



Company VO – Suzy Taylor with Segolène and Geraldine

Suzy: Well, we started this morning and we've been working with the sixième, so the youngest pupils, and we've done in total five performances with the pupils so that's about two classes per performance - big school. And we've been doing improvisational theatre in English so the Company has a technique called English in Action and we ask the audience lots of questions to create an original story and in the case of the sixième we do witch stories sometimes with other groups we do detective stories or other themes. Today we've been doing witch stories and each group, by answering the questions, creates a story and then we act it out. One of us takes the main role and we ask the pupils voluntarily to come and play all the other roles, including inanimate objects.

Rob: So they've been listening to English being spoken. Are there any particular teaching aims that you have in mind when you're doing your presentation?

Suzy: To be honest - um, no. Because the English teachers in the school teach English. The idea for us is that we show them that even with a limited vocabulary they can communicate or understand - thanks to using actions, gestures, mime, speaking clearly. So, although they might learn some vocabulary during the process, the idea is to use their existing vocabulary. So for the younger ones we do witch stories because they've been studying adjectives; what is your name, age, where do you live; vocabulary like that so it eases them gently into listening to English and speaking English, without it being terrifying. How we do it is that at the beginning of the story we set up the main character. So that involves a physical description and if the pupils were spontaneous, were very good at English, they could just throw in ideas, they could volunteer information. But if they're, if they're not quite sure we would say, for example, "What colour is the witch's hair?" and if there was no answer - well they normally would know the colour - but then we'd say "Is it curly or straight?" and we'd support that with a gesture so even if they didn't know the word 'curly' they would then repeat the word 'curly' and they would understand it. And there's a lot of repetition so that we don't need to speak any French to them. They follow the story, and then we repeat, we recapitulate and then we act it. So at no moment should they be totally lost.

Rob: And they've obviously had a lot of fun this afternoon.

Suzy: So have we.

Rob: And you've been doing this for a while have you, this kind of activity?

Suzy: I started doing it in 1993. I had the idea of doing it. Initially, I had a company under a different name. I then went on, I met another English actress who had lived in Brittany for a long time and we put our companies together and we used to write and perform plays, more theatrical plays, and we continue doing English in Action and then she moved

to another region of France and so I re-created a company under the name of Company VO I'm the artistic director and since then we've been continuing. We sometimes we do plays but with the activity we've done since 1993 is this technique English in Action.

Rob: And you go to several schools, I gather, in Brittany?

Suzy: We go to a lot of schools in Brittany. We work a lot in Morbihan and otherwise we're supported as well by the Conseil Départemental in Cote d'Armor. We actually go as far La Roche sur Leon and La Rochelle sometimes but we prefer to stay in Brittany.

Rob: It's been brilliant being with you this afternoon - watching the kids who respond so positively. The last group, I have to say, was wild with enthusiasm and went off speaking English, which is, I guess....

Suzy: Yes, and the last group included some pupils that have quite a lot of problems with traditional education so it was very encouraging to see them going off and speaking English and smiling. The idea, of course, is that we leave the teacher with a copy. Each group makes a completely different story and we leave the school with a copy of their story. And then, of course, they can go on to use that in class for future work. So it consolidates that they've been learning and gives them a support for future learning experiments.

Rob: Brilliant, Suzy, Company VO, thank you very much indeed for your time.

Suzy: Thank you, you're welcome.

Rob: I am talking to Segolène Darnier who is the English teacher who has invited Company VO to come to school. Why, why have you invited them to come?

Segolène We received the, the leaflet about the, the company and I thought it would be interesting to have real English-speaking people interacting in English and creating something.

Rob: Do you think that it works with your class of sixième who are -- what kind of age are they?

Segolène They are ten or eleven.

Rob: And, does it work with them, do you think?

Segolène Yeah, they really like being obliged to speak English and having no choice. With, with us, they are trying to speak French, with Suzy, they just speak English; they have no choice, and they, they try, and they realise they can.

Rob: I notice that the company, Jeff and Suzy, they speak entirely in English.

Segolène Yeah, they do.

Rob: Do you think that the kids understand?

Segolène. Mainly, yes. And they realise they don't have to understand every single word. They just have to, to concentrate and to go into the story.

Rob. How does an intervention like this fit in with your normal teaching of English?

Segolène. It's just a bonus. It is something we couldn't do, because it is really entertaining and really different, but then in class we use the script to draw and to do something about, and to write in English as well, and at the end of the year, usually they get a kind of comic with the, the script and, and the illustration they drew themselves.

Rob. So, the work that they've done with the group, you develop in the class.

Segolène Yeah, we use it towards.

Rob. Segolène, thank you very much.

Segolène You're welcome.

Rob Do you feel the kids get some benefit from ...

Geraldine Oh yes, definitely, definitely in terms of their confidence, in terms of fun, we think after, after the session, they usually think English is much more fun than they first thought it would be. And, in terms of their participation in class, some kids are very, very shy and after that, they tend to participate a bit more. And, on the other hand, some can be very serious, and afterwards, they think English is a bit more fun. So, definitely, yes, it's a very, very positive experience for them.

Rob Well, I hear lots of French being spoken right now, but we're waiting for their performance.

Geraldine Yeah.

Rob Thank you very much, Geraldine.

Geraldine You're very welcome.

