

# **Drama & Improv for EFL Educators**

***Theories, ideas and guiding principles for educators in Switzerland and other TESOL environments.***

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## **Introduction**

Teaching English in an EFL setting comes with a wide range of challenges and possibilities. This document compiles core ideas, concepts and principles from some of the most influential research about Drama and Improv for teaching English from the past 40 years. Later on, the document goes over some ideas and games on how to incorporate Drama and Improv into your classroom for fluency and as a means for anti-bias education and fighting social injustice.

This document does not claim to be complete, definitive or perfect. It was produced as part of an individual research project for the diploma exams at PHZH by me in late 2025 and contains both fundamental ideas and concepts as well as specific ideas for how to incorporate Drama and Improv in EFL (DaleEFL) with the current coursebook "Young World". It is important to remember that this is more of a general guide on how to get started with this. I highly recommend you read the literature linked on play-4-future.org under "Links and sources" for a more detailed insight into this highly complex field.

## **The fundamentals: 4 core tenets of Drama**

DaleEFL requires educators to rethink their role from a traditional "generator of input" to that of a "viewer". Similarly to a machine, we become more of a little piece, a cog or bolt, in this bigger machinery that is our class. Of course we still maintain the leading role and initiate the activities, plan the lessons and provide the scaffolding needed for these tasks. However, we move away from the idea that learners are deficient in their language and need correction and move towards the sentiment that they are indeed very competent speakers and see each and every attempt at communication as what it is: an experiment that leads us down the road to true proficiency. I'd argue that the exposure to drama and improv enables us to reflect on elements of language in a way that is so unique, even very few native speakers can claim to have reached this stage. It is this shift in paradigm from an "input-output" centered view to a "communication at the heart and authentic exposure as the driving force" that makes this approach so powerful.

As described in the book "Enlivening Instruction with Drama" by Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor and Kathleen R. McGovern, drama lives off 4 core tenets that are fundamental to its successful implementation:

# **Tenet 1: Be present and pay attention**

If we want to engage in DaleFL, we need to be present in the situation. Scenarios are vivid and will be constructed as we go. If we do not pay attention to all the things going on, we may miss key details. From the perspective of an "actor" this may include missing a key detail about a character, the situation or an action. Being present also means paying attention to the gestures, intonation and body language of all actors present in a scene. These details matter and quietly inform us of dynamics, power and status. Who leads the scene? Who dominates it? Who is just quietly observing but might be able to participate if we give them a nudge in the right direction?

From the perspective as an educator this also gives us a great opportunity to see the current linguistic and paralinguistic capabilities of our learners, as well as the limits of their current skill. We can use this for formative assessment in a way that feels so natural and subtle, it's hard to distinguish from regular chit-chat. Not only that, but if used correctly, we can use these observations to adjust our lesson, the scene or the aims accordingly and plan further sessions with these newly discovered "learning chances" in mind.

However, most importantly is that we use these situations to show genuine appreciation for the efforts our learners display. The road to fluency and language acquisition is lengthy and covered in all kinds of hurdles. Giving tangible and meaningful feedback that values the learners for all the things they accomplished during an improv or drama sequence shows them that the hard work pays off and can greatly increase willingness to speak.

# **Tenet 2: Say "yes, and" in improv**

In the spirit of true improv, it is important to build upon what others have already laid out for us and expand it. This requires a stance that is additive and not subtracting from all the hard work the others in a scene have already poured into it. When engaged in improv, we take what is provided to us and approach it with a "yes, and" mindset. We do not just discredit something simply because we deem it not matching or out of context. In fact, some of the best improvs and dramas may happen precisely because we accept all contributions on an equal level.

Saying "yes, and" is our new superpower. We use it to add context, to expand the scene, to acknowledge what is already there and to give feedback. The simple addition of "Yes, and" can transform almost any kind of criticism into a learning chance. Don't say "Good, but say that in the past tense!", instead, say "Yes, and now how would you say that in the past tense?". It is this minuscule shift in how we approach things that others have created or contributed that moves us ever closer from a mindset of "can't yet" to "will try to". And it ties directly into decreasing foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) whose role in raising the affective filter and thus reducing learning speed and efficiency cannot be understated. Both you and your students should use this new superpower of "yes, and!".

## **Tennet 4: Take risks and be ridiculous**

Drama and Improv take a lot of risk taking to be pulled off successfully. In order to immerse ourselves into a scenario, we must let go of our fear of producing and just embrace the moment with its ups and downs, no matter what. Taking these risks is hard to do when the climate of the classroom does not allow for mistakes to be made and laughter to be had together instead of "laughing about someone". Of course, this principle applies to any teaching and should be a fundamental concern for any given classroom, but its importance in drama and improv cannot be understated.

