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# Awakening the Muse in the Land of the Morning Calm: Guidelines for New and Future Teachers Bound for South Korea

Lauren Jennifer Gerken  
*School for International Training*

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AWAKENING THE MUSE IN THE LAND OF THE MORNING CALM  
GUIDELINES FOR NEW AND FUTURE TEACHERS BOUND FOR  
SOUTH KOREA

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts in Teaching Degree  
At the School for International Training  
Brattleboro, Vermont

By

Laura Jennifer Gerken

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Author's name: Laura J. Gerken

Author's signature:

This project by Laura J. Gerken is accepted in its present form.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Project Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

Project Reader \_\_\_\_\_

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## ABSTRACT

How is it to teach English in South Korea? What are the students like? How are the schools? What kind of education system do they have? How proficient are Korean students when speaking English? What types of learning styles do they have? What are their strengths and where are their weaknesses? How can a new teacher prepare her/himself best for an English teaching position at a school or university in South Korea? Where is the best place to teach? What methods and strategies work best in the South Korean EFL classroom? Based on my experience of thirteen years teaching English in the Land of the Morning Calm, this classroom research project offers new and future teachers some preliminary answers to the above questions. This information is crucial for those colleagues to be able to make a smooth transition from newcomer to veteran teacher. The following pages describe one woman's professional journey to find the best ways to create a comfort zone in her university classroom. Introduced the very first day of the semester, such an environment can enable students to feel so good about themselves, that they can improve their English language skills, playfully and with a positive attitude, minus the fear of losing face even before more advanced peers and/or native speaker teachers.

### ERIC Descriptors:

Student Teacher Relationship  
Student Attitudes  
Teaching Styles  
Group Instruction  
Student Developed Materials

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## Chapter 1

### THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Beware! Korea is a nation of stone-faced people who are reluctant to show emotion in public! It was with these discouraging words in the spring of 1993 that I was introduced to South Korea, the country where I have lived for the past twelve years and which I fondly call my second home. Before leaving the United States for Asia, a US citizen with northern European roots, I had taught German in rural King George County, Virginia. Because the county's school system was experiencing many difficulties, I decided to leave after having taught there for five years. Prior to Virginia, I had enjoyed over a decade of teaching EFL in Germany. Therefore, "Wanderlust" got the best of me, and again I found a teaching position overseas, this time in Seoul, South Korea, a place about which then I knew practically nothing.

In preparation for my great adventure, I tried to make contact with as many Korean Americans in Northern Virginia as possible. One never knows what is lurking around the corner, for one day as I was on my lunch break I met Mr. Bae, a 65 year old Korean-American scholar who owned a hamburger restaurant near my school. When I realized he was from South Korea, I introduced myself and told him of my plans to teach in his country of origin. A very nice chat ensued. Most of what Mr. Bae said was very helpful except for his words of warning, with which I began this paper. Even though Seoul is definitely not Saigon, I had a flashback of a scene from the film, "Good Morning Vietnam!" where Robin William's character

first encounters the blank looks on the faces of students in the English class he had volunteered to teach. For me, Mr. Bae's remarks implied that similar to Williams' experience with the Vietnamese, I would have difficulty teaching Koreans, because they were so very shy and passive. The implication caused me to think very seriously about refusing the job offer in Seoul.

However, I did take the job, and I consider that one of the best decisions I have ever made. I did have some difficulty at first, but fortunately, also like Williams, I could solve the problem. I learned quickly that Mr. Bae, who had lived away from his homeland for more than twenty years, was not quite up to date on the changes in education taking place there. From the moment I arrived in the Land of the Morning Calm, I kept hearing the same words over and over again, "That is how it was in the past, but things are changing." It did not take me long to connect with a most diverse group of Korean people. What I found delightful were their warm smiles and wonderful sense of humor.

Starting in the very first class, I tried to bring some comic relief into my lessons, and thankfully my students did appreciate my humor and actually laughed at my jokes at the right time. After there was a feeling of mutual respect and trust between us, I decided to ask my students about the stone-face theory. I began with the words: In the US I met an elderly Korean American gentleman who told me that ALL Koreans, yes ALL Koreans have stone faces. (While telling the story I, of course, mimicked the appropriate stone face facial expression). This man told me that Koreans never, never, never smile or laugh. They don't ever, ever, ever show any emotion! Never! Of course, by now many students were either grinning from



ear to ear, or chuckling to themselves. I “worked” the audience by saying to those who were smiling or laughing-You are laughing, you are not Korean! And you, you are smiling! You must not be Korean either. Where do you come from!?!? By now everyone was having a good time laughing!

Then I asked my students if they could understand how Mr. Bae could have said such a thing. Everyone in the class could. I heard that the adjective stone-faced could easily apply to many of my students’ grandparents and great-grandparents who were still living. From the lively discussion we had about this topic, I learned that in the past displaying either positive or negative emotions in public, or showing off before a crowd could cause a person to be ridiculed and lose face in the community. Therefore, people preferred to remain silent and avoid showing any emotion in front of strangers and people of high status. To avoid being rude South Korean females are still taught to cover their mouths when laughing. Confucius ranked kings, teachers, and God at the top of the social hierarchy. Even today Korean students are never supposed to look a senior directly in the eyes. That can be a major obstacle for westerners, especially when teaching the importance of eye contact with the audience in effective English public speaking. However, I was assured that now because of the globalization of the Land of the Morning Calm, Koreans had either already become or were becoming much more outgoing, and willing to express themselves in public.

Of course this does not mean that Korea has become a land of extroverts either. It has been my experience that among the many smiling, eager faces in conversation classes there are still many students who show a pronounced weakness

in the speaking and listening skills. Because reaching / teaching such students can be one of the most difficult challenges facing native speaker English teachers, part of this IPP will familiarize colleagues, new to Korea, or considering employment there, with reasons why many Korean university undergraduates are reluctant to participate actively in EFL conversation classes and what can be done to help them.

Based on my own experience, I will present an overview of what newcomers can expect while applying for and after accepting a teaching position in South Korea. I will also warn new teachers about potential reasons for conflict with their students, sponsors, and immigration authorities, and how to avoid these problems altogether. I feel that the international teacher who is most effective in the Korean EFL classroom is the individual who has done his/her homework thoroughly and knows what to expect from the beginning. There will always be unforeseen problems during new teacher orientation, but many of these can be solved easily if the newcomer has done some thorough and careful preliminary research and made careful preparations. Since I will emphasize later that the first day of class is the most effective time for the teacher to establish a good rapport with all students and familiarize them with class routine, etc. it is essential that new teachers are not preoccupied with personal adjustment problems when they actually begin teaching. If they can reach the first day of class having sailed smoothly through the period of adjustment to their new environment, they will be most able to concentrate on helping their students learn most effectively. They will not feel overwhelmed and make mistakes when dealing with Korean college students, many of whose oral

language proficiency level ranks them at the bottom of the extremely diverse, multi-level English conversation classes foreign teachers are assigned to teach.

For reference I will provide a brief description of the system of education found in South Korea so that new colleagues can understand from where their students are coming academically. This knowledge will enable them to make better use of the strategies and activities suggested in later chapters to motivate students to take the risks and begin improving their English oral communication skills. Much of the information presented will be based on my own classroom observations, as well as on student feedback, both oral and written.

Next I will explain the differences between the two types of schools doing the most hiring of international English teachers in South Korea.

## Chapter 2

### TO TEACH AT A HAGWON OR DAEHAKYO THAT IS THE QUESTION

Because it is the purpose of this paper to familiarize future international teachers with the situation in South Korea where the job market is booming, I would like to devote this chapter to a discussion of the differences between a position at a *hagwon*: language institute and at a *daehakyo*: undergraduate university. I would like to stress the fact that although I have taught at both, I have had the most experience with the latter and I feel that Korean universities offer foreign teachers more benefits than the alternative, private foreign language academies. Furthermore, unlike foreign language academies, Korean universities for the most part require successful candidates to have an MA degree. In the past it did not necessarily have to be in TESOL, but now there is a trend towards more specific job requirements. Therefore, those SIT alumni who have finished either their MAT or SMAT degrees have a definite advantage over other ex-pat candidates for a university position.

I have met many recent college graduates with a brand new BA who have come to Korea for a year or so to tour Asia and earn money to pay off college loans. There are many such teachers employed at *hagwons*. On-line job seekers will find a long list of Korean language academies in need of native speaker English teachers. There are many different types of *hagwons*, each catering to a diversified student body. I spent my first year in Korea teaching at a language academy and I enjoyed

my job very much. At the school where I taught we had classes for people of all ages, from kindergarteners to retired business people. This experience was very helpful in introducing me to the Korean educational system and the English teaching job market.

However, one must be careful when considering accepting such a position. These schools are usually run by a private individual or company for profit. There have been clashes between language academy directors and international teachers over such things as severance pay, etc. that have had to be settled in court.

Of course there have also been conflicts between native speaker English lecturers and university administrations. The only difference here is that more people become involved and the international faculty member must quickly learn university protocol as to which administrator should be contacted first for what type of problem.

I would suggest asking a potential employer for the e-mail addresses / phone numbers of some foreign teachers at his/her school who can be contacted in order to get a clearer, more realistic picture of what it is like to teach at the school under consideration. If the director/department chair refuses to give any names, I would say-“forget that school!” During my first Korean job search, the academy director gave me the telephone number of one of the international faculty members as a contact person. Now looking back, I can honestly say that the conversation I had with the woman the director recommended gave me quite an accurate picture of what teaching at that academy was like. Do not be shy to ask very direct questions. If other international teachers hesitate to answer important questions, there may be

some problems at the school. Now that I am teaching at the university level, I have been very willing to speak openly to candidates for positions at our school. In other words, job seekers should do their homework no matter whether they are interested in a university or language academy position, because, unfortunately, no workplace is perfect.

