

QUESTION-CENTERED ACTIVITIES

Ian Dakers

The classroom seems to be the ideal place for students to learn to respond to a variety of question types. However, this same environment gives second language learners very few opportunities to formulate their own questions.

The following activities are original ways to involve the students in making their own questions. These particular activities are most suitable for students at the high beginner and intermediate levels. In addition, by making a few minor adaptations, these activities could be used with adults as well as with younger second language learners.

Activity 1: Unusual Job Interviews

To introduce this activity, find out what your students already know about how job interviews take place. In addition, ask for one or two pairs of more outgoing students to roleplay some kind of job interview, e.g., an interview between a personnel manager and an applicant for a laboratory technician's job. Once your students have a good understanding of what goes on during a job interview, tell them that they are about to participate in a spontaneous roleplay activity involving a job interview for a very unusual job.

To begin, divide the class into three groups and then subdivide these groups into pairs. Have the students decide whether they want to be the interviewer or the job applicant before they begin so that you can distribute some simple costumes and props to increase the students' motivation to participate in this activity. Explain to the student interviewers that their role is to fill in the company application form provided (see Appendix for samples) as accurately as possible by the end of the interview. Make sure that each interviewer understands that he/she is to ask the applicant as many questions as necessary to fill in the company form. Finally, give a different application form to the student interviewers from the three different groups and give each pair twenty minutes or so to complete the interview. During this time, circulate in the class and provide help when necessary. Once the interview is complete ask one or two pairs of students to roleplay a part of their interview for the class. If the activity has been successful, you may want to provide additional job application forms and have the students reverse roles.

As a follow-up to this activity, you can encourage the students to compare their own experience of job interviews with this amusing classroom activity. Another possibility would be to have the students compare

the qualifications of all the pirates, superheroes or gods and decide on the most suitable candidate for the three different jobs.

Activity 2: You Direct the Feltboard

To carry out this activity you need a feltboard and an assortment of magazine cutouts backed with strips of felt. If you do not have these materials, you can easily make them yourself. Buy a metre of felt and wrap it around one side of a rigid piece of cardboard to make your feltboard. Then, cut out a variety of magazine pictures and stick felt strips on the back of these to make them adhere to the feltboard.

Once you have all the necessary material, place the feltboard for all the students to see and spread all the pictures out on a nearby table or desk. Begin telling a story by placing only one picture on the feltboard and saying only one sentence related to the picture. Explain to the students that they are to ask relevant questions if they want to find out more about the story characters and the plot in general. Make it very clear to them that you will not continue the story unless you are asked specific questions.

For example, you may begin by placing the picture of a woman on the feltboard and saying "Patty lives in Sherbrooke." The students might then ask questions such as "Does she work?" or "Where is she going?" You continue the story either by answering these questions directly or by placing another picture on the feltboard in response to the questions. Remember, only give the students the information they ask for. The less information you provide, the more questions they will ask. The story can go on as long as the students are enjoying themselves or until the story has come to a logical conclusion.

A variation to this activity would involve the students taking on the role of the storyteller. In addition, the pictures and the feltboard could simply be used as the basis for a chain storytelling activity.

Activity 3: Musical Questions

Music has often been used as a tool in the second language class to enhance student motivation. Therefore, why not use it to provide practice in recognizing and formulating questions?

One simple activity involves the preparation of a tape with 20 second excerpts from 10 or 15 different popular songs that all happen to have some type of question in the lyrics. The student's task is to listen to the tape and write down the questions as he/she hears them in these excerpts. If the students enjoy a little competition you can turn this activity into a team game where different team members earn points for their team by identifying questions in different excerpts. Another activity that provides

students with practice in formulating questions involves the preparation of a tape with 10 to 15 extremely short excerpts from different songs. These excerpts should be 5 to 8 seconds long and should contain only one sentence. For example, you might begin with the song "Born in the U.S.A." by Bruce Springsteen and tape 5 seconds of the song including only the sentence "I was born in the U.S.A." and continue by recording only the sentence "I'll be watching you" from the Police's song "Every Breath You Take" with the sentence. The students' task is to formulate questions that would elicit responses such as the ones they hear in the taped excerpts. Thus, the students would have to ask questions such as "Where were you born?", "Who are you going to be watching?" or "Who's going to be watching me?" Once again, you may want to add an element of competition to the activity by turning it into a team game.

There are many more ways to get your students to ask questions in the classroom. However, I recommend these three because they provide for a change in pace from regular classroom activities as well as incorporate the use of a variety of audio-visual materials that often appeal to second language learners.

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APPENDIX
THE INTERNATIONAL PIRATING COMPANY

Job Application Form for Pirates and Other Professionals in the Field

Personal Information

Name: _____ Age: _____ Date of birth: _____

Place of birth: _____ Address: _____
(island, coast or sea)

Mother's name: _____ Father's name: _____

Hobbies: _____

Favourite books: _____

Pets: _____

Appearance

Height: _____ Weight: _____

Colour of eyes: _____ Colour of hair: _____

Colour of beard: _____ Length of beard: _____

Number of teeth: _____ Sword hand: _____

Number of injuries: _____ Location of scars: _____

Educational Background

Previous Work Experience

Name of last ship sailed on: _____

Length of voyage: _____

Number and name of seas visited: _____

Captain's name: _____ Number of boats taken over: _____

Number of towns pillaged: _____ Number of injuries given: _____

Job description on ship: _____

Reasons for leaving: _____

PERSONALIZED SUPERHERO SERVICES INC.

Job Application Form for Superheroes and Other Professionals in the Field

Personal Information

Name: _____
(supername) . (alias)

Age: _____ Date of birth: _____

Place of birth: _____
(city) (planet) (galaxy)

Mother's name: _____ Father's name: _____

Superhobbies: _____

Favourite T.V. shows: _____

Description of Superpowers

Origins of superpowers: _____

Speed: Faster than a comet: _____
Faster than a speeding bullet: _____
Faster than a sprinter: _____

Strength: Stronger than a raging bull: _____
Stronger than a locomotive: _____
Stronger than the "Jolly Green Giant": _____

Longest high jump: _____ Longest broad jump: _____

Educational Background

Previous Work Experience

Description of previous superdeeds: _____

Names of previous superaccomplices: _____

Names and type of superpets: _____

Cities, planets and galaxies where you have worked: _____

Names of enemies: _____

THE ALLGOD SERVICES COMPANY

Job Application Form for Gods and Other Professionals in the Field

Personal Information

Name: _____ Age: _____ Date of birth: _____

Place of birth: _____ Current Address: _____

Mother's name: _____ Father's name: _____

Height: _____ Weight: _____

Favourite books: _____

Hobbies: _____

Pets: _____

Educational Background

Professional Qualifications

Type of god: Roman ___ Greek ___ Christian ___ Moslem ___ Other ___

Number of disciples and followers: _____

Types of civilizations you have worked in: _____

Languages spoken: _____

Views on marriage: _____

Views on war: _____

Views on paradise: _____

Previous Work Experience

Description of miracles: _____

Description of major activities: _____

Publications: _____

