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Seven Techniques to Encourage

Oral Communication in the Classroom

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P • Pressure & Competition

R • Receive an Unknown

O • Open-ended

M • Mild Controversy

O • Occupy a New Role

T • Target Personal Responses

E • Encourage Collaboration
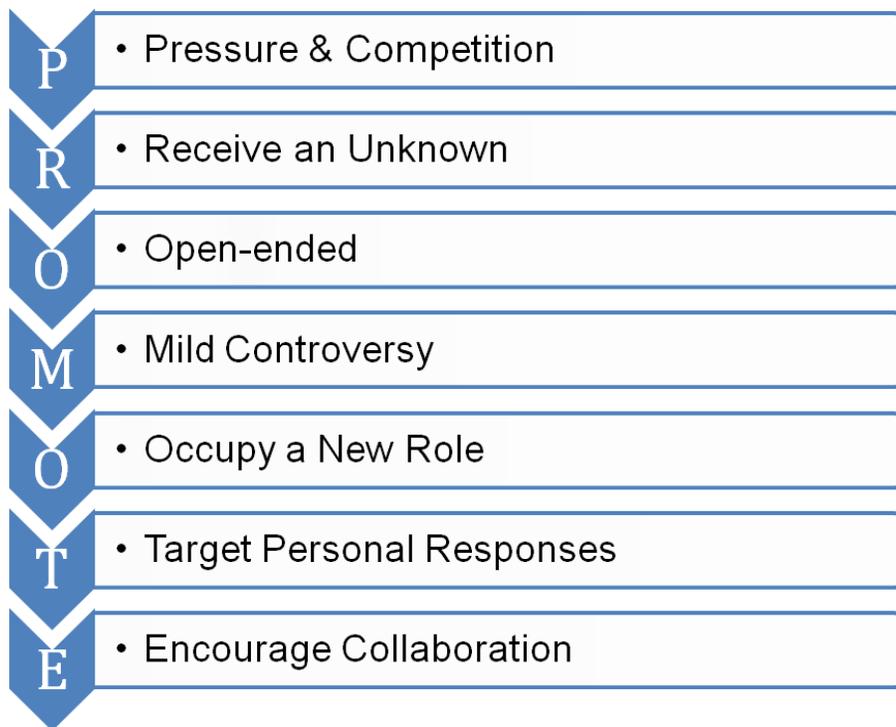
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Oral Communication in the Classroom: Supporting Research and Literature

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<u>Theoretical Frameworks</u>

1) **Communication Strategy (Canale & Swain, 1980)**
   ☞ Language learning is done through verbal and nonverbal tactics aimed at avoiding communication breakdowns such as paraphrasing, gesturing, and asking for clarifications.

2) **The Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985)**
   ☞ Language learning is acquired through comprehensible input. Learners should be exposed to input that they understand but that slightly exceeds their current ability.

3) **The Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985)**
   ☞ Language learning is acquired not only through comprehensible input, but also with comprehensible output. When learners notice a gap in their knowledge, they may then attempt to modify their output.

   Output promotes automatization of language use, i.e. "consistent mapping of the same input to the same pattern of activation over many trials" (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 134).

4) **The Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1985)**
   ☞ Language learning is facilitated by the use of the target language in interaction. Negotiation of meaning (when learners try to handle difficult situations in a communicative setting) specifically contributes to language acquisition.

   Interaction research "takes as its starting point the assumption that language learning is stimulated by communicative pressure and examines the relationship between communication and acquisition and the mechanisms (e.g, noticing, attention) that mediate between them" (Gass, 2003, p. 224).

   Development occurs when learners notice mismatches between input and their own organization of the target language. Those confirm or disprove hypotheses they had formed (Gass, 1997).

5) **Collaborative Dialogue (Swain, 2005)**
☞ 'Output' becomes 'collaborative dialogue.' Learners co-construct their linguistic knowledge and mediate their understanding. As they seek solutions together, they develop their proficiency. Interaction through problem-solving and knowledge-building is a social activity.

6) **Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978)**
☞ Beyond physical and neural conditions for higher-order thinking, human cognitive activity develops through interaction within social material environments. Thus, mental functions such as problem-solving, voluntary memory and attention, rational thought, planning, and meaning-making activity are strengthened by participation in culturally organized activities.

Learning collaboratively precedes and shapes development. What learners can do with help from others is an indication of what they will be able to do by themselves later. This is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). It is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Planned second language (L2) environments can stimulate that development.

