

Inside/Outside Circles

THEME: SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

LANGUAGE: ANY

STANDARD(S): COMMUNICATION

1.1 1.3

Time Frame:

10 minutes

Materials Needed:

Cards for recording information shared by students

Description of Task:

This is a good “ice-breaking,” “warm-up,” or “review” activity and should be used for short periods of time to get students to interact in the target language (Denny, 1995). It may be used to practice a particular grammatical structure (in this example, the past tense is used). Prior to the activity, the teacher may want to introduce or review a grammatical structure that students will need to engage in the interaction.

To set up this activity, distribute cards to each student for recording information. For this example, the question to be asked is: “What did you do over the weekend?” The cards should have a space for students’ names and may have categories for students to check off (e.g., “work,” “movies,” “sports,” “other,” etc.). Explain to students that they are to record the information that their partners report during the activity.

Direct students to number off consecutively. Then have the odd (or even) numbered students stand and form a small circle (the “inside” circle) and face their “partners” (the even, or odd-numbered students who form the “outside” circle) for paired conversation. Provide a question for the inside circle to ask their partners in the outside circle (e.g., “What did you do over the weekend?”). After allowing some time for the students to respond, interrupt the activity and direct students of either the inside or the outside circle to move a number of persons to the left or to the right. Once students find their new positions, direct the interaction further—the group that responded in the first round now asks the question, and the other

Level:

Intermediate-Low

Purpose:

To describe orally; to practice social interaction

Communicative

Function(s):

Referential: Talking about things, actions, events, or people in the environment

Language Structure(s):

Past tense; question formation

Cultural Aspects:

Will vary depending upon the topic or question chosen

Modalities:

Speaking

Listening

NOTES

group responds. Continue in this manner for three or four rotations. Shifts in topics are recommended for a good mix of partners and an adequate opportunity for students to socialize in the target language.

After there are 3-4 rotations, the students can return to their seats and the teacher can ask questions about the information shared. Students report the information that they recorded on their cards.

Assessment:

The teacher assesses students' performance informally during the interactions and during the class discussion/reporting that follows.

Extensions:

Suggestions for adapting the task to various levels:

For beginning levels: Very simple questions can be asked. Students can practice small memorized "chunks" of language.

For advanced levels: Increasingly complex questions can be asked or more sophisticated topics can be discussed. Interactions can be timed.

Other extensions:

- Students can be assigned a particular topic to share about rather than being asked to respond to a question. For example, "describe how your family celebrates X holiday."
- Students in one of the circles can describe an object or event and students in the other circle are to guess the object or event being described. They write the objects/events that they guess correctly on cards. [This is a variation on the "Circumlocution" activity found in the "From Presentation to Creation" section of the *Handbook*.]
- Students in one of the circles can be given information that students in the other circle are supposed to find out.

Cultural extensions:

This activity can accompany a review of content material based on cultural themes that the students have studied. For example, students can be asked to share an historical event or to describe an important figure or celebrity in the target culture.

References and Resources:

Denny, J. W. (1995, October). *Using cooperative strategies to strengthen foreign language achievement*. Presented at the annual meeting of the Minnesota Council on the Teaching of Languages and Cultures, Bloomington, MN.

Reflections:

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