

The Communication Game

1. Each participant picked a partner that they don't know very well. In a small school system this can be difficult but I urged them to not to partner with a friend.
2. I randomly assigned the labels "Person A" and "Person B" to each person in each partnership.
3. "Person A" was asked to think of an important fact about themselves that "Person B" would be unlikely to know. Neither person could talk. Person A was asked to convey the message using gestures or drawings. He/she was not allowed to write words or numbers. Person B was not allowed to make gestures. Person B had a paper and pencil to write down the message they thought was being conveyed. (It is important, however, that Person A not see this message). Person A wrote down how it felt to try to convey the message without language.
4. At the end of the exercise all participants came back to together. Many finished early and thought they had easily determined the message. We then went around the group and each Person B read what they thought the message had been. Person A then told what he/she was trying to convey.

Very few messages were correctly interpreted. Most understood a few central ideas or words but misinterpreted the message. Those participants who wrote about what it felt like to try and convey a message without words had feelings of frustration and helplessness. This was a great exercise in putting teachers in the place of their second language learners.

Ideas for messages are as follows:

Last year, I was sick. I had surgery on my I hurt myself....

During the vacation I went to

A funny thing happened in my class the other day.....

It makes me feel uncomfortable when people.....

Last night I dreamt that.....

Something I really like to do in my spare time is.....