Taking risks and being ridiculous come in many shapes and forms and different learners may present this in very varied ways. What is a no-brainer for some might be on the edge of complete overwhelming for another. As educators, we should get to know our learners and their attitudes towards these aspects and acknowledge their efforts whenever possible. And one of the most fundamental parts of embracing this tenet is to be a shining beacon of exemplary risk taking and ridiculousness ourselves. Educators should embrace this tenet as much as possible, make a fool of themselves in a scene and inspire laughter. Learners are far more likely to emulate this tenet if they feel like they aren't alone in it.

Regardless of this, we must keep in mind when it is time to be ridiculous and when this may actually inhibit our goals for a scenario. Whilst being ridiculous and silly during a play about a misunderstanding in a store may be hilarious, it should not be applied to scenarios where we are working on and reflect about discriminatory practices or biases. Humor is the gateway to free speech but mustn't be confused with ridiculing something or someone. Anticipating where a discussion may lead can help plan guiderails that ensure that a scene remains meaningful and a chance for genuine reflection and does not leave anyone feeling like their struggle has been reduced to a laughing matter.

## **Tenet 4: Endow scenes with real meaning**

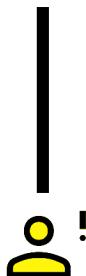
Endowing in this context is twofold: One one end, it asks us to bring meaning to a scene by thinking and talking about a moment, interaction or problem that is real and tangible. This commands taking issues seriously and thinking about why they matter and where we can encounter these.

On the other hand, it also means that we give all of our learners a role, that actually brings something to the table. Students should be given meaningful roles where they can shine and showcase their skill, bringing something unique or at the very least impactful to a scene. This is easier said than done, but there is a simple trick that lends itself well to achieve this: Splitting our learners into smaller groups reduces not only the anxiety of being exposed, it also helps us focus on roles that really matter. It's easy to fill a scene or improv with lots of side characters, that may contribute a laughter or two, but since we are advocating for meaningful interactions, we want to let our learners go beyond simple one-liners. Giving each student a chance to partake in a meaningful way in a scene, helps them discover their self-efficacy in communication and endows each of their words with relevance to the outcome. And as a bonus, it lets you focus easier on individual learners and give them formative feedback as you go without interrupting the greater flow of scene(s) or the rest of your learners.

# The 4 core tenets of Drama and Improv



**Endow scenes with real meaning**



**Take risks and be ridiculous**

4 core tenets of drama, as defined in "Enlivening Instruction with Drama" by Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor and Kathleen R. McGovern

EFL teachers are the stepping stones for learners into a world full of communicative challenges. As such, they are also their *models* and should follow these *core tenets of drama and improv* just as their students do.



**Be present & pay attention**



**Say "yes, and" in improv**

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## Deep-dive 1: Fluency

When we talk about fluency, we often reduce it to speed or accuracy, as if producing English was just a matter of getting the grammar right. But fluency is far more than that. It is the ability to react, to adapt, to navigate the unexpected. Nobody chit-chats in neatly pre-planned IRF-patterns; there is no teacher initiation, learner response and teacher follow-up waiting for us outside the classroom. Real conversations jump, collapse, restart and drift into new directions. The real world just doesn't offer such niceties.

Learners need to go beyond just processing rules and start acting in a space that is dynamic and unpredictable, where they have to use any tool they have in their arsenal to get the job done. Drama and improv offer exactly that space. They take learners out of the cocoon of "safe" dialogues: those perfectly edited, polished exchanges that strip spoken language of any spontaneity, and push them gently "into the open sea". In an improvised role-play, you cannot hide behind a script. You have to listen, gesture, paraphrase, guess, reformulate, raise your eyebrows or your voice, and try again. You start noticing how intonation changes meaning, how a single adverb can shift the tone of an entire sentence, how "lukewarm" is not the same as "toasty," and why it matters who says what and, more importantly, to whom. Fluency grows in this dance between what you say and how you say it and is far more than just knowing a lot of words: It's about how you use your limited vocabulary and still manage!

Drama and improv activities naturally build communicative competence as learners go: linguistic, paralinguistic, interpersonal and cultural skills can be experienced, played with and discussed. When learners improvise a visit to the doctor, or a morning commute, or even a simple guessing game, they will run into unforeseen hurdles. The real test of skill is to see how they navigate through them:

They experiment with their voices, bodies and identities. They reflect on how to be clearer, more helpful, more cooperative. They begin to notice pragmatic meanings, those subtle signals that differentiate polite from rude, supportive from dismissive. And they learn these things not because we explained them, but because they tried them. Of course, we should always remember that this is a classroom and, as such, we need to provide ample support and scaffolding. But the mere fact that we can build these scaffolds right into the task without having to spend extensive periods of time to practise and drill them makes them stick just that much more easily.

