

Feeling safe to speak –  
How to use the principles of group  
dynamics to foster speaking in the  
English classroom

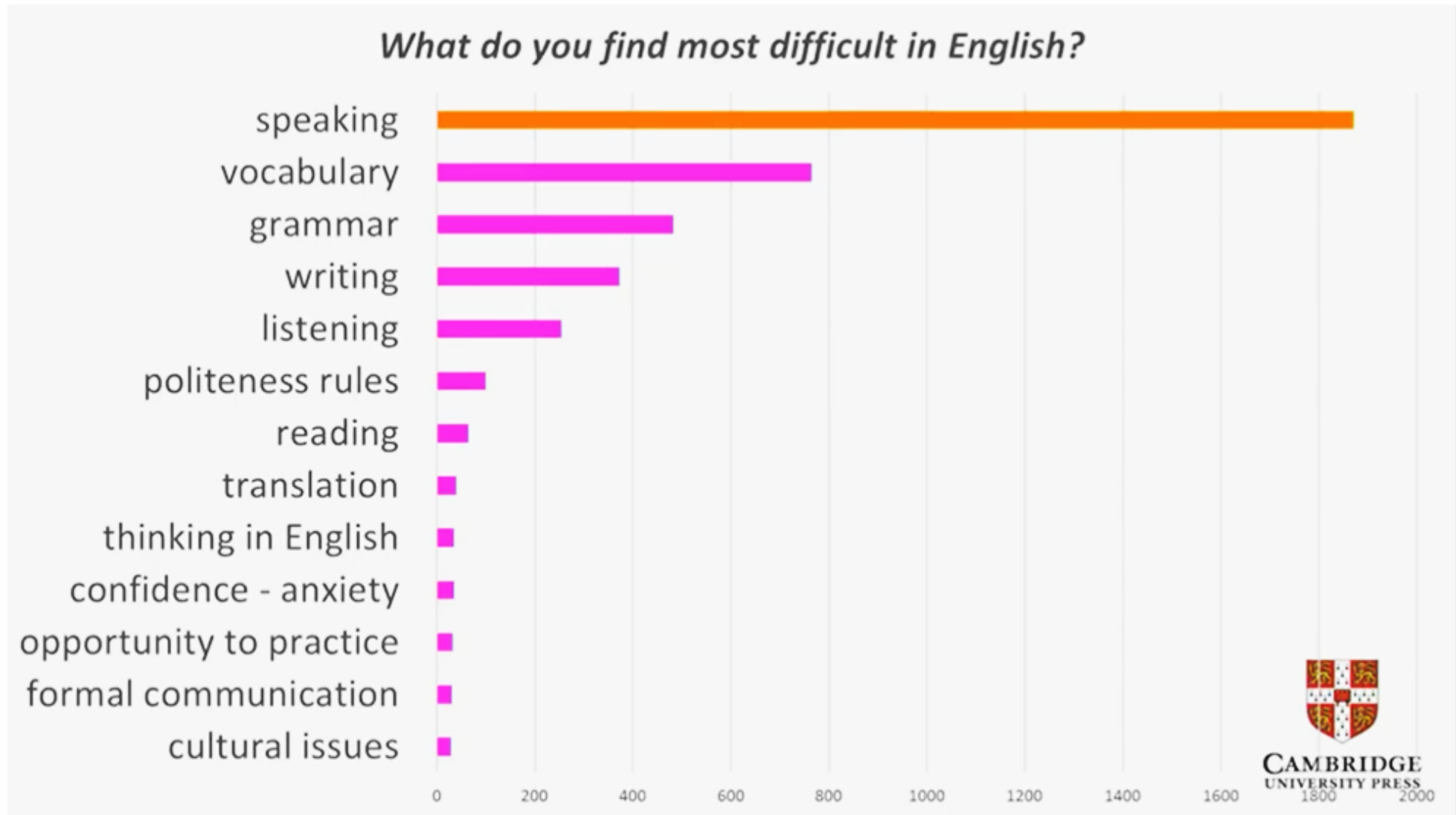
Anneli Sigus

University of Tartu

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# Cambridge University Press survey (Dörnyei, Z. 2018. presentation)



# What's so hard about speaking then?

- Modern learner-centered methods presume **speaking about yourself**, but this requires an atmosphere of support and trust.
- Practising speaking is crucial for language development (not just extra practise for revising vocabulary and grammar) – **speaking in the target language is cognitively demanding.**

Through meaningful speaking activities, the learner will develop:

- conversation skills
- the skill to use the appropriate (not only accurate) linguistic forms in different situations
- their understanding of complex concepts
- critical thinking and analysis capability
- courage to experiment and play with the target language
- overall competences (Zone of Proximal Development — the student will learn more with peers than alone.)