Research from Four Different Decades

Doughty C., & T. Pica. (1986). Information gap tasks: Do they facilitate second language acquisition? *TESOL Quarterly*, **20(2), 305-325.**

Tasks requiring information exchange in problem-solving and decision-making situations (with confirmation and comprehension checks) generate conversational modifications of classroom interaction, which benefits second language acquisition. Group and pair work produced more modification than teacher-fronted settings.

"The most modification was obtained when (a) all members of groups/dyads were nonnative speakers, (b) members of groups had varying proficiency levels, and (c) members of groups had different first languages (L1s)" (p. 321).

"To be effective, group interaction must be carefully planned by the classroom teacher to include a requirement for a two-way or multi-way exchange of information" (p. 323).

Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal,* 78(3), 273-284.

"Motivation is one of the main determinants of second/foreign language (L2) learning achievement" (p. 273).

Dörnyei recommends the following to increase motivation:

- Include a sociocultural component through videos, anecdotes, and guest speakers.
- Promote the students' self-efficacy by teaching them problem-solving strategies.
- Promote favorable self-perceptions by focusing on communicative goals, not always focusing on form.
- Decrease student anxiety by creating a safe learning environment and developing group cohesion.
- Increase students' interest and involvement in the tasks by bringing authentic material and visual aids.
- Arouse and sustain curiosity and attention by avoiding routines, personalizing tasks, and engaging learners in meaningful exchanges.
- Adopt of the role of a facilitator rather than an authority figure.
- Promote learner autonomy by allowing options and responsibility by leaving students in charge.
- Use cooperative learning techniques, even in evaluations.

Ryoo, H-K. (2009). Language related episode (LRE) in learner interactions as an opportunity for language learning. *English Teaching*, 64(4), 315-335.

This research shows that learners create second language knowledge through collaborations and LREs.

 "It is generally believed that second language interaction is an essential opportunity for learners to develop communicative language skills in the target language" (p. 315).

"…language learning is intrinsically a social phenomenon. It emphasizes the fact that engaging in second language interactions helps learners reach language development through the collaborative work in which the more expert language users provide novice language learners 'scaffolding' actions to help them develop second language knowledge" (p. 318).

"Learning did not take place as a form of simple exchanges of information, rather, it happened through multiple turns and different role enactments by the learners themselves" (p. 326).

Language development "is a rather complex process with the interplay of the learners' own efforts to provide assistance to each other and appropriate it in a self-regulated way" (p. 331).

Nakatani, Y. (2010). Identifying strategies that facilitate EFL learners' oral communication: A classroom study using multiple data collection procedures. *The Modern Language Journal*, 94: 116–136.

Communicative strategies for maintaining discourse and negotiation of meaning have the potential to enhance learners' communicative ability.

"When learners face difficult information, by using communication strategies (CSs) they can experience the process of comprehending information input and thus have a chance to facilitate their own target language (TL) acquisition. These strategies allow learners to remain in the conversation, which provides them with opportunities to hear more TL input and produce new utterances" (p. 118).

The learners' "use of strategies to keep the conversation smooth was significantly related to their oral communication ability in English" (p. 124).

"The third significant predictor was signals for negotiation [… i.e.] confirmation checks, comprehension checks, and clarification requests during the interaction. This result supports the prediction […] that these negotiating behaviors enable learners to gain opportunities to develop their productive capacity in the TL" (p. 124).

Promote
Pressure and Competition

Activity 1: Scratch-off Quizzes

- Acquire a few IF-AT forms (Immediate Feedback Assessment Technique [http://www.epsteineducation.com/home/] and prepare a set of multiple-choice questions to ask in class (you can test grammar, a reading, etc.). Craft your questions carefully so they will lead to disagreements within groups.
- Organize groups of three students and give each group a form. Then ask your questions and give students time to discuss and choose the correct answer as a group. When time is up, students will scratch off the form and see whether or not they were correct. Designate a group who had the correct answer to explain it to the class. The group with the most correct answers may win a prize.
- This activity may be a little difficult for beginners as they may not know enough vocabulary to discuss their choices in the target language. However, depending on the topic, one could prepare a worksheet with useful phrases to be used by beginners in their groups.
- This can also be done as a whole class with a PowerPoint presentation with or without clickers.