There is also a significant difference between the number of hours a teacher is required to teach at an academy and a university. *Hagwon* teachers usually have to teach more than 40 hours a week and many have Saturday classes. Take for example the last academy daily timetable I had:

*7:00 to 8:30 am-Conversation Class ( basically for Business People)*

*9:30 to 11:00 am-Conversation Class ( basically for Homemakers )*

*11:00 am to 1:00 pm-lunch break (almost three times per week I would be taken out to lunch by one of my classes.)*

*2:00 to 7:00 pm-Conversation Classes for Children of All Ages*

*8:00 to 9:30 pm-Adult Conversation Classes*

*8:00 am to 3:00 pm Saturday-all kinds of special classes*

*After a few months probation, we were allowed to take an annual vacation of two weeks per year.*

Compared to the 36 plus hours per week that a language academy teacher is contracted to teach, a university lecturer only has to teach an average of 15 to 18 hours per week only seven months of the year. During the other five months, professors usually receive their regular salary although they are officially on vacation. The long vacation tradition can be traced back to the weather. In the past when heating a building was very expensive and air conditioning did not exist,

universities simply shut down from Christmas to the end of February, as well as from the end of June to the last week in August.

Universities offer some other perks as well. For example, at many universities all faculty members are given one research day off per week plus weekends. The term “research day” refers to the time given Korean professors to do the research needed to complete the academic paper(s) they are required to write according to the “publish or perish” clause in their contract. Luckily, because international professors usually have more teaching hours, many universities, but not all, waive the research requirement for non-Korean lecturers. In such cases, international professors still get the extra day off, but it is considered planning time instead. When applying for a job at a Korean university, candidates should definitely ask about the research requirements, because there is no uniform policy.

One last word of caution for those interested in teaching in Korea. Any international teacher will usually receive many offers from passers by on the street or passengers on public transportation to teach private lessons on the side. New teachers may find this a very tempting way to earn some extra cash. However, it must be very clear from the beginning that this is illegal. When someone from another country first accepts employment in Korea, the primary employer becomes the person’s sponsor and assists the newcomer in acquiring the appropriate visa and personal identification card. Most contracts include the acceptance of any other employment without the sponsor’s permission as grounds for termination. And the majority of sponsors are very reluctant to give that extra permission.

In my twelve years in Korea, I have witnessed a series of “crackdowns” on illegal English teachers by the National Immigration Office. Back in 1995, for example, many international teachers were deported for having come to Korea on a three or six month tourist visa without sponsorship to teach private classes at offices or apartment complexes. Some people had four or five lucrative “gigs” per day in the same apartment complexes. Because these teachers were quite visible as they carried out their daily routines hopping from one apartment to the other, the buildings’ security guards played bounty hunters and received a commission for every “illegal English teacher” they reported to the Seoul Immigration Office.

The most recent crackdown came roughly one year ago. As mentioned above, Korean universities have long summer and winter vacations which amount to a total of five months vacation time per year. Because of air conditioning and more efficient heating systems, universities are now making considerable profit by offering many different types of vacation school programs. For instance our university offers intensive summer school classes where students in only four weeks can earn the English conversation credits needed to graduate, which they could not take during the semester because of schedule conflicts.

The Institutes of Continuing Education also offer longer intensive, total immersion camp-like programs where students of all ages spend their day in an English speaking environment with a native speaker at the helm. According to the rules, English must also be spoken during free-time activities. These camp programs have proven to be very successful.



The only problem has been that compared to teachers in North America and Europe where citizens are free to seek summer employment without consulting their regular full-time employer, in Korea where an international teacher is a sponsored holder of a visa with a time restriction, applying for an extra vacation job at a school other than the one originally responsible for the applicant becomes a process entwined in a web of bureaucracy. The rule of thumb here is always to check with one's sponsor. Gaining the sponsor's official permission is a process requiring more paperwork, but going through proper channels is always best. If one's sponsor should refuse to grant permission, accepting the camp job anyway is too risky. If caught, teacher and sponsor both must pay a substantial fine and the teacher is deported immediately and temporarily banned from further employment in Korea.

Finally one must also be aware that South Korea has many different types of universities. Traditionally, the universities in the nation's capital, Seoul, are considered to be the best, with Seoul National University ranked number one.

The location of a university is so important that some companies quickly discard cover letters and resumes from Korean job applicants once they have been identified as students attending colleges in the provinces. Such institutions of higher learning are often unfairly lumped together as an inferior group according to no other criterion than their location. Even though they are fully accredited four year colleges, Koreans consider them to be roughly equivalent to community colleges in North America. Similar to the situation at community colleges in the United States, there are many late bloomers at provincial universities who do so well that they can

transfer to a better university after the first two years. However universities outside of Seoul usually do not attract the most highly motivated or qualified students.

Applied to English this means that there will be many students whose speaking and listening skills are quite poor. In the next chapter a description of the traditional Korean system of education will be given, that reveals some of the reasons why so many Koreans have difficulty communicating in English.

No matter where the university may be located, in Korea college classes are quite large. I have taught some composition classes with an enrollment of 60 students, or conversation classes where there were over 40. Practical English courses at provincial universities can have many more students registered for a class. Again there is no set standard.

One international teacher at a university outside of Seoul, who is a friend of mine, reported having to teach low intermediate level English conversation to a class of over 100 students. He finally had to resort to using a microphone and inventing his own textbook. His creativity and endurance made him a very good teacher. Because teaching in Korea is very different from teaching in North America, the ideal candidate for a position here is someone who is diplomatic, flexible, creative, and has the ability to endure/accept/and adapt to sometimes difficult cultural differences.

I have deliberately avoided a more detailed description of teacher salaries. Here again there is no set national standard. Exchange rates fluctuate so frequently that it is difficult to keep up to date. At first Korean salaries might seem low compared to those in North America, however, living in Korea can be far less

expensive. By being somewhat frugal, one can actually save a lot of money. That means not taking taxis everywhere and putting modest restrictions on one's consumption of food and beverages.

In order to lure prospective teachers to the provinces, universities there will offer applicants huge modern apartments, rent free. Each individual is different. Because there is usually not too much to do in a Korean small town, a teacher who accepts the beautiful rent-free apartment must realize that he/she is probably going to spend quite a lot of time there.

On the other end of the list of housing options is the dormitory studio plus private bath for one person or a couple. Having lived in Korea for such a long time I have tried a number of housing options. These include sharing a 1 1/2 bedroom apartment with kitchen and bathroom with another international teacher from the same academy, living alone in a faculty dormitory room plus private bath, moving to a nice apartment in Seoul, which I had to pay for completely by myself, and then to save money for retirement moving back to a special single dormitory room reserved for faculty and graduate students. In order to keep this second dormitory studio plus bath I must pay some rent, but it is very low compared to what I had to pay to live in Seoul. There are many housing options for international teachers. It is essential for prospective teachers to shop around for the type of housing that suits them best. Here again there are no set standards for housing.

Above I mentioned having a roommate when I taught at the academy. Just from talking to many other expats, I have determined that assigning two international teachers to share housing is much more common at a language

academy, but it can also happen at a university, although I have neither experienced this myself nor heard of any colleagues who have either.

Unfortunately, unlike US colleges where a great deal of care is taken to match roommates according to personality and hobbies, etc., at a South Korean language academy, one usually must live where one's predecessor lived. Even though Koreans can be very gender conscious, I know of two Canadians, one male and one female, complete strangers, who had to share an apartment given to them rent free by the language school where they taught. Gender basically should not matter, but the Canadians had such different personalities, life styles, and habits that they ruined each other's time in Korea.

Age differences are often not taken into consideration either when Korean employers assign roommates. I know of some cases where teachers have resigned because of serious conflicts with room mates where there was an extreme age difference. The above are exceptional cases, but applicants for any job should also do some research on the type of housing provided, before they find themselves in a difficult living situation in a strange country. The best sources for information about housing are again other teachers already working at the school in question.

Once I signed my university contract I began a career that has been a very worthwhile adventure and excellent learning experience. For many of my students I was/am the first native speaker with whom they ever dared to carry on a longer conversation in English. In the following chapter I will return to academics and discuss the traditional Korean philosophy/system of education and how it is slowly changing in order for the Land of the Morning Calm to become a more active

participant in a global, interconnected world where the language of international communication is English.

## Chapter 3

### W H Y S O S H Y

When looking for the reasons why many South Korean college students are so poor at the English speaking and listening comprehension skills, one must consider the way they have been taught in elementary and secondary school. Traditionally, on the peninsula the goal of education has been to create a scholarly nation dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. Teachers were given the same respect as deities and kings. Above all, it was their responsibility to pass on the vast fund of knowledge with which they had been blessed. Even today, for many, an educator's job is to transfer as much information as possible to students, all of which they are required to record, memorize, retain, and recall on future examinations.

In a classroom the main activity one observes is students sitting, diligently writing down all the important points from a lecture. If there is any classroom participation or interaction between students and professor, it is usually in the form of teachers calling on students to recite what has just been said, or what they should have studied for homework.

Because Korean students fear that it will be perceived as a sign of ignorance, or an indication that they have not been paying attention when they have not understood what a teacher has said, they will usually ask a classmate for clarification rather than consult the educator directly. They also feel that it is rude to bother teachers with simple, basic questions.

Applied to EFL, this means that ever since it became a requirement in the public school curriculum, the emphasis has been on grammar and translation from English to Korean. Grammar rules can be presented to students by the teacher and memorized for a test. Translation exercises are also suitable for the Korean system. Here again, the teacher has a fund of information to pass on to his / her students, whether it be the proper translation of an English word into Korean, or the basic grammar differences that exist between the two languages.

Not until after 1988 when South Korea opened up to the world at the Seoul Summer Olympic Games, has there been a growing demand for proficiency in the communication skills-speaking and listening. This led to an enormous increase in the number of foreign language academies where many teachers were native speakers of English recruited from overseas.

These usually quite expensive schools can spell economic disaster for large families, or place poor children who cannot afford the tuition at an unfair disadvantage academically. Unfortunately the only way Korean children can learn to speak English fluently is either by going to school abroad, or attending an academy in Korea, or taking private lessons at home. All three cost money. At public schools the emphasis is basically on grammar, reading and writing, and the tests given are short answer, multiple-choice tests that are easy to correct.

In some cases, the integration of international teachers into the Korean system has not gone as smoothly as planned. Consider the following. Although it was written by Young, a Korean university student, studying in California, it

describes a problem that often occurs when east meets west in schools across South Korea.

