Instructor’s note: Conversation activities make great fodder for writing assignments. Here is an essay written by an advanced-level adult ESL student who was asked to compare and contrast the two types of speaking activities we had during the first week of class: a speed-friending ‘line dance’ and rotating-partner conversation circles. The purpose of this writing assignment was to have students reflect on their experiences participating in these two types of activities. All names have been changed. More examples of possible questions asked during the two speaking activities follow.

About speed-friending activity and collaborative conversation circles

Honestly, I did not hear about speed-friending activities before this week. However, after my last two writing classes, not only did I know about that, but also, I participated in that activity.

The rules are quite simple: after making a dance line, we talked about ourselves for two minutes. During the activity we were allowed to ask personal questions to each other in order to meet, and hopefully, to make new friends. When the time ended, we moved one step to the right to talk with the next person.

In less than ten minutes I knew two Venezuelan and two Chinese people. Jesús, who is single, and Anna, who is mother of two kids, are Venezuelan and came to this country two years ago. Kelong, who likes listening all kind of music, and Jenny, who is amazingly fluent speaking English, are Chinese.

Even though I knew some other things about them during the activity, it did not seem to me an effective way to make friends, in part because my questions were not meaningful and deep and in part because we had just a few minutes to talk. Nevertheless, it the best way to know the most people in the less possible time, I agree.

Trying something different next class, we repeated the activity using pre-make questions and working in small groups. There were four people in my group and we asked each other in three ways: clockwise, crossed, and counter clockwise.

The name of the list of pre-make questions was “questions that promote deeper understanding of each other” and it was true, each one of them were made to discover more about my classmates and even about myself. Questions like “for what in your life do you feel most grateful?” or “what is your most treasured memory?” went direct to the heart.

Certainly, it was interesting for me to know that David likes singing and admires to Manny Paquiao and for Lili the most precious values in a friendship are honesty and helpfulness, but I was really impressed by Fumio’s point of view about a perfect day. I had a selfish point of view about it, a perfect day for me is when I can get up late, I don’t have to clean or to cook and I can spend time reading or watching a movie, but for him means share happiness with his wife.

Because of the pre-make questions were really helpful to share our feelings and thoughts, and we spent more time talking in the second activity, we could know better each other. Whereas Jesús, Anna, Jenny and Kelong seemed just nice people to me, I felt a connection with David, Fumio, and Lili, and I am eager to share more time with them in order to become real friends.
Possible Questions Asked during Speed-friending Activity\(^1\)

1. How do you like to spend your free time?
2. What was your most valuable possession as a child? And now?
3. How often do your parents/children call you?
4. Who’s your favorite celebrity?
5. What word best describes you?
6. How often do you go out with your friends?
7. How many people do you know in your neighborhood?
8. Which cities have you been to?
9. What do you do for exercise now?
10. What should you say no to more often?

Possible Questions Asked during Rotating-partner Conversation Circles Activity\(^2\)

1. What would make a “perfect” day for you?
2. If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?
3. Name three things you and your classmate appear to have in common.
4. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
5. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
6. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?
7. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?
8. Is there something that you’ve dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven’t you done it?
9. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
10. What do you value most in a friendship?

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