Have you ever asked students to discuss a reading, topic, or film only to have the room go quiet?

In this webinar, we will:

• explore discussion formats that keep students engaged and focused while upholding individual accountability

• identify benefits of student discussions for critical thinking and language learning

• outline specific ways to help your students engage and connect meaningfully in English conversation practice
Kelley has worked in international education for over a decade. She currently works as the Instruction and Curriculum Coordinator at Chiang Mai International School in Thailand. She is also working on a U.S. Department of State English Language Specialist digital storytelling and mentoring project with teachers in Brazil.

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Kelley has a BFA in Writing, Literature, and Publishing from Emerson College in Boston and a MA in TESOL from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey.
Discussion Strategies for Meaningful, Effective Conversation Practice
Why talk about different discussion formats?

- Acknowledge variations in our classrooms
- Address differing learning styles
- Allow for differentiation in instruction
Structure of Today’s Session

1. Spider Web Warm-up and Introduction
2. Principles of Communicative Language Teaching
3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Discussion
4. Addressing Disadvantages
5. Four Practical Discussion Activities
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What is your favorite way to get students talking?
The Spider Web Icebreaker

• Say your name and something about yourself.
• Toss the ball of wool to the next person.
• Keep going until everyone has shared.
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Principles of Communicative Language Teaching

• Make **real communication** the focus of language learning.

• Provide **opportunities for learners to experiment** and try out what they know.

• Be **tolerant of learners’ errors** as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence.

• Classroom activities should be **meaningful** and involve **real communication**.

(Communicative Language Teaching Today, Richards, 2006)
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What are some advantages and disadvantages to group discussion?
Advantages to Group Discussion

• “All of us is smarter than one of us.”
• Creativity
• Memory
• Insight into self
• Insight into others
• Teamwork

(Burke, 2011)
Disadvantages to Group Discussion

- Conformity
- Domination
- Laziness
- Difficult to Assess

(Burke, 2011)
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Addressing Disadvantages:
What makes group work successful?

• The group has a clear objective, a tangible outcome or product.
• Every member of the group has a role.
• Members are held responsible for that role.
• Every member of the group is necessary to complete the task.
• Discussions reflect real life (CLT).
Addressing Disadvantages:
What makes group work successful?

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- Discussions reflect real life (CLT).
Why do we have discussions in real life?

• Make decisions
• Give/Share opinions
• Create something
• Solve a problem

(Communicative Language Teaching Today, Richards, 2006)
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Four Practical Activities

1. Inner Circle – Outer Circle
2. Chalk Talk
3. Jigsaw
4. Spider Web Discussion
Four Practical Activities

1. Inner Circle – Outer Circle
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Inner Circle – Outer Circle

• Can be shorter (standing) or longer (sitting) to get students interacting.
• Reduces anxiety about speaking in front of the class.
Phoom: Hi, I’m Phoom! What’s your name?

Yeji: I’m Yeji. Nice to meet you.

Natalya: What do you like to do after school?

Jip: I play volleyball. How about you?

• Timing: 30 sec. to 5 min.
• Two Circles: inner - outer
• Introduction + Small Talk
Ideas for Large or Low-level Classes

- For low- or mixed-level classes:
  - Allow students to write down ideas first.
  - Use a graphic organizer.

- For large classes:
  - Instead of a circle, let students talk with nearby classmates.

Note: Walk around and informally assess. You can collect handout for formative assessment.
What challenges might you face in your classrooms using inner circle – outer circle?
Four Practical Activities

1. Inner Circle – Outer Circle
2. Chalk Talk
3. Jigsaw
4. Spider Web Discussion
Chalk Talk: A Silent Conversation

Can a person be part of more than one culture? Why or why not?

Agreed

Yes, I think anyone can be a part of more than one culture, because anyone can participate in tradition.

I agree

Yes, someone can have more than one culture because you can experience and be a part of different cultures.

Yes, someone can be a part of more than one culture because what if they are mixsey.

Some people lived in other country more than in their mother country.
Chalk Talk

• A written, silent discussion.
• T prepares by writing one question per poster around the room.
• Ss spend 1-2 minutes at each poster.
  • Ss can respond to the question or other classmates’ comments.
  • Ss can draw responses (learning styles).
• Ss return to original poster and share what they find interesting to conclude the activity.
A Variety of Classrooms
Digital Chalk Talk

- T prepares by writing questions on a digital platform.
- Ss are put into small breakout rooms for set time.
- Each group discusses questions.
- Each group has one note-taker who writes responses on the Jamboard or Padlet.
- Debrief as a whole group.
Four Practical Activities

1. Inner Circle – Outer Circle
2. Chalk Talk
3. Jigsaw
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For those who use it, what do you like about jigsaw discussions?
**Phase 1**: Learn everything you can about a topic (animals)

**Phase 2**: Teach your classmates about your topic.

**Phase 3**: Review what you learned with classmates.
Variation for 2020-2021: Jigsaws Work in Breakout Rooms!
Round 1:

• **Breakout Room 1**: Reasons why school should be 100 percent online during the pandemic.

• **Breakout Room 2**: Reasons why school should be in person during the pandemic.

• **Breakout Room 3**: Reasons why schools should follow a hybrid model during the pandemic.

Make breakout rooms

Make groups automatically

Do your math: 9 students = 3 groups of 3 students
Round 2:

• Discuss the options in mixed groups and decide which you think is the best.
• Choose a group leader to share your group’s opinion.
Round 3:

- Debrief as a big group
- Team leaders share
- Teacher facilitates
Four Practical Activities

1. Inner Circle – Outer Circle
2. Chalk Talk
3. Jigsaw
4. Spider Web Discussion
How do you assess student discussion?
Spider Web Discussion

- Students prepare for discussion on a given topic, text, or Ted Talk before class.
- Students sit in a circle facing each other.
- Students talk for a set amount of time.
- Teacher observes and takes notes using template.
Teacher’s Role: Formative Assessment
What do you notice about the turn-taking or pattern of interaction in these two spider webs?

Are students participating equally?
Date: 24/11
Class: English
Topic: Hamlet

Data!
Spiderweb discussion is also adaptable to the online class format!
Summary of Today’s Session

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Which one do you think will be most useful in your class?

• Inner Circle – Outer Circle
• Chalk Talk
• Jigsaw Discussion
• Spider Web Discussion
References


• Richards, J. *Communicative language teaching today*. New York: Cambridge University Press.


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Reflection Questions

1. What challenges do you experience when implementing discussion practice in your classroom?

2. What are some solutions to those challenges that have worked in your classroom?

3. What are some of your students’ favorite speaking activities? What makes them engaging?
Thank you!

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