

## ELC Demonstration ESL Class: A (Nonverbal) Drama Workshop

**Instructor: Cameron Culham**

**Lesson duration: 2 hours**

**University of Victoria**

“Language acquisition,” O’Neill and Kao (1998) explain, “arises from the urge to do things with words, and this need becomes paramount in process drama, when participants are required to manipulate the dramatic circumstances to achieve their own goals” (p. 4). This is a DIESL (Drama In ESL) workshop that has been conducted over four years with various adult ESL groups at the University of Victoria (Culham, 2002, pp. 95-112), and it encourages all students to get involved and explore avenues of self-expression and creativity through movement and imagination.

### Introduction: a Group Discussion

*Running time:* 5 minutes.

*Activity:* Pair discussion; whole group discussion.

*Focus:* To get students thinking about the relevance of the work their own language learning experience.

*Questions:* “In what ways do people communicate gesturally?”, and “Have you noticed ways that people in Canada gesture differently from people in your country?”

### Activity 1: Group Warm-up

*Running time:* 10 minutes.

*Activity:* “Follow the Leader”, whole group.

*Focus:* To introduce physical work to help make students comfortable with one another.

*Questions:* “What sorts of things do we have to think about when we lead?”

### Activity 2: Physical Name Game

*Running time:* 15 minutes.

*Activity:* Standing as a group in a circle, one person introduces him/herself (name only) with one action that describes them. Everyone repeats that action and name, and so on around the circle.

*Focus:* To give them words with which they are familiar (their names) and invite them to add a movement that helps them to remember classmates. To have students play physically with familiar language and at the same time provide an ice-breaker that helps them learn each others’ names.

*Question:* “What sorts of things have we learned about each other?”

### Activity 3: Passing the Claps

*Running time:* 15 minutes.

*Activity:* A clap is passed sequentially around the circle; the clap is then passed between A and B who must now clap together, then B and C clap together and so on around the circle. Once a rhythm is established, extra claps can be introduced by the leader.

*Focus:* To work on group rhythm and establish eye contact with classmates.

*Question:* “In what ways did you communicate to your partner that you were making a connection?”, and “What were some of the difficulties you had with this game?”

Activity 4: Circle Cross

*Running time:* 12 minutes.

*Activity:* Students are still in a circle and must negotiate their exchange of places by eye contact only. Only one pair of students may exchange places at any given time.

*Focus:* To encourage participants to take a risk using only nonverbal communication.

*Questions:* "What sorts of risks were involved in your deciding to make a move?", and "Can you think of some reasons that prevent us from going?"

Activity 5: What are you doing?

*Running time:* 15 minutes.

*Activity:* Person steps into the middle of circle and mimes an action. Whole group supports that player by mirroring his/her action. When students in circle have discovered the name for that action, they turn to a neighbour and name it. Person miming action says the action out loud, which is the cue for another student to step in and quickly begin to mime a new action. Game continues until all have taken a turn in the middle.

*Focus:* Students develop improvisational skills and learn to listen and react in a spontaneous way. New vocabulary is given a context.

*Question:* "How is this game similar to learning a language?"

Activity 6: Group Mirrors

*Running time:* 15 minutes.

*Activity:* First the students work in pairs mirroring each other. A leads and B follows. Reverse. Next the whole group is in a circle mirroring together. A classmate leaves the room and the circle selects a leader and begins mirroring. The classmate returns to guess the leader. Repeat.

*Focus:* Connecting and helping a disparate group of students engage with each other safely, while freeing them to interact physically.

*Questions:* "When was it easy to tell who we were following and when was it more difficult?", "What kinds of clues helped you to discover the leader?" and "Where in life might we need the skills that 'mirroring' requires?"

Activity 7: Scarf sculptures

*Running time:* 15 minutes

*Activity:* Students sit in a circle. Teacher throws a scarf into the middle of the circle. She or he shapes it into a recognizable form, helping with sounds and reactions so that students can see the object it has become. Teacher then invites students, one by one to step into the centre and do the same; with a quiet group, the scarf is passed around and student by student, it is reshaped, until it has been all around the circle.

*Focus:* Introducing mime and use of props. Encouraging imagination and participation. With an introductory level class this can be a useful vocabulary exercise.

*Questions:* "What were some of the things that we recognized?", and "What were some ways that were used to help us understand what was being made?"

\*\*\*If time remains a tableau activity can be introduced in which students in small groups are invited to make pictures (frozen) for a "Visit to Victoria" Souvenir Photo Album. Teacher invites all but one group to "unfreeze" and look at the pictures one by one, moving about the room and commenting on what they see.

Although these activities are primarily nonverbal, the instructions introduce students to new words and the reflective questions provide expanded language opportunities for the participants (Morgan & Saxton, 1991). The importance of establishing shared experiences through the reflective questions and subsequent storytelling allows the focus to be on making meaning (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). For example, in activity 2 the actions students choose to share often provide a glimpse into their cultures, personalities and interests. In one class alone we discovered, in this activity, a Thai dance step, Tae Kwon Do techniques and how fishing in Japan is different from that in Canada. The language is generated from the desire to know more, and interactive drama activities such as these help lighten inhibition.

This workshop is based on a communicative model in which students are able to employ several language skills (listening, speaking, pronunciation, gesture, grammar, vocabulary) throughout. Nunan (1989), whose pedagogy embraces the communicative approach, outlines the most widely practiced approaches to ESL teaching in North America:

Approach

Roles

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. Oral/Situational | -learner listens to teacher and repeats; no control over content or methods.      |
| 2. Audiolingual     | -learner has little control; reacts to teacher direction; passive, reactive role. |
| 3. Communicative    | -learner has an active, negotiative role; should contribute as well as receive.   |

References:

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