

## Get them talking

Have you ever tried a whole-class discussion and, instead of speaking to each other, the learners direct all comments to you? How can you get more student-student interaction in such activities?

### **Circles rather than lines**

It's hard for anyone to talk to people they can't see - so straight-line rows in classrooms can get in the way of interaction. Arrange seating so that learners can make eye-contact with each other. If you have fixed desks try getting everyone to sit on their desks for a while so that they can make a circle and really talk to each other around class. Alternatively get people out of their seats and standing. A "mingle" is also a useful format - where people walk around (as in a party) meeting others and having short conversations.

### **Look away**

If a learner is talking to you when you would prefer them to tell the whole class, gently break eye contact with them and turn away to look in the direction you want them to talk in. It's quite hard for someone to go on talking to a person who is not looking at them and they may naturally start talking more to the rest of the class.

### **Disappear sometimes**

Sometimes a teacher's presence can interfere in a discussion. If you feel that you keep drawing attention back to yourself, try "disappearing" for a while - i.e. move to a different part of the room, out of the participants' view and keep a low profile (e.g. not making any comments or corrections). This sets the learners free to continue without constantly worrying about your reaction and opinions.

### **Walk away**

When a student speaks quietly it seems natural for a teacher to walk closer to her in order to hear better. Unfortunately this often has the effect of encouraging that learner to speak even quieter. Instead, try walking further away - across the classroom. This often has the effect of getting them to speak up - and then more students will be able to hear.

### **Don't fill the silence**

Teachers often seem worried if there is silence in class - and may over-compensate by talking to fill the space. Sometimes we might feel we are not doing our job if we're not talking. It's worth remembering that a lot of silence is "quality silence" - it's space to think, to find a way to articulate thoughts. So, for example, when you ask a question, and there is no immediate answer, don't panic and start talking again or re-stating the question - try allowing three times the waiting space you normally do - and see what happens.

### **Reduce the echo**

"Echo" is when the teacher repeats what a learner has just said. For example when a student says "at the weekend" and the teacher responds "At the weekend. Yes. At the weekend." A teacher who does this is probably trying to be helpful so that all students can hear the comment. Unfortunately it trains the learners not to bother to listen to each other and instead they just wait for the teacher to say everything. So monitor yourself - watch out for unnecessary echo - and avoid it. If someone doesn't hear something get them to ask the learner who spoke to say it again.