

# Learning Spaces.

## An Introduction to Performative Pedagogy

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### Empathy Questions

Students are shown a picture of a person. They adopt the same position and hold it in silence. The teacher then reads aloud a number of questions, which the students silently answer for themselves. These empathy questions are designed for learners to develop their own thoughts and ideas shaped by the position they have adopted. Following this activity, students should have the opportunity to exchange thoughts and ideas. It is not necessary to remember all the questions and answers; students should talk about what they can recall.

It is important to note that empathy questions are framed in the second person singular in order to encourage personal answers in the *here and now*, since an outside observer keeps his/her distance and tends to interpret, whereas the inside experiencer reflects and empathizes. Empathy questions help learners develop their own thoughts and ideas towards a given situation, since physically adopting another's posture helps adopting an inner perspective.

### Still Image (Tableau, Freeze-Frame)

A still image can be described as a frozen moment in time and space. They are easy to do and work for all language levels and learner groups. People (either alone or with others) adopt a particular position and hold this position in silence.

The still image is an excellent *introductory technique* to performative teaching. Still images are embodied representations of meanings, highlighting themes, concepts, ideas, situations, relationships, perceptions, and attitudes. As non-verbal forms of symbolic representation, they can be regarded as physical metaphors that go beyond the actual context, capturing the essence of the moment.

Still images are often used in conjunction with thought-tapping and/or doubling.

### Thought-Tapping and Doubling

Both thought-tapping and doubling start from a still image. In thought-tapping, other participants go into the still image and tap the people in it lightly on the shoulder. The 'tapped' people then say what is going through the mind of the person whose posture they are copying at that moment, using the first person singular.

In doubling, participants go behind the person in the still image and copy his/her posture. They then say what might be going through the person's mind, also in the first person singular.

Both thought-tapping and doubling *give voices* to a still image, again changing perspectives from the 'outside' to the 'inside.' These voices might be quite diverse – from expressing general emotions to more concrete, contextual reactions. It is important to note that the aim of this technique is not guessing the 'correct' interpretation but to sound individual ideas.

## Teacher in Role

The teacher can enter into the dramatic improvisation as teacher in role, adopting the role of a character in the text (this can be a side-character too). This technique affords the teacher the possibility of inserting new impulses into the improvisation, model verbal output, and manipulate the course of the interaction. The new and unforeseen input stimulates spontaneous output from the other actors. The *change in status* from instructor to actor can provoke more independent action in the students, who have to come to their own decisions in the ensuing interaction without outside help from the teacher.

## Hotseating

In this activity, the details of a character are *collaboratively constructed*. One person takes the 'hot seat' in the middle of the room as a particular character, and the other participants sit around and ask him/her questions. The person on the hot seat has to answer 'in role', i.e. as if s/he were this character. The unique dynamics of this activity stem from the need for, and power of spontaneous invention, to which everybody contributes. The person in the hot seat has to make decisions on the spot about the character in question. These decisions, in turn, are shaped by the nature of the questions asked. This technique helps students get deeper into the character in question and makes the situation of this character more transparent to the others, at the same time encouraging free interaction among the participants.

Hotseating questions differ from empathy questions. While empathy questions can be answered spontaneously without much deliberating (questions in the here-and-now; see above), hotseating questions are questions that require decisions about a person and his/her place in the world (e.g. personal details, likes/dislikes, strengths/weaknesses, work and leisure, relationships, past occurrences/future dreams, and so on). The answers are restricted by the overall context.

Hotseating is a very popular activity with learners. Since questions and answers are not predetermined, learners are eager to find out more about the character on the hot seat and are intrigued by the fact that they themselves help generate details that did not exist before. It is also an integrative exercise; learners contribute according to their language level (from simple to more complicated questions, from beginners to advanced). And even those who do not ask questions listen intently, since both questions and answers arise from the moment.

When introducing hotseating, the teacher might take the hot seat him/herself at first, and show that the person on the hot seat can take a while to think before answering. It is also possible to have more than one person hot seat at the same time.