

Meaningful discussions make a significant impact in both student and teacher learning. In this workshop participants will do a variety of discussion-based activities using simple or no materials. We will discuss key aspects of designing discussion activities for the language classroom as well as for teacher development. We will look at the principles and practices of Stephen Brookfield and Jane Vella from the world of adult learning to consider how they can be applied to language learning, and also at the contributions of Penny Ur from the field of English Language teaching.

Meaningful Discussion Activities for Students and Teachers

**NicaTESOL 2016 National Convention
New Direction in ELT: Create, Collaborate,
Engage, Communicate**

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What potentially makes a discussion meaningful?

- ▶ What are 2 or 3 meaningful discussions that you have had in an English or language class?
- ▶ What made them meaningful?

What potentially makes a discussion meaningful?

- ▶ Personal - but in a safe environment/structure
- ▶ Authenticity and Genuine curiosity
- ▶ Choice about what to say
- ▶ Interesting prompts/questions
- ▶ Relevant content
- ▶ Active listening
- ▶ Clear purpose
- ▶ It is okay to be silent and silence is okay
- ▶ Our freedom is interconnected
- ▶ Genuine good will and assumption of good will
- ▶ Curiosity is greater than conviction
- ▶ No “fixing”
- ▶ Every voice is heard and every voice is valued.

1. Way of Council / Circle of Voices

- ▶ Teacher poses a question
- ▶ 1-2 minute solitude to think about what they want to say
- ▶ There is an object to pass.
- ▶ Only the person with the talking stick or object, speaks
- ▶ When you don't have the object, you listen.
- ▶ The object is passed around the circle and people listen to each other's comments.
- ▶ When speaking, speak from the heart and be brief
- ▶ When listening, listen from the heart and be present to the speaker

2. Bilingual conversations

- ▶ Post topics/questions around the room
- ▶ Students walk to the topic or question that they are interested in talking about
- ▶ Students talk for 2 minutes in English, 2 minutes in Spanish, then 2 minutes in English again.
- ▶ Students take notes about anything they would like to remember (language bits they'd like to learn in L2, vocabulary, ideas or questions)

3. Mini debates

- ▶ Find a partner, stand face to face
- ▶ Put an object between you (a bag, a pen)
- ▶ Look at me when you are ready for the next set of instructions

3. Mini debates

- ▶ I will say a statement
- ▶ One person HAS to pick up the object and REPEAT the opinion I stated
- ▶ The other person HAS to debate from the OTHER SIDE of the opinion

4. Snowballing (from Brookfield)

- ▶ Teacher offers a question
- ▶ 1-2 minutes of solitude to think about answers
- ▶ Share in pairs
- ▶ Pairs find another pair - groups of 4 - and share
- ▶ Group of 4 joins with another group (8) - and share
- ▶ Group of 8 joins with another group (16) - and share
- ▶ Groups of 16 joins with another group (32) - and share

5. Hotspot interviews - roles

1. **TIMER** - person who keeps time
2. **HOTSPOT PERSON:** 1 person in the hotspot
3. **EVERYONE ELSE:** Question-makers

5. Hotspot interviews

1. 1 person stands in “hot spot”
2. For one minute: everyone else asks as many questions as possible. (person in the hotspot ONLY LISTENS - do not answer them!)
3. For one minute: person in hotspot can answer any questions that they like/remember - they do not have to answer all of them
4. If there is time, a second round (with same person in hotspot) can be done for follow-up questions.
5. If there isn't time, a new person sits/stands in the hotspot.

Gratitude Pause

- ▶ Students/teachers sit silently and think about what they are grateful for in the moment (from the class) . It could be an idea or question from class, a comment someone say
 - ▶ A question or comment that suggested a whole new line of thinking
 - ▶ A comment that clarified something that up to then was confusing
 - ▶ A new idea that is intriguing and had not been considered before
 - ▶ A comment clarifying the connection between two other ideas or contributions
 - ▶ An example that helped increase understanding of something difficult

THANK YOU!!

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Copy these slides of this session can be found
at: Marysscholl.com

- ▶ We love you Sandra
- ▶ oh yes we do
- ▶ We love you Sandra,
- ▶ and your baby too!
- ▶ We wish all the best
- ▶ to you!
- ▶ Oh Sandra we love you!

References and Resources

- ▶ Brookfield, S. D., & Preskill, S. (1999). *Discussion as a way of teaching* (Vol. 85). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- ▶ Vella, J. (2002). *Learning to listen, learning to teach: The power of dialogue in educating adults*. John Wiley & Sons.
- ▶ Kramer, K. P. (2013). *Learning Through Dialogue: The Relevance of Martin Buber's Classroom*. R&L Education.
- ▶ <http://www.stephenbrookfield.com/>
- ▶ <http://www.globallearningpartners.com/about/our-team/dr.-jane-vella>
- ▶ <http://infed.org/mobi/dialogue-and-conversation/>