In-Service Teacher Training: Around the World in Many Ways

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In-Service Teacher Training: Around the World in Many Ways

by Carrie McDermott and Andrea Honigsfeld

Regardless of the subject matter or certification area, all teachers participate in professional development programs, some of which are mandated and others self-selected. Both as participants and presenters at numerous staff development sessions, invariably we have found that teachers' active participation is key to successful inservice teacher training. As stated by Posnanski (2002, p. 190), "more contemporary views of staff development promote a constructivist approach in the delivery of professional development programs. In a constructivist based staff development program teachers develop the knowledge base to effectively analyze the teaching situation and choose from a variety of strategies to enhance teaching behaviors and student learning."

The purpose of this article is to share some highly interactive activities utilized in staff development programs for ESL and mainstream teachers. Cultural issues are at the crux of each activity, and we believe that merging content and application as a dual approach will sensitize participants to cross-cultural differences in the classroom. The goal is to broaden awareness and cultural sensitivity of all professionals through eight effective and ready-to-use games and activities. These activities are utilized primarily in teacher education courses and staff development; they could, however, be easily transferred to the ESL classroom as an icebreaker, introduction, or wrap-up to a lesson at all levels (elementary, middle school, high school, and adult) to heighten awareness and sensitivity of various cultures. In addition, these activities may serve as a sit-down-and-arrive activity or as an entire staff development session. We hope that the following activities will serve as helpful tools for you as they did for us.

- **Hopes and Fears**
  **Objective:** To explore and express basic feelings about a challenging new situation.
  **Description:** Each participant receives an index card. In response to a well-defined question, they anonymously jot down their Hopes on one side and Fears on the other side of the card. For example: What are your hopes and fears regarding working with English language learners? What are your hopes and fears for this new school year? The facilitator collects all the cards and reads out all the fears first and comments on them to provide reassurance. Then he/she reads aloud all the hopes and validates people’s expectations. Great ice-breaker and informal needs-assessment tool!

- **Name That Feeling!** (adapted from Myers & Lambert, 2000)
  **Objective:** To develop empathy for all those who are perceived as different by the mainstream culture.
  **Description:** Participants will be asked to recall a time when they were (or felt) different from everybody else in a certain context. They will think of an adjective that best describes how it felt to be different from everybody else. They will then walk around the room and meet as many people as possible in five minutes while introducing themselves using the adjectives in place of their names. For example: "Hi, I’m self-conscious." "Hi, I’m nervous. Nice to meet you." After the activity, participants have the opportunity to share their personal stories; list, group, and label all the adjectives heard in the activity and reflect on the experiences of being or feeling different.

- **More Alike than Different**
  **Objective:** To explore the many characteristics that makes students more alike than different.
  **Description:** Participants will be asked to move around the room and locate others who have similar visual features. Once in a group, participants will share ideas about these features that bond them together. They will have 5-7 minutes to complete this activity. After the activity, students will reconvene with the class and discuss those visual characteristics that make them more alike than different.

- **Find the Fiction** (adapted from Kagan, Robertson, & Kagan, 2001)
  **Objective:** Find out how well do you know the person sitting next to you.
  **Description:** Make a semicircle of chairs. Each participant will receive three idea cards on which they will write three statements: two true and one false. Participants will take turns sharing their statements; fellow participants try to identify the fictitious statement.

- **Pet Names and Good Names**
  **Objective:** To develop an understanding of, and appreciation for, different name-giving traditions and personal stories behind names.
  **Description:** Participants listen to an excerpt from The Namesake (Lahiri, 2003) and take turns sharing name-giving traditions from their own cultures and telling the story behind their names.

  ... a practice of Bengali nomenclature grants, to every single person, two names. In Bengali the word for pet name is *daknam*, meaning, literally, the name by which one is called, by friends, family, and other intimates, at home and in other private, unguarded moments. Pet names are a persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, so complicated. They are a reminder, too, that one is not all things to people. They all have pet names. Ashima’s pet name is Monu, Askoke’s is Mithu, and even as adults, these are the names by which they are known in their respective families, the names by which they are adored and scolded and missed and loved. Every pet name is paired with a good name, a bhalonam, for identification in the outside world. Consequently, good names appear on envelopes, on diplomas, in telephone directories, and in all other public places. (For this reason, letters from Ashima’s mother say “Ashima” on the outside, “Monu” on the inside.) Good names tend to represent dignified and enlightened qualities. Ashima means “she who is limitless, without borders.” Ashoke, the name of an emperor, means “he who transcends grief.” Pet names have no such aspirations. Pet names are never recorded officially, only uttered and remembered. Unlike good names,
pet names are frequently meaningless, deliberately silly, ironic, and even onomatopoetic. Often in one’s infancy, one answers unwittingly to dozens of pet names, until one eventually sticks. (Lahiri, 2003, pp. 25-26)

• For Whom the Wind Blows (Adapted from Gillies, 2001)

Objective: To identify both diverse and common elements within the group.

Description: Make a circle of chairs.
(There should be one less chair than the total number of people in the group. Ask the participants to find a seat—the seats should now all be occupied. Stand in the middle of the circle.) Start the game by saying “The wind blows for those who speak two languages.”

Ideally, many people (but not all) of the group will share this characteristic—it helps to get people into the game. Everyone who has that characteristic must stand up and quickly find a different chair—the facilitator must also look for a chair.

This part of the game resembles musical chairs. One person will be without a chair, and that person becomes the person in the middle. The person in the middle states something that is true for her or him using the same type of statement, for example “the wind blows for those who...”, and once again all those sharing the characteristic must stand up and find a new chair. The game can proceed until many different diversity dimensions have been mentioned or until everyone will have been in the circle at least once.

• Four Corners

Objective: To explore the meaning of culture through a kinesthetic activity.

Description: Ask participants to state whether they Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree with selected statements about culture. Place a large sign (SA, A, D, SD) in the four corners of the room. Once each statement is rated, read aloud the first statement and have partici-
pants move to the appropriate corner in the room to indicate their response. Repeat with each subsequent statement.

Examples:
- Usually, only one culture exists within a single race, language group, religion or nationality.
- One’s own sense of cultural identity often is not evident until one encounters another culture.
- One should understand the language of a culture to understand that culture.

• Cultural Gallery Walk

Objective: To reflect on and relate to quotes about cultural diversity.

Description: Select 5-6 quotations related to cultural diversity or cross-cultural communication. Make sure to include a variety of sources and types of quotes. Selections could include poems, songs, proverbs, or famous sayings. Place the quotes around the room and invite participants to walk around and read the quotes they find in your gallery. Ask them to fill out a gallery response sheet that will have students reflect on quotes (a) that were most personally meaningful in the present, (b) reminded them of something in their past, (c) they have questions about, (d) they would like to take with them and share with someone outside class, and so on.

Examples:
- African Proverb
  Don’t ask me where I am going but where I have come from.
- Arabian Proverb
  Ask me what my virtues are, not about the color of my skin.
- Cuban Proverb
  Every head is a world.

Once each game is over, teachers have the opportunity to share their reflections on these experiential learning activities. In addition, they may also collaboratively ex-

plore how these games may be applicable to their own ESL classes. The ultimate goal is to transfer culturally sensitive, active learning to the classrooms.

References

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