I once had a style clash when I took a (basic) communication class in English. The US American teacher was a strong haptic (hands on) person who always wanted students to demonstrate certain kinds of motion and actions in class. The teacher, himself, liked to act, dance, mime, and move around in class. He rarely wrote down the main points from his lesson. I have no doubt that many of the activities that the teacher developed were excellent for the course. Personally, however, I had difficulties adapting to such activities because I am an introvert... I often skipped the required group activities. Frankly, I did not enjoy the course at all. In the classroom I had often been anxious because I didn't want to be called to be a demonstrator in front of the whole class. (Oxford 1999)

Unfortunately, the anxiety Young experienced is very widespread. According to Arnold (1999),

Research indicates that the speaking skill is the most cited source of anxiety among language students, and one of the leading causes of this type of anxiety is the sufferer's clash with her / his teacher's preferred teaching style.

Young also mentions the fact that she "skipped" required activities. Other fearful students will skip entire classes, if there is an extreme clash between their own learning style(s) and their teacher's teaching style. This is one reason why student absenteeism is relatively high in Korea. Fear of speaking English can make Korean students try to avoid coming into contact with native speakers in general. From student feedback I learned that in many cases not only was I the first foreigner an individual had spoken to in English, but also when Korean English Language Learners spot a native speaker their first impulse is to run away. When a student with underdeveloped communication skills is caught not paying attention, and is suddenly called on to speak in front of the whole class, the individual feels much like a cave dweller being surprised by a huge wild beast. The "attacked" individual



like a cave dweller being surprised by a huge wild beast. The “attacked” individual freezes, and then tries desperately to come up with an answer (fight), but then when her / his mind goes blank, she / he becomes extremely embarrassed and would like nothing better than to vanish into thin air (flight). This fear can be intensified and extended if the victim places all the blame for the memory block on his / her own inadequacy.

The ideal classroom (where the students described above can begin to overcome their difficulties learning English) is one in which anxiety should be of a low level and should be attached to the need to communicate, rather than to personality factors or the fear of appearing ridiculous. Teachers can make a difference in motivation, in anxiety, and in the self-image of the student. (They) should respect (their) pupils, listen to them, and take note of what they say. They will respond more efficiently to their teaching. (Mason 2002)

Unfortunately, even if many classrooms are run exactly the way Mason 2002 suggests, in Korea this does not guarantee that there will be a nation-wide improvement in English oral communication skills. There is one last obstacle that must be included for a complete understanding of the state of English language education in South Korea today. That is the great value placed on and the widespread use of the standardized English proficiency assessment tool-the TOEIC test. Students now take this battery of objective, multiple-choice tests on the computer. One popular type of TOEIC test question that also frequently appears on Korean public school English tests and examinations is called *Error Recognition*.

Directions: In this part of the test, each sentence has four words or phrases underlined. The four underlined parts of the sentence are marked (A), (B), (C), (D). You are to identify the **one** under-

lined word or phrase that should be corrected or rewritten. Then, on your answer sheet, find the number of the question and mark your answer.

Example: All (A) employee are required (B) to wear their (C) identification badges (D) while at work. (Answer is: (A) employee should be in the plural).

A second widely used type of TOEIC question is the *Incomplete Sentence*.

Directions: This part of the test has incomplete sentences. Four words or phrases, marked A., B., C., D., are given beneath each sentence. Then, on your answer sheet, find the number of the question and mark your answer.

Example:

Because the equipment is very delicate, it must be handled with \_\_\_\_\_.

A. caring

B. careful

C. care (correct answer)

D. carefully

( Educational Testing Service Canada 2006 )

The problem with the use of these tests in Korea is that because they are so easy to acquire, administer, and score electronically, both universities and businesses are using TOEIC scores for recruitment and promotion purposes. Therefore, similar to the way in which US students spend a lot of time and money preparing for the SAT exams, Koreans cram for the TOEIC at a time when they should also be learning to speak and understand spoken English better. TOEIC test courses, overflowing with students, teach how to “crack” the test system, and not how to speak English fluently. There is a speaking component being developed for the TOEIC test, but it is not yet a standard part of the test battery with widespread use.

Once again the main points here are that because of the traditional teacher centered method of teaching that has prevailed in South Korea for so long, plus the great emphasis society there places (ed) on individual humility, group harmony,

and the shame of losing face in public, many students in the Land of the Morning Calm have simply not been as accustomed as FL learners elsewhere to the type of active classroom participation western English teachers consider essential. This has led to sometimes traumatic teaching style clashes which cause great friction between educator and learner. For the learner this friction can cause a feeling of anxiety with such physical symptoms as rapid pulse rate, temporary memory loss, or the mind going blank. Therefore it is especially important in an EL oral communication class to create a comfort zone in the classroom where students can dare to take risks and not be afraid to make mistakes.

Although the situation in Korea has improved, many are forced to spend the time and money needed to improve their ability to speak English instead on preparation for such standardized tests as the TOEIC. This is because schools, universities, and businesses all rely on TOEIC test scores as a valid measurement of a candidate's overall ability when making decisions concerning recruitment and promotion. Unfortunately, because of the test's emphasis on reading and writing, there are many cases where a person with a high TOEIC test score is by no means a fluent speaker of English.

## Chapter 4

### THE SOONER THE BETTER

Chapter 3 highly recommends creating a comfort zone in the EL classroom where students feel safe enough to speak English, even though maybe not perfectly, to take the risks, and make the mistakes that are a necessary part of the EFL learning process without the fear of being ridiculed or ostracized.

By comfort zone I do not mean a learning environment which lacks structure or where students are free to do whatever they want, whenever they want. Quite the contrary, it has been my experience that students work most efficiently within a framework they can easily understand. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to present their expectations as clearly as possible, taking the first weeks of a new class to familiarize students with the routines, activities, and procedures they will use.

What do you do with your classes on the first day? Do you make some opening remarks and then run through the course outline? Do you think of the first class as an introduction to get out of the way before the “real” learning begins? Did you ever think the first day of class could be so much more? (You can) make the first day of your class the first day of a new learning adventure for your students that will make students feel secure, give them a real taste of what learning in class will be like, and establish a positive learning atmosphere. ( Downey 2001: KOTESOL Abstract )

In the paragraph above I deliberately wrote “taking the first weeks of a new class.” For those unfamiliar with the Korean system, during the first ten days of a new semester students have the right to shop around and change/drop classes, even though at the end of the last semester they were already required to register on-line

for the classes they wanted to take the next. The deadline for dropping/adding classes is approximately ten days after the first day of the semester. The dilemma for the teacher is what to cover the first sessions. It has been my experience that a class roster can change 95% from the first class meeting to the end of the drop/add deadline. This is particularly true of the general College English classes. To be sure, they are required to graduate, but classes in a students' major have priority. Any schedule changes there will mean an adjustment elsewhere, like having to cancel a College English class meeting at the same time as an Electronic Engineering Major Field Seminar. The new teacher should be aware that although they may have originally been assigned six courses, after the drop/add period some classes could be cancelled. At most universities there is a minimum number of students required to be officially enrolled in a course, before it can actually be taught. The decisive number of students can vary from university to university.

In spite of the frustration of the drop/add procedure, I still firmly believe that the first two weeks of classes are the most important of the year for creating a hospitable learning environment. Downey 2001 has identified eight requirements which are very helpful in the process of establishing the type of comfort zone essential for students to have a successful learning experience in my classroom.

- Anticipate students' uncertainties and resolve them.
- Establish rapport.
- Begin community building.
- Personalize the language, begin creating a core vocabulary shared by all students that will facilitate their interaction.
- Establish class routines.
- Create an atmosphere of success.
- Model the attitudes and behavior expected.

- Arrange the room consistent with teaching goals.  
( Downey 2001: 30 )

One of my most important teaching goals is to be a student centered teacher. This requires a classroom seating arrangement that is much different from the one to which most of my students are accustomed where everyone sits in rows facing the teacher or professor who never steps down from behind the podium.

The first time I rearranged my classroom significantly, was not on day one, but unfortunately well into the fall semester right after the visit of my IYTP advisor. Having been so moved by the supportive community feeling of the closed circle that I experienced during my first SMAT summer, I decided to use that seating arrangement in my classes. What impressed me most about the SMAT 20 circle, was that the faculty member conducting the class was not allotted a lofty position away from the students, but rather sat together with us in the circle.

A word of warning to those considering teaching in Korea, at first my students found the new seating arrangement confusing and in particular had some difficulty accepting me as part of the circle. In all my classes at some time during the big change, I found myself, to be sure, sitting in the circle, but feeling rather isolated because there were always four or five empty chairs on either side of me. However, I did not take this personally, but rather quickly learned that this was part of Korean social etiquette where students were taught to show respect for a teacher by keeping a distance. When this happened, I did not give up. As mentioned in Chapter 1, I have always found humor to be a powerful ice-breaker and universal language that can help a great deal in the student-teacher bonding process. Therefore it should not be surprising that I used a little humor in this awkward situation, too. Because

Korean students are generally very playful, but overly concerned about their grades, I jokingly offered A+ to the brave people who sat next to the professor. In all of my classes this caused a mad scramble to fill the coveted empty places. After closing the circle I explained in simple English the reasons why I wanted the students to sit in that formation.

Now when students walk into the first class of a new semester they will find I have placed the chairs in a closed circle sometimes with a vase of flowers in the middle. At the door there is a table with a ream of white paper and a box of colored marking pens. Each student is to take two pieces of paper and one marker. I tell them that no empty seats are allowed and any unused chairs are to be removed from the circle immediately. Although I speak some Korean, I stress that only English is to be spoken. Of course this is a procedure that I have no trouble at all modeling. I believe in keeping students busy from the time they enter the classroom.

Even on the first day while sitting in the circle waiting for class to begin I have my students make large name cards with their given name written in English, the name they want to be called in class (of course written in English), the *hanja* or Chinese character they were given at birth, and a small icon to indicate how they are feeling at the moment (example: sun icon would indicate that the student was feeling very happy and optimistic about the beginning of the new semester. )

In Korea the family name comes first, then the given name. In many cases the given name has two parts. One of the parts is the generational *hanja* that is given all the siblings in a family and the other part is the child's individual *hanja* that describes a quality the family believes the child will have. For example, one of

sister is Yoon, Young-ahn. Yoon is the family name. Young and bin both mean to shine. Young and hyuk mean shining glow. Some of the combinations can even be quite entertaining and that is why having each student describe the meaning of his/her hanja is a perfect ice breaking activity. For example Yoon, Young-ahn means shining wild goose.

Another family has two sons. The family name is Lee. Each boy has the same generational name, Jung, meaning government or administration. The oldest son's name is Jung-bok and the youngest is Jung-min. Bok means fragrance or aroma and min is jewel. So Jung-bok is the fragrance of the government and Jung-min is the jewel.

