

Using L2 Outside the Classroom

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A lot has been written about using a students' first language (L1) in the EFL (L2) classroom, but almost nothing has been reviewed about using English outside the classroom. I really don't know why.

We have written previously here about using L1 in the L2 classroom. I tend to use L1 almost not at all, and I have tried to make a strong case for that approach. Across four countries in 15 years, I've somehow been able to conduct my classes from start to finish rarely using L1.

Many teachers though are worried about excluding L1 and want to use it to warm up the students. That might make the teacher feel better, but I am not sure how much benefit it is for the student.

Outside the Classroom

I see L1 trying to sneak its way into the L2 classroom, what about sneaking L2 into the student's L1 environment outside the classroom? I've always felt that if a school hired me as a native speaker EFL teacher that they should get what they are paying for from the time I step on campus until I go home. When I meet my students in the hallway or in my office, I use English. If I meet my students in town or other places, it doesn't hurt to have a bit of relaxed L2 practice with the students. I could be selfish and practice the local language with my students, or I can help them learn what a relaxed and casual conversation might really be like without much correction. *Let's just chat.*

Let's Have a Chat

How often have they had that opportunity? To *just chat*? No examination, no review of how you have done, no grades, just pure and simple and enjoyable (!) communication. In English. Maybe never?! Probably never! Isn't that the real goal anyway? Why are we teaching them English if not to learn how to communicate in English in natural situations? Well, when the opportunity arises, don't pass it up. Talk to your students in English!

It seems some teachers almost want to apologize for "forcing" English on their students. Take the pressure off the whole thing and just have a nice casual conversation in English. Doing that is a very good way to know if you are succeeding in the classroom or what might be missing from what you are teaching that you should add. Really, if you meet your students on the street and they can't have a simple little *Hi, how ya doing? Where ya going? See ya later?* kind of conversation, have you been doing your job? Why not find out?