WELL BEGUN IS HALF DONE:
PREPARING FOR THE START OF A NEW CLASS

Stephanie C. Downey
B.A. McGill University 1991

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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

This paper explores the critical learning moment that occurs on the first day in a new language class as the individual students, group and teacher interact for the first time. It states that the first day can influence the entire direction a course takes and asserts that the learner, the group, the teacher and the cultural context are key variables that determine how the first day turns out. It argues that by being aware of the impact each of these variables has on learning, the teacher can direct the emotional, mental and social energy of the group positively and create the most advantageous conditions for learning.

Secondly, it examines the key strategies that teacher can use to effectively prepare for the first day. These strategies are: anticipating students' uncertainties and resolving them, establishing rapport, beginning community building, personalizing the language, arranging the room consistent with teaching goals, establishing class routines, creating an atmosphere of success and modeling the attitudes and behavior a teacher expects.

ERIC Descriptors:

Class Activities
Classroom Techniques
Student Teacher Relationships
Teacher Attitudes
Teacher Behavior
Teacher Role

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INTRODUCTION

*He who chooses the beginning of the road
chooses the place it leads to. It is the means
that determines the end.*
                                    -Henry Emerson Fosdick

Walking into teach a new class on the first day is like setting out on a journey. Although I may have an end in mind and an itinerary of the stops my students and I will make along the way, I have no idea of exactly where the path we travel may lead or what we will encounter along the way. The challenges we will face in the learning adventure that is about to unfold depend largely on how I initiate the teaching-learning process with this new group. As we set out, I can consider and prepare carefully to ensure the conditions for our learning journey are favorable or I can pack hastily and hope the wind will be at our backs. The choice I have to make is critical for it will shape the journey and determine the final destination.

This paper discusses the importance of how the language learning journey begins for a new class and examines the personal, intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural dynamics that are involved in that beginning. It argues that an awareness of the complex variables involved in these dynamics can help the teacher to make the

most of the start of a new class. It also suggests steps a teacher can take and activities that can be used to start the first day off on the right foot.

As a single step is said to mark the beginning of a long journey, so the work presented in this paper began with a single question posed to me during my Interim Year Teaching Practicum in the Summer Master of Arts in Teaching program at the School for International Training (SIT). You might call that question a step in the right direction, although at that time I had no idea that it would lead anywhere at all. My advisor, Bonnie Mennell asked the question of me, when she came to observe me in November 1999. At the time of her visit, I was teaching English Conversation to Korean university students. I usually taught large classes of thirty to forty students and always let them sit wherever they chose during my lessons. They would often push five or six desks together and sit surrounded by their friends; or they would all congregate at the back of the classroom, leaving the first several rows empty. I would typically spend a few minutes at the beginning of each class trying to get them to spread out and move forward. This is exactly what happened in the first moments of the first class that Bonnie observed. She saw me struggling, trying to coax the students into rearranging themselves; and in the observation notes she was keeping, Bonnie asked me quite matter-of-factly, "Why do you let the students sit that way?" Why, indeed? I had never thought about it before. The students sat that way because that's just the way they sat.

In our conversation following the lesson, Bonnie suggested I try out some other seating arrangements. I did so in the very next class, arranging the chairs into a

horseshoe configuration. I noticed a difference immediately; the impact was dramatic

and impossible for me to ignore. The classroom dynamic had totally shifted. I was

amazed at the result such a simple thing as the rearrangement of chairs could have on

the classroom atmosphere.

The realization that small changes in my classroom management approach

could have profound results on classroom dynamics was empowering. This insight

encouraged me to look more deeply into other classroom management issues in my

context that had always challenged me and seemed to interfere with learning.   Some

of the issues I wanted to grapple with were superficial, such as getting students to turn

off their cellular phones or bring their textbooks to class regularly. Others went much

deeper, such as helping students overcome their reluctance to speak in class and take

risks with the language.

Trying to address these issues lead me to retrace my steps back to the start of

my classes because I realized that there was nowhere else to go but back to the very

beginning. Partly this was because there seemed to be no point in spending class time

undoing what had already been done. It made more sense to establish classroom

policies and procedures at the beginning of a new course, instead of halfway through

the term. More importantly, I recognized that many of the classroom management

issues I faced were the result of my own thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Without

being aware of it, I had made certain decisions about how I would set up, manage and

conduct my classes. Through inattention to certain dimensions of class dynamics, I

had unwittingly established an atmosphere that tolerated and condoned the exact

behaviors I thought interfered with learning. These were things that I had not considered because I wasn't aware of the complex forces that are set in motion when a teacher and group of students meet for the first time. Realizing this lead me to closely examine how I approach and prepare for the first few meetings with a new group of students.

I spent the long winter break between the fall and spring semesters in Korea looking at how I could address such issues of classroom management. I was determined to start the next semester off on the right foot. I worked hard to prepare for my new classes: planning activities, designing materials, and clarifying my goals and objectives. It was a time-consuming process, often confusing and frustrating; but the results were well worth the effort. The spring semester started off wonderfully. All the planning and preparation made a huge difference. I was aware that students were leaving my class excited, confident and secure on the first day. Student groups seemed to be more cohesive and receptive than they had ever been in the past. I seemed also to have a better idea of who my students were and what their learning needs were. It was like no other first class I had ever taught. I cannot really explain how it felt to watch the students leaving the first class feeling excited and secure, except to say that it was amazing. I was able, in a matter of a few classes, to get to a level of understanding, cooperation and intimacy with new students that would usually have taken me a semester or more to reach in the past.

This rewarding experience encouraged me to look more deeply at the first day and analyze the personal, intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural dynamics that exist

between the learner, the group and the teacher in this moment. On this journey of inquiry I was guided by Stevick's discussion of the importance of what goes on inside and between learners in a classroom. Schmuck and Schmuck's examination of group processes in the classroom aided my understanding of how groups develop and how group standards and group atmospheres are formed. Ehrman and Dornyei's research on interpersonal dynamics in second language education helped me to become aware of the fact that group interactions constitute a powerful influence on the language learning process and that learning can be facilitated by the appropriate use of interpersonal dynamics. Horowitz and Young's research on language anxiety focused my attention on the learner and confirmed my belief that affect plays a significant role in learning to speak another language. Palmer's provocative statement that "we teach who we are" drew my attention to the importance of teacher self-awareness in the teaching-learning process and inspired me to strive to actualize my awareness and beliefs in my teaching practice.

Through research and reflection, I have come to the conclusion that getting off on the right foot in the language classroom really does make a difference. This paper asserts my belief that the beginning is the most important part of my work as a language teacher and presents a personal account of how I have tried to prepare for the start of a new course based in my experience, reflections and teaching philosophy. Chapter Two discusses how the first few classes are a critical period in the formation and function of a classroom group and set a tone that will prevail for the duration of the course. It details the personal, intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural dynamics

at play in a classroom setting on the first day and individually examines the influential roles that the learner, the group, the teacher, and the culture can have on how things turn out. Chapter Three examines how a teacher can make the most of the first few classes to create a hospitable classroom atmosphere that is positive, nurturing and conducive to learning. This chapter also presents the strategies and activities I have developed for doing so.