Have you ever intentionally used techniques or special activities to create a more cohesive group in your language class?

Which ones?

# What is a *group*?

Collins COBUILD Online Dictionary:

**1. COUNTABLE NOUN** [with singular or plural verb]

A **group of** people or things is a number of people or things which are together in one place at one time. *The students work in groups on complex problems.*

**2. COUNTABLE NOUN**

A **group** is a set of people who have the same interests or [aims](#), and who [organize](#) themselves to work or act together. *Members of an environmental group are staging a protest inside a chemical plant.*

**3. COUNTABLE NOUN**

A **group** is a set of people, organizations, or things which are considered together because they have something in common. *She is among the most promising players in her age group.*

# Why bother?

- Group dynamics have been studied for decades in the business world (a part of organizational psychology)
- A cohesive group will be more:
  - productive in terms of output
  - efficient during the process
  - motivated
- A sense of group belonging does not simply „happen“ from being in the same room at the same time

# What is required to help students feel good enough to speak?

- Zoltan Dörnyei's plenary presentation at the 2018 IATEFL (the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) International Conference.

*Safe Speaking Environments – What? Why? How?*

[Video link \(27 min\)](#)

For the best atmosphere in the classroom, the teacher would need to apply the principles of:

- a) Group dynamics
- b) [„Safe speaking environments“](#) (article)



# Dörnyei, Z. 2018. presentation

## A) The principles of group dynamics (2)

- Group cohesion
- Group norms and values

## B) The principles of „Safe speaking environments“ (5)

- Providing plenty of time for speaking
- Using engaging goal-oriented speaking activities (where language is not the primary focus)
- Having students select speaking topics
- Fostering positive interactions (real conversations, assigned roles in group tasks)
- Appropriate and supportive feedback (does not distract from the goal, offers solutions and clarifications rather than corrections).

Dörnyei, Z. 2018. Presentation

## Factors promoting cohesiveness

- **Learning about each other**
- Proximity, contact and interaction
- Cooperation
- Intergroup competition
- Investing in the group
- Extracurricular activities
- Joint hardship
- Teacher's leadership style



Dörnyei, Z. 2018. Presentation

## Group norms

- Real group norms are inherently ***social products***.
- Therefore in order for a newly introduced norm to have an impact, it needs to be:
  - ***explicitly discussed***,
  - then ***accepted***
  - by the ***majority*** of the group.



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# Classroom Dynamics

Jill Hadfield



OXFORD

Jill Hadfield

# RÜHMADÜNAAMIKA VÕÕRKEELETUNNIS



# Jill Hadfield, *Classroom Dynamics* (1992), OUP

- **Jill Hadfield. „Rühmadünaamika võõrkeeletunnis“. 2010. Tõlk. Ursula Erik. Tallinn: Kirjastus Argo** (Euroopa Sotsiaalfond; Integratsiooni ja Migratsiooni Sihtasutus Meie Inimesed, free distribution)
- Systematic and practical
- Based on the experiences of herself, her colleagues, her students and others, but also linked to research (mainly in psychology)
- Humorous, readable, applicable; open and direct 😊
- The author does not propose the book is a universal solution to all our group cohesion problems, but she offers ideas and possible solutions for teachers to select options that work for them, their students and the learning situation.

# Three sections:

- Forming the group
- Maintaining the group
- Ending the group
  
- In each section there are both affective and cognitive activities.
  - The affective activities aim to create a **positive and supportive group atmosphere** in a non-explicit way;
  - The cognitive activities seek to make certain demands of **the group learning process** more explicit to the learner.

# Section A

## Forming the group

1. Breaking the ice: warm-up activities and getting acquainted
2. Thinking about language: individual learning styles and group strategies
3. Thinking about groups: group strengths, individual contributions

## 1.3 Circles

LEVEL

Elementary and above

TIME

15 minutes

PROCEDURE

- 1 Get everyone to stand in a circle facing each other in pairs.
- 2 Tell them they have two minutes to find out as much as possible about their partner. They can ask anything they like.
- 3 When the time is up, ask them to turn so that they are back to back with their first partner, facing a new partner. They should now tell their new partner everything they can remember about their first partner.
- 4 Finally, get them to sit down in the circle and ask them to say anything they know about anyone else in the circle.