After all name cards are complete and have been placed in front of each student so that they can be read by everyone in the class, I ask each person to write down in English on a separate piece of paper in the form of a short note:

*Hello Professor:*

- *My Korean name is....., but I want to be called....*
- *My Hanja means..... I think it suits me because*
- *Today I feel ..... and why.....*

In the directions, I keep the note's form and contents very basic on purpose, and encourage students to expand upon them, if they already know how to write a friendly letter in English. If less advanced students are not sure how to say



something they are free to ask one of their classmates or refer to the electronic dictionaries that 90% of them carry.

Many times in order to accommodate individual differences in learning style and make up for an insufficient knowledge of suitable English vocabulary words, I let students make illustrations to help explain what they have written. One will find that Korean students have been taught to draw very well. Letting them supplement what they have written and express themselves with drawings help more students finish the first day of class with a feeling of success knowing that they have been able to communicate their ideas in English to others (including a native speaker) and have been understood. This initial feeling of success is the building block from which a strong motivation to learn and improve in their study of English can develop. This is one reason why I ask students to create an icon to describe how they are feeling at the beginning of the first day of class.

Upon completion of their Hanja notes, the students are called back to the group and asked to introduce themselves in a speaking exercise where going around the circle, they will greet the entire class for the first time, hold up their name cards and say what name they will use in class. Then pointing to their individual icons they will explain how they are feeling at the moment.

Before beginning this activity I take out an object and briefly explain that it will be our talking piece. ( Zimmerman 1996: 18-21 ) While being passed around the circle only that person holding the object will be allowed to talk. No one should interrupt the flow of the process by talking out of turn, without holding the talking piece.

I include myself in this process and also holding the talking piece briefly introduce myself at the end using the same format as my students. I have a name card with the Korean name, Kim, Bo-ree, which I was given by a friend. Bo-ree means barley, the dark blonde color of my hair at one time. Students are always amused because now my hair is quite grey. Including myself in this activity is a great ice-breaker and I find that students appreciate my effort to understand something of the Korean culture.

Holding classroom discussions while sitting in a circle and passing around the talking piece is very effective in Korea especially because the tendency in the traditional teacher-centered, lecture/discussion type of course is for the oldest, most out-going male students to monopolize discussions and turn them into a dialogue between themselves and the professor, ignoring and not being concerned about anyone else in the class. In such a classroom atmosphere, the rest of the students, sitting idly by, are perfect targets for the crippling type of foreign language learning anxiety that can make a classroom into a competitive war zone instead of the desired comfort zone.

Since the tendency is for large classes, I would recommend not having each student explain her / his *hanja* to the whole group. Other students tend to get restless if each student has to give too much information. Rather, I collect their written notes of introduction with the individual *hanja* explanation and read and correct this part of the assignment at home. Because I encourage those who are able to to expand on the structure and contents of the note, these letters are a very good indication of an individual student's proficiency level in writing. Whereas the

talking piece self introduction exercise, coupled with the effort I make to circulate around the class on the first day engaging students in small talk while they are preparing their name cards and writing the Hanja notes, helps me roughly determine the individual / average class proficiency level in speaking and listening, such information helps me decide at the beginning of a semester what changes are needed in the degree of difficulty of activities and assignments on my syllabus. Although our university desperately needs an official placement test for the required College English classes in order to identify those advanced students who could meet the university requirement by taking a language test at the beginning of the semester, after many years there is still no such test in place. Therefore, it is impossible to anticipate the average proficiency level of any new class of students before the semester begins. Unfortunately upon consulting teachers at other universities, I found that the lack of an effective placement test is more the rule than the exception. Whether their new school has an effective placement test is very important information for new teachers to acquire as soon as possible. If not, they will be left on their own to deal with classes where differences in student proficiency can be extreme.

After everyone has been properly introduced, I ask the students to pair off with the person sitting next to them and consider the questions: We are sitting here in a circle, what does the circle mean for you and other Koreans? Why, for example, does the Korean flag have two circles on it? Do you see any connection between the effect of sitting in a circle in class and the meaning of the circles on the flag? This activity is an introduction to the cooperative/collaborative learning Think-Pair-

Share technique that I frequently use in all of my classes. I find that brainstorming a topic with another person helps students practice formulating their answers and, thus, feel more secure about their accuracy. This is a great opportunity for more advanced students to help their classmates, behind the scenes, thus removing any fear of being ostracized for showing off or trying to brown nose the professor. Thus, more people are willing to participate in the follow-up whole group discussion.

As a prompt I hold up the Korean flag, the *Taegukgi*, which has a circle in the center. Inside the circle are two equal half circles joined together. These represent the two opposing forces of nature, Yin and Yang. The red semi-circle on top means Yang, bright and hot, on the bottom is the blue Yin hemisphere which means cold and dark. Their being joined together in a circle in the center of the flag represents balance, harmony, and the interconnectedness of the entire universe. The name of the flag *Taegukgi* means the harmonious state of the movement of yin and yang. In ancient Chinese philosophy the circle by itself symbolizes the interdependence of all creation.

To be sure, this topic might seem difficult, but I have done this activity with lower intermediate students. All Koreans have learned the meaning of the symbols on their flag in school. So because the basic knowledge is shared by everyone, this activity can have a leveling effect on the wide discrepancy in English proficiency. Besides finding the English for such philosophical terms as interconnectedness, balance and harmony on their electronic dictionaries will be a challenge for more advanced students as well. The twosome members can help each other with the pronunciation, etc. of the more difficult words.

For the teacher it is important to circulate and answer questions, helping the students with more challenging vocabulary. Once a group has asked for and found a key word, such as harmony and interconnectedness, for example, I will write it on the overhead or chalkboard for everyone to see and use. I never give students the answer directly, but first ask them what they think it might be, or what they have found so far. In this way I avoid becoming a walking dictionary. I am always surprised at how much dormant knowledge my students have stored in the computers of their brains.

After each pair has finished gathering the required information and answering the questions together in the THINK PAIR phase of the activity, the SHARING begins. This is basically still a dreaded classroom discussion, but in which everyone has the same chance to prepare cooperatively. Everyone is encouraged to participate and they do. Throughout the semester, participation points are awarded those who contribute to class discussions and an on-going record of points accumulated is kept in my gradebook. The total number of points each student accumulates is an important factor when determining final grades.

A new teacher will hear students use the English word circle when referring to the many extracurricular clubs they can belong to on campus. These circles are very popular and are an excellent way for students to meet likeminded people with the same interests. For example, they might talk about belonging to a drama circle, or debating circle, or current events circle. This comes from the Konglish word 서클, pronounced something like *sawkle*. This is only a conjecture, but it could be that early missionaries taught the English word circle to the Koreans, when they formed

bible study circles, or sewing circles. Nowadays 서클 is being gradually replaced by the word 클럽 or club, but one still frequently hears 서클. There is more chance for a group to connect in a circle. A circle has the power to make people feel more comfortable. It can end hostility between members of a group. At the beginning of the semester each class has a different dynamic because every class has its own combination of yin and yang. As their flag indicates, a circular configuration can add an element of harmony and balance to the group dynamics of any class even on the first day and serve to prevent future clashes. According to the above, because of their long cultural association with the shape, Korean students will not have any problem understanding why a teacher would like them to sit in a circle.

Whereas most Korean professors simply go over the syllabus and course objectives on the first day and dismiss students at least ten minutes earlier than a “real” class, the first day plan that I have described above is really a unique experience for students. With the number one goal here being to create a non-judgmental comfort zone where students feel safe to speak imperfect English, expose their weaknesses, and make the mistakes that are such an important part of the learning process, an attempt has been made to base the multi-level activities on content areas that are familiar to all, as well as take individual student differences into account. Although not one handout was distributed during this 90 minute lesson, students were introduced to an essential part of the procedure and framework which would be used the entire semester.

Because Korean students usually start arriving ten to fifteen minutes before class, I believe in engaging the early-birds the minute they walk in class, and I

modeled this belief the very first day by handing them paper and markers at the door and asking them to start making their name-tags immediately. Before class is also a good time for the early-birds to practice English with their native speaker teacher and begin the bonding process.

Students were introduced to the practice of sitting in the circle and passing the talking piece. Here I anticipated the uncertainty that arises when one student is allowed to dominate the discussion or when someone is interrupted by another and not given the opportunity to finish saying what he/she wanted to.

In addition in the Think/Pair/Share activity, students were shown an alternative to the traditional teacher-centered method of conducting a large group discussion which puts weaker students on the spot, and encourages one student to dominate.

While circulating throughout the class during the pair work enabled me to determine student proficiency levels, it also sent the message to the students that I am approachable. It was for the same reason that even though my classes are English classes, I made an effort to express some interest in and knowledge of the Korean culture, and even take a Korean name myself. Thus during the first day of class, I could already start eliminating the fear that many new students have of a native speaker.

In chapter 3 I told the story of Young, an introverted Korean student studying in California, who had a clash with her haptic professor because of his teaching style. The main reason was that she did not want to be a demonstrator, forced to perform in front of her classmates. Like Young's professor, I, too, like to make use of such

drama techniques as role-play in my classes, but I have discovered a way in which no one is made to assume the uncomfortable role of demonstrator. This is because I have found that many of my students feel the same way as Young. However, that does not mean that one should avoid using role play in Korean university English conversation classes. Quite the contrary, I make frequent use of this technique and my students enjoy role play activities very much. The secret is that I have discovered a method which was developed in Japan which presents role play as a collective community endeavor that never places students in the awkward demonstrator position where they feel they are in danger of losing face before their peers. It is my experience that Koreans are very group oriented people. Most do enjoy acting, but on their own terms. They find their comfort in the collective.

The method I am referring to was developed by Theo Steckler, founder of DramaWorks, a publishing company in Japan since 1997. Further information can be found at their website: [www.tzeo.co.jp/dw/about/index.html](http://www.tzeo.co.jp/dw/about/index.html), where they describe their main purpose as “communication, not acting theatre.”

Drama activities bring learning English out of the realm of academic ‘study’ and into the world of action and interaction. The scripted dialogues provide the basic unit for practice. The objective is for students to practice and master the short simple scenes, and to prove their mastery by actual performance. The drama aspect brings communication to life.