Drama also gives us the rare opportunity to document and observe fluency as it actually emerges. There is perhaps no better time for a formative assessment than during these moments of genuine talking: we see who hesitates, who dominates, who supports others, who struggles with connectors or intonation. And most importantly, we can use all of these formative assessments to naturally guide and lead the scenarios, adjust them as we go, build scaffolds and dismantle them on the go. We do this through modelling, through prompts, through the simple act of joining in and showing that risk-taking is normal. We are all in the same boat, navigating the rough sea that is communication. When we step into the scene with them, embracing our own inner clown, we show that proficiency grows not from perfection but from the courage to take a step, fall and just keep going as if it was planned all along.

Most importantly, drama lowers the affective filter. The affective filter theory propagates that learners' willingness to participate and their ability to take in new information greatly depend on their emotional state. Feelings of anxiety and distress can bring learning to a grinding halt. It is therefore of utmost importance that we do not cause scenarios where a mistake breaks the situation but is seen as a "launchpad" that transforms the situation. Someone used a wrong word? Whatever, as long as you get what they mean, just continue. Or better yet, use it and make the scene your own, suddenly going from "a tiny local store" to a "giant mall" – these details matter and can help emphasize where we are and how we act accordingly. Language becomes less about "not making mistakes" and more about communicating meaning.

Throughout literature, learners of all ages report feeling more competent, less anxious and more willing to speak after exposure to drama and improv in English learning. They start performing themselves as users of English long before they feel "ready" – and that performance, that imaginative leap, is precisely what moves them closer to actual fluency.

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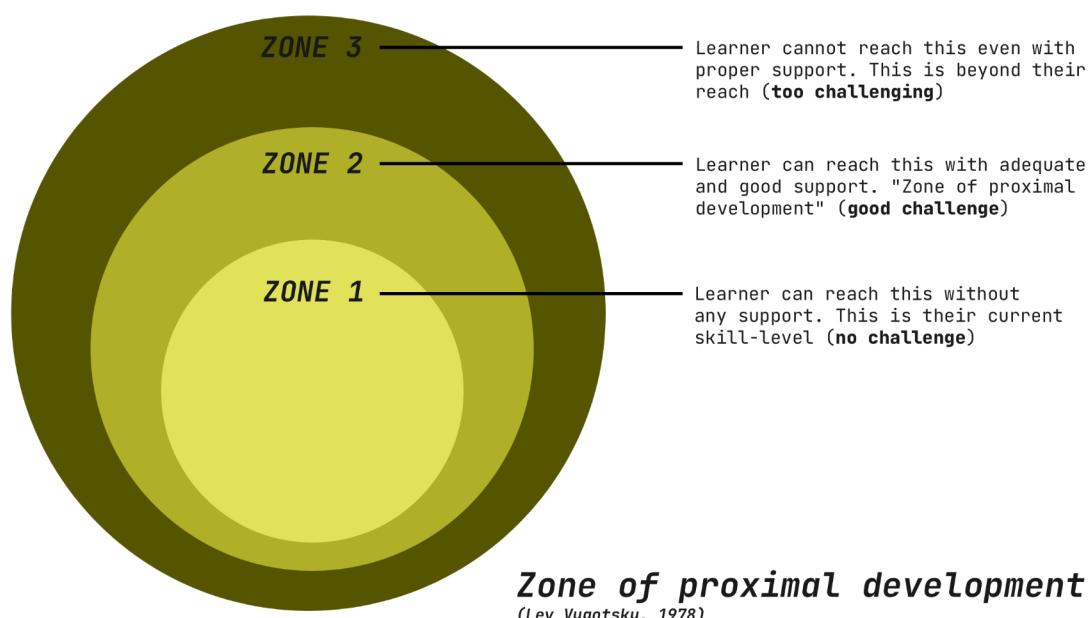
***“Fake it until you make it!”***

## **Deep-dive 2: Vygotsky's ZPD**

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (from now on referred to as ZPD) captures a reality every teacher recognises: Meaningful learning happens when students work just beyond their current ability, nudging ever closer to full on proficiency but with the right scaffolding to avoid crashing and failing. This must be done via support in challenging yet manageable situations of genuine communication and not technical, mechanical application in controlled and non-challenging tasks. And this principle is not limited to psychology: It has direct, practical implications for how we design EFL classrooms and tasks.

