

Speaking spontaneously

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David Heathfield offers some simple drama techniques to make speaking more personal.

Students bring so much experience and so many ideas with them into the classroom that their lives should be our richest resource. Yet when they are asked to talk about themselves, they will inevitably refer to people and events unknown to their classmates. This can make it difficult for those listening to get involved and really listen actively.

Even in our mother tongue, not all of us feel we have the skills to tell a good story, describe our feelings or express our views confidently. Here are three simple drama techniques which

help to bring the students' outside worlds alive in the classroom:

- 1 The students are invited to enter into a partner's real-life experience.
- 2 Pairs re-enact a real-life conversation.
- 3 The students put themselves into each other's shoes to predict each other's thoughts and views before finding out what they are.

The following three activities demonstrate these techniques. The students won't only be listening actively

to each other, they will be interacting fully and involving themselves in each other's lives.



David Heathfield is a freelance language and communication skills trainer and drama worker. He also teaches at Exeter University English Language Centre, UK. His book *Spontaneous Speaking: Drama Activities for Confidence and Fluency* will soon be published by DELTA.

nizmat33@hotmail.com

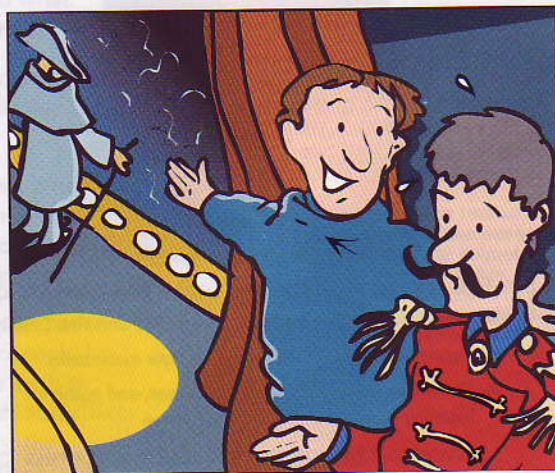
Encouragement

Aim: To practise and discuss giving and receiving encouragement

Time: 15–20 minutes

- 1 Tell the students about a time when you needed and received a lot of support and encouragement from someone because you were unsure about doing something new and/or challenging. For example, I tell them about when I started running workshops for teachers and the encouragement I got from my wife. Ask a confident student to 'be you', expressing your uncertainty and receiving encouragement, while you play the part of the 'encourager' (in my case, I play my wife).
- 2 The students form pairs and tell each other about a time when they needed and received a lot of encouragement. After a couple of minutes, Student A roleplays the person who encouraged him or her, while B pretends to be A, expressing uncertainty and responding to the encouragement. After a few minutes, A and B exchange roles.

- 3 Ask for whole-class feedback. A couple of pairs may offer to show their scene to the rest. If so, the others should guess who is who and what the situation is.



Fantastic journey

Aim: To find out about and experience each other's best journeys

Time: 20–35 minutes



1 Elicit as many different types of transport as possible in two minutes, encouraging the students to mime the more interesting ones with you as they practise the pronunciation, eg *I'm riding a donkey. I'm driving a snowmobile.*

2 Using present tenses, tell the students the story of one real-life, special journey you made, involving one form of transport, using the prompt questions below in stage 3 to guide you. Use gesture and mime to bring the journey to life and engage with the students as if they're there on the journey with you, eg Describing a trip in a Land Rover across the Uyuni salt-plains in Bolivia, I say: *'It's very bumpy, isn't it? Look over there! Can you see the colour of that lake? It's bright green! Have you ever seen anything like it? Let's get out and put our feet in the hot springs on the edge.'* Encourage the students to ask you questions along the way.

3 Ask them to close their eyes and to remember a special journey, short or long, which they made using one form of transport. Read the following text slowly, pausing between questions:

'Breathe in ... and out ... As you breathe, feel your body relax ... You're going to begin your journey. I'm going to ask you some questions. Please answer them to yourself in your head, but don't speak. Where are you at the start of the journey? ... Who are you with? Or are you alone? ... What kind of transport are you going to use? ... How does the journey begin? Look around. What do you see during the journey? ... What do you hear? ... What do you smell? ... How do you feel? ... What's the best thing that happens on the journey? ... Is there any kind of problem? ... Now you're coming to the end ... How do you feel when you arrive? ... One final question ... Why do you remember this journey? ... Now listen to your breathing, you're back in the classroom ... you can open your eyes.'

4 In groups of three or four, the students in turn take their fellow passengers on their journey. Remind them to use present tenses, gesture and mime and to encourage questions.

What does my partner think?

Aim: To encourage prediction and active listening

Time: 10–15 minutes

1 Invite the students to sit facing a partner they don't know very well but would like to know better. Ask them to look at each other and think about their answers to the following questions, without showing their answers on their faces. Ask each question slowly and clearly, allowing a little time between each one:

- *What does your partner enjoy most about learning English and why?*
- *What would your partner like to change about the English language? Why?*
- *What does your partner think of the sound of English when it's spoken?*
- *What does your partner think is the biggest difference between English and his or her own mother tongue?*
- *What's your partner's best experience using English?*
- *How would your partner like to use English in the future?*



2 Pairs exchange ideas and find out how accurate their guesses were. Don't give them written question prompts at this stage. It's not important for them to remember and answer all of the questions, neither is the order important. As they discuss one answer, another may be triggered.

3 Ask for whole-class feedback. What did they learn about English from their partner?

Note: The questions can be of any kind and can be used to lead in to or review any topic. It is successful to do this without written prompts as, while looking at each other, the students will reflect on what they know of their partner and may be more intuitive. They will also listen more closely in stage 2. This activity improves with regular repetition as the students get to know each other better and want to find out more.