LEVEL A/1 SPEAKING ACTIVITY

1/13/16 Lis Stark

**What’s different? Sorting and Making Distinctions**

Every few weeks, after studying new content, I plan for students to do this speaking activity to review and organize the concepts we’ve studied. This exercise allows students of different proficiency levels to speak together about common knowledge. It’s not completely scripted, so students can vary their language and even their responses. Sometimes a student partner will take on more of a teacher role and sometimes the students will discuss together as peers. That’s O.K. I allot about 20 minutes of class time for this. The first time you do it, it’s clunky, but it gets easier and smoother.

**STEP 1. Make Conversation Strips**

1. Think about the concepts and vocabulary you’ve taught recently and what distinctions you think students should recognize. For example, within the first few weeks of my class, students should be able to distinguish between letters and numbers; capitals from small letters; days from weeks from years; and seasons from weather words. I’d like them to distinguish between languages and country names; some US cities from states; and to recognize contractions with the verb be.

2. In MS Word, insert a table of four columns and the same number of rows as students in your class. I like font size 16.

2. For each row, type 3 vocabulary words, numbers, or symbols you have practiced with students. Type a fourth vocabulary word, number, or symbol that is significantly different but is also something you’ve introduced to the class.

Example:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Monday | Spring | Summer | Winter |

3. Print your table and cut the rows into strips.

**STEP 2. In class, explain the process to the students.**

Write the Example above on the board.

Say:

*Three things are the same and one is different.*

*Read with me. Monday, Spring, Summer, Winter.*

*Which one is different? Why?*

Wait for students’ responses. If the students have chosen Monday, ask them why Monday is different. They may say, “It’s a day;” or “spring, summer, and winter are seasons;” or “day, season, season, season;” or Monday isn’t a season;” or “spring, summer, and winter aren’t days.”

Say:

*These are all good answers. You can say the answer different ways.*

NOTE: If a student/students has a different answer, ask why. The answers can be surprising like, “Spring is different. It has one syllable.”

Say:

*Students, what do you think? Is this correct? Sometimes there can be two correct answers.*

Say:

*Each student gets a little paper. It’s a secret. Read your paper. Do you understand it? Do you know what’s different?*

Distribute strips of four words to each student. Wait. Let them think.

Say:

*I will come to you. Quickly you tell me which one is different in a whisper.*

*Tell me why it’s different.*

Listen to each student’s whisper about what’s different. Make sure she/he understands the concept.

Say:

*Now repeat after me:*

*Three things are the same and one is different.*

*Read with me blah, blah, blah.*

*Which one is different? Why?*

**STEP 3. Set up the physical activity.**

Ask students to come with you with just the paper.

Go into the hallway.

Line up student partners face-to-face across from each other, against each wall.

Say:

*People on this wall, you start.*

*Show your partner your paper.*

Say:

*Three things are the same and one is different.*

*Read with me blah, blah, blah.*

*Which one is different? Why?*

*Listen to your partner. Does your partner understand? Is your partner correct? Maybe you need to repeat your question. Maybe your partner has a new answer that is correct. Talk! Ask me if you have questions.*

Say:

*Go.*

Let student partners talk about first slip of paper.

Wait and listen a couple of minutes. Circulate as best as possible.

Say:

*I hear a lot of speaking in English. Good! Do you have a question for me?*

Say:

*People on this (other) wall, it’s time for you to talk.*

*Show your partner your paper.*

Say:

*Three things are the same and one is different.*

*Read with me blah, blah, blah.*

*Which one is different? Why?*

Say:

*Go.*

Let student partners talk about second slip of paper.

Say:

*Now it’s time to change partners.*

Ask last person on one end of line to switch to the other wall.

Ask the people on the other line to move over one so they each have a new partner.

Lead new partners to talk to each other about what’s different on their papers.

It’s NOT necessary to complete the line of partnerships. Gauge the enthusiasm.

**STEP 4. Solicit class feedback.**

When students are again seated in the classroom, solicit their feedback

Say:

*Did you hear the same answer every time?*

*Who learned a new answer? Do you think it is correct?*

Say:

*Tell me what you think about this speaking activity.*

*Thumbs up is easy.*

*Thumbs to the side is so-so.*

*Thumbs down is difficult.*

*Show me what you think with your thumbs.*