Activity 2: Tourist Trap

- Organize students in pairs or small groups. Give students time to research the tourist features of different countries or regions within a country. Have them develop a poster (virtual or paper) or PowerPoint presentation to "sell" their vacation package to the rest of the class.
- During the presentations the audience may use a graphic organizer to note the trip features (e.g. climate, cost). At the end, the students vote for the best vacation package (not voting for their own). The winning team may receive a reward such as extra credit or a small prize.

Activity 3: Speed Vocabulary Review

- Line up the desks in the classroom so there are two rows facing each other (if odd number, add one desk on the end for a group of three). Tell the students they will be given a topic that they must discuss until you give the signal (e.g. bell, whistle, light blink).
- When the signal goes off, one side of the group moves down a chair so everyone has new partners and the next topic is given.
- Sample topics include: vacations, families, food and restaurants.

Activity 4: Name that Category

- This game is modeled after the television show from the 1970s called the *$10,000 Pyramid*. The board game is built in the shape of a pyramid and contains different categories.
- This activity can be used with the whole class split into two teams, with the whole class grouped into pairs, or in small groups. One player on each team, the clue giver, is able to see the board. The guessers are not able to see the game board. As the categories are revealed, the clue givers list terms belonging to that category. For example, for the category "fruits" the clue giver may say, "pineapple, apples, grapes" and continue to list terms until the category is named by the guessers. The team that names the category first wins the points. The other categories are revealed in turn.

Notes

pROMOTE
Receive an Unknown

Activity 1: Vocabulary Grab Bag

- In this activity, students are divided into pairs or groups of three. Groups are then paired up. Group A is asked to come up with a "grab bag" of vocabulary from a given unit including a set number of nouns, verbs, and adjectives.
- The vocabulary list is given to Group B. The group members use all the words to create a story and briefly illustrate it.
- Group B then combines with Group A and narrates (not reads) the stories while presenting the illustration. Group A then shares their story with Group B.

Activity 2: Play-Doh Alien Invasion

- Ask students to pair up and provide each with a can of Play-Doh. Ask them to make the most creative alien they can in 60 seconds.
- Have them trade aliens with another group and explain that the alien crash-landed on Earth and has amnesia. The students have five minutes to come up with the alien's backstory that they will then orally present to the group that originally made it. This activity may work well with past tense structures.

Activity 3: Who Will I Be?

- First, ask students to create masks based on the unit of study (e.g. character, animal, or object). The masks are made out of a sheet of paper, folded in half. No scissors are needed.
- In groups of three or four, students pass their masks on to the next group who has to create a spontaneous dialogue or role-play with the masks given to them.

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PROMOTE
Open-ended
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Activity 1: Judging a Book by its Cover

- Buy some affordable used novels and remove the covers or use the Digital Children's Library [http://en.childrenslibrary.org/] and print only the covers.
- Give each pair of students a cover and ask them to invent the basic story line based on the cover and title.

Activity 2: Creating a Story

- Make a deck of 24 cards depicting characters, events, or places related to a story. Each group receives a deck of cards. In groups of two to three, students take turns flipping over a card and adding to the story based on the character or event.
- An example of a deck of cards comes from Sánchez, J. & Sanz, C. (1993). *Jugando en español: Actividades interactivas para la clase de español. Niveles elemental-intermedio.* Berlin: Langenscheidt.

Activity 3: Making Connections

- Provide groups of students with two or three pictures. Make the activity challenging by using pictures that are usually not associated with one another.
- Students then come up with the connection between the pictures and share their connections with group members. The same pictures will generate different connections.
- This activity comes from: Wright, A., Betteridge, D., & Buckby, M. (2006). *Games for language learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Activity 4: Choose Your Own Adventure

- Prepare an intriguing opening line to a story focusing on a certain vocabulary theme and/or grammatical structure. Organize students into groups of four to five and ask the first student to repeat the opening to the story, and then add another line. The next person in the circle repeats the first two lines, adding a third.
- The groups continue to practice the four or five line story then all groups share with the class to see how different stories evolved from the same introduction. When all groups have presented, the class votes by applause for the most creative story.