Drama and improvisation naturally operate within this zone. They place learners in situations that require slightly more linguistic, social and pragmatic competence than they currently have at their disposal or command, while building scaffolding into the outlines of the scenario. B that through peers, embodied cues, and shared context or a linguistic feature that is specifically at the center of attention (conjunctions, adverbs, opposites). Learners negotiate connotations, compare choices and use strategic communication to justify their position.

The same applies to improv-based guessing games or spontaneous role-plays. When students act out everyday scenes – returning to our examples from deep-dive 1 “Commuting to work”, going to the doctor & solving a misunderstandings – they practise the paralinguistic and pragmatic skills that scripted dialogues rarely capture. Questions such as How did you guess? What made this clearer? What language did we need here? help learners reflect on how communication actually works. They move beyond accuracy toward clarity, adaptability and intention.



If we want to take ZDP seriously, we'll have to consider it on various levels. The following implications come to mind when using ZDP as a guiding principle for our (EFL) teaching:

### **1) Instruction must prioritise authentic communication.**

IRF-pattern exchanges, rooted in correctness and teacher control, rarely push students into the ZPD. They must be reduced to a minimum in this context.

Drama-based tasks, in contrast, mirror real-world communicative demands and encourage learners to act as "thinking social actors" rather than passive responders. We hand over control of the situation to our learners (scary, I know, but it pays out!)

### **2) Scaffolding should be social, dynamic and responsive.**

In drama, scaffolding emerges through interaction: Peers model language, scenes provide context, and embodied cues lower cognitive load. We can help learners further by pre-teaching some language but we don't want to define exact vocabulary. Chunks and functional language are good, vocabulary that specifically guides learners to one outcome are to be avoided.

Teachers guide rather than script, ensuring learners experience productive struggle instead of frustration. It is important to keep in mind that this zone of proximal development varies greatly between students and it is our task as teachers to know where each student's current limits are. This leads us into point 3:

### **3) Assessment must become formative and continuous.**

If learning unfolds through scaffolded interaction, evaluation must acknowledge and attend to growth as it happens, spot strategy use and acknowledge communicative effectiveness with praise!

Drama makes this visible in real time: who needs more support, who risks more, who is expanding their repertoire. It is important to pay attention to these subtle cues and adjust the lesson, scaffolding and aims in realtime. And don't forget to take notes: What is written on the exam shows but a screenshot. Our goals are to empower students to be competent communicators. Where else could you possibly see this better than in real communication such as drama and improv?

### **4) Critical language awareness can be developed best within the ZPD.**

Because drama exposes how language constructs relationships, identities and power, it offers opportunities to examine stereotypes and bias without overwhelming learners. Sensitive facilitation keeps them within a zone where reflection is possible but not threatening. Do not push learners into roles or situations they may not want to partake in. If your drama and reflection is good, they'll participate out of free will. We strive to communicate, this intrinsic motivation will be present if you do your job well. But do not push learners to partake in possibly triggering discussions – at least not without the right amount of emotional distance.

# **Deep-dive 3: Drama and Improv for anti-bias education and fighting social injustice**

Drama and improv offer something that many traditional classroom practices struggle to achieve in such a natural way: They make the abstract element of language tangible by making it an experience of all of our senses. When we talk about anti-bias education, we are ultimately talking about helping learners notice the often invisible ways power and social presumptions work: how language shapes who gets heard, who gets silenced, and how identities and assumptions are constructed and deconstructed as “faulty” or “different.” These ideas can feel distant or theoretical, especially for young learners and even more so in a second-language context.

Improvisation starts with simple tools like “**C.R.O.W.**”: Character, Relationship, Occupation, Where. Yet these four elements already open the door to exploring how power circulates in everyday interactions. A “relationship” such as boss–employee or mother–son doesn’t just guide what characters say, but how they say it. Learners begin to understand status as something we perform, negotiate, and manipulate, and that it can and will change over time. Activities like a “Status Walk,” as described in *Enlivening Instruction with Drama and Improv*, where students embody dominance or submission, show that power is neither fixed nor neutral. Learners get a chance to play and experiment with these subtleties in a safe environment. Once learners feel this physically, discussions about social hierarchies no longer center around some abstract concept; they are tangible and can be addressed and reflected on by all learners at their individual level.

