

TODAY YOU WILL...

- ...DEVELOP SPONTANEITY IN SPEAKING
- ...USE AUTHENTIC TEXTS TO EXPAND YOUR VOCABULARY

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

If you want to get your students chatting fluently in a target language, says **Liz Fotheringham**, then you need to find topics that genuinely press their buttons...

Look around and it's obvious that students like to talk; but when it comes to foreign language lessons they are often reluctant to speak, not because they have nothing to say but because the subject matter is of little or no interest to them. Why not give them the

opportunity to express themselves on matters that are of concern and interest to them? Allowing them to engage with authentic texts such as online discussion boards also gives them access to the vocabulary they need to express their own opinions on these matters.

STARTER ACTIVITY +

To get students thinking about talking about things that matter to them show them a series of images of young people chatting to each other in person or on their mobiles, texting, using the internet (Skype, Facebook, Twitter) and so on. Ask

them to work in pairs to describe what they can see in the target language. Then superimpose some speech bubbles onto the images and get them to suggest what the people are saying. Tell them that this lesson is going to be about talking about what *they* want to discuss.

MAIN ACTIVITIES +

1 INTEREST RATES

After this initial activity ask students to come up with suggestions as to what general topics or themes might be on the minds of the people in the images. Once they have done this, or sooner if they get stuck for ideas, show them a series of images that relate to issues that typically concern young people, such as relationships, the opposite sex, money, the future, health, self image, socialising, drugs, alcohol etc and get them to match them with some captions. You could also include some more general themes such as music, celebrities, TV programmes, sport and the like. Then get them to rank these topics in order of most to least important to them. Let them compare their choices with each other, encouraging them where possible to use the target language. If necessary sentence prompts in the target language can be projected onto the whiteboard to help them – for example: I think (for me) X is the most (least) important because... For less able pupils it may also be necessary to have a pool of additional vocabulary on the board for them to use.



2 FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS

Divide the class into groups and get each one to choose a theme, ensuring that each group is working on a different one. Hand each group a large sheet of paper (at least A3) and give them three to five minutes to produce a mind map of as much vocabulary as possible related to that theme. You might want to suggest that they categorise the words into verbs, nouns, adjectives, useful phrases etc. Encourage them to think of as many words as they can before recourse to their dictionaries. After the allotted time get them to pass their sheet of paper on to the next group to add words to the sheet and so on; reduce the amount of time for this and for subsequent rounds. These should then be displayed on the wall so that students have access to them; they could subsequently be photographed and the images uploaded to your school's VLE for reference.

3 HOT TOPICS

Give the students a selection of short texts drawn from online discussion boards and/or advice columns to read. This will give them the opportunity to see language used by young people writing on things that matter to them in context and to develop strategies for acquiring new vocabulary. There may be a need for some judicious editing to ensure suitable content and to eliminate errors; whilst this may be slightly less authentic you will probably want them to be looking

at accurate language. You could at a later stage show them the original text and get them to point out the errors, spelling, grammatical or otherwise (if they express horror at the thought that a native speaker might make a mistake you can always show a

few snippets of equivalent text in English!) The type of task you set students whilst they look at the texts will depend on the level of the class but could range from adding additional vocabulary to the mind maps on the wall, finding synonyms/antonyms, devising a heading for each text, find the French/German/Spanish etc for... and so on. Encourage them to discuss the texts in the target language and allow some time at the end to have a brief discussion about strategies for decoding text.

INFO BAR

+ STRETCH THEM FURTHER

THERE IS SCOPE TO GIVE A GREATER PSHE EMPHASIS IN THIS LESSON. MORE ABLE STUDENTS COULD BE DIRECTED TOWARDS SPECIFIC VIDEOS OF TARGET LANGUAGE TEENAGERS TALKING ABOUT, FOR EXAMPLE, BLOGGING OR FACEBOOK, OR LEARNERS COULD DEVISE A SKETCH BASED ON JEREMY KYLE/TRISHA TYPE PROGRAMMES.

+ ABOUT THE EXPERT



Liz Fotheringham is an experienced MFL teacher, former regional subject adviser for the secondary curriculum and trainer with the Network for languages.

4 STATUS ISSUES

Show the students the Facebook icon with the phrase "What's on your mind?" in the target language. Give them each a strip of paper and ask them to write a 'status update' in the target language at the top of the vertical strip. Get them to circulate their strips of paper to their neighbour(s) to add a 'comment' in the target language. These can then be passed back to the original author or to another student for further comment and so on, creating a 'Facebook conversation'. You could insist on no verbal communication at all.

HOME LEARNING

- > Imagine you have a blog in which you write about whatever is on your mind. Produce a couple of entries – this could be expanded into a controlled assessment writing task.
- > Write a letter to an agony aunt or an online 'expert' about something that is on your mind, asking for advice.

SUMMARY

Round up the lesson with a 'speed dating' activity with the students choosing the topics; it could be the ones you have already discussed or they may wish to come up with some of a more general nature such as music, film, TV and sport. Have some cards ready to write down their suggestions; you will need one card for each pair of students. Have the students seated in pairs either in a line or a circle, each pair with a different card. Get them to talk with their partner in the target language on the topic on the card for 60 seconds. At the end of the minute they should leave the card in position and each student should move clockwise on two spaces; in this way they should all have a new topic to talk about and a different partner. This activity can continue as time permits but allow time for students to feed back what they found easy/difficult about the task and what they would need to do to improve.