In Korean there is a proverb, 시 작 이 반 이 다, (*Shi jak i ban i'da*) which means well begun is half done. My experiences have taught me that this is definitely true in the language classroom. Well begun is indeed half done!

Chapter Two

THE FIRST DAY: A CRITICAL MOMENT

"Success in language learning depends less on materials,
techniques and linguistic analysis, and more on what goes on inside
and between the people in the classroom."
(Stevick, 1980, p.4)

Parker Palmer, in his book, *The Courage to Teach*, mentions the importance of critical moments in teaching and learning. He defines a critical moment as one "in which a learning opportunity for students will open up, or shut down – depending, in part, on how the teacher handles it." (Palmer, 1998, p.145) When I read his description of critical moments, Palmer's words resonated deeply within me and reaffirmed my belief in the importance of a good beginning. I believe that the first few encounters with a new class represent such a critical moment in language learning and, as such, can have a tremendous impact on the development and outcome of a course.

The beginning of a new class is a critical moment because so much is at stake for the individual learners, the group as whole, and the teacher. As the students, group and teacher act, react and interact within the classroom on the first day, a complex set

of dynamics is set in motion that influences everyone present and ultimately influences the course itself. Because of the ESL/EFL setting in which I teach, I believe these intrapersonal, interpersonal and group processes take place in a cultural context that further influences and complicates the quality of the connections being formed.

Successful language learning depends less on materials and methodology and more on what goes on "inside" and "between" the people in a classroom. (Stevick, 1980, p.4)   Separately or in combination, I have experienced ways in which these forces - learner, group, teacher and culture – can interfere with the teaching-learning process. I believe that if the learning opportunity is to open up, as Palmer suggests, a teacher must be aware of what is going within themselves, within the learners, between all the people present in the class, and within the culture on the first day. Only when there is a balance among the above-mentioned forces will the conditions for optimal learning exist and the learning opportunity open up.   If a teacher does not take positive steps to attend to these forces in the first few classes, the critical moment will pass and the learning opportunity will disappear.

THE LEARNER

Learning a foreign language can be an emotionally trying experience for a student, especially on the first day. I believe a new language classroom is a risky place. Anxiety is often a major obstacle to overcome in learning to speak another language.

Many sources of anxiety are already present within the learners when they enter my class on the first day. Research shows that low self-esteem, poor self-image, feelings of inadequacy, and a fear of failure can all contribute to the degree of anxiety learners experience. Many learners also have misconceptions about the language learning process that interfere with their learning and create anxious feelings. They may believe that language learning is a talent only some possess or that pronunciation is the most important part of communication. These intrinsic feelings and beliefs can seriously hinder the learning process for a student. (Oxford, 1999, pp.62-5)

There are forces outside the learner, as well, that present obstacles to learning since the classroom itself can be a potential source of anxiety. Students suddenly find themselves in an unfamiliar context surrounded by unfamiliar people when they enter a new class. (Price, 1991, p.105) They do not know what is going to happen, what they are supposed to do, how they should behave or what they are being judged or evaluated on. This ambiguous situation is psychologically unsettling for students and causes many learners to feel overanxious and apprehensive.

Furthermore, on the first day many learners fear having to speak the target language and be evaluated in front of their peers. Since they are performing in a new language, they often experience frustration and anxiety from not being able to communicate effectively. Because of this inability to express themselves, students fear they are only showing part of their real personality and intelligence. (Price, 1991, p.105) They worry about being laughed at or ridiculed by a new group of classmates.

The teacher can also be a source of potential anxiety to learners on the first day. The teacher's leadership and interaction styles can have a significant impact on the learners' levels of anxiety. (Young, 1991, p.428) A teacher can create an impression of being caring, accepting, trustworthy and approving or, alternatively, harsh, critical, authoritarian and disapproving depending on her attitudes and actions. The verbal and non-verbal signals teachers send students on the first day, as well as their manner of error correction and choice of instruction procedures can encourage or discourage learners and, as a result, either decrease or increase anxiety.

I have experienced the debilitating effects of language anxiety firsthand. As a Russian language major in university, I struggled in my freshman year intensive language class and was an incredibly shy and self-conscious learner. Looking back, I believe the struggle in this course began for me in the first moment of the first class. As I waited for the start of class, I felt uneasy looking around at the fifteen strangers I found myself sitting with. But that was nothing compared to the uneasiness I began to feel when the class actually got underway. Looking very serious and stern, our native speaker professor suddenly entered the room conversing quickly in Russian as she

walked to her seat at the front. She continued to speak very quickly in Russian, pointing at each of us and gesturing for us to repeat after her. I felt my stomach tighten into a knot. I remember feeling totally blown away at that moment, and I do not think I ever recovered. I was so anxious during the rest of that first class that I could barely participate and spent the whole class dreading that I might be called on. When I was required to answer or participate, I felt tongue-tied and my mind became a complete blank.   I felt lost, totally incompetent and helpless. I left the class feeling miserable, thoroughly convinced that I had no ability for learning languages, would most likely never learn to speak Russian and was the poorest student in the class.

My experience on that first day was nerve-wracking and I believe that my learning opportunity in that class closed almost entirely from the beginning. The negative emotions that I experienced that day continued to increase as the course progressed and had a very negative effect on my learning. It was a continuous downward spiral; the more anxious I felt, the more poorly I performed which caused me to suffer even greater anxiety. Although I did well enough to pass the class in the end, the negative feelings surrounding that initial experience stayed with me throughout the course and for a long time afterward. These feelings influenced not only my perceptions about myself and my abilities as a learner, but also influenced my performance in subsequent language classes.

My first day in Russian class was so stressful because I felt threatened by many things. Our lesson thrust us right into the first chapter of the textbook, and I was expected to use these strange new words and sounds to communicate.

Essentially, I was called upon to make the language a part of myself and to use it to express myself; but because I had no previous knowledge of Russian and could hardly decipher the peculiar new alphabet before me, this task was impossible for me to complete successfully. I remember thinking that if we could just switch to English for a couple minutes so I could ask a few questions I would be fine. When I did ask something in English, however, the teacher answered in Russian.

Not being able to use my native tongue deprived me of my normal means of communication, which was extremely distressing to me. My ability to express myself and, consequently, to be myself was limited. This made me feel uncomfortable, anxious and frustrated because I could not function as I normally did.

In addition, I was terrified of making a mistake, so terrified in fact that I couldn't really pay attention to what was going on. I knew I was being evaluated, and I feared making a mistake and being corrected. I did not want to risk being humiliated by appearing incompetent in front of my fellow classmates.

When I consider the suffering that language anxiety can cause learners, the significance of the first day for a student is clear to me. Most students enter a new language class with various anxieties. They feel nervous and suffer from "first-day jitters" as they try to deal with the new linguistic challenges facing them, try to get to know a new instructor, and try to find their place in a new group. Students enter the classroom looking for as complete a description as possible of what are, more or less, the terms of the contract they are about to sign by registering for the class. They are

waiting and watching for many things, and their personal observations play a central role in the level of comfort they will feel.