### 3.1 Thinking about groups

<b>LEVEL</b>	Post-elementary and above
<b>TIME</b>	One lesson
<b>MATERIALS</b>	Copy of the questionnaire for each student if required
<b>PROCEDURE</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Give out the questionnaire and get students to work through individually or in pairs, a section at a time.</li><li>2 At the end of each section draw ideas from the whole group <b>and</b> write them on the board. Get students to discuss their answers in pairs.</li><li>3 Students then pool ideas as a group, referring to the notes on the board.</li><li>4 Go on to the next section and repeat stages 1-3.</li></ol>

#### VARIATION

Do not give out the questionnaire at all, but pose the questions one at a time to the group and get them to write down ideas individually before opening **up** the discussion.

#### REMARKS

Either way, I think it is important to set the activity in stages with time for reflection and discussion, instead of asking students to fill in the whole questionnaire at once.

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

##### THINKING ABOUT GROUPS

- 1 In your life up to now, what groups have you been a member of? (For example, family, church, colleagues at work.) Try to list all the groups.
- 2 Did you have a good, a bad, or a mixed experience as a member of these groups?
- 3 Think about the good groups. Did they have anything in common? What do you think these groups *gave* you?
- 4 What did you give back?
- 5 What did you have to give up? (Not the same question as 4!)
- 6 Think about the group you are in now. What do you think they will be able to give you? What can you offer to them? What might you have to give up?

## Section B. Maintaining the group – the affective side (Hadfield, 1992)

4. Bridging gaps: opinion- and value-bridging activities
5. Maintaining fluidity: reseating and melee games
6. Getting to know each other: humanistic exercises and personalized grammar
7. I did it your way: empathy activities
8. A sense of belonging: whole group identity activities
9. Establishing trust: trust-and confidence-building activities
10. Staying positive: encouraging positive feelings
11. Group achievements: product-orientated activities
12. Bringing it together: pyramid discussions, feedback techniques, and summaries
13. That patriotic class feeling: inter-class activities and competitions

## 4.2 The Flat Earth Society

<b>LEVEL</b>	Lower-intermediate and above
<b>TIME</b>	20 minutes
<b>MATERIALS</b>	Pen and paper for each group
<b>PROCEDURE</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Divide the students into groups of six to eight.</li><li>2 Give them a time-limit, say 10 minutes, to write down as many statements as possible with which they <i>all</i> agree: for example 'The Earth is flat' or 'Politics is a waste of time' or 'Women are more intelligent than men'.</li><li>3 At the end of the allotted time ask each group to read out their list. The group with the longest list wins.</li></ol>

## 6.6 Group predictions

**LEVEL**

**Intermediate**

**TIME**

**20 minutes**

**LANGUAGE**

**Will, future continuous, future perfect**

**PROCEDURE**

- 1 Ask everyone in the class to imagine what the other people in the class will all be doing in ten years' time.
- 2 Ask them to write a prediction for everyone else in the group, plus one for themselves.
- 3 When they have finished, you can either ask them to read out their predictions, or pin them on the wall and let everyone go round and read them.

## 11.5 Group scrapbook

**LEVEL**

Elementary and above

**TIME**

15 minutes once a week

**MATERIALS**

Large (A3) pieces of paper

**PREPARATION**

This is a cumulative group scrapbook that will provide a record of the group's experiences over the term. If you have a photocopier that reduces, you or they can make a small-scale copy for every student as a souvenir. Set aside a time every week for this activity. Monday or Friday are probably good times.

Think of a topic or angle for every week, for example (for students in Britain):

Week 01: First impressions of Britain

Week 02: Our class

Week 03: Other countries

Week 04: Learning English

Week 05: At the weekend...

Week 06: Friends

Week 07: Things to do in...

Week 08: Places to visit

Week 09: Misunderstandings

Week 10: Family life in Britain

Week 11: Social customs

Week 12: My best memories

For students studying in their own countries, it is best if you make your own list depending on their ages and interests.

## 12.4 Postbag

### PROCEDURE

- 1 Finish off a role play by asking each member of the group to write a letter to a friend, in character, expressing their views and describing the incident the group have just played out.
- 2 Collect up the letters and act as 'postman', redistributing letters across the class. Try to ensure that letters are received by a student who played a different role from the writer of the letter.
- 3 Ask the recipients to imagine they are a sympathetic friend and to write a reply.
- 4 Pin letters and replies up around the room and ask students to walk round and read them.

