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Negotiating as a teaching tool

A key problem in teaching business communication to TEFL students is creating teaching scenarios that are both realistic and interesting. Business students are pragmatic; they become most engaged in classroom work when they can see an immediate application. And because actual business communication problems involve reading, speaking, listening, and writing, the most productive classroom assignments involve all four skills. I have found that some of the most effective assignments are collaborative negotiations.

The class activities are as follows:

1. Groups divide into negotiating teams.
2. Teams are given very brief negotiating problems
3. Teams analyze their problem and define their objectives.
4. The pairs then meet for a collaborative negotiating session. This is not a debate in which one side wins. Collaborative negotiation is used in business, diplomacy and in family counseling to form or reinforce long-term relationships between the two sides. Thus, such negotiation requires:
 - a. Very careful listening to the other side's needs
 - b. A respectful dialog, using vocabulary that emphasizes alternatives 'on the other hand,' 'in my opinion,' 'perhaps.'
 - c. Discussion that attempts to distinguish between significant and insignificant needs on each side.
 - d. A final clarification of what each side must have to reach a resolution.
 - e. A mutual exploration of possible options for resolution.
5. The instructor serves as a resource for the groups.
6. Each group then presents to the class, with the instructor critiquing grammar, pronunciation, and phrasing.

The assignments are easy to prepare. After completing the first assignment, the students themselves will suggest cases for additional classes. These assignments also work with all ability levels. Elementary students can negotiate using a basic vocabulary and the phrasing to present opinions. Advanced students can negotiate using more sophisticated vocabulary and complex grammatical forms.