My reflections and experiences have shown me that this affective situation in the classroom on the first day is especially important in language learning. A teacher needs to be aware of the possible anxiety within students and take steps to minimize it on the first day before it contributes to poor performance and reduced participation. By understanding the sources of learner anxiety, I can help students cope with their anxious feelings as well as make language learning less stressful for them. As I begin a new class, I can take steps to help students get used to the new routine and atmosphere of my classroom. I can my clarify goals, objectives and expectations, and establish clear procedures. I can foster a supportive environment by being warm and personable and by treating my students with dignity and respect. I can also shift the focus off of performance and evaluation and on to positive reinforcement. In doing so, I can create conditions that keep anxiety at reasonably low levels on the first day and allow my students to feel positive about the learning adventure they have just begun.

THE GROUP

While what is going on "inside" of individual learners is of central importance on the first day, it is only part of the equation. I realize it is also necessary to pay attention to what is going on "between" learners because classroom language learning is a group activity. As a new class begins, interactions within the group exert a

powerful influence on individual students and their learning. As students try to

determine what their role in the group will be, they are comparing themselves to

others in the group and formulating opinions about themselves, their abilities, and the

classroom. They wanted to feel esteemed and respected, and they are concerned about

being accepted and liked by their classmates. Just as many learning obstacles can

originate in these social interactions and interpersonal relationships that occur among

learners in our classes as within the learners themselves.

As a teacher, I occupy a role of leadership in the classroom and from that

position can directly influence the formation and evolution of the group. I believe it is

important to realize that the teacher can direct group processes deliberately or

unwittingly. "Group processes make a difference in learning, whether or not the

leader pays attention to them." (Ehrman and Dornyei, 1998, p.230)   Whether a group

comes together and gels in a way that activates the full potential of its members or

coalesces in a way that inhibits learning depends in large part on what the teacher does

or does not do.

On that fateful first day in my Russian class, I believe that I experienced the

effect that unintentional inattention to group dynamics can have. Our lesson that day

consisted of learning to say our names in Russian, drilling the introductory dialogue in

the textbook, and practicing some follow up exercises. Although I was extremely

conscious of the others around me throughout the class, the only information I had the

chance to learn about my classmates that day was their names. I had no real

opportunity to get to know them, and they remained strangers to me as the class ended

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and we headed home. More than anything else, my group was a further source doubt

and worry to me. I had only my personal observations from which to draw

conclusions of them, and I was intimidated. I had continuously compared myself to

the others in the group and felt that I did not measure up. My energy was spent in

trying to conceal the fact that I did not understand and in dreading having my

incompetence exposed. I was worried that my weaknesses would be revealed.

Certain my classmates were different from me, I felt that I did not belong, had nothing

in common with them, and could not trust them. My perceptions of the group and my

place in it further added to my anxieties and also contributed to undermining the

learning opportunity for me.

     Fortunately, as a learner I have also experienced firsthand the impact that

consciously attending to group dynamics at the start of a course can have on learning.

At the beginning of the SMAT program at SIT we were not asked to dive into our

subject matter immediately, but spent our first three days together in orientation. We

participated in movement exercises, shared personal timelines, gathered information

about the campus for a group project, presented skits, and took a walk in the woods

with a partner. I had the opportunity to work with many different classmates and in

several different groups. By the end of the three days, I had gotten to know a little

something about almost everyone in my class and had even made some new friends. I

felt I had the support and understanding of other people who were in the same

situation. I stood on common ground with my classmates and shared a strong bond

with people who had similar interests and goals.

I realize that such activities encouraged and accelerated the formation of a productive and cohesive group. These community-building efforts allowed us to get to know each other, to share our feelings and experiences, to bond, to trust each other, and to give each other emotional support. I believe they played a radical role in the life of our group, and without them, the academic work we were to later pursue would have turned out much differently.

These experiences have taught me that the atmosphere established at the beginning of a group's life has the power to guide or restrict the individual learner. Although each class ultimately develops its own character and dynamic, all groups go through roughly the same stages of development. (Ehrman and Dornyei, 1998, p.99) In the initial 'forming' stage a gelling process occurs in which the group develops a definite structure and organization that will prevail and become firmly established. During this phase of group life rules, norms, standards of acceptable behavior, relationship patterns and social hierarchies are determined. (Arnold, 1999, p.155) Since group formation will occur regardless of what the teacher does, I can see no good reason why a teacher should not try to make the most of it? With conscious effort, the teacher can create good conditions for group development and can channel the class' energy into forming and strengthening productive interpersonal relationships.

As a teacher, I often enter class on the first day hoping that the students before me will be the 'group': the class that really gels and surpasses all of my wildest expectations. I used to assume that the gelling process was an act of fate or

happenstance and left it up to the powers that be. I now know that with a little

attention, organization and encouragement on the part of the teacher, any class can

come together, join in a way that is optimal for learning, and surpass a teacher's

expectations. If I am aware that my students' learning experiences are influenced by

what goes on among and between the people in my class, then I can include activities

in my initial lesson plans that allow students get to know each other and discover

similarities they share with one another. By paying attention to how act, interact and

react to the students, I can set the example for the interpersonal norms I wan to

establish. I can take the necessary steps to provide an environment that is supportive,

inclusive, non-competitive and allows all of a person's resources to be available for

learning.

THE TEACHER

As the teacher I am the leader in the classroom, but at the same time, I am also

a participant in the class. As both leader and participant, I can also interfere with the

learning that occurs in class. Therefore, I believe that what goes on "inside" the

teacher and "between" the teacher and the students on the first day has a profound

influence on learning.

If you close your eyes and think about teaching on the first day of class, what

sort of images and associations come to mind? What are you feeling? Imagine your

classroom. What does it look like? What do you see and hear? Think about your

typical lesson plan. What have you prepared? As you enter the room and face a group of new faces, what thoughts are running through your head? How do you feel?

When I asked myself these questions, 'nervousness', 'uncertainty', 'insecurity' and 'apprehension' were usually the emotions that I associated with meeting a new class for the first time. As a teacher, I have experienced first-day jitters on numerous occasions. Before I began investigating beginnings more closely, the first day of class always presented a huge dilemma for me. As I made my preparations, I would be overwhelmed by feelings of self-doubt and a tremendous lack of confidence in my teaching abilities. These misgivings would cause a state of panic inside of me; thereby making it difficult for me to think clearly or make informed decisions. As a result, despite my best intentions, I rarely had a well thought-out lesson plan, and I usually felt very anxious, unprepared and paralyzed by fear just before meeting a new class. Usually in a last minute panic, I would rush to put together and copy an ice breaker or name game activity to fill time, but this did little to calm my fears or ease my discomfort.

I remember one first class in particular. It was my second year teaching at the university level, and I was teaching a new course offering for which we had no established curriculum or text. On that day, as on numerous other occasions, the bell rang as I arrived in the classroom to see a sea of expectant faces staring up at me. As I looked at the students scattered throughout the room, I remember feeling extremely intimidated and unsure of myself. I recall that I started things off by anchoring myself behind the podium and then began introducing myself by turning my back to the class

to write my name on the board. After my introduction, I made a few opening remarks, and, in a rapid barrage of teacher talk, I quickly ran through the course outline, class rules and requirements, and necessary texts. Next, I recall introducing the ice breaker activity that I had photocopied by again launching into a lengthy explanation of the steps of the activity. When I saw looks of confusion appearing on the my students' faces, I repeated myself more frantically, peppering my explanation with comments like, "Okay?" "Got it?" and "Everyone understand?" Of course, my students did not, but I could not turn back; so I remember that I then moved toward the students in the front row and started physically moving them in an attempt to show the class how the activity worked. After a huge struggle and much confusion, they finally understood the directions and did their best to limp through the activity. As the activity progressed, I remember that it seemed to form more ice than it melted, and I could clearly sense the students' discomfort, so I cut it short. Overwhelmed by feelings of nervousness and insecurity, I dismissed my students early with a huge sigh of relief.

