
Friederike Klippel

Imaginative Discussions

The majority of language teaching games are aimed at learners of English at the beginner's or the intermediate stage; suggestions for games needing an advanced level of achievement are rarely found in the relevant publications. Since most learners of all ages and levels of proficiency enjoy playing games, more ideas are needed for advanced students of English. Of course the games must be suitable in terms of their appeal to a particular age group, their intellectual challenge and their creation of foreign language learning situations. The following three suggestions are variations of discussion games and may be used with classes from the upper end of the *Sekundarstufe I* to the *Sekundarstufe II* (from the fifth year of English onwards). All three discussion games practise speech acts and phrases connected with expressing

one's opinion, i.e. agreeing, disagreeing, stating the degree of certainty or conviction, contradicting, simplifying and elaborating statements, giving reasons, defending one's point of view, etc. In addition to these types of utterances further kinds of structures as well as discussion strategies are practised in each case. Three devices have been used to transform the usual "I-think-you-think-discussions" into games. In the first instance the choice of discussion topics has been made random, resulting in slightly nonsensical discussions which can be very stimulating. With *Hidden Topic* an element of guessing has been introduced. And *Fishbowl* contains a suggestion for the alteration of discussion procedures.

1. Mad Discussion

Material: Twenty to thirty different topics written on separate cards (examples: space travel, Italian restaurants, disco music, fashion shows, trams, vegetarian cookery,

plastic bags, safety pins, package holidays, mountain climbing, newspapers, dancing competitions, knitting).

Language: In addition to the speech acts mentioned in the introduction the participants practise expressing praise and criticism, using comparisons and attacking their partner's point of view. Depending on the choice of topics more or less emphasis may be put on the practice of certain situational word fields (e.g. hobbies and spare time activities), verbal phrases (e.g. all kinds of activities), or descriptions of quality (e.g. all kinds of objects).

Procedure: All topic cards are put face down onto the teacher's table. Two players (either two volunteers or the first members of two teams respectively) come forward and take a topic card each. They have 30 seconds to think of positive qualities and effects of their object/activity in order to convince their partner and the audience of its value and use. The main question to be argued is "What is more important to mankind – A (= topic 1) or B (= topic 2)?" After a few minutes of – hopefully – entertaining discussion it usually becomes obvious who has been more successful in defending his topic. Then the next two players continue with new topic cards. *Variations:* This discussion game can be turned into a team or group contest with points being awarded (by the teacher or an independent jury) to each speaker.

2. Hidden Topic

Language: This game involves more of a cooperative effort between the two (or more) discussion partners. Thus speech acts like enlarging on the partner's statements, giving examples, expressing support and agreement, asking for confirmation become important. Since the topic should remain obscure to the listeners as long as possible the skill of expressing oneself in a vague manner is practised as well.

Procedure: Two players agree on a topic they want to talk about without revealing

it to the rest of the group. They then start the conversation trying to give as few clues to the actual topic as possible. As soon as someone amongst the listeners thinks that he/she knows what the two players are talking about, he/she writes his/her solution on a slip of paper and shows it to the players. If his/her guess was correct he/she may join in the conversation. A round of the game is finished when either a large number of listeners have guessed correctly and joined the conversation group or a certain time (e.g. ten minutes) has elapsed.

Variations: A nonsense word may be used to refer to the hidden topic. As a result the difficulties in phrasing correct if obscure sentences will be reduced for the participants in the conversation while the guessing may get harder.

3. Fishbowl

Materials: For Step 2 the chairs have to be arranged in a double circle, with three to six chairs in the middle (depending on the number of groups in Step 1) and the rest grouped around them.

Procedure: Step 1 – A given topic or question is discussed in three to six small groups. The members of each group have to reach a consensus about the topic in question. They then elect a speaker to present their group's point of view.

Step 2 – The speakers of the individual groups meet in the inner circle to outline the opinions of their groups and to try and find a common solution. The rest of the class are listeners and sit in the outer circle. If one of the listeners, however, feels that his/her speaker is running out of arguments or misrepresenting the group's point of view, he/she may join the inner circle for a while.

Remarks: Since the liveliness and the success of the final "fishbowl" discussion depend on the groups having reached differing points of view in the first phase, it is necessary to choose controversial issues for discussion.