# B-osa. Maintaining the group - the cognitive side

14. Ensuring participation

15. Learning to listen

16. A sense of direction: setting, assessing, and resetting goals

17. Coexistence and compromise: individual wants and frustrations; group solutions

18. Coping with crisis: some group problems, sources of problems in groups, responding to problems

Some strategies for coping with conflict

- teacher- group conflict
- conflict in the group
- the „indigestible“ group member

## 14.3 Group scribes

**LEVEL**

Post-elementary and above

**TIME**

Up to one lesson

**MATERIALS**

Pen and paper for one member of each group

**PROCEDURE**

1 Appoint a 'scribe' for each group, whose job is to take notes on what is said in the discussion. The scribe should not participate in the discussion, but keep a record of points raised by the others in the group.

2 At the end ask the scribe from each group to report back, giving an oral summary of what was said in the group.

**REMARKS**

This is a good role for either a dominant or a tongue-tied group member. A dominant group member can thus be kept out of the discussion while the others have their say, but still has a role at the end. It is a good way of getting a really tongue-tied member to speak, providing something ready-made to say.



4 Finally, ask each pair to tell the class the most interesting thing that came out of their discussion.

### QUESTIONNAIRE

### LISTENERS

## 15.3 Listeners

<b>LEVEL</b>	Post-elementary and above
<b>TIME</b>	15 minutes
<b>MATERIALS</b>	One copy of the questionnaire for each student (or write it on the blackboard or OHP)
<b>PREPARATION</b>	Make copies as necessary.
<b>PROCEDURE</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Ask students to think about situations in their lives where they have listened to people or where people have listened to them.</li><li>2 Give out one questionnaire to each student and ask them to think about the questions on it.</li><li>3 When they are ready, ask them to discuss their answers with a partner.</li></ol>

Try to think of all the situations in your life where you have been a listener (to teachers at school, to a parent telling you off, to a friend with a problem...)

Who do you enjoy listening to? Who do you dislike listening to? Why?

Who listens to you? Are any of them the same people as in the first question?

Who do you enjoy talking to?

Who is a good listener? Are these the same people as in the previous question?

What is a good listener? What do they do to make you feel happy about talking to them?

# Section C

## Ending the group **experience** (Hadfield, 1992)

19. **Ending with** positive feelings: sharing feelings, giving imagined gifts, imagining a future reunion.
20. Evaluating **the** group experience – evaluating development and learning strategies, setting future goals, a letter to new students taking the course.
21. The teacher's reflection and self-evaluation – what worked and what did not? What to do differently next time?

# Sample ending activity

## **20.5 The old lags' letter**

<b>LEVEL</b>	Elementary and above
<b>TIME</b>	30-40 minutes
<b>PROCEDURE</b>	Ask students to imagine they are writing a letter to a new student who will be beginning the course next term. Ask students to write and tell him or her what to expect, saying what they found surprising, what they enjoyed, what they found difficult, what they found worked for them, and giving them advice for learning English.
<b>REMARKS</b>	Some of these letters may prove a useful real introduction for incoming students in the new term.

# Possible setbacks

- Insincere team-building can be perceived as manipulative
- Disregarding the learners' agency
  - Mandatory sharing/ time spent together (they have to be able to decide how much they feel comfortable with)
  - Ignoring protests/ objections
- Treating a large group as a single entity - the relationships between the individuals are what matters.
- Automatically applying the activities and methods - the tasks should suit the teacher, learners, situation, ...
- The teacher's actual lack of interest – group-building activities enhance the feeling of belonging within the group, but if the teacher really does not care at all, the group will not be cohesive.

# Overall ...

- There are no solutions and tasks that work for everyone – choose what suits you, your students, your aims and possibilities.
- Do not try to force yourself to do anything you do not believe in nor enjoy!
- Start small and work your way up – before treating the group as a whole, let the students get to know each other and build relationships.
- Listen to your students and respect their opinions (negotiate goals and plans with them).
- At the same time, be mindful of your own wellbeing and the learning aims of the course (the students have a voice, but they do not dictate what goes on)

- How have you accidentally enhanced group cohesion?
- What types of activities would work with your students?
- Any other thoughts? 😊

# Sources:

- Jill Hadfield. 1992. *Classroom Dynamics*. Oxford: OUP
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- [Cambridge Papers in ELT](#) – title page – RECOMMEND! 😊
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