

## **Brainstorming in EFL and ESL Classes**

### **What is Brainstorming**

Brainstorming is a combination of a relaxed, informal approach to problem-solving and lateral thinking. People are asked to find ideas and thoughts that can at first seem to be a bit irrelevant. The idea is to use some of these ideas to form original, creative solutions to problems. Even some seemingly useless ideas can spark still more ideas. The goal of brainstorming is to direct people to new ways of thinking and break from the usual way of reasoning.

The most important thing about brainstorming is that there should be no criticism of ideas. students try to open up possibilities and discard wrong assumptions about the limits of the problem. Judgments and analysis of ideas are explored after the brainstorming process while focus should be at this stage on idea generation.

### **Why brainstorming?**

Brainstorming contributes to the generation of creative solutions to a problem. It teaches students to break away from old patterns of reasoning to new unexplored paths of thinking.

- Problem solving has become part and parcel of teaching and learning process. Brainstorming can make group problem-solving a less sterile and a more satisfactory process.
- It can be used with your class to bring the various students experiences into play. This increases the richness of ideas explored, particularly before reading, listening and writing activities.
- Brainstorming is fun. That's why it helps student-student and students-teacher relationships to get stronger as they solve problems in a positive, stress-free environment.

Brainstorming technique was first designed to be used with groups, but it can also be used by a single person privately to generate ideas.

### **Individual Brainstorming**

When individuals brainstorm on their own, they come up with more ideas, and often better quality ideas, than groups of people who brainstorm together. Perhaps this occurs because of many reasons

- In groups, learners aren't always strict in following the rules of brainstorming, and the risk of unfavorable group behaviors may arise.
- Instead of generating their own new ideas, students may pay more attention to other people's ideas.
- Sometimes learners forget their ideas while they are waiting for their turn to speak.
- Sometimes people are blocked because of shyness.
- Some students tend to do well when they work alone.
- individual brainstorming may be less engaging and less stressful. Students are free and do not worry about other people's opinions and judgments, and can therefore be more freely creative. For instance, a student who hesitates to bring up an idea in a group brainstorming because he thinks its unworthy, might be free to explore it in an individual brainstorming and find that it develops into something quite interesting.
- Students don't have to wait for others to stop speaking before they contribute their own ideas.

There are however some downturns with individual brainstorming. In a group brainstorming, the experiences of the members of the group help to develop ideas thoroughly. This is something that might be missing in individual brainstorming where only the individuals experience come to play.

### **Group Brainstorming**

Group brainstorming may work in so many effective ways:

- Brainstorming brings the full experience and creativity of all members of the group to solve a problem. When individual group members get stuck with an idea, another member's creativity and experience can take the idea to the next stage. Group brainstorming can therefore develop ideas in more depth than individual brainstorming.
- Another advantage of group brainstorming is that it helps everyone involved to feel that they have contributed to the end solution.
- It reminds one that other people have creative ideas to offer.
- Brainstorming can be great for team-building and creating harmony within a team!

Nevertheless group brainstorming has some disadvantages. It can be risky for individuals. Valuable but unusual suggestions may appear irrelevant

at first sight. That's why, the teacher needs to be careful not to suppress these ideas. Group problem-solving must not stifle creativity.

### **Brainstorming in EFL & ESL classes**

In EFL and ESL classes brainstorming can be effective in a wide range of areas of instruction.

- **Pre reading**

Teachers ask questions that are central for the overall comprehension of the text and students try to give as many answers to them as possible. The questions must involve a wide variety of possible answers.

- **Pre listening**

The same as above. Students come up with as many answers to open-ended questions.

- **Pre writing**

A topic can be fully brainstormed in an individual or group brainstorming (or a combination of both) to generate as many ideas as possible. At home students use their notes to prepare an outline and write the first draft to be edited in class.

- **Grammar**

In order for students understand how grammar works they should explore it instead of having the teacher explaining everything. It would be an interesting experience for students to brainstorm how different structures are used, what their meanings are and how they are formed.

- **Vocabulary**

EFL and ESL students are often faced with difficult vocabulary. It is a good idea to teach students how to use a dictionary, but it would be better if students use brainstorming sessions to find the meaning of difficult vocabulary using the context. Again, encourage students to provide their guesses and accept all of them even the wildest ones. Only later with the help of the teacher students try to evaluate them and pick up the most appropriate definitions.

These are just suggestions. Teachers can develop this technique to fit their students needs.