

# In the Classroom

## *En Classe*

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This section presents descriptions of teaching techniques or practical classroom activities.

*Cette section est consacrée à la description de différentes techniques ou activités d'enseignement.*

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### TELEFON ACTIVITIES IN AN ELEMENTARY LEVEL CLASSROOM

#### **Ranka Curcin**

Most second language learners are faced with the problem of making and answering telephone calls. They fear that they are neither able to understand the other party, nor be understood over the phone. This is a consequence of a conversation which depends entirely on words without recourse to non-verbal cues such as gesture or facial expression. Although a telephone is a necessary part of life, second language learners, particularly those at elementary levels of language, are reticent to use it.

To help elementary ESL learners develop confidence and improve their ability to communicate on the phone, I have devised a number of activities. These activities should be done throughout the course, and should be properly sequenced and graded for difficulty. They should be done exclusively with classmates to make them as non-threatening as possible. Although students perceive the telephone activities as FUN, they are much more than just fun. Having students use the telephone to exchange information engages them in genuine communicative tasks. Using the phone on a regular basis enables the students to feel more comfortable when they have to make other telephone calls besides the ones required for the class. Through these activities the students learn how to use the telephone in different situations. The students also improve their listening comprehension and speaking skills. As well, such activities sometimes create the opportunity for students to get together and socialize outside of class.

Telefon activities should be started at the beginning of the course and

carried on to the end. They should be perceived by the students as long-term, regular activities which will eventually help them to feel more at ease when their phone rings. Before any telefun activities are started, the activities should be described to the students and their purpose stated as clearly and as simply as possible. The students should also understand that these are serious activities, a part of their language training, and should, therefore, be done with as much care as other assignments.

There are many types of telefun activities, each of which focuses on different aspects of language use. One type of task may involve giving information about oneself; another may require students to report on information taken from a reading or listening assignment; others may require students to help each other with homework assignments or pass on a message. The tasks involve varying degrees of complexity.

Before any of the telefun activities are tried out, it should be understood that they are used only as follow-up activities to whatever has been dealt with in class. They should be thematically related to classwork so that students do not have to deal with unfamiliar vocabulary.

It is also advisable to teach students some of the more common expressions related to telephone usage, in particular, greetings, how to identify oneself, how to ask for someone, and appropriate closings. These do not all have to be taught and learned before the first telefun activity is undertaken; they can be introduced and practised on several occasions. Another word of advice pertains to instructions. Each activity has to be explained clearly and simply so that students do not run into the problem of not really knowing what to do once they are at home. Teachers must supply students with the necessary information and materials needed to complete each activity successfully. With some activities the teacher also has to get involved and participate. Finally, start with a simple activity so as not to scare the students at the outset. Remember, you want your students to feel comfortable and in control as much as possible. Here are some of the activities that I have tried with my elementary level students.

### **Activity 1—Personal Details Chart**

In class, students learn and practice how to give their names and personal details about themselves. They learn how to ask and answer questions such as "What's your name?," "What's your telephone number?," "Where are you from?." Once they have had sufficient practice, they are given a chart with eight columns to fill out (name, telephone number, address, age, country of origin, languages spoken, profession, reason for studying English). They complete the first line by asking the teacher the personal details questions. When this is completed, the students go around the class and fill out the first two columns (name and

telephone number) for each student in the class. When the first two columns are completed, they start to get information for the other columns for each student. While the students are working with each other, the teacher walks around, helping and checking. The activity lasts from twenty minutes to half an hour. The teacher then tells the students to stop and asks them to complete the information, for the other students they have not had a chance to talk to, over the phone. Next day they bring their charts to class. As a follow-up activity, the students verify their information in pairs. When the activity is over, the students are asked to save the charts for future telefun activities.

### **Activity 2—Transferring a Message**

This is a simple activity which the teacher takes an active part in initiating. The teacher begins by calling one of the students to give a message (e.g., the class will meet in the library instead of the classroom tomorrow at 9:00 a.m.). Each student must transfer the message to another student. Everyone should make one phone call. To insure that this is done properly, the students should go down the list of names given to them in class. About four hours later the teacher should call the last person on the list to find out whether the message was received. If the message has been received, ask the student to repeat it. The extent to which students are successful in relaying the message can be verified next day in class.

### **Activity 3—Exchanging Favourite Recipes**

If you are doing a unit on cooking, you can ask your students to think about their favourite dish, then write out the recipe with the list of ingredients and steps for preparation. Students next call one another and exchange the recipes. Students bring their recipes to class and get with the person they phoned and got the recipe from to verify the information. Students should be told to be sure to indicate the name of the recipe and the country of origin. Once the activity is completed, recipes are collected to make a book. Students with nice handwriting can copy the recipes. Another group can be in charge of making photocopies for the class. An artistically oriented student can do an illustration for the book cover and the title which has been voted on by the entire class (e.g., *An International Recipe Book*). Yet another group can be in charge of binding the book and distributing it to the class. All this can be followed by an international luncheon to which students bring their own favourite dishes. The teacher plays an active role throughout the activity by contributing a recipe and bringing a dish to the party.

