CREATING SITUATIONS FOR NON-STOP TALKING

Large Group Activity

CONVERSATION CORNERS

The facilitator designates each corner of the room as a topic, for example the four seasons of the year in the United States. Participants circulate and choose the corner they like the best. The group assembled in that corner has to develop at least five reasons why they like that corner. Each corner elects a spokesperson and the reasons are presented to the whole group. The conversation corner topics can be adapted to the interests and levels of the participants.

Possible Conversation Corner Topics

At the weekend I prefer to:
shop, watch TV, garden, do a sport.

For my next vacation I’d like to go to:
Hawaii, Africa, Disneyland, New York City.

In a job the most important thing is:
nice co-workers, interesting work,
a pleasant working environment, a good boss.

If I could have lunch with a famous person it would be:
Bill Clinton, Ken Griffey Jr., Oprah Winfrey, Janet Reno.

The job I would most like the most would be a:
bus driver, a janitor, a receptionist, a sales clerk.

I have children in:
pre-school, elementary school, middle school, high school
(develop list of parenting challenges for each age group).

Small Group Activity

PROBLEM POSING TREES

Problem posing trees are a variation on a brainstorm. A problem is represented by the trunk of the tree, for example, difficulty in finding a job. Roots are drawn and the group brainstorms the reasons or root of the problem. Branches of the tree are drawn to represent the effects of the problem and the group brainstorms the effects. Draw a watering can and have participants fill it up with ideas for what actions can be taken to address the problem. The tree gives a clear structure to the discussion. Conversation is richer if you ask participants to explain their thinking and elicit agreement and disagreement from the group as you go along.
USING GRIDS

I like using grids with ESL students because lots of information can be presented in a meaningful way. The information in the grid is relevant to the student (about and/or supplied by) and is immediately accessible in the form of pictures, symbols, single words, or short phrases. Relationships and grammatical structures are presented visually.

Grids work well not only with pre-literate students, since minimal literacy is required, but also as a "bridge" to conversation for those "book-dependent" students who tend to want to have everything written down.

Procedure

1. Introduce the topic with a picture, object, discussion, etc.
2. Draw the grid on the board or piece of newsprint.
3. Elicit information from the student(s) to fill in the grid. At this point, don't worry about how the student tells you, just get the information.
4. Model the material by giving a statement while pointing to the appropriate squares on the grid. Give several examples.
5. Practice the material orally. Once the information has been elicited, recorded, and modeled, try a variety of listening and speaking activities.
6. Follow up with literacy exercises.

Literacy Activities

- Student can practice sight word recognition by matching written words on index cards to pictures/symbols on the grid.
- Have student combine parts of sentences on strips to match information on grid.
- Provide a cloze (fill-in-the-blank) exercise.
- More advanced students can write their own sentences or paragraphs based on the information in the grid.
- Many of the oral activities can become writing exercises. For example, have students respond to written true and false statements or answer written questions.
Oral Practice Activities

- Give the student lots of listening practice if necessary, before having him speak. Make a statement suggested by the grid (e.g., "Tran doesn't like pizza") and have student point to appropriate squares in grid (without repeating). Then switch roles. Ask student to point to squares on the grid and you give the sentence.

- Give a series of statements based on the grid and have student tell you if they are True or False.

- When a student is comfortable with the material, have him practice speaking. Point to squares on the grid, give the statement suggested, and have student repeat. Or, point to the squares and have students come up with the appropriate statement.

- Students can practice asking and answering various types of questions:

  Yes / No Questions
  - Do you like ice cream? Does your daughter like ice cream?

  Either / Or Questions
  - Does Minh like coffee or tea? Who likes ice cream, your husband or your daughter?

  Wh - Questions
  - Who doesn't like ice cream? What does Tran like? How many people in your family like coffee?

- Let the conversation flow naturally from the information presented in the grid.
  - Can you get pizza in Vietnam? What do you put in your tea?
  - Do you drink coffee in the morning or at night? How many cups a day?
BALANCING MULTI-LEVEL NEEDS written by Alysan Croydon

What is a Multi-Level Group?

Most small groups of adult ESL students are made up of people from diverse backgrounds with varying language needs. They may or may not be literate in their own language. Their levels of literacy in English will vary, as will their previous education and current exposure to spoken English. All of these factors and many others contribute to making multi-level groups a challenge for the ESL tutor. Therefore careful planning and sequencing of activities is required.

Groupings

For any activity, decide what student grouping will best meet the needs of each level and make all students feel part of the group. Some possible groupings:

Whole Group - Decide if the activity will work with all the students participating together.

Mixed Ability Groups or Pairs - Lower level students have exposure to a greater language group. Higher level students reinforce and demonstrate what they know in helping other students.

Equal Ability Groups or Pairs - Each group can proceed at its pace. The tutor is free to help students who need it.

Individualized work - Students can work towards specific goals and with material appropriate to their level.

Activities for Multi-Level Groups

Greetings - Small talk at the beginning of lessons. Vary the kinds of questions you ask so that students of all levels are able to participate. “How did you come here today?” vs. “Did you come by car today?”

Dialogue Journals - These are appropriate for all levels. Low level students can give the tutor dictation and then work on reading their own words. They can record new words and phrases learned in class also. Other students can enter into a “dialogue on paper” with the tutor or another student. The writing is student generated and you will learn a lot about your students that will help you in lesson planning. It provides a written record of students’ writing progress. In responding to students’ entries do not correct errors in grammar and spelling but model correct English in your responses.

Use pictures for oral and literacy practice - Show a single picture or sequence of pictures. Have students tell a story or respond to pictures. Students can write about pictures at their own level. Some may write or say single words or short phrases while other students can give more extensive answers. The tutor or another student can take dictation from non-literate students.