If I asked myself what it would have felt like to be a learner in my class on that particular day, I know the answer would not have been a positive one.   Students would have arrived to find a drab and disorganized classroom with chairs and equipment haphazardly arranged around the room. They would have encountered a teacher who seemed distant and inaccessible as she hid behind the podium wrapped up in her own needs, issues, and anxieties. As she rushed through the important details of the class in her rapid-fire speech that went mostly over their heads, they would have felt confused and overwhelmed. Her poor choice of activity and explanation

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would have made students feel incompetent, and her impatience and frustration with their confusion would have made them feel insecure and unimportant. In addition, the way she dismissed them early would have told them that she was not serious about their learning. In general, my learners would have experienced a first day that made them feel insecure and unlikely to return. On that day I failed to encourage a classroom climate where students felt accepted or could be comfortable taking risks, where they could discover and experiment with the language. I did little that day to excite my students about the class, calm their fears or set their expectations for the semester.

I can see that my feelings caused me to regard the first day as more of an obstacle to overcome as quickly as possible, rather than the first day of new learning adventure. I would approach it as an introduction, but only of the briefest kind, not the sort of introduction where we could delve into getting to know each other and the work at hand. I thought of it as something I needed to survive, like a scouting mission into enemy territory where I could glimpse the enemy, gather intelligence to know what I was up against and prepare for the next assault. More often than not, I was eager to get the first class out of the way before the 'real' learning would begin in subsequent lessons. I never realized that the first class could be so much more.

My concerns with my own feelings and fears prevented me from being truly aware of what is at stake on the first day. I never thought about my students' needs on the first day, the impression I was making on them, or the tone I was setting for my class. In beginning my classes that way, I realize now I was doing more harm than

good and was getting off on the wrong foot with most of my classes. I was essentially my own worst enemy. I never considered that I was communicating and creating an impression on several different levels simultaneously. Now that I have become more aware of what is at stake in a first class, I realize that in my lack of attention to first day dynamics I was establishing norms and routines that would come back to haunt me repeatedly throughout the semester. Since a first impression is a lasting one, it is no wonder I faced as many classroom management challenges as I did.

In *The Courage to Teach,* Parker Palmer discusses the idea that the kind of teacher one is depends on the kind of person one is. He writes,

> "Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or for worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life" (Palmer, 1998, 2)

The above quote from Parker Palmer is very meaningful to me because I know it to be true from my own teaching. My personal experiences demonstrate that who we are when we walk into a classroom really does have an effect on the way dynamics unfold once we are there. The inner turmoil I usually felt before meeting a new class for the first time did indeed have a profound influence on the direction and shape my classes took.

I know that facing a group of students can be a daunting experience and can trigger a great deal of emotional anxiety and insecurity in a teacher. What goes on "inside" of the teacher can have a tremendous impact on the outcome of a first

meeting with a new group of students. Emotional needs and fears rise to the surface, such as "Will I fail?" "Will the students accept and like me?" "Will they understand me?" "Will they approve or disapprove of me?" "Will they like my accent, teaching style, my material?" How I as a teacher chose to deal with these anxieties is of the utmost importance. If I am aware of them, I can control them, stop them from interfering in the learning process and focus my energy on creating an optimal learning experience. If I am not aware of them, I may behave, react and make decisions that are self-defeating and counterproductive to my students' learning. This is of critical importance on the first day as students try to deal with their inner anxiety and the social pressures of the group.

I believe what goes on "inside" a teacher also has the power to influence what goes on "between" a teacher and the students because of the expectations that exist for both the teacher and the students on the first day. As Schmuck and Schmuck note, "even on the first meeting of a class in which teachers and students are strangers to one another, certain expectations exist because the classroom carries meaning even without interpersonal interaction." (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1976 p. 41)

As a teacher, I have certain expectations of my learners at the beginning of a new class. I go into a new classroom situation wanting to know the answers to such questions as, "Why are they here?" "What do they want to learn?" "What are their attitudes toward English language and culture?" "What are their attitudes toward learning in general?" "What are their interests?" I have learned that the expectations teachers hold have important and real effects on the students. Schmuck and Schmuck

refer to the "circular interpersonal process" to illustrate the relationship between a teacher's expectations and a student's performance. According to this process, my expectations for the students affect the way I interact with them and, at the same time, affect the reactions of the students. As I relate to my students, I communicate, however directly or indirectly, my feelings about them. Students interpret my actions and interactions and will modify their behavior to conform more to the teacher's expectations. Such gestures of affect influence how students view themselves, their ability and their general worth. A teacher, therefore, can have a significant influence on the expectations the students develop about themselves.

A teacher's expectations about how students will act and what roles they will adopt can become self-fulfilling prophecies because they initially influence what actually happens in the group. They will have a real effect on the students and learning because all of these things have meaning for the students.

Through observation and reflection, I have become aware of the fact that the way I am in my class on the first day, the way I feel, think, and behave while teaching can have an impact on my students that is as significant as the materials and methodologies I use. I have realized that my inner landscape - my emotions, my needs and fears, my expectations and my beliefs and values – contributes significantly to the positive or negative tone of my teaching and to my students' receptivity to learning.

Because a teacher assumes an automatic leadership role in the classroom, my state of mind will affect all aspects of my teaching – my relationship with my

students, my relationship with the material at hand, the students' reactions and interactions with each other, group cohesion and students internal feelings about themselves. That's why it is critical to be mindful of how we act and the impression we create on the first day. First impressions matter in any situation, influencing our attitudes and behavior towards others. While they play an influential role in any educational setting, I believe that they carry even more significance in the language classroom

where so much personal and social risk is at stake. As the teacher, the first impression I create in my class has a direct bearing on how the class develops and unfolds.

CULTURE

The complexities created by learner anxiety, group dynamics and teacher influence on the first day of class are only exacerbated by the cultural gap that often exists between the teacher and students in an EFL context. Culture definitely plays an important role in the language teaching context where people from different cultures interact in a classroom setting. The expectations that teachers, individual students and groups bring with them on the first day is determined to a large extent by the cultural forces that are present in each individual teaching context.

In my context, I have come to realize that there is a wide cultural gap between myself and my students that must be bridged during the first few classes in order for the students to feel secure and for a productive learning atmosphere to be established.