#### **Activity 4—An Invitation to a Movie**

As a follow-up activity to a unit on entertainment, students can be asked to buy the Saturday newspaper and flip through its Entertainment Section. Once they find a movie they would like to see, they should note its title, where and when it is playing, the actors and actresses involved, the director, and write a brief description of the movie which they can read about in the "Movie Roundup" (see Form A, Appendix A). Then, they should decide when (the date) they would like to see it and at what time. Following this, they are asked to use the phone to invite someone from the class to the movie. They should give the person they call all the necessary information about the movie. The invited student listens and notes down this information (see Form B, Appendix A). If interested in accepting the invitation, the student discusses possible times and dates with the caller. Once an agreement has been reached, both students write down the date and the time, as well as their meeting place. If, on the other hand, the invited student has turned down the invitation, both students have to write down why the invitation was refused. All students have to bring the information to class. If the majority have chosen the same movie, the teacher might take the students to see it, or ask the students to go see it and report on it orally or in writing (short description and evaluation).

#### **Activity 5—A TV Program I Watched**

Students are asked to look through the *TV Guide*, choose a program they would like to watch, and then watch it. For this activity, they are provided with a worksheet (see Form A, Appendix B). The worksheet consists of two parts, one about the program and the other about the commercials during the program. They are asked to complete the part about the commercials while they are watching the program. Here they are asked to note: how many commercials there were, what they were for (the student should note five names), as well as the best and worst commercials. Immediately following the program, they should complete the part about the program itself. Here they are asked to indicate the kind of program they watched, its title, the time it started, its length, the TV channel it was on, and finally, write a brief description. Once they have completed this, they should call one person from the class, exchange information and write down details about their partner's program (see Form B, Appendix B). In a case in which the students have seen the same program, they should call somebody else. This activity can be done several times during a course.

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**THE AUTHOR**

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**APPENDIX A  
AN INVITATION TO A MOVIE**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**FORM A**

Flip through the Entertainment Section of the Saturday newspaper. Find a movie you would like to see. Fill out the following information:

**PART I**

1. its title \_\_\_\_\_
2. where it's playing (the name of the movie theatre and its address)  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. what times it's playing \_\_\_\_\_
4. actors/actresses/director \_\_\_\_\_
5. brief description (read about it in the "Moviegoer's Roundup")  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Decide:

1. when you want to see the movie (the date) \_\_\_\_\_
2. what time you want to see the movie \_\_\_\_\_

## PART II

Name \_\_\_\_\_ I called \_\_\_\_\_

When you have completed page 1, do the following:

1. Call one person from the class.
2. Invite him/her to a movie you have chosen.
3. Using page 1, tell him/her:
  - the title of the movie;
  - where it's playing (give the name of the movie theatre and its address);
  - what times it's playing;
  - the names of actors/actresses/director;
  - what the film is about;
  - when you want to see the movie (the date);
  - what time you want to see the movie.

Did he/she accept the invitation? YES NO

If YES:

1. When are you going to see the movie (the date)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What time? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where will you meet? \_\_\_\_\_

If NO:

Write why he/she refused your invitation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**FORM B**

\_\_\_\_\_ called me.

When a person from the class calls you up, write down the information about the movie you have been invited to.

## PART I

1. its title \_\_\_\_\_
2. where it's playing (the name of the movie theatre and its address)  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. what times it's playing \_\_\_\_\_
4. actors/actresses/director \_\_\_\_\_
5. what the film is about \_\_\_\_\_

6. the date of the invitation \_\_\_\_\_

7. the time when the movie starts \_\_\_\_\_

## **PART II**

Did you accept the invitation? YES NO

If YES:

1. When are you going to see the movie (the date)? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What time? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Where will you meet? \_\_\_\_\_

If NO:

Write why you refused his/her invitation.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **A TV PROGRAM I WATCHED**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**FORM A**

Choose a TV program to watch this evening. While you are watching it, complete Part II. Immediately after the program, complete Part I.

#### **PART I**

1. kind of program

\_\_\_\_\_

2. title

\_\_\_\_\_

3. started

\_\_\_\_\_

4. lasted

\_\_\_\_\_

5. TV channel

\_\_\_\_\_

6. any famous star in the program (give his/her name)

\_\_\_\_\_

7. brief description

\_\_\_\_\_

**PART II**

1. number of commercials

\_\_\_\_\_

2. commercials for (give at least five)

\_\_\_\_\_

3. the best commercial

\_\_\_\_\_

4. the worst commercial

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**FORM B**

I called \_\_\_\_\_

When you have completed Form A:

1. make the questions for Parts I and II;
2. call one person from the class;
3. find out what program he/she watched;
4. complete Form B;
5. tell him/her about the program you watched.

**PART I**

1. kind of program

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

2. title

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_



3. started

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

4. lasted

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

5. TV channel

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

6. any famous star in the program (give his/her name)

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

7. brief description

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

## **PART II**

1. number of commercials

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

2. commercials for (give at least five)

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

3. the best

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

4. the worst

Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_