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Interactive Warm-ups that Promote Engagement and Build Community

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Interactive Warm-ups that Promote Engagement and Build Community

Abstract

Daily warm-up activities can lead to greater student interest and engagement and can help build community in the classroom. Warm-ups are divided into three categories in this paper: personal, cultural, and creative. Student-led warm-ups can allow students to benefit from peer instruction and experience a student-centered classroom.

Keywords

warm-ups, student engagement, peer instruction

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Introduction

Beginning class with a warm-up is a simple way to promote interest and engagement in the lesson. Most instructors are familiar with a variety of these activities, including games or short review exercises, but may not always feel they have the time or see the benefit in doing so. However, warm-ups can set the tone for the entire lesson and encourage students to take an active role in their learning. Warm-up activities should be communicative, low stakes, and connected in some way to students' lives; most importantly, they should be fun. In fact, brain studies support the positive relationship between enjoyable experiences and effective learning (Willis, 2007).

Warm-Ups

This paper divides interactive warm-ups into three categories: personal, cultural, and creative. It also describes an option for student-led warm-ups as an opportunity for peer instruction and student-centered learning. These activities have been used in remote and in-person university ESL classes with both undergraduate and graduate students at a high- intermediate level (CEFR B2) but could easily be adapted with other learners in different contexts. The instructor allows approximately 20-25 minutes at the start of a two-and-a-half-hour class for these warm-ups.

Personal

This first category of warm-ups includes activities that require students to share

something personal about themselves, similar to classic ice-breaker activities. Ice-breakers are typically done only at the start of the term, but students benefit from these types of activities periodically throughout the course to help build community (Chlup and Collins, 2010). In one activity, students share three photos from their phone with a partner: a place they've visited recently, a person that's important to them, and a food they've eaten recently. Once they've shared the photos with their partner and explained the context of the photo, they upload one of their photos to a shared document like a Jam Board or Digital Whiteboard. The instructor goes through each photo individually and asks students to share information about the photos with the whole class. Students ask questions and learn more details about their classmates, which helps foster a more personal and empathetic classroom dynamic. Other activities include games like "Two Truths and a Lie," and "What's on your desk?" (for remote classes)

Cultural

The second category, cultural warm-ups, should be relevant to the calendar date. The instructor creates a mini lesson about an upcoming holiday or cultural event. Examples include Groundhog's Day, April Fools' Day and Martin Luther King Day. Students discuss questions to access prior knowledge, watch a short video or read a short text about the event, discuss comprehension questions, and do a follow up activity, such as use related idioms, categorize famous pranks, or list their personal dreams. These lessons are self-contained, fast-paced, and communicative. They provide an opportunity to practice receptive and productive language skills and offer cultural context that students often lack in L2 settings.

Creative

Finally, these types of warm-ups ask students to create a simple piece of visual art. This can be pairs of students describing different

images to one another and drawing what they hear. In one particular activity, the instructor shares a poem based on a painting. The instructor reads the poem, explains new vocabulary, and then asks students to recreate the artwork described in the poem through a simple drawing. Students share their drawings, explaining the details that relate to the poem. Afterwards, the class views the original artwork and compares their drawings to the original. In this way, students activate learning through visual art and practice reading comprehension.

Student-Led Warm Up Option

If an instructor provides daily warm-ups throughout the course, mid-term may be a time to introduce the student-led warm up project. First, students think reflectively on previous warm-ups and list the features of a good warm-up, if, for example, it should be educational, fun, or related to course content. A daily warm-up can be dedicated to this activity with students sharing answers to questions in pairs and on a digital form reviewed as a class. At this time, the instructor introduces the student-led warm up project which involves students working in pairs to develop and lead their own warm-up on a scheduled class date. Students are given detailed instructions and feedback from their instructor before leading the activity. Afterward, the class completes anonymous feedback forms, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the warm-up. The instructor assesses the activity based on organization, delivery, and presenters' engagement with the class. This project allows students to engage in peer instruction, improve confidence, and experience a truly student-centered classroom.

Key Takeaways

With assessment and learning objectives at the forefront of curriculum design, it can be difficult for instructors to make time for "fun" activities that build community and engagement in the class. A daily warm-up is

is a way to ensure that at least part of the lesson is dedicated to just this. Students begin the class eager to participate and develop valuable leadership skills through peer instruction. Instructors might feel that they don't have time to dedicate 20-25 minutes every day to such an activity, but times can be adjusted, and course content, including vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation tasks, can be incorporated and reviewed as part of the warm-up. Knowing that class begins with a low-stakes activity reduces the affective filter of students and increases interest and engagement in the lesson (Schrank, 2016). Additionally, participating in student-led warm-ups builds community and confidence among learners.

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