Greatly increased eye contact is an immediate and obvious result of using these materials. Another benefit, slower to appear, is self confidence. But perhaps the biggest benefit is that it allows students and teachers to play, and to use their (collective) imagination.

I first experienced DramaWorks as a workshop participant at a KOTESOL conference, and I was impressed. Therefore I went back and tried some of the



technique on my students, and it was a success. The reason is that demonstrating is an entire class activity from the beginning and no one is put on the spot. For example, a scene from a play is chosen that involves two people. The students select a partner and the entire class is asked to stand up with the members of each twosome facing each other. Roles are assigned with each partner playing a different person. The teacher then assumes the role of a model by reading each line separately out loud, using appropriate body language. The students are never allowed to see the written text. The half of the class assigned the role of the character whose line has just been read repeat what the teacher has said in unison, being careful to mimic tone, stress, and pronunciation. The other half of the class remains silent until it is their turn to recite. The process continues until all the lines in the scene have been practiced once. Then the first step is repeated a second or third time until each pair can perform the scene on their own. At this point, to assist visual learners, each twosome prepares their own script, with stage directions, of the scene just presented. The ultimate objective is for each pair to perform the scene for the rest of the class in an interesting, natural way, using appropriate gestures, body language, and props.

This method works with Koreans, because in school they were exposed to a great deal of choral work in different subjects. I remember a class of low intermediate Physical Education majors, in which a former member of the Korean Olympic Swim Team was an active participant, who loved speaking in unison. Due to the uncertainty of the drop/add period, I would recommend introducing a DramaWorks scene on the second day of class. Such activities are self-contained

modules which do not require any prior experience or advanced preparation. The website given above includes two free sample scenes that are the right length for a ninety minute Korean university English conversation class.

After the initial choral work phase, if extra time is given for recording the script and writing stage directions, selecting props, improvising costumes, and rehearsing, students should be ready to memorize their lines for homework, and, thus perform the next day of class. By the time the last pair has presented its skit, the drop/add period should be over and the class should be ready to get down to “some serious business.” However, because the students are already familiar with many of the preferred teaching methods and classroom procedures and have become acquainted with at least one other person in the class, i.e.- their partner, the transition to what comes next should be very smooth.

## Chapter 5

### BEGINNING THE REAL THING

At the official end of the drop/add period, with completed class rosters in hand, not having to fear that the same activities will have to be done over and over again, and that the same information will have to be repeated for each latecomer, it is time to do some overdue classroom management housekeeping. ( see Appendix 5.1 ) First, I have each student fill out a picture student identification card. I am very glad that a Korean colleague acquainted me with such cards my first year in the Republic. These cards are an essential reference tool for new international teachers, because they help match a student name with a face.

The new teacher will soon discover that in Korea the choice of accepted family names is very small. This means that in the same class there will be, for example, 10 Kims, 6 Lees, 7 Jung, 4 Parks, and 5 Songs. To newcomers, some Korean given names might seem difficult to pronounce, but they are not impossible. In elementary and middle school most students selected and used an English name in their EFL classes. While some students still prefer to go by such a name in college, others resent the practice. Therefore, I always give my students a choice.

I ask my students to give the following information on their photo ID cards.

*(1.) name in Korean letters (2.) Korean name in English letters plus (3.) name they wish to use in class (4.) university student identification number (5.) school year (6.) cell phone number (7.) e-mail address (8.) major (9.) whether they have traveled, studied, or lived in an English speaking country. If yes-what, where, when.*

In the past, on the first day of class I simply handed students blank index cards along with the syllabus and dictated what should be written on the cards. I found, however, that when I made the students fill out the information on the first day of class I was throwing away half the cards by the end of the drop/add period, because so many students had had to make last minute schedule changes. It was especially this enormous waste of paper that forced me to find an alternative to the traditional first day activities and slightly delay managing my classroom.

Now I make a jeopardy game out of the process. First I hand out my own fictitious ID card where I have filled in my own information, using my Korean name, Kim Bo-ree. In pairs I have the students write down the questions that elicited the information on the cards. For community building, students should work with a new partner for this activity. When everyone is finished, I make sure that each twosome has come up with the correct questions. No matter how high a student's proficiency level is, he or she might not be familiar with the English for such useful terms as student registration / ID number, school year, or English speaking country. This is all part of the process of personalizing the language that is one of the requirements mentioned in chapter 4 for creating a comfort zone that is conducive to successful learning.

With all vocabulary clarified, the next step is for students to interview each other and fill out their partner's card. This is another bonding activity. The last step is for the students to attach photos to their cards. Recently the bonding ritual includes students taking a picture of their partners using camera phones.

At least ten days into the semester I finally present my expectations to my students in written form in order to confirm and facilitate their processing of the impression they have gained during the previous weeks' activities. Reflecting on this practice, I feel it is justified especially since during the first few days of class students are deluged with the syllabi from at least four other classes at the same time. The result is that any distinguishing features of one course become blurred and indistinct from those of the others. This prevents the students from properly internalizing the required classroom procedure, and makes them vulnerable to making mistakes which might annoy the teacher.

Now the class is ready to face the music. However, using an advanced organizer, I have turned the potentially boring reading of the rules into an activity that encourages students to interact with me as well as with their classmates. Before distributing my rules, I engage the students in a warm-up activity called the negotiable/non-negotiable game. Bear in mind that none of my students have ever seen my list of rules before. Part 1 of this sheet gives a series of statements concerning my classroom regulations which the students are to put into the following categories:

- . *Based on what you have experienced in Professor Gerken's course the first week of class do you think the statement is: 1. correct-not negotiable 2. correct-negotiable 3. incorrect-negotiable 4. incorrect-not negotiable 5. n/a-not applicable.*
- By negotiable I mean that the possibility exists for students to discuss the rule with the professor in order to establish a policy which they consider more favorable. Non-negotiable, on the other hand, means that the rule has been set by the university administration and is not open to discussion. Not applicable

implies that a statement does not refer to any regulation on the list. Below is a sample of such statements:

- If students are absent more than nine times before the final exam, they will not be admitted to the exam and will automatically fail the course.
- All absences are unexcused.
- Under certain circumstances, a student might be allowed to cheat and copy another student's work.
- Professor Gerken gives students grades like she gives birthday presents.
- Because Professor Gerken is very busy this semester, all students are encouraged to ask their friends if they have a question about assignments, or any other matter that is related to this class.
- All students are required to do when handing in an assignment is to put their name on it. Any other information is unnecessary and slows down the process.
- Professor Gerken welcomes student feedback at all times.
- A student's grade is based entirely on the average of their scores on all written work.
- Since this is a conversation class, there will be no written assignments.
- Under certain circumstances students will be allowed to sleep in class.
- Dancing and singing are never allowed in class.
- This class is a teacher-centered class.
- Students are not allowed to bring any food or drinks to class.
- In an emergency situation a student is allowed to use his/her cell phone in class.
- Students are encouraged to have a variety of cell-phone ring tones so that if someone receives a call in class everyone will know whose call it is.
- If a student has been absent more than five times before the midterm, he/she will not be allowed to take the exam and will automatically fail the course.

- No more than 40% of all students in one class can receive a grade of 83 (B+) or better.
- With no exceptions, when nature calls, students are always allowed to leave the classroom to use the restroom.
- Students are under no obligation to participate actively in class because class participation does not count towards their grades.
- Attendance will be taken 10 to 15 minutes after the beginning of class. After that, the doors will be locked and no one will be allowed to enter.
- Part 2 of this activity asks students to list five rules which they would like to make for the professor to follow.

The above activity is a very good way for students to process information in order to internalize what is expected of them. The statements contain the essential English vocabulary needed to understand all my guidelines perfectly. After the students have finished placing the statements in the appropriate categories, they have the opportunity to earn participation points by explaining the choices they made and why they made them. I use this opportunity to explain my real expectations and the reason each rule was made. Surprisingly I am willing to negotiate more than one might assume. The wording of many of the statements is quite humorous and this adds levity to what could become a quite heavy discussion, but this does not mean any loss of respect for the subject matter at hand from the students.

In compliance with my student centered approach to teaching, I decided long ago that a letter to my students should replace the list of classroom rules and regulations I once handed out when I first arrived in Korea. A copy of that letter can be found in the appendix ( see Appendix 5.2 ) Being a lifelong learner, I am

always trying to improve. Therefore I have decided to involve the students more in the presentation of new material, including expectations and guidelines at the beginning of the semester. My belief in and trust in the ability of my students was bolstered a number of years ago when after handing out my letter of introduction, I gave the simple homework assignment to create a visual or skit to demonstrate that they have understood the contents of the letter. The results were over and beyond my expectations. Some of my students' visuals are displayed in the appendix of this paper. ( See Appendix 5.3.1 ) Below is a sample of a skit written by students the second week in class to explain my policy on cheating.

*(Two students, Ji-eun and Sang-hoon, are talking outside the Multimedia Building at Kyunghee University Suwon Campus.)*

*Ji-eun: Hi Sang-hoon, you look terrible and s-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o tired !  
What's the matter ?*

*Sang-hoon: O-h-h-h-h I stayed up all night playing computer games with my room mate and I forgot to do Professor Gerken's homework. What was it ?*

*Ji-eun: We had to write what we thought would be our ideal summer vacation and why.*

*Sang-hoon: Oh my God class starts in an hour, what am I going to do? I already have such bad grades.*

*Ji-eun: Well, I suppose you could copy my homework. It is just homework, Gerken will never know the difference. She never checks homework !*

*Sang-hoon: Oh thanks Ji-eun, you are a real friend.*

*(Sang-hoon takes Ji-eun's paper and quickly copies everything down verbatim.)*

*(One week later in Professor Gerken 's Global Conversation Class.)*



*Prof. Gerken (student wearing grey wig and a long skirt.) : Hello class, today I want to hand back your homework to you. Oh yes, could Ji-eun and Sang-hoon see me after class.*

*Ji-eun (to herself): Oh n-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o !*

*(Sang-hoon avoids looking at either Prof. Gerken or Ji-eun and slips way down in his seat.)*

*(After class Ji-eun and Sang-hoon are standing in front of Prof. Gerken's desk with heads down. )*

*Prof. Gerken: It is very strange, but both of you handed in the same personal opinion essay. Because I have no proof of who really wrote this paper, I will have to give both of you an F. I will be in my office until 3 pm, if you would like to talk to me. OK*

*Ji-eun and Sang-hoon together: Yes ma'am.*

*(Later Sang-hoon goes to Professor Gerken's office and confesses.)*

The next step would be for students to make formal or informal presentations in groups or as a whole class activity in which they explain the class rules and expectations to each other, only consulting me if they need clarification.

