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Strategies to Promote and Assess Oral Proficiency

Classroom Survival Expressions

Take the time to collect or create a list of classroom survival expressions or *Phrases of the Day*. Although you may write one on the board each day for students to copy down into a notebook, students appreciate having a premade list of them. This way, students don't have to wait until November to learn a particular expression they might like to have now. It also facilitates review of past expressions, because you can ask students to take out the expression-of-the-day packet for a quick review. Flashcards of the expressions are helpful, too. Make a list for each level so students continue to learn new expressions. These lists may also come in handy for students when they write dialogues.

Classroom Survival Posters

From your survival expressions list, choose the most important of the expressions and have students write and illustrate the expressions on a poster. Motivate students by telling them that their posters will be laminated and posted in the classroom. Students will enjoy seeing their work on the wall and will be reminded of the expressions.

Essential Oral Questions

Writing the Questions

At the beginning of each unit, take the time to determine the oral questions that are essential for your students to be able to ask and answer. Create a list of them and type them up to give to your students. By typing the list you will save class time for more meaningful activities and you also may elimi-

nate transfer errors some students make when copying words in the foreign language from the board to their notebooks. Explain why you think the questions are essential and how you intend to assess the students on the questions. The following activities help students practise the questions for your assessment. Some of the activities can also double as the assessment at the end of the unit.

Sample Essential Questions for a Unit on Shopping for Clothing

- What do you need to buy?
- Do you want to go shopping with me on Saturday?
- Do you prefer the red or blue shirt?
- Do you like my new coat?
- Where did you buy it?
- How does it fit me?
- What do you think of these pants?
- Should I buy them?
- How much is it?

Practising Essential Oral Questions

Class Challenge

Materials: Essential Questions written on index cards

Write the essential questions on index cards. Write one question per card. At various points during the week, have a volunteer student come up to the front of the class and conduct a Class Challenge. The student questioner can pick anyone in the class to answer the question on the card. If the student answers the question correctly, the class gets a point. If not, the questioner gets the point. Determine ahead of time to how many points you will play. Initially, the questioner generally tends to win, but as the unit progresses, the class usually does.

Pair and Group Activities

Materials: Varied pair activities

Make sure that the essential questions are also included in pair and group practice activities. Information Gap activities lend themselves well to practising these oral questions. Walk-around activities are also good because you can set up the activity so students can ask the same question multiple times of various students.

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Pair Activities

Activity & Brief Description	Page	Application Areas				Type of Communication	
		VO	GR	CO	CU	Oral	Written
Back-to-Back Write questions in the first column of a two-column table. Write the answers on index cards. Each student sticks the card on his or her back. Students move around and find the answer to their question from the cards and record them in the second column of their sheet.	48	•	•	•	•	•	•
Blindfold Course Each student takes a turn walking a blindfolded partner through the school giving directions in the target language about where to turn.	49	•	•			•	
Dice Games With two different colours of dice, one representing subjects and the other verbs, create six different topics and six different verbs to correspond to a number 1 to 6 for each side of the die. Students roll and conjugate the verb. Students can also use a third die to form sentences. There are various review options with this game.	49	•	•	•	•	•	•
Eyewitness Reports One student interviews another to get an account of an event.	52	•	•	•	•	•	•
Find the Errors First! Students work in pairs or against one another to identify all of the errors in a passage.	54	•	•	•	•	•	•
VO = Vocabulary GR = Grammar CO = Content CU = Culture							

Sample Topics

- Any vocabulary word or phrase.
- Essential questions you need to know when on holidays.
- Practise answering questions in the first person of the past tense.

Blindfold Course

Objectives: Use vocabulary for giving directions.

Materials: Enough bandanas for half of your students

Activity Directions and Preparation Hints

This activity works well for practising directions and places in the school. It could be a good way for new students to get to know their way around the building better as well. It also works nicely as a trust-building activity. Divide students into pairs. Give the first student in the pair a map of the inside of the school building showing a path along which they must lead their partner. Have a couple of different maps drawn up so students don't all go off in the same direction. Leaders must blindfold their partners and take them on the path, starting at your classroom door, giving them directions in the target language and making sure they stay out of danger. The blindfolded partner evaluates how well their partner communicated. Students may not speak to each other in English. If anyone hears them, they are disqualified and do not receive points for the activity. The partners then switch roles. The new leader should not use the same path their partner took.

Dice Games

Objectives: Conjugate verbs and form complete sentences.

Materials: Dice game worksheet, set of 3 dice in different colours for each pair of students.

Activity Directions and Preparation Hints

You need three sets of dice, each a different colour, to play the dice game. You also need a worksheet with three numbered lists divided into three columns of categories: subjects, verbs in their infinitive form and nouns (Figure 5.1). Include six items per category, assigning each item to one number in your list. At the top of each column, write the colour of one of the dice that you have. Students working in pairs roll the three dice and match the number on the die with the number and word in each corresponding column to form a sentence. Students can be asked to form the sentence orally or write it down. It is more challenging if you mix nouns and verbs that do not make logical sentences. When writing the sentences, students should be asked to determine if they make sense. If they don't, they should not write it down on their worksheet. This is one way you can check to see if the students comprehend the meanings of their sentences.