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PROMOTE
Mild Controversy

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Activity 1: Fold the Line

- Select a friendly controversial topic. Ask students to line up with those who most strongly agree on one end and those who most strongly disagree on the other end. Once there is a line in place, fold the line so that the students are paired up with a partner. The person who most strongly disagrees will be paired with the student who most strongly agrees. Give each side one minute to state their opinion and instruct the students to defend their opinions using comparative or superlative structures and a supporting "because" statement. An example is "The country is better than the city because you can go swimming."
- Once completed, unfold the line and have students move to one side of the room or the other based on their view point. There will most likely still be students in the middle. If so, ask students representing each position to make their case. Throughout the discussion, students in the middle may decide to move to one side or the other. If they are taking too long, ask them to move to the side which most represents their position on the matter. Topics may include: "City living is better than country living", "It is more interesting to watch sports with men than women", "Printed newspapers are no longer needed with digital copies."

Activity 2: When Can We Meet?

- Organize students in pairs, and give each one a different piece of paper with a different schedule. Ask them to determine a time at which they can meet to go eat out.
- Make clear that they need to explain to their partner why they cannot meet at certain times. Emphasize that they must find a solution.
- What students don't know is that the schedules do not have a common meeting time. Therefore, students will have to resolve this problem in a different way and negotiate a solution that will please everyone. If they stall (as students will logically assume that there is a solution, or there must be a mistake in the handout), the instructor may point out some ways to compromise, such as doing one activity together or canceling /moving plans in their schedule.

Activity 3: Survivor

- Organize students in pairs and inform them that they have won a camping trip to an exotic location (e.g. Machu Pichu, the Pyrénées). Give them a packing list including any relevant vocabulary such as foods, clothing items, electronics, supplies, etc. and tell them only 20 items will fit in their backpacks so they must come to a consensus.
- Now it is time to go to the airport; have two pairs merge to create a group of four flying mates. Unfortunately, the small plane is overweight! The four students must now come to a consensus on what 15 items they will share on their excursion. All groups in class will share their narrowed lists to see which group is best prepared for the voyage.

Activity 4: Either Or

- Make a list of "either/or" items in the target language, for example: "apples or oranges," "science or math," "books or magazines," "pizza or chocolate," "love or money." Prepare 30-40 "either or" statements. Give the students about three to five minutes to circle their preference.
- After they have completed their choices, students get into small groups and discuss the results. Conversation starts immediately as students defend their choices and often get into small friendly debates.
- Credit to Wagner and Gutschow, WAFLT, 2006.

Notes

PROMOTE
Occupy a New Role

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Activity 1: Suspicions

- A crime has been committed. For example, cheese was stolen from the cafeteria. Select a cast of suspects including teachers, staff, and students. In pairs, Student A is the detective and Student B is one of the suspects. Detectives are given prompts that will help learners construct sentences in the past. Student A will have to determine if Student B's alibis are solid enough.
- For more advanced students, prompts may not be necessary and they could describe their actual schedule to the detective.
- Optionally, some pairs could act out the interrogation in front of the class and the class could decide who committed the crime.
- This activity can be paired with a showing of the film *8 femmes*, a musical about solving a murder. For example vocabulary could be drawn from the film, and some scenes acted out.

Activity 2: Masks

- First, ask students to create masks based on the unit of study (e.g. character, animal, or object). The masks are made out of a sheet of paper, folded in half. No scissors are needed.
- Students are given different situations each wearing a mask and respond to the situation based on their character. The characters can interact, debate, and discuss things as well. Then, students rotate masks and respond to a different prompt or situation. This activity couples well with a video series the class may watch or a theme from the textbook.
- **Example A:** Students have just studied bull fighting in Spain. Three masks are created: a matador, a bull, and a local community member. The three characters have to react to one of the following prompts: a) eating bull tail is a delicacy in Spain or b) bullfighting has been made illegal in Catalonia, Spain.
- **Example B:** Students have just studied novels by Victor Hugo. They create a mask based on a character from the *Notre-Dame de Paris* (Quasimodo, Esmeralda, Frollo) and react to one of the following prompts inspired by the themes in the novel: a) people can't be judged by their physical appearance or b) destiny can be changed.
- Masks can be used again for Mardi Gras.

Activity 3: Family Reunion

- This activity comes from Foerester, S. & Miller, J. (1997). *Teacher's Guide for Supplementary Materials to accompany the textbook Puntos de Partida*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Each student receives a card with clues to his/her identity. They need to stand up, mingle, and ask questions of the other students to find their family.
- There are three families in the room and each member needs to reunite with his/her family based on the information given. Once the three families are reunited, transition to an activity that requires three groups.