Although my students have spent a minimum of six years studying English before entering university, they have done so in a way that is very different from my class. In Korea, the educational system remains very formal, regimented and authoritarian. Classrooms are typically large, impersonal spaces, where large classes of forty to sixty students sit in rows facing the board. Methodology is largely teacher centered with the instructor traditionally lecturing from a podium at the front of the room. Because of the rigorous national entrance exams required to enter university, emphasis is placed on memorizing material necessary to pass the test. In most language classes, instruction is still based on the Grammar-Translation teaching method in which students have relatively few opportunities to actually communicate in the language they are learning. As a result, most of my students have an extensive knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, but almost no experience actually speaking English.

Attitudes toward teaching and learning in Korea have been greatly influenced by the doctrines of Confucianism, which pervade all aspects of social interaction in Korean society. According to Confucist ideology, society is arranged hierarchically, like a vertical ladder, with teachers above students. As a result, teachers are highly respected and students must always defer to them. The influence of this hierarchy in the classroom can still be seen to a large extent. Teachers are typically one-way transmitters of information, mostly lecturing from behind a podium at the front of the classroom. Students always bow to teachers and usually speak only when spoken to. When they do speak, students must usually stand up when answering a teacher. Direct

eye contact on the part of the student is considered impolite and, as a result, students always look down when addressing a teacher. As a result of this, Korean students are passive in the classroom setting. They usually keep a low profile and seldom volunteer answers or ask questions for clarification. They are very inhibited and are not used to giving input. (Windle, 2000, pp.6-7)

The cultural gap in my classroom is further complicated by the importance of "*chemyon*" or "face" in Korean social interaction. Saving face is a major element in relating to others, especially in formal relationships, and Koreans try to avoid situations in which self-respect may be lost or embarrassment may result. Korean people go to great lengths to avoid losing face and to help others avoid it in social situations. (Windle, 2000, p.7) As a result, they are generally sensitive to others' feelings and determined to maintain positive feelings. This has an enormous impact in the language classroom because students will often refrain from answering or avoid difficult questions so as to save face. Making mistakes is also a way of losing face. Therefore, anything other than perfection is considered a loss of face in front of ones peers.

In contrast, I conduct my language classes in a manner that is very unfamiliar to my students. My beliefs about teaching and learning lead me to create a language learning environment that is dramatically different from the ones my students experienced in language classes they attended in middle school and high school. My teaching style is learner-centered, and I expect my students to take an active role in my class. They are encouraged to share their ideas, feelings and opinions and are

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invited to give input and feedback about the course on a regular basis. Because I believe students learn best by doing, my approach is largely communicative and my goal is to have every student speak often in every class. I use pair and group work to a large extent and there is a great deal of movement and interaction in my classes. In addition, I believe that making mistakes is an integral part of the language learning process and, therefore, encourage my students to experiment and discover the language through a process of trial and error.

Consequently, when my students arrive in my class on the first day, they are essentially arriving in a foreign land and experience something akin to culture shock in my foreign language classroom. From the very start, an informal atmosphere pervades my classroom. I have the students address me by my first name, I usually sit down in the circle with the students, and I use body language and gestures that are informal and friendly. I behave, interact and react in a way that is completely different from any teacher they have ever had, and I have an entirely different set of expectations of the students than their own culture does. They are in unfamiliar territory and can feel extremely uncomfortable. They may experience feelings of anxiety, confusion and frustration because of the absence of familiar cultural cues. Such feelings cannot help but interfere with the learning at hand. If I am aware of the fact that I may contribute to my learners' anxiety by choosing to teach in the way I do, then I can take steps to bridge the cultural gap that divides us. I can make the students feel comfortable by helping them transition into my class and by explicitly explaining my goals and objectives, classroom policies and teaching procedures to them. I can

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try to alleviate students' uneasiness by empathizing with and respecting their feelings and their culture and giving them to acclimatize. By selecting activities and materials that allow students to explore cultural and educational attitudes and shape classroom norms, I can also promote understanding and empowerment.

In this chapter I have focused on how the first few classes with a new group of students are a critical period in the formation and function of the class and set a tone that will remain for the duration of a course. I have looked at the various sources of learner anxiety and discussed the interpersonal dynamics that are involved in the language learning process.   I have examined how the cultural background of the teacher and the students can influence and interfere with learning.   I have also discussed how the teacher can be instrumental in helping each student perform optimally by being aware of the complex set of dynamics that exists between the learner, the group, the teacher and the culture on the first day. An awareness of these dynamics can help a teacher create a positive classroom climate that enhances students' self-esteem, sense of belonging to the group, and overall academic performance.

Chapter Three

A HOSPITABLE ENVIRONMENT

Hospitality in the classroom requires not only that
we treat our students with civility and compassion but also that we
invite our students and their insights into the conversation.
(Palmer, 1998, p.78)

This chapter presents a framework that outlines the key factors necessary for getting off on the right foot on the first day of a language class. It also offers a number of recommendations and suggested activities to facilitate making the most of the first day.

The previous chapter analyzed the intricate web of intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics that exist in a classroom on the first day. Becoming aware of these dynamics marked a turning point in my professional development, but I soon realized it was only half the journey. Being aware of the personal, intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural relationships that are formed at the beginning of a new class was not enough; as the teacher I now had to impact those relationships and serve learning better. I had to design an approach and practice that would take all the

complex variables that are in play in a new class into account and help me make the most of the first day. The next challenge that lay before me was how to translate my new awareness into action.

While the first day was no longer something to get out of the way before the 'real' learning began, I still had to decide exactly what kind of classroom climate I wanted to create. More than anything else, I knew I wanted to make the first day so much more than it had been in the past. I wanted to make the first day in my class the first day of a positive new learning adventure for my students. I wanted to plan and teach first classes that made students feel secure, fostered community and established a positive learning atmosphere.

In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer writes,

> " . . . so a learning space must be hospitable – inviting
> as well as open, safe and trustworthy as well as free."
>
> (Palmer, 1998, 75)

When I read this quote in Parker Palmer's book, I knew that I had found the direction the next half of my journey would take. A hospitable environment for language learning is exactly what I wanted to create in my classes on the first day. The term "hospitality" has many shades of meaning: "warm," "generous," "sincere and friendly," "having an open-mind," "receptive," "favorable to growth and development," and "stimulating." In all its nuances, the concept of hospitality embraces all that I want to achieve in my class on the first day and everyday. I want students to make themselves at home in my class, to feel they can be themselves, to

feel comfortable taking the risks that are necessary in language learning, and to feel that they are valued and supported.

How does one go about establishing an atmosphere of hospitality in the classroom on the first day? As I looked closely at this question, I realized I needed to design strategies to help me create such an environment at the start of my classes. I developed the strategies discussed in this chapter to help myself better identify and understand what I need to do in my classes to make the most of the first day. These strategies detail the steps I have taken in my own teaching to create a hospitable learning environment and get off on the right foot with a new group of students. I also present a number of adaptable activity ideas that have been helpful to me in preparing for the first day. For me these strategies and the activities suggested below help me to achieve the hospitality I desire to extend to my students on the first day.

