

ASK NO QUESTIONS

The Jill Tweedie Agony Column

(Extract)

Dear Joan,

I'm sure that horrid modern invention, the trannie, is responsible for the "voices" you say you hear Goodness knows, it is becoming almost impossible for any of us to get any peace these days. And I'm convinced your troubles have partly to do with this bothersome Common Market as well. All conscientious Europeans must be worrying a bit, one way or the other, until the referendum is over. As for your preference for men's clothes, well, quite honestly my dear, what woman doesn't wear men's clothes these days? Don't give it another thought. A nicely tailored pair of trousers and a neat sweater are perfectly acceptable anywhere and there's no need to feel unfeminine in them. Take no notice of those who tease you. People like that just like to play with fire.

Dear Cleo,

I'm sure you are quite unnecessarily selfconscious about what you call, so disparagingly, your "schnozzle." Many people think a good-sized nose indicates leadership and character. But as you feel so strongly about it, I am enclosing details of how to contact a good plastic surgeon in your area, since you are obviously intent on having a "nose job" done. Do remember though, that feelings of inferiority may not disappear (like your nose) overnight, so be prepared for the fact that your shorter nose will not exactly change the course of history.

A useful idea for all levels is the "magic circle" adapted for ELT. As the name suggests, students sit in circles, of three or four and talk about a personal theme. After a student has spoken, other members of the group are encouraged to make appropriate comments, and frequently a brief discussion will follow. As extension (particularly at the elementary and intermediate levels) students can be asked to choose one of the incidents narrated and report it. This exercise, as well as providing practice in reported speech, trains students to listen carefully and remember what they have heard.

Some themes that have proved successful in the magic circle are these:

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Possible comments</u>
The change you'd like to make in your life	If you could only do that? That would be fantastic! I wouldn't like that. Do you think that would be fair on your . . . ? One learns from experience.
The happiest moment of your life	How nice ! / wonderful ! Fantastic ! What a lovely thing to happen !
The nicest thing that has happened to you this month / year	Life is full of surprises. How lucky you are to . . . What a delightful . . .

THE TEACHER'S ROLE

For the success of the Conversation Circle, the principal quality needed in the teacher is patience, his role being rather like that of a good host at a cocktail party, circulating, listening, and sometimes suggesting new themes. But to allow maximum student talking, he should refrain from intervening to express his own opinion, however interested he might be in the subject. "The atmosphere should be relaxed and there must be no tensions between student and teacher, or student and student, if the spontaneous use of the language is not to be inhibited." 2 To foster the right atmosphere for spontaneous rapport, the teacher should be friendly, flexible, and unobtrusive.

There are many excellent books available on conversation practice, but as they normally concentrate on one type of conversation whether it be dialogues, situations, skits or topics, we have, chosen to use them as source material only. Being realistic, we have endeavoured to stimulate all the different kinds of talking which occur in every day life, using materials from existing books, along with ideas of our own to prepare a comprehensive and altogether more interesting conversation programme. As a result, students are showing a marked improvement in their communicative competence.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Acy L. Jackson 'The Conversation Class.' FORUM - Special Issue. Volume XII, 1 & 2, 1975. P. 99
- 2 Wilga M. Rivers The Psychologist and the Foreign Language Teacher. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.