Concerning presentations, I must add that since my arrival in South Korea in August 1993, I have witnessed a computer technology revolution firsthand by simply observing the work submitted by my students over the years. In the beginning of my stay, any visuals accompanying oral presentations were handmade posters either on heavy cardboard or flipcharts. Now, according to what I have observed, it seems as if all my students have access to a personal computer and most of them are skillful users of the Windows Power Point program. Those unfamiliar with it can easily learn how it works from their classmates. Power Point has improved the quality of student oral presentations 100%.

However, there is a widespread tendency for less experienced presenters to read what is on the screen, rather than explain it to the audience using proper pronunciation, enunciation, and eye contact. Many Korean students need help in mastering the art of English public speaking. Luckily, since the best help here is from international teachers who can intervene and correct mistakes as they are made, no one has to fear being made redundant because of a computer.

Next, before concluding this paper, I would like to describe a unit of study where low intermediate students successfully used art and Power Point as part of their final examination. Here I am referring to a lesson about vacations based on a reading passage from Pathfinder 2, a popular textbook in South Korea. ( See Appendix 5.3.2 ) In order to motivate the students before reading the text, I would have the class try to figure out the answers to study questions 1 to 4 on page 63 in pairs and discuss them with their partners. For homework the students would be required to read the passage and answer the question: Is how you spent vacations in the past the same or different from the way you spend them today. Why or why not? This question helps students establish a personal link to the material. In class the students share their experience with a partner and check to see if everyone can correctly answer the comprehension questions 1 to 4 on page 63.

Then instead of a unit test, students are asked to make a group presentation based on the following assignment.

*Imagine you are the directors of a camp. Prepare a presentation which you are making to recruit future campers either with or without their parents. Please include:*

1. *Camp name and Logo for a t-shirt*

2. *Description of the camp's purpose*
3. *A map of the camp facilities and a short description of the sleeping quarters, dining hall, kitchen, food, sports facilities, and infirmary*
5. *A list of activities and a sample schedule*
6. *A picture (photo or drawing) of the ideal camper*
7. *Price*
8. *Dates from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_*

Samples of actual student's work can be found in the appendix. ( See Appendix 5.3.2.1 and 5.3.2.2 ) Such a presentation also enabled students with learning style strengths other than visual to shine as well. I will never forget how one advanced beginner, a strong kinesthetic learner, who had hardly spoken a word the entire semester made a very good presentation about a martial arts camp, complete with a memorable demonstration of Taekwondo kicks. It turns out that this quiet student bore the title All Korean Taekwondo Champion for the year he had participated in my class. He went from being the quiet outsider to the class hero just because of the caliber of his presentation. His moment in the sun gave him the confidence to become much more active in class, take the risk and dare to speak English in front of his classmates whose proficiency level was much higher than his own.

## Chapter 6

### FINAL REFLECTION

In retrospect I find this classroom research project has become a log of a journey which began in a hamburger restaurant in King George County, Virginia. It continued at a foreign language academy in Seoul, South Korea where the creativity, enthusiasm, and respect of my students helped me reconnect with the teaching profession. It later brought me to Kyunghee University Suwon Campus where I could reap and still am reaping the many personal and professional benefits a full-time university lecturer position has to offer.

It also introduced me to some stumbling blocks along the way, some of them of my own doing, while some were the fault of others. However, because I also learned ways in which to avoid the occasional snags, I feel it is my responsibility to pass along as much information as possible about what future teachers can expect after accepting an EFL position in South Korea.

To be sure, times have changed since 1993. South Koreans no longer feel the need to hide behind the stone faced façade of their ancestors. However any extroversion they might display is strictly on their own collective terms. Because their traditional system of education is teacher centered and emphasizes the importance of the accumulation and memorization of facts and figures, many young Koreans have underdeveloped EFL communication skills. They, therefore, are prime targets for foreign language learning anxiety when they come face to face

with a native speaker (teacher). In the classroom this can manifest itself in the form of a severe style clash between student(s) and teacher(s). The best way to avoid such a problem is for the teacher to strive to make her/his classroom a comfort zone where EFL students feel safe to take the great risk and dare to expose the limitations of their far from perfect English to their teacher and classmates. It is only by accepting their weaknesses and not feeling ashamed to make mistakes in a comfortable and supportive environment that students can begin to improve.

Downey 2001 created a list of eight key factors that are present in the EFL classroom with an environment that is hospitable to learning. In this paper I have demonstrated what I have done to create the necessary comfort zone in my classroom during the first ten days of the semester.

A student centered teacher, I chose to arrange my room with chairs in a circular formation. The circle with its long tradition in Korea has a harmonizing effect on group dynamics.

When I introduced the talking piece during the whole group introductions activity, I anticipated that the other students would feel very uncertain if one student dominated the discussion and I resolved the problem.

By introducing students to such terms as talking piece and think-pair-share, and having them describe their own feelings, etc, on the first day of class, I began creating a core vocabulary which was to be shared by all to facilitate student interaction.

When I cheerfully took part in the circle activity myself, I modeled the behavior and attitude expected in my classroom.

By selecting activities that would appeal to a wide range of learning styles, I created an atmosphere of success.

When I circulated regularly during pair and small group activities, as well as when I made myself approachable in class and available before class, I began to establish rapport. Through humor I was always able to break through the ice of a first time encounter.

The DramaWorks collective role-play process is great for community building. Community building was also accomplished by basing exercises and activities on a core of knowledge familiar to all participants, for example-the Korean flag and its symbols in the explanation of the importance of the circle for group harmony.

During the first week of class, I could establish the following routines: the warm up activities to keep students busy at the beginning of class, the think/pair/share small group work to enable more students to participate actively in whole class discussions, the giving of participation points that count towards a student's final grade as an incentive for taking part in whole class discussions, the closed circle seating arrangement with the talking piece for important classroom discussions, the DramaWorks collective role play process to help students overcome FL stage fright, the use of games such as Jeopardy and Negotiable/Non-negotiable to enliven routine classroom management procedures, the advanced organizers to introduce reading units, and the student generated hand-made visuals and Power Point graphics to supplement and enhance presentations.

Finally, the most important lesson I have learned on my odyssey in the Land of the Morning Calm is that the young people of South Korea hold the keys to a treasure house full of untouched creative energy which when channeled in the right direction can make teaching them a delightful, rewarding experience. However, this same energy has been lying dormant for so long, that it has lost some of its spark. The perceptive international teacher can do a great service if she/he creates a classroom in which the muse can be awakened and allowed to flourish. If this classroom research project can relay this message to at least one future teacher bound for South Korea, it has met its objective.

## **APPENDIX**

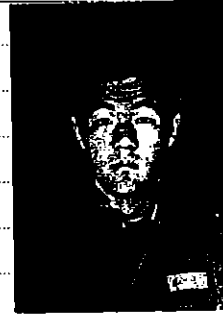


APPENDIX 5.1

Sample Student Registration Cards

No. \_\_\_\_\_

1. 김의연 (W1)
2. Yun
3. 2006201489
4. 019 - 4402 - 781
5. Dokterbear@hotmail.com
6. Freshman
7. International Studies
8. NY (buffalo) USA  
1994 ~ 1998



MOOREUX CO

W-3

No. \_\_\_\_\_

1. 김의연
2. Kim Yejin / Yejin
3. 2006201483
4. International studies
5. 019. 398. 9324
6. Kimyangel@hanmail.net
7. b.k. 5 years (elementary, middle school). father's studies
8. Freshman



MOOREUX CO

## APPENDIX 5.2

### Letter to my students

My dear Students:

Welcome to English Conversation Class. I look forward to teaching you this semester. The first week of class is history, but we still have a lot of time left to work together. As I mentioned last week, the most important thing for me when deciding a student's final grade is whether she or he really makes an effort to participate in class and always tries her/his best, regardless of the individual's level of experience with the English language.

I, in turn, will do my best to show you that I know that each one of you learns differently. Early in the semester, I will try to find out what type of learning style each student prefers, so that I can plan activities that help you all learn the best you can.

I do not give grades like awards or presents. I simply record what I see and hear. Each student is in control of her/his own grade. I believe very strongly that no-one should feel ashamed of making mistakes, and no one should ever laugh at someone who does. Although we all make mistakes, they happen to help us learn.

I want this class to be a student-centered class. You also will be given many chances to make suggestions or give me feedback about anything that happens during our time together.

In the past, I gave students a list of rules to follow in addition to my syllabus. This time I have decided to write you a friendly letter. In this letter you will find the reasons why I have decided on certain classroom procedures. Basically each procedure is in place so that our English class can run as smoothly as possible. This is most important if you wish to improve your English and I my teaching. It is my belief that all of us, whether we are teachers or students, are learners. Everyday I learn new things from my students.

- First of all, I would prefer it if all cell phones were turned off before our class begins. Think of how disturbing it would be if phones were ringing throughout class and people were having conversations or writing text messages in Korean instead of studying English!
- Next if someone comes in late, it interrupts the flow of the lesson, because it means that some things must be repeated. I realize that being late is sometimes unavoidable because of traffic, but in general it can be avoided with a little bit of effort and planning. Maybe you just have to go to bed earlier so that you can get up at the right time! I will allow a student to come up to 10 minutes late to class. After that the individual is tardy. Two tardies equal one unexcused absence. If you foresee a problem, please talk to me about it. Under difficult circumstances, something can be worked out. The motto in this class is always- *Communicate, don't Irritate!*
- When you are absent or forget to do a homework assignment, please speak to me after class ASAP! During our conversation I will record in a notebook that you have a missing assignment and when we have agreed it is due. If there is no note in my book, meaning that we have not discussed the problem, any work that is handed in late will not be accepted and you will receive an F. Discussing and recording make-up work arrangements makes things run much more smoothly for me. Otherwise I have many pieces of late work sitting around my office that always seem to develop legs and hide so that they cannot be found when we need them!
- Also, please-always identify every assignment you hand in with: name, registration number, and class written clearly on every page. Any UFW (unidentified flying work) will be graded F. I am going to be very busy this semester and I do not have enough time to try to identify mysterious homework papers. Getting into the habit early of writing your name, registration number, and class on every page you submit in this class, will help make things run as smoothly as possible!
- Before this letter gets too long, I would like to talk about one last problem area. I know that we are all fortunate to live in the computer age. However, that does not mean that any student has the right to copy material from either a book or the Internet and hand it in as their own individual work. I have a lot of experience and I am good at detecting this type of cheating. Anyone caught cheating will receive an F. This also means that if two people hand in exactly the same creative work or parts of a creative assignment that are similar, this will be considered cheating and both parties will automatically receive an F. There is absolutely no exception to this rule. Please be original and creative. The bottom line is *Don't Cheat!* If you are having trouble completing an assignment, don't copy from someone else just to get it done! That is too dangerous! Come to me and ask for help!