My observations and experiences as well as the research I have done have led me to the conclusion that the key factors in creating a hospitable learning environment on the first day are:

- **Anticipate students' uncertainties and resolve them**

- **Establish rapport**

- **Begin community building**

- **Personalize the language**

- **Arrange the room consistent with teaching goals**

- **Establish class routines**

- **Create an atmosphere of success**

- **Model the attitudes and behavior expected**

Anticipate Students' Uncertainties and Resolve Them

Students enter a new class with a multitude of uncertainties and expectations. By being aware of the questions and concerns students have, a teacher can take steps to address them directly. Students want and need to know what is expected of them, so one of the best ways to get off on the right foot is to anticipate your students' uncertainties and plan to resolve them. I believe it is important to make classroom policies, procedures and norms explicit to your students, especially when a cultural gap between the teacher and students is involved. Sharing such a common classroom language provides students with access into the course, thereby reducing learner anxiety and creating a comfortable and effective learning atmosphere.

Since the balance of power rests with the teacher on the first day, I believe it is necessary to make things clear in a way that is friendly and constructive so that students will develop positive feelings about the class and their roles and responsibilities in it. There are many learner-friendly ways to give your students an overview of the course. In my current teaching context, I have found that preparing a *Class Handbook* (see Appendix 1) for my students is a highly effective way to preview my course and make things explicit to my students.

Class Handbook

In the *Class Handbook* I prepare for my students, I include a humorous cartoon I drew of my class, a letter of introduction, a list of suggestions for our learning and an information sheet that covers the class policies, grading system, required texts and my contact information.

Because I believe a teacher should take steps to reduce learner anxiety on the first day, I decided to use a cartoon as the first page of my handbook. The cartoon I drew illustrates a group of students sitting in a new class and the various anxious thoughts that are running through their heads as they listen to a teacher. I chose this particular cartoon because I wanted my students to know that I sympathize with how they may be feeling and that I will try my best to make them feel comfortable in my class. It is also my hope that they will enjoy reading the cartoon, laugh a little and begin to relax.

The *Class Handbook* also includes a letter of introduction I write to the students and a list of suggestions for our learning. I have found the letter of introduction to be the most effective tool I have developed for sharing a common classroom language with my students. In the letter, I try to give students a clear idea of what to expect from my class by explaining not only what we will be doing in the course but also how we will be doing it. It describes my initial expectations for our learning and a description of my teaching style.

In the letter, I particularly try to explain those aspects of my class that my students may not expect or understand because of their cultural background. This letter includes my expectations for learning such as full and active participation for all, learning in community, making mistakes, being accountable and giving feedback. When I first began brainstorming ideas of how to make things explicit to my students, I hadn't originally planned on using such a lengthy written piece. I had thought of using a list of my expectations and a list of "dos" and "don'ts," but they seemed so severe and controlling. I chose the letter because it gives me a chance to explain the things that are important for me to have the students know in a manner that is pleasant and non-threatening. I think the letter and the suggestions for making our class a better place to learn are more encouraging and set a tone for the class that is positive and full of good energy. It is my hope that the students will get a sense of how important it is to me that they understand that their teacher knows them, sees them, speaks to them and takes them into account.

I decided to have all the materials in the handbook translated into Korean and to present the English and Korean side-by-side. Some teachers may object to using the students' first language in English class, but I have found it to be very effective for making important information about the course explicit. If I neglected to do this, I feel the value of the message I am trying to send would be lost. In trying to decipher the content, students would be distracted from the deeper meaning of what I am trying to convey. I want the handbook to be something the students take in and hold throughout the semester, not a document that heightens their anxiety. As I see it, the

letter provides the students with the access and scaffolding they will need to do well in my class. In addition, translating the material into the native tongue gives the students a glimpse into English as well as making the information truly accessible.

I distribute the handout on the first day and give students time to read it quietly. When I can see that most of the students are on the last page, I go through the handbook page-by-page, highlight the important items and answer any questions that students may have. Then we discuss the handout as a class. I encourage the students to keep the handbook in a safe place and refer to it periodically throughout the course.

The *Class Handbook* has been a very useful tool in helping me create the hospitable atmosphere I wish to establish on the first day, but I believe there other equally effective methods of delivering such information to the students. If I did not have a *Class Handbook*, I would be sure to cover the following points on the first day of class:

Goals and objectives of the course: I believe it is necessary to articulate the main purposes and intended outcomes of the course. State your priorities for the course and spell out what students will actually learn or be able to do by the end of the class.

Syllabus: I feel that the syllabus is the conceptual container that supports my course, so it is also important for students to have a clear idea of the shape this container will take. I think it is important that the teacher makes sure to tell students about the schedule of the class and sequence of the lessons. It is important also to provide as much information as you can about the topics, grammar points, language skills or textbook units that will be covered in the class.

Materials required: I feel students also need to know detailed information about the materials that are required for the course. I have found that showing copies of the textbook and letting students know the author, title and publisher information, as well as where the text may be obtained is very effective. It is also important to point out any other materials they will needs such as notebooks, folders, portfolios, dictionaries or cassette tapes.

Major requirements: I believe that it is only fair to warn students of any work that will factor in their final grade at the beginning of the course. Therefore, I feel it is essential to explain in any quizzes, midterm and final exams, assignments, homework or projects you intend to assign. It is also helpful to provide students with a breakdown of the percentages in the final grade.

Classroom policy and conduct: Norms and policies need to be explicit for students to feel secure and comfortable. Explaining how I will deal with such issues as attendance, tardiness, missing work and class misbehavior on the first day has helped both me and my students get off on the right foot with each other. I feel it is important to present such policies with fairness and objectivity so that the students will get a positive feeling.

Teaching style and expectations for learning: Because of the cultural gap that exists between me and my students, I like to give them an overview of what I expect from them and how I will conduct my classes.

Sharing a Common Classroom Language

Another way to make things explicit in the first few days is to actively explore classroom policies and norms together with your students as part of the lesson. I feel that consciously discussing and formulating the norms operating in the group gives students a voice in classroom decisions. It is empowering and motivating for students to share responsibility for making up the rules of the class and helps them to regulate their own behavior.

I have found that there are several wonderful activities that a teacher can prepare to share classroom norms, policies, expectations and values with students. The activity **Norms Clarification** (see Appendix 2.1) is a wonderful way to discuss and establish important classroom norms, policies and regulations in a learner-centered way. It allows students to take an active role in shaping an effective learning environment and makes them accountable for their own actions and learning. The activity **Values Exploration** (see Appendix 2.2) provides the teacher with valuable insight into the students' feelings and attitudes toward the class, the target language and culture, and learning in general. It also helps them to share with each other. Activities such as **Teacher-Student Responsibilities** (see Appendix 2.3) and **What Makes a Good Teacher?** (see Appendix 2.4) are also excellent for clarifying classroom roles and expectations. I find this activity particularly helpful in my teaching context where students do have very different classroom expectations from my own.

Establish Rapport

When I first started teaching, I remember one of my more experienced colleagues advising me never to smile on the first day. Now that I am aware of what is at stake on the first day, I disagree with this philosophy of trying to assert control by being strict. To learn a foreign language effectively, most students need to experience the classroom as a place where they can be themselves and feel safe taking risks. In operating from a position of dominance and authority on the first day, laying down the 'law of the land', so to speak, I am often achieving exactly the opposite results with my students than I was hoping for. I have learned that I am much more successful in achieving my classroom aims when I try to establish a good rapport with my students. Therefore, I feel that it is important to create the foundations of mutual respect and trust in the classroom as early as possible. Doing this will make students feel comfortable and will also encourage them to respect and trust each other.

