.



Consider changing pairings

Even if you have fixed desks, the students should be within talking distance of two or three different partners, which adds interest and variety to the lesson. And - if you're in a larger room - make sure your students are sitting close enough to see and hear each other easily.

Encourage students to listen to each other

If they're working as a group, stay in the background. If they're reporting back, encourage them to talk to their classmates, not just to you. If students speak quietly, get them to speak up (so everyone can hear) rather than repeating what they say yourself. And always give thinking time when you ask a question - remember that it may take time for students to formulate their ideas, so don't jump in too quickly.

Learner training

Learner training has been a buzzword in ELT circles for many years now, but all too often the reality falls far short of the ideal. But if you do want your learners to acquire good study habits, the beginning of the course is the time to try. Here are two areas we can all focus on:

Providing a record of the lesson

Often students don't take proper notes. A good way to remedy this is with your board work, which in many cases is what the students take home as a record of the class. Keeping the board neat, comprehensible and clearly organised will really help. Try sectioning off your board into areas such as vocab / grammar / etc. Look at your board work at the end of the lesson. How would you feel if another teacher looked at it?

Dictionaries

The benefits of learner dictionaries are widely recognised nowadays - and you can also get worksheets to train students to use dictionaries like The Longman Active Study Dictionary (LINK TO LDOCE) effectively. The beginning of the year really is the time to do this. (By the way, remember that Cutting Edge users have the extra advantage of a mini-dictionary inside the back cover...so students can't say they forgot it!!)



This is a small sample of realistic resolutions that we have found useful. What works for you? Why not share your ideas with other Cutting Edge users around the world? (LINK TO TEACHER TALK)



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