Research shows that drama is flexible enough to be integrated into any curriculum while drawing attention to the sociocultural and sociopolitical forces that shape language use – all while bringing much-needed movement and communication into the classroom. It not only strengthens linguistic competence but also raises a kind of consciousness that helps both teachers and students “recognise the role of language and culture in systems of privilege and oppression” and “use language and culture to promote equity and social justice” (ACTFL, 2006, as quoted in Cahnmann-Taylor and R. McGovern, 2021).

Dramatic play can shine light on each student’s individual perspectives and thoughts, promoting equity on a classroom level. On a larger scale, many improv games naturally invite conversations about what counts as “normal” or “good,” and how these categories are constructed. Learners begin to question why certain behaviours, accents, or identities are valued over others. Misunderstandings around linguistic differences, whether gendered nouns or unfamiliar word order, can easily lead to value judgements. It is crucial to be vigilant so as not to let such discussions drift into a place where these perceived differences are enabled and justified rather than deconstructed: A challenge that we must confront in the moment but with a lot of care. Here are some key considerations that may help educators guide a conversation:

- **Ask learners to use words that do not have a negative or positive connotation. Ask them, “Yes, and how could we describe that as neutrally as possible, like you’d find it on Wikipedia?”**

- Ask learners to be sensitive to these diverse contexts and think as an observer when reflecting. “How did that make me feel?” is just as important as “How could this make someone else (who is perhaps affected by this imbalance or idea) feel?” Emotional intelligence is a skill that must be honed and can be trained by “feeling through the other’s mind.”
- Ask learners to purposefully change their character by taking an opposite stance. Let them play a confident person, then a shy one, then a person who barely speaks English, then one who is as proficient as one could possibly be. How did that change how the interaction went? Who was in power? Where did you notice this shift? These are all rich questions that inspire learners to think beyond their own emotional horizon and can lead to a thorough and multiperspective view of a situation.
- Use possible biases and stereotypical portraits that emerge during play as a stepping stone to think about roles, power, and equality. Every “misstep” that could further the rift and divide the learners through their views of “belonging” and “different” can be rechannelled into a step towards a more accepting and allied view of how “different” doesn’t have to mean bad or worse.
- Support the development of this view of bias and stereotypes by having a “board of outdated views.” Students can point out possible moments of bias, stereotypes, or outdated views they encounter in the coursebook and other material. Use these inputs from students as the starting point of new scenes and discussions. (A list of examples for such possibly outdated or invalidating excerpts from the coursebook *Young World* can be found in the materials section.)

This work matters because biased perceptions of languages and their speakers have real consequences. They can determine how individuals are treated and whether their voices are taken seriously, regardless of how well they use the language. English as a Lingua Franca is in the unique position where no one person may claim their English as the “one and only correct version.” But exposure to one-sided accents and uses in media has become a very common occurrence. And whilst there is nothing inherently wrong about using possible misunderstandings as comedic relief, far too often the portrayals of English speakers with a different L1 background are used as hallmarks of poor education and lacking integration: views that are subtle but very damaging and that ironically affect our students, who may see others’ accents as “weird” and “deficient,” just as much as themselves. After all, this view goes both ways.

As Hall (2016) notes, keeping English from anyone in today’s day and age of digital communication must now be seen as a form of social injustice. Yet mainstream language teaching often avoids these realities and fails to empower learners to engage in these discussions. Global ELT materials – and even *Young World*, which was specifically written for the Swiss context in which the curriculum unequivocally mentions foreign language education as part of political empowerment, tend to present a “sanitized world,” full of safe topics like travel and shopping but devoid of any discussions about racism, gender discrimination, or inequality. This erasure is not neutral. As Freire (1968) in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* reminds us, refusing to address conflict means siding with those already in power. Drama and improv push back against this avoidance. They create space to engage critically with real issues, rooted in students’ own experiences or allowing them to take on the role of the marginalized. They build the critical literacies needed for democratic participation: noticing injustice, reflecting on it, and, most importantly, imagining alternatives.

# ***Games and Ideas (selection for illustrative purposes)***

The following collection of games and ideas for improv and drama in an L2 EFL context such as Switzerland are meant to give a quick and hassle free entry point to any educators aspiring to implement DaIEFL into their classroom. These examples are a combination of what I'd consider some of the best examples from the book "Enlivening Instruction through Improv and Drama" as well as some of my own ideas that have been specifically designed with core skills for communication in mind.

For a more comprehensive list, I recommend checking out the consulted literature from the sources and literature tab.

Before going into detail about some examples, I'd like to quickly point out some key characteristics any good drama and improv game or task should incorporate in some form. You may use the compiled list below as a guide when evaluating your own ideas or tasks you have stumbled upon online.