I believe it is the teacher's responsibility to take the first step in creating a hospitable and secure and trusting learning environment. As Ehrman and Dornyei write, "The balance of power usually is on the teacher's side, which means that the initial responsibility for establishing an atmosphere of unconditional positive regard belongs to the teacher." (Ehrman and Dornyei, 1998, p.46) To achieve this on the first day, I strive to be warm, genuine, empathetic and enthusiastic about meeting my students. I also endeavor to share my personal background and interests with my students.

For me, having a good rapport with students and establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust means that I must establish personal connections between the students and myself as soon as possible. To establish a personal relationship, there is a need to exchange basic information about each other. If I want students to share their hopes, dreams, wishes and beliefs with me and with one another in class, I believe that I must set the example on the first day by sharing mine with them. There are a number of effective ways to do this: *Self-Introductions*, *Name Games, Identification Cards*, and a *Student Letter of Introduction*.

Self-Introduction

I believe the first impression students get of the teacher plays a determining role in how they will feel about the course. A teacher's early behavior is influential and sends important cues to learners that have immediate effect on the group's atmosphere. Students "perceptions of the leader as enthusiastic, personable, psychologically present and open person who has faith in the group is crucial." (Ehrman and Dornyei, 1998, p.172) Therefore, it is my goal to be myself and let the students meet me as a person and not only in the role of teacher on the first day.

I believe that how I initially introduce myself at the start of the first class will determine how my students view me. On the first day, I always make it a point to introduce myself as a person first before explaining the course preview or taking care of other first day items of business. Because most of my students are very interested in foreigners, I always begin with a self-introduction in which I offer personal

information and anecdotes about myself. Activities such as ***What's the Truth?*** (see Appendix 3.1) and ***What's the Question? What's The Answer?*** (see Appendix 3.2) are perfect ways to do this.

I try to come across as friendly, approachable, open to and interested in the students as individuals, enthusiastic about what I do. I also try to be aware of my position in the room, as well as my body language, hand gestures and facial expressions, so that I do not convey any unintended messages to my students.

Name Games

The most effective and direct way to create a personal connection and establish a good rapport with students is to recognize them as individuals. Therefore, I believe it is critical for the teacher to make the time and effort to learn everyone's name. Names are a very powerful learning tool. They carry tremendous personal meaning for each individual and are a great way to get students talking. Being able to call students by name lowers a student's affect and raises their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth.

I believe that name games are very important and that the teacher should set aside time in the first few classes to devote to learning names. I use activities such as ***Name Chain*** (see Appendix 3.3), ***Name Echo*** (see Appendix 3.4) and ***The Story of My Name*** (see Appendix 3.5) for learning students' names. I have found, however, that using such activities once on the first day is not enough. Even if you spend some time having students introduce themselves at the start of the course, they will often not

be able to remember each other's names in subsequent classes. Therefore, it is

important to use name game activities several times in the first few classes.

Identification Cards

In my context, learning every student's name is an extreme challenge as I have

on average 250-300 students pass through my classroom each week. The benefits of

being able to call each student by name, however, are well worth the effort it takes to

do so. My memory is no better than the next person's is, but I find that using

Identification Cards (see Appendix 3.6) does the trick. With the help of these cards, I

am usually able to remember most of my students' names after two or three classes.

On the first day of class I have students make personal identification cards as an initial

class exercise. These are regular index cards that I hand out to the students and have

them fill in with basic information about themselves as an initial class exercise.

The process of filling out the cards can be a valuable language learning lesson

in itself. I try to conduct the card preparation session in such a way that the students

will think, act and contribute to the class in a learner-centered way. Using the cards as

a follow up to my self-introduction or in combination with activities such as *What's*

the Truth? or *What's the Question? What's the Answer?* can make it a fun learning

challenge. I find the following items as being appropriate information entries:

Photo: I have students provide and attach a small passport photo to their ID card.

This helps me to have a clear visual connection between the face and information

contained on the card. In Korea, students need multiple copies of such photos for

school registration and will usually have them on hand. I bring in several pairs of scissors and bottles of glue to pass around the class as students are filling out the cards. Those students who do not have a photo on the first day are asked to bring one in for the next class.

Name: I explain the proper order of first name and family name when writing English. I also have students write their name in Korean as well as their nickname if they have one.

Personal information: I usually have my students write their age, hometown, major, student number and telephone number because this is the information that aids me most in my context, but other items such as date of birth, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and favorites could also be included. If I were to have my students include their home addresses, I would teach them to write them in the standard English format – name, house number, street, city, state or province, country and zip code.

Message to the Instructor: On the back of the index cards, I have students write a message to me. With lower level students I usually give some prompts such as "I like/dislike . . ." "My favorite _____ is . . ." or "I would like to study . . . ." With more advanced classes, I let the students express themselves freely. These messages help me to get to know the students better and also help me to do an initial assessment. By having the students provide a writing sample, I can get a good idea of their level of proficiency, their confidence using English and their language learning needs.

At the end of the first class I collect the completed cards and use them as a constant reference throughout the semester. Before each class I usually go through the cards and briefly review the information they contain. Doing so helps tremendously with the recollection of names and faces. Oftentimes I will use the cards to make personal comments in class. I also use the cards to record students' attendance, exam scores, homework, notebook checks and participation grades.

Making an effort to learn each individual student's name has had a tremendous impact on my classes. I have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from my students about this. Even when I have not gotten everyone's name right all of the time, students have told me they appreciate my effort to get to know everyone. They feel a warmth and friendliness from and towards me and between others in the class. They feel comfortable and reaffirmed and they tell me that it is totally different from their other university courses where their student numbers usually identifies them.

Student Letter of Introduction

In the first few classes, I will often have students write me a letter of introduction. This can be done as homework or as an in-class assignment where the teacher and students both write a short paragraph about themselves to share with the class. I find that such letter writing activities can provide me with valuable information about the students' personalities, interests, needs, beliefs about learning, and expectations and goals for the course. They can also be a good way for me to

assess the students' proficiency level and language learning needs. In addition, a

letter can be designed in such a way that it has a specific focus for a specific class

such as a case history of their background in writing for a composition class.

Begin community building

The teacher can take positive steps to direct group processes and encourage the

formation of a productive and cohesive classroom group on the first day. To nurture a

strong learning community, I try to spend time consciously on group processes and

promoting peer relations in the first few classes. I believe that a strong group identity

and sense of belonging can reduce learner anxiety, encourage cooperation, and create

a positive, supportive atmosphere that facilitates learning. It can make learning and

teaching a rewarding and unforgettable experience for everyone involved.

I believe that student-student interaction is the foundation of community

because group cohesiveness occurs when members are interested in each other and

feel that they have something in common. By sharing information, ideas and opinions

with partners, students get to know each other and develop bonds of trust and mutual

respect for each other. Therefore, I feel that learners need space to themselves and to

share their ideas from one student to another without teacher intervention in the first

few classes. I believe that it is important to do this before diving into the material on

course syllabus or before giving students linguistic or academic challenges. I try to

set aside the first few classes for only community building and leave performance and evaluation out of them.

