Context-less Dialogue (Drama-based EFL Activity)

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Quick Guide:

Keywords: Inflection, physicality, intention, emoting, creativity

Learner English Level: Any

Learner Maturity: Tertiary level

Class Size: Suitable for classes of 6-20 students

Preparation Time: 20-30 minutes

Activity Time: 45 minutes to an hour

Materials: Context-less dialogue (example included here)

This is a great activity that can help students work on emoting and using their bodies to communicate a message. Often used as an acting exercise, context-less dialogues can help students analyze a dialogue for clues and figure out what intentions the dialogue could convey. As the title suggests, there are multiple possibilities as the vagueness of the dialogue leaves it open to being between different people and in different contexts. It is up to the students to create meaning. The sample dialogue here is of medium difficulty; the teacher may choose to create dialogues of differing difficulty to match their students' levels.

Procedure

Step 1: Give the context-less dialogue (example below) to students in pairs.

Step 2: Tell the students that they should read the dialogue and decided who they are, what their relationship is, and what the situation is. Make sure that they do not tell other pairs this.

Step 3: Ask the students to practice in pairs the scene and explain to them that they should not tell other classmates any information about who they are or what the situation is. Explain that through their acting (physical as well as through emoting in the dialogue) they have to try to demonstrate what is happening for the other pairs to guess.

Step 4: Give the students 10-20 minutes, go around and answer any questions about the dialogue and provide some advice to the pairs. Alternately, in a large class, have pairs of students work in small teams, helping each other create a good scene.

Step 5: Have each pair perform their scene for the class or for other pairs. The audience must guess what the situation is and who the pair are.

Sample Dialogue

A: Oh, wow.

B: I know.

A: I can't believe it.

B: Yeah, I thought you might be surprised.

A: So, what now?

B: I… I don't know.

A: Right. Ok, well… hmmm…

B: Let's leave it for now.

A: Ok.

B: Shall we go?

A: Ok.

Comment

Side coaching is a great way of helping the students to connect their physicality and how they say their lines with conveying their intention. Observing different interpretations of the same lines also can help students to understand the importance not only of what they are saying but how they are

saying it. A reflective phase after the activity could be useful in helping the students further recognize this.

Conclusion

This activity keeps the dialogue simple to focus on the tone, intonation, and emphasis to convey a message, as well as the physicality. It can help connect, much like their L1, that it is not merely what you say, but how you say it that is important. The response to question and suggestions within this dialogue, for example, can convey whether A is enthusiastic about following B's plans or not. The opening phrase "Oh, wow" could be positive or negative surprise also, allowing for a wide range of situations. It may be useful for the teacher to start with a short dialogue that could be used as an example prior to the students trying on their own.

Aya Kawakami is a teacher, researcher, actress, and director living and working in Nagoya, Japan. She works as a lecturer at Aichi Shukutoku University, teaching drama related language courses, and as the artistic director of Theatre Iridescence, a multi-cultural theatre company. She is currently working on her doctorate which focuses on process drama in English language education.