Activity 4: Puppet Problems

- Ask students to create simple sock puppets or Popsicle stick puppets. In class, divide the students into groups of three. Assign one puppet the therapist role and the other two a problem (e.g. sibling rivalry, parent/child curfew negotiation).
- Ask the group to create a counseling session with all puppets using the subjunctive (or similar advice giving structures) as much as possible. After practicing, the groups may perform their puppet show for another group or the class.

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PROMOTE
Target Personal Responses
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Activity 1: What Would You Do?

- Create a worksheet if you are practicing the conditional. What would you do for $1,000,000? List a number of possibilities and have the students move around, again asking questions looking for an affirmative answer. For example: Would you eat liver? Would you shave your head?

Activity 2: Amélie and Me

- This activity is based on the film "Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain", in which the characters are introduced through a list of their likes and dislikes.
- After watching the movie or an excerpt, students prepare a list (perhaps as homework) according to the model. In the film, you are told about the characters' strange habits and little quirks (e.g. Amélie's dad loves to remove wallpaper, he hates when his swimsuit sticks to his skin) – it's not a list of hobbies. Students should do the same.
- In class, organize students in small groups so they explain to one another their likes and dislikes.
- Next, have students report to the whole class one like and one dislike from one of their partners.
- The following day, try to have students remember the funny peculiarities of their classmates.

Activity 3: Partner Preferences

- Pair students and provide them with a list of items (e.g. food, leisure activities) and ask them to silently guess what their partner loves, likes, and hates.
- When both have guessed, they will orally check their guesses with their partner and discuss their preferences to see how much they have in common and where they differ.

Notes

PROMOTE
Encourage Collaboration

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Activity 1: Dial a Phone

- Cell phone use is normally prohibited in the classroom. Students enjoy breaking this rule for one day!
- Put students in pairs, and ask them to take their phone out (nowadays, almost every student has one; if not, they can use a piece of paper and mimic a phone conversation). Student A gives his/her phone number orally to Student B who dials it. If the phone rings, communication was clear. Student A can pick up and they can exchange greetings or have a short conversation. Then they switch roles.
- To continue working with cell phones, each pair will now work together to figure out text messaging language, and to come up with their own, too. From then on, they'll be able to text each other in French.
- To expand this phone activity and refocus it on conversation, introduce vocabulary relevant to phone conversation as well as cultural elements such as area codes, emergency phone numbers, cell phone contracts and companies, etc.
- Have students role-play: put them back to back (just like on the phone, they can't see each other's face, which creates an extra challenge) and play out a phone conversation (a business transaction, for example). Have them use vocabulary such as "please hold", "I'll put him through", etc. Create a situation and a goal for them; for example they need to reserve a hotel room, or make an appointment with someone, or make travel arrangements.

Activity 2: Packets of Clues

- Prepare packets of clues, one packet per small group. Each packet contains authentic materials (e.g. money, newspaper clippings, and receipts), pictures or unusual objects. Collect realia from trips abroad. From the packet the students need to make up a story about the person who left these objects behind. What kind of person is it? Where did they go? Guide the students with a checklist of questions to answer orally.

Activity 3: Draw and Show

- Pair students. Student A gives a description, and Student B draws what they hear on a piece of paper. When the drawing is done, Student A evaluates the accuracy of the drawing. Then they switch roles.
- Next, collect all the drawings and redistribute them randomly. Student A will describe the new drawing to Student B, and then as a group they can compare the accuracy of the reproduction.
- At the end, you may share all drawings with the class and pick which one is the most creative.
- This activity can be adapted to various topics. You may give students an actual picture to describe or let them imagine something. At the beginner level, when working on physical descriptions, it's fun to have students describe a mythical creature or alien, as the drawings are often funny, original, and varied. But you can also work with maps at a more advanced level, a piece of art in a course on culture, or a famous person. In a literature class, you may have students give their personal description of how they imagine a certain character and later engage them in a discussion justifying their description based on their interpretation of the story.

Activity 4: Collaborative Narration

- Students select a cultural video (e.g. http://www.otavalovideos.com/). The students record a narration for the video in pairs to describe what is happening during the video. Students present the video accompanied by their narration to the class.

Activity 5: Solving a Fill-in-the-blank

- Students are divided into groups of three. Each person is given their own worksheet with clues to complete a fill-in-the-blank.
- Students collaborate sharing their clues to find the correct word for the blanks.
- Credit to Piet van der Meer and Amy van der Meer (2009), Central States Conference.