Well, that is enough of my classroom procedure for now! If you try to do your best to help everything run as smoothly as possible, we all are going to have a very pleasant time together. I look forward to getting to know each one of you.

Very sincerely yours,

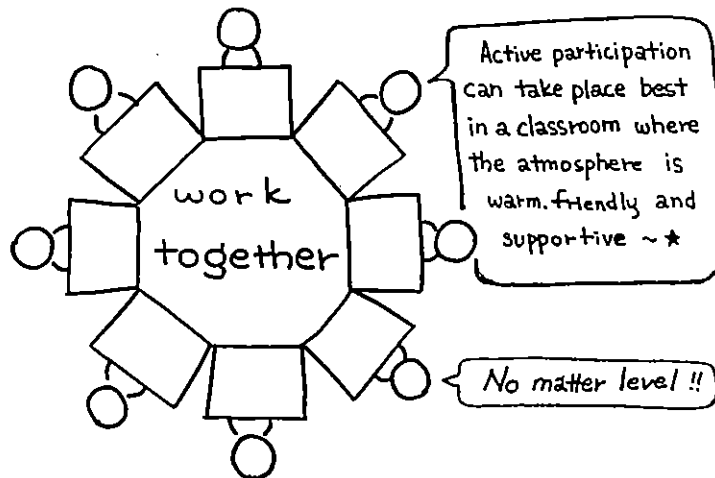
## APPENDIX 5.3

### Gallery of Student Work-Let the students speak for themselves !

#### 5.3.1 Interpretations of Classroom Procedures

# student centered

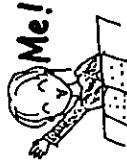
Put the chairs in a big circle



- Mistakes are an important part of learning
- You are always trying your best !
- A class is not meant to be a dialogue between the teacher and one or two students unless it is a private lesson.

## GUIDELINES

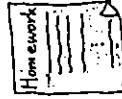
1 We should be interested and always participating actively in class



2 Latecomers should report to the professor during break. If we are late for class 15 minutes or more two times, it counts as we absence. But there are exceptions.

EX) ROTC training or military duty, MT... etc

3 If we have forgotten to do homework, we must make arrangement with the professor to do make up assignment.

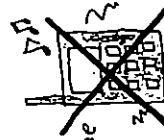


4 If we are absent from class on any day, we must report to the professor in the break to discuss.

5 We should not copy anything, when we have a exam or do homework.



6 We should turn off cell phone before coming to the class



7 First students who arrive in this class put the appropriate number of chairs in a circle.

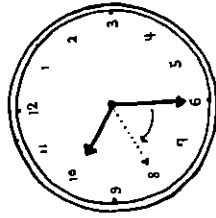


8 Unless professor tell students that two people can hand in one paper together no two people are allowed to hand in creative indivisual work that is word for word exactly the same.

9 We should communicate Should not irritate.



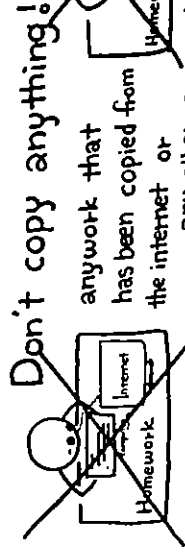
# GUIDELINES



" Please try to come to class on time ... "

(Allow people to come up to five minutes late with a good excuse ten minutes)

★ Two tardies are equal to one absence ★



Don't copy anything!

anywork that has been copied from the internet or

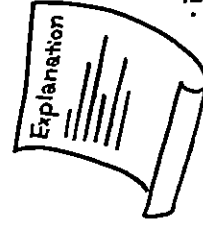
any other source is an automatic " F " grade or " O "

\* Any missing work will be given the grade " O "

if you have forgotten to do the work, you must arrangements with professor immediately to do a make up assignment

if you must be absent for long period submit a written explanation for the absence ahead of time.

You must make arrangements to make up your work before you go as well.



### 5.3.2

#### Pathfinder Text-Let's go to camp !

**F**or the average American or Canadian, a family vacation is a real treat. For many families, camping is a popular vacation activity. Camping is less expensive and more adventurous than staying in a hotel. There are many national parks and private campgrounds across both countries. A family can set up a tent or park their campers at one of many campsites. Some campsites offer water or electricity. However, most people enjoy *roughing it* without the conveniences of home. That's part of the fun!

Another sort of vacation is a road trip. A road trip is where families pack up their cars and hit the road. Many families will visit relatives or friends in other parts of the country or enjoy another city. Theme parks like Disneyland are also very popular, as well as lakes and beaches with resorts. It usually takes several days to reach the destination. Families take their time, stopping for picnics and to enjoy the sights along the way.

There are also many summer camps, especially for children. The camps can last from a week up to three months. Some camps are educational such as music camp or computer camp. However, most of them are just for fun. Campers spend a lot of time outdoors enjoying activities such as swimming, hiking, and doing arts and crafts together. They stay in cabins and eat together in a big building. Most camps have a campfire at night. Everyone gathers around a small fire to sing songs, listen to stories, and maybe roast marshmallows.

■ Write T for true or F for false

1. Camping is very expensive in the United States and Canada. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Campers sing songs around a campfire. \_\_\_\_\_
3. When people are on a road trip they might have a picnic lunch. \_\_\_\_\_

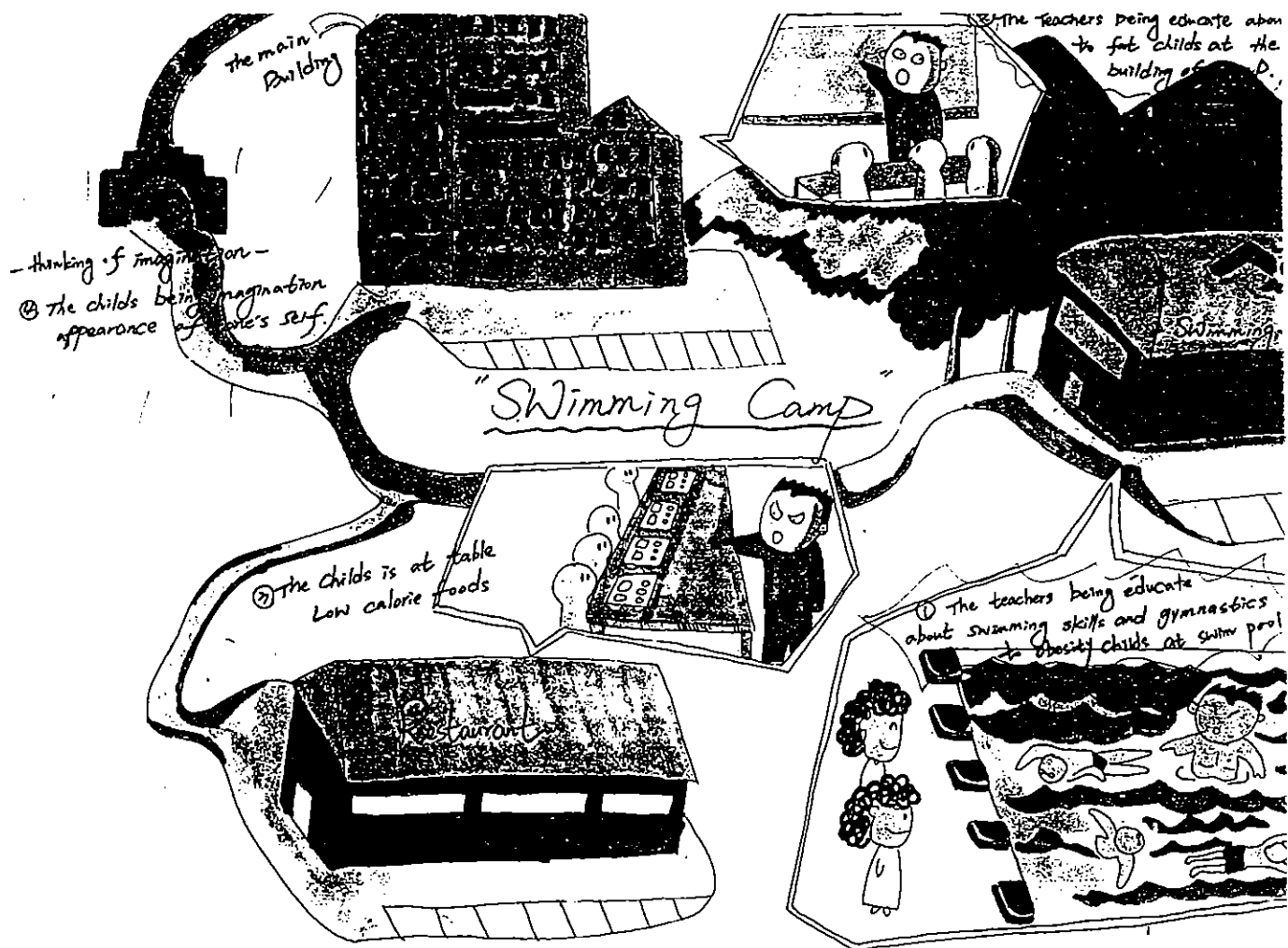
■ Answer the following questions.