- The task follows the 4 key tenets of drama, especially allowing for authentic communication and real meaning.
- The task offers adequate scaffolding in form of pre-taught functional language
- The task is mindful of learners' personal experiences & interests and offers either insight into an essential linguistic feature, a topic that lends itself well to anti-bias education or fighting social injustice, or both. Key indicators of this are:
  - a) It is relevant to the everyday life of the learners or prepares them for a communicative challenge/interaction they may face in a realistic scenario.
  - b) It teaches functional language that is applicable to more than one scenario and does not focus on language that is only applicable in a very niche topic.\*
  - c) It builds a set of skills that have been identified to be key competences for communicative success such as focus on minimal pairs, intelligibility, mediation, collocations or propositional precision.
- The task is engaging and fun for more than just a few minutes, even with limited vocabulary and offers learners a chance to work in their ZPD.

\*It is nice and all if your students know the name of every animal in the zoo and its proper spelling. However, the focus on very targeted language like this is often a waste of precious classroom time, as it holds little to no real value for the everyday communication your students may encounter on the street and online. Not to mention that it doesn't matter so much if they know the name of an Aardvark or Wombat as the fact if they can describe it or why it matters. Others can infer or simply google which animal you mean, but this gets substantially harder if you cannot express any clues or context around your description.

# **This is my...**

## **Aims/Learning opportunities:**

Students will be able to (SWBAT)

- Imagine what isn't and embody what could be
- Interact with things and people in a fun and performative way
- Use their bodies, gestures and intonation to empathize something
- Use the language "this is, these are" and "but/however" to talk about something. They describe its attributes with as little/as much language as they command at this moment and use other skills at their disposal like gesturing, paraphrasing or even using individual german (L1) words to communicate.

## **How its played:**

1. Learners form a circle, making sure they have enough space to move and perform.
2. The teacher steps out of the circle into the middle, takes up an imaginary object or person and says "This is my ...". They showcase its features through body language, gestures and intonation to give it volume and and showcase it.
3. Another person stepts into the circle and says "This is your ..., but this is my ....", completely changing the object and its meaning.
4. Once this principle has been understood, the learners split into groups of 3 to 5 and continue with this exercise.
5. (Variation 2) After a few rounds/minutes, ask players to leave out the word and instead describe it as they act it out with "and it is/and they are/you use it for/you can find it in/at". Learners now reply with "I think this is/these are..." and change it to something else. Learners can keep track of how many they got right with a simple list or through gestures like thumbs up/thumbs down entirely.

## **Reflection:**

- What were the things you came up with in your group?
- How did you handle situations where you didn't know a word?
- If you played variation 2: What helped the others the most to understand which object you were talkiung about? How many were you able to guess right as a group? (Focus on success and celebrate this moment of communicative success as a group!)

## **Considerations:**

- Pre-teach the necessary chunks ahead of this game and stress that there are no wrong suggestions (Tenet 2: "yes, and...")

# ***The never ending story***

## **Aims/Learning opportunities:**

Students will be able to (SWBAT)

- Use various conjunctions to tie together sentences and keep a scene going
- Take on a different role than their own and engage in it for as long as possible
- Experience the possibilities of conjunctions and use them in a fun and silly way to keep on talking forever.

## **How its played:**

1. Learners form groups of 4 to 6 players. The groups must be even numbers (or, if not possible, designate one player per round as the "buyer" (see variation 2))
2. They players split into two groups within their group (evenly sized and assigned by random to avoid overly dominant teams). They teacher then gives them a topic (variation 1) or description of an item (variation 2). The groups now have to keep talking for as long as possible, with each student saying a sentence that is connected to the previous with a conjunction. You may provide a list of these as aid or pre-teach them and use this as a possibility to evaluate how many conjunctions your students were able to retain. The focus is NOT on accuracy of the sentences but only the correct and fitting use of conjunctions. They keep on making arguments/talking about examples that fit the topic (variation 1) until they run out of arguments or stop for more than 5 seconds. If they do, its the other team's turn. Each team keeps track of how many sentences the opposing team was able to make consecutively.
3. Variation 2: If you have to make unevenly sized teams, switch the scenario to be about making a sale. You (the teacher) gives a name of a machine (its most fun if the machine doesn't actually exist or is some creative spin on a real machine). One player in the team is designated the buyer, the other players once more split into two equally sized and random teams. They then have to make a "sales pitch" using conjunctions to expand on all the wonderful things the machine can do and how it will revolutionize the life of the buyer if they decide to buy their machine.
4. If a team fails to make a new addition to their sales pitch or reuses a conjunction that was said before (count this only within your own team to keep it fair) or hesitate for more than 5 seconds, the sales pitch ends and its the other teams turn. Once both teams had a chance to make a convincing pitch, the buyer decides which product to buy. Want to challenge the buyer some more? Have them repeat some of the points using conjunctions they remember before they "make a purchase decision".