Notes

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Activity Appendix

Pressure and Competition: Name that Category

Instructions: Identify a learning partner and introduce yourself. Then assign Person A and Person B. Stand so that Person A can see the screen and Person B cannot. In a moment, Person A will see different categories and will use one to two word statements to help Person B guess the correct category. Person A may begin with any one of the categories until all categories are guessed. The first group to guess all categories will raise their hands.

Receive an Unknown: Who Will I Be? See page 25.

Instructions: Tear out the mask in your handout, and draw a character of your choice (e.g. President Obama, Sarah Palin, a business man, a typical student, a football player, a professor, or a plumber) and write the name of the person on the back of the mask. Form a group of three or four people and introduce yourself. Pass your masks to the group next to you, and receive masks from another group. Create a spontaneous dialogue or role-play with your new masks, discussing the future of education in the United States.

Open-ended: Choose Your Own Adventure

Instructions:
In groups of five, choose one of the following story-starters to begin your tale.

- I ordered Boston Cream Pie for dessert but you'll never believe what the server brought me instead. He brought…

- I grabbed the wrong suitcase at the baggage claim and couldn't believe what I found inside. It was…

- Last night at the hotel, I got stuck in the elevator with Tom Brady. He said…

Person A will read the first sentence then add their own. Person B repeats the first sentence, repeats Person B's sentence and then adds a new one. The group continues until time is called to see what story develops.

Mild Controversy: Either Or

Instructions:
Introduce yourself to a partner then read through the either/or dyads, noting your preferences. Then, in pairs share and defend your choices to your partner. If there is disagreement, be sure to explain in detail the reasoning behind your likes and dislikes.

Occupy a New Role: Puppet Problems

Instructions: Create a cast of puppets representing the faculty of a language department including one instructor of Martian. Have a conversation with the Martian to try to persuade him or her to use other teaching methods and not just grammar-translation.

Target Personal Responses: Partner Preferences

Instructions: Silently read the questions and think about how you would answer. Then, look deeply into your partner's eyes and predict how they would answer. Discuss the predictions and true answers with your partner.

Encourage Collaboration: Solving a fill-in-the-blank

Instructions: In pairs, assign Person A and Person B. Each person has different clues to the fill-in-the-blanks. Working with a partner, negotiate the correct answers to the blanks. See pages 23-24.

Encourage Collaboration
Activity 5: Solving a Fill-In-the-Blank

Instructions: You have been given clues to each of the fill-in-the-blanks below. Your partner has different clues for each. Working with your partner, figure out the correct answers to the blanks.

A

1. __ __ __ __
2. __ __ __ __ __ __ __
3. __ __ __ __ __ __ __
4. __ __ __ __ __ __ __
5. __ __ __ __ __ __
6. __ __ __ __ __
7. __ __ __ __ __ __ __
8. __ __ __ __ __
9. __ __ __ __ __   __ __ __ __
10. __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __

1. The capital of this country is Lima.
2. One of two landlocked, Spanish speaking countries in Latin America.
3. This city is the capital of Bavaria
4. The flag of this country is red, white and green and features a bird clutching a serpent.
5. A popular dance with Puerto Rican origins
6. You cannot take a direct flight from the US to this island nation.
7. This group's calendar is round and famously recorded on the Sun Stone.
8. Isabel Allende was born in this country.
9. Citizens of this country refer to themselves as "ticos" and live the "pura vida."
10. This city was once home to the Popes.

Encourage Collaboration
Activity 5: Solving a Fill-In-the-Blank

Instructions: You have been given clues to each of the fill-in-the-blanks below. Your partner has different clues for each. Working with your partner, figure out the correct answers to the blanks.

B

1. __ __ __ __
2. __ __ __ __ __ __ __
3. __ __ __ __ __ __
4. __ __ __ __ __ __
5. __ __ __ __ __ __ __
6. __ __ __ __
7. __ __ __ __ __ __
8. __ __ __ __
9. __ __ __ __ __   __ __ __ __
10. __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __

1. The location of Machu Picchu.
2. A country that has two capitals: La Paz and Sucre.
3. This city hosted the 2006 World Cup.
4. A city that houses the Prado Museum.
5. Two famous artists are from this country: Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera.
6. A popular dance with Puerto Rican origins
7. First discovered the concept of zero.
8. One of the main exports from Chile.
9. This country is known for its national parks and coffee.
10. A famous song was written about the bridge in this French city.

Receive an Unknown
Activity 3: Who Will I Be?