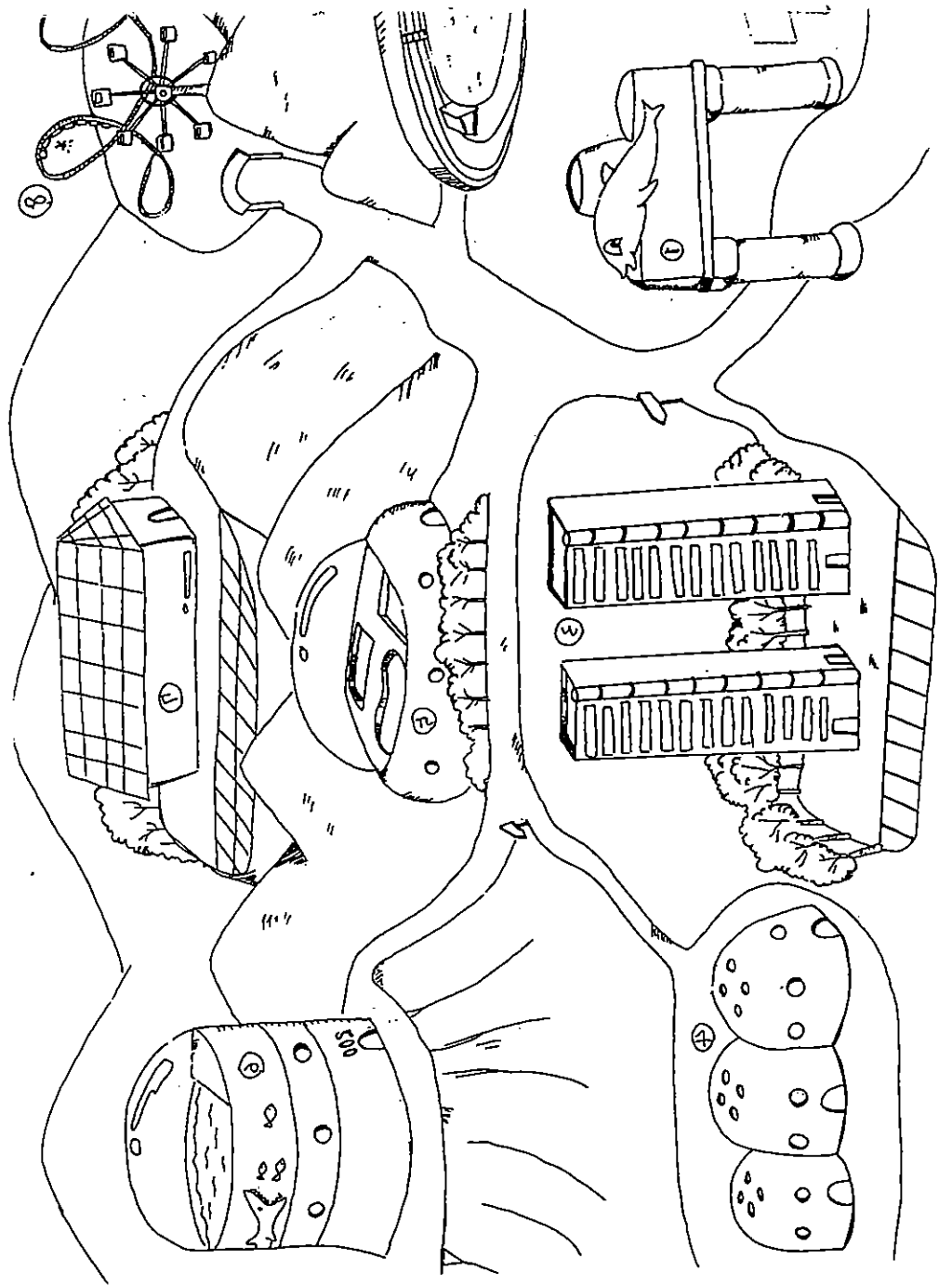
1. Where do people go on road trips?
2. What is a road trip?
3. What can you do at a camp?
4. Tell your partner about a family vacation you have taken.

(MacGregor 2000)

5.3.2.1

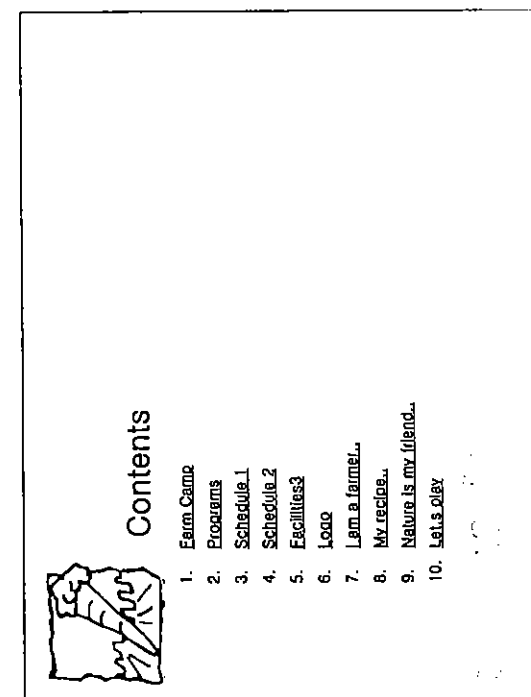
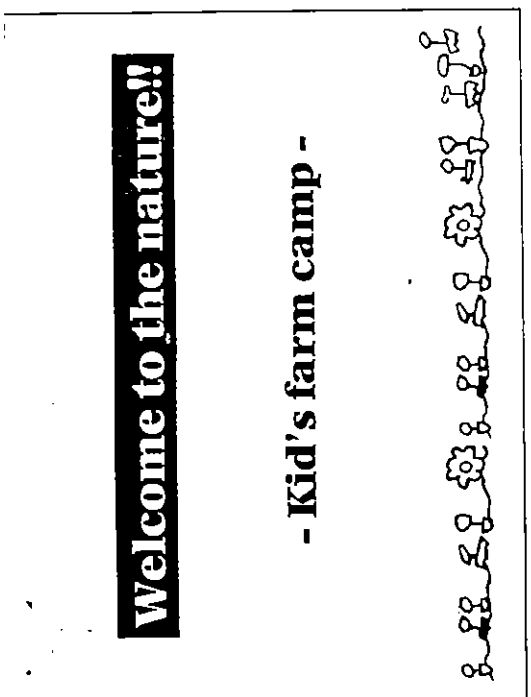
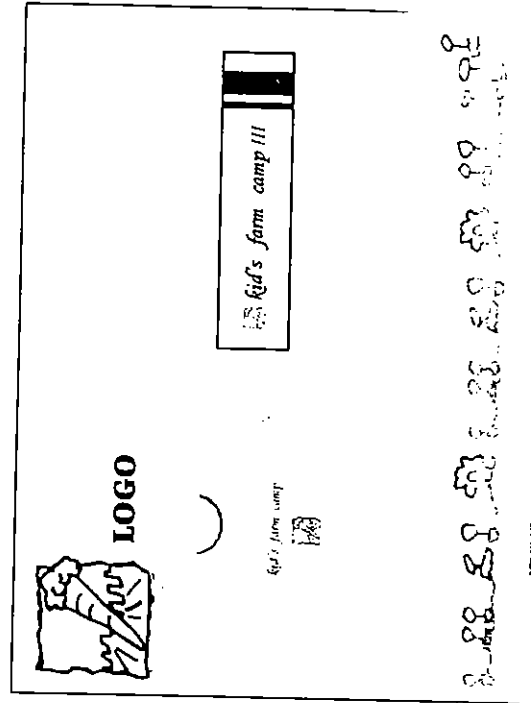
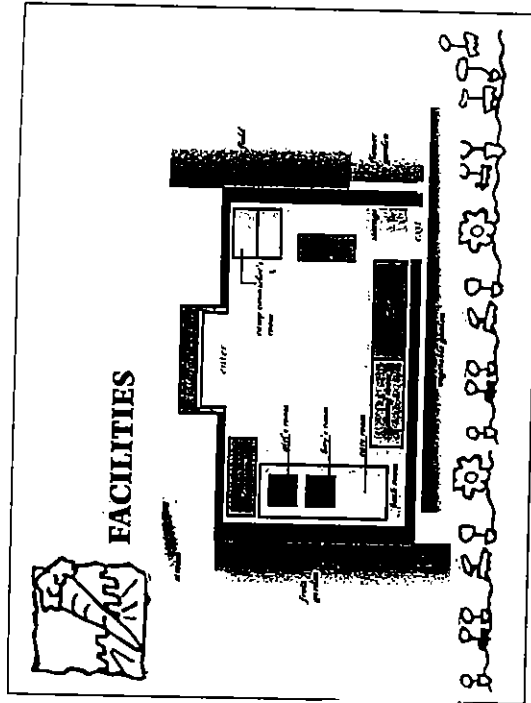
Sample of handmade graphics





5.3.2.2

Samples of students' computer generated materials







### FARM CAMP

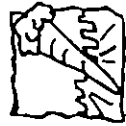
If you join in the camp, you have feeling.  
The nature is our friend and the farmers are reputable persons.  
You have a good chance.

AGE : 8 ~ 13 KIDS  
Term : August. 1 ~ August . 7  
Cost : 180 \$ / 6 days  
Tel : 02) 337-3335



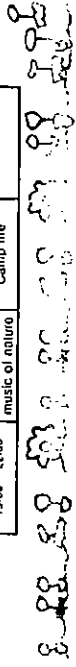
### SCHEDULE 1

	7 / 1	7 / 2	7 / 3
7:30 - 8:00	/	Wake up	Wake up
8:00 - 8:40		Breakfast	Breakfast
9:00 - 13:00		Working at vegetable farm	Working at fruit farm
13:00 - 14:00		Lunch	Lunch
14:00 - 18:00	Making Groups	Our earth is sick..	My recipe
18:00 - 19:00	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner
19:00 - 22:00	Introducing	Let's play..	Letters



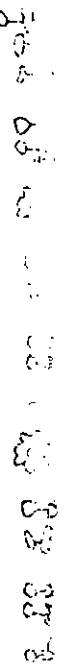
### SCHEDULE 2

	7 / 4	7 / 5	7 / 6
7:30 - 8:00	Wake up	Wake up	Wake up
8:00 - 9:00	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
9:00 - 13:00	Working at flower farm.	Working at animal farm.	We are friends.
13:00 - 14:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
14:00 - 18:00	Drawing some flowers.	The animal stage.	Bye ~~~
18:00 - 19:00	Dinner	Dinner	
19:00 - 22:00	Listen to music of nature	Camp fire	



### Let's play..

You can learn Korean traditional games.  
Ex. Jatchigi , yutnori, spin a toy ...  
These are very exciting.



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