## **Considerations:**

- Depending on grade and complexity of a topic/machine, give the teams a set amount of time to brainstorm points and ideas. You can reduce the cognitive load by giving the students a list of conjunctions they can cross out as they go and focus more on accuracy rather than fluency in this setting.

# **Power through talking**

## **Aims/Learning opportunities:**

Students will be able to (SWBAT)

- Engage in random talks about a topic for a short period of time and interact with others that embody different levels of power and status.
- Adjust their way of speaking based on who they interact with and use non-verbal cues and clues to guess their own role.
- Reflect on power and status and how it affects how we engage with others.
- Experience power and status as something that we negotiate (variation 1)

## **How its played:**

1. Learners draw a card from a deck of cards. Each card corresponds to a certain "level of power" where higher cards mean higher status and thus more power.
2. They then tape this card to their shirt, either with the cards value visible (variation 1) or facing their chest (variation 2). If you are playing variation 1, make sure that students draw the card face down and do not see its value. You may also opt to craft little "crowns" where the cards can be attached with a clothes peg so its harder to spot accidentally and less prone to falling down (these crowns can be reused to variations where you have to guess topics, words, celebrities (who am I) etc., so do not toss them after you are done!)
3. Variation 1: Learners walk around in the room and "stumble" into each other. They then apologize according to the status of their counterpart. Since they do not know their own status, they must observe very carefully how the other person interacts with them to deduce what kind of "power level" they might be. They then talk about a topic (trivial, like their favourite food) and try to get a feeling for how their power level is in relation to their counterpart through cues and language. After a few interactions have occurred (a bell can signal a switch to speed this up and help guide this task), the learners are asked to form a line in relation to their status. They are not allowed to talk anymore and must decide for themselves where to position oneself.
4. Variation 2: In this variation, learners are aware of their own status but their counterpart no longer knows their status. This time, they try to embody their status during the entire conversation. Once a few interactions have happened, invite your learners to reflect on how this assigned status made them feel? How did it affect how they interacted with others? How was it different from when they didn't know their own status and had to negotiate it?

## **Considerations:**

- Talk about what symbols of status are in our world, how they affect interaction and what this feeling of "being superior/being worth less" may mean for those affected?

## ***Examples of materials/topics from "Young world"***

The following examples illustrate potentially harmful/outdated or biased materials and representations from the Swiss English coursebook "Young World" that can be used to engage in critical reflections with your Learners.



- Do all children celebrate christmas?
- Do all families look like this?
- Why is the mother working hard to cook whilst the father is just sitting around and doing nothing?

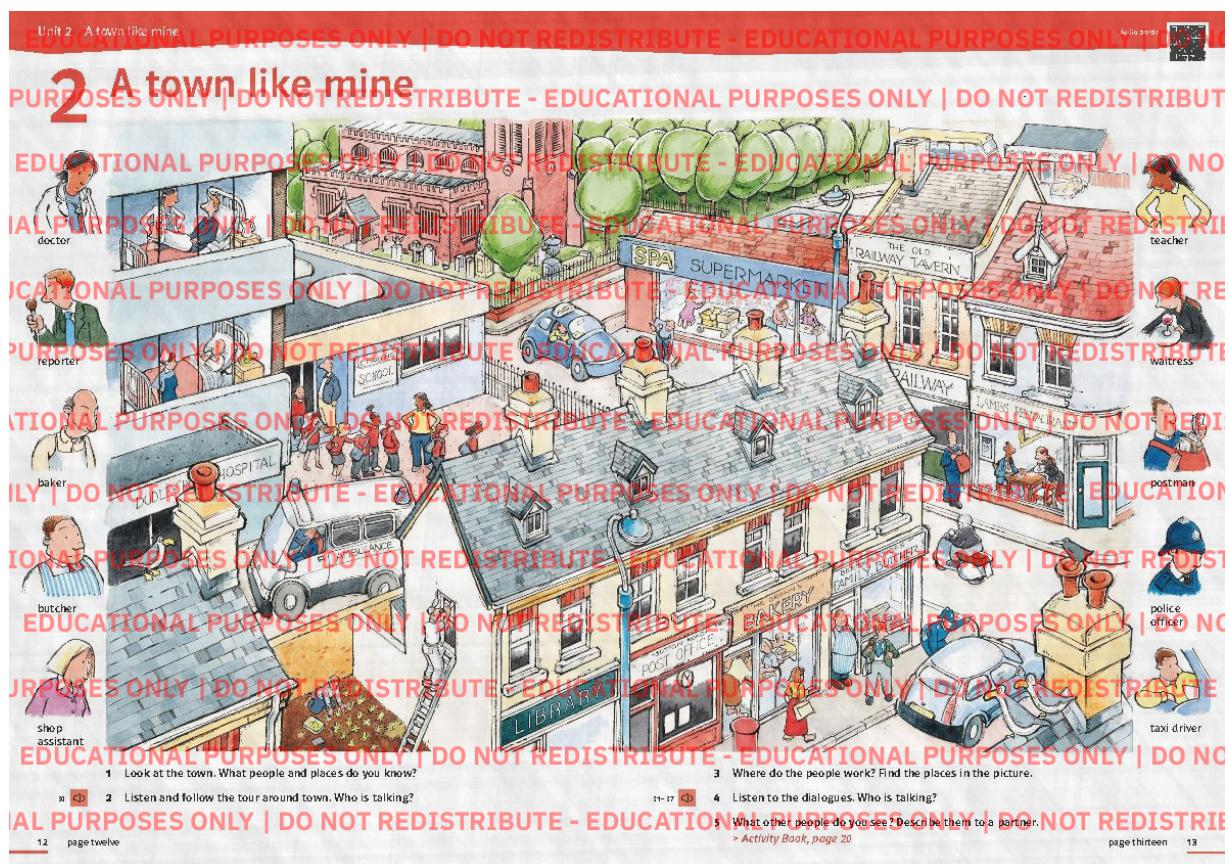


- Why are the white families shown with less children? Why does the South African family have 5 children when the average in SA is 2.21?
- Which stereotypes about these people are reinforced through these images?
- Why does the book not tell the story of why and how cacao farming came to these places (colonization)?





- Do all families look like this? Consider the reality of many children.
- Why does this image show very distinctively male/female seperated jobs? How does this affect the image of roles? (See also next page with the illustration about the maid)



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Working as a maid

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Saturday morning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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6.30 am → open curtains and windows in the morning room

→ clear fireplace and make a fire.

7.30 am → polish children's shoes

→ scrub floor in the hall

8.30 am → make beds

→ fold nightclothes

9.00 am → help the nurse with the baby's bath

→ clean bathroom

10.00 am → wash breakfast dishes

→ prepare table for lunch

11.00 am → dust furniture in the dining room

→ check flowers

15 Close the book and say what you remember. Use the past forms.

Examples: She made a fire in the morning.

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16 Complete the letter Jenny wrote to her friend.

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Dear Grace,

How are you? You won't believe what it's like working as a maid in this big house.

I'll tell you about yesterday. I got up at 6.00 am. At 6.30 am I ... the

curtains and windows in the morning room. The family was still asleep. I ...

the fireplace and ... a fire. Then I ... the

children's shoes and ... the floor in the hall. In the meantime, the

family got up. At 8.30 am I ... the beds and ...

the nightclothes. Later I ... the nurse prepare the baby's bath

and ... the bathroom. At 10 am I ... the

breakfast dishes and ... the table for lunch. Then

I ...

- What kind of stereotypes are reinforced through this image? How does this relate to the reality of today's children at all?

What kind of image do the children learn about the natives from this?

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A bear would be a good totem animal for you - it's strong and charming. It could protect you and give you strength.

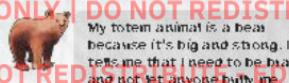
An owl would be a good totem animal for you - it's clever and sees everything.

A marmot would be a good totem animal for you - it's playful and quick. It could help you to find new friends and have fun.

A wolf would be a good totem animal for you - it's loyal and fast. It could help you to lead a group and care for others.

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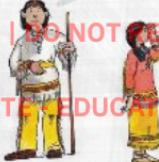
14 Read what other children say about their totem animal.



My totem animal is a bear because it's big and strong. It tells me that I need to be brave and not let anyone bully me.



My totem animal is a bee, because it enjoys all the wonderful flowers and smells in the world. It reminds me to love nature, especially flowers.



My totem animal is a bird, it's an eagle, because eagles have very sharp eyesight. It tells me to keep my eyes open and look out for things.



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15 Choose a totem animal that fits you best. Write a short text on a separate piece of paper.

User: My totem animal is ...

My totem animal has ...

It can ...

I chose this totem animal because ...

It tells me to ...

I have to do ... more / better.

16 Present your text.

# **Sources and Literature**

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