I have discovered a number of effective activities that make it fun and easy for the teacher to begin building community in a new class. Activities such as *Line-Ups* (see Appendix 4.1), *Center Circle* (see Appendix 4.2), and *Odd Man In* (see Appendix 4.3) are excellent ways to warm up new groups and provide opportunities for students to interact and cooperate together. Activities such as *Personality Introductions* (see Appendix 4.4) and *Two-Minute Conversations* (see Appendix 4.5) are wonderful ways to help students become acquainted and to share personal information. Preparing any of these activities for the first few classes will successfully foster student-student interaction, stimulate students' curiosity about their fellow classmates and lay the foundations of a strong learning community.

Personalize the Language

I believe that the student-student interaction that strengthens community must be meaningful and real. By this I mean that activities have to go beyond simply exchanging target language and data as in a typical information gap activity. Students need to personally invest in what they are learning, so I feel it is important to relate language to the students' lives and personalize the content. As Palmer says, "the good host is not merely polite, the good host assumes that the guest has stories to tell." Therefore, I try to invite students to share themselves, respect their stories and utilizing them in our learning.

My goal is to get students to use the target language to describe themselves as much as possible. Whenever I have the chance, I shift the focus of my lessons away from the textbook material to the students themselves. Even on the first day, I design and adapt activities to get students talking about themselves. I am amazed at most textbook approaches that have students introducing fictional, two-dimensional characters to each other on the first day. In my teaching context, even though I often teach classes sectioned according to major and will have groups of students who attend the same classes all semester, I am surprised at how little the students will know about each other. They may know one or two of their close friends well, but may not know the names of many of the people they sit and study with on a daily basis. In light of this situation, there seems to be no need for fictional textbook characters to introduce and become acquainted with on the first day. We have plenty of acquainting to do on our own.

I believe that activities that invite students to draw on their personal experiences, talk about themselves, and share their feelings, ideas and opinions are critical if a learning community is to evolve at the start of a new course. Activities such as *What's the Truth* (see Appendix 3), *What's the Question? What's the Answer?* (see Appendix 3), *Multi-Introductions* (see Appendix 5.1) and *Tag Exchanges* (see Appendix 5.2) are great ways to help students become better acquainted and learn about classmates' interests. Activities such as *Personal Timelines* (see Appendix 5.3), *Favorite Times* (see Appendix 5.4) and *Tell Me Three Things* (see Appendix 5.5) encourage the sharing of personal experiences and

preferences and allow students to discover similarities with one another. The

activities *What Kind Of Language Learner Are You?* (see Appendix 5.6) *How Do*

You Like To Learn? (see Appendix 5.7) provide students with the opportunity to

share their personal feelings about language learning and lower their anxiety by

helping them realize that others have similar concerns as their own.

Arrange the room consistent with your goals

Realizing the impact that seating arrangements can have on classroom

dynamics was one of the simplest, yet most profound lessons, that came to me on this

journey. Rearranging furniture and space seems like such a small thing, but the

implications for learning, learner security, group development, and teacher awareness

are dramatic.

The physical environment of the classroom can create a feeling of intimacy or

distance between the teacher and the students on the first day. Ehrman and Dornyei

state that, "spatial arrangements exert significant influences on the perception of

status, patterns of participation, leadership activities and affective reactions of group

members." (Ehrman and Dornyei, 1998, p.91) Therefore, I believe it is necessary for

the teacher to attend to the physical conditions in the classroom on the first day.

In my context I travel to many different classrooms in the course of a week, so

the institutional constraints on the physical space are very limiting. Although I have

little control over the arrangement and decoration of the rooms, I believe that even a

small change is better than none at all. I try to view the class as a working group and make sure that the chairs, the tables and the floor space should serve our particular work needs. I strive to create a classroom where the focus is on shared communication and interaction, not lecturing, on the first day. My lesson plan on the first day typically requires that all the students discuss or plan something together, so to serve our learning I usually opt for a circular, horseshoe or rectangular arrangement of chairs and tables. I prefer a circle or horseshoe because I like the way it has an inward focus and helps the students concentrate on each other. From a circle or horseshoe arrangement, pairs and small groups can be easily set up for a good flow of communication and I can choose to sit or stand.

On the first day I endeavor to have the classroom already set up before students start arriving. I have the chairs arranged in the horseshoe and any visuals I want to use up on the board. On the board are also our agenda for the class period and any other material I need for the lesson. Sometimes I play background music as the students are entering the classroom and settling down. As students sit down, I gently encourage them to make a more conscious entry into English by leaving bags and other items outside as well as to turn off cell phones. On the first day I also try to discuss room set-up with students and ask them to help getting the room ready before class.

Establish class routines

I believe that the way my students experience my class on the first day will set their expectations for subsequent lessons, so I believe it is necessary to introduce class routines from the beginning. "Procedural classroom activities and methods can be a source of anxiety for students especially if their cultural expectations differ greatly form those of the instructor's." (Horowitz and Young, 1991, p.143) Therefore, I strive to conduct my class on the first day the way I will throughout the course.

One of the most important things I have learned from my experiences is that having authority in the classroom does not mean being authoritarian. By establishing clear classroom rituals, I can create the kind of atmosphere I desire without ever raising my voice, being stern or handing down a list of dos and don'ts. I introduce students to a number of classroom rituals on the first day including starting class, taking attendance, warming up, transitioning between activities, getting students attention and ending class. I feel these rituals and routines are an important part of shaping the learning space and providing a secure environment.

To make the atmosphere in my classroom more conducive to learning, I try to be aware of how I begin each class. From the first day I designate the start of each class as a time where the students and I gather our collective forces and come together as a group, as well as a time when I notice and connect with each student.
One way I do this is to begin each class by taking attendance using the *Identification Cards*. While calling out each student's name, I make a point to make eye contact

with each student and greet him or her. I also like to use group warm-up activities to get my classes off to an energetic start. Warm up activities are perfect techniques for bringing individuals together to work and getting the group energy flowing. They give students a chance to ease into my class by helping students to relax and getting people to become aware of each other.

Create an atmosphere of success

I believe that it is imperative to create an atmosphere of success in the first few lessons with a new class. Doing so allows students to experience competence in the language classroom, thereby reducing learner anxiety and creating a sense of security and making students feel confident in their abilities.

An atmosphere of success can be achieved in a number of ways. I feel the best way to do this is to plan doable activities that students can complete with success. By "doable" I mean activities that are appropriate to the students' level of language ability. For the first day I design activities that use language and topics I anticipate my students will already be familiar with. By choosing an activity that is exciting and challenging in and of itself, such as *Line Ups*, *Center Circle*, *Odd Man In* or *Two-Minute Conversations,* and pairing that activity with vocabulary and grammar structures well within the students' zones of proximal development students can experience linguistic competence. By allowing them to experience using the language competently, it stimulates self-confidence and positive self-esteem. It also gives the students a taste of the learning challenge they will be encountering later on in the

course and previews how I will be teaching. In addition, I believe that first day activities must also have directions that are clear and easy-to-follow. Whenever possible, I try to demonstrate the activity instead of explaining it with teacher talk.

I believe it is incredibly important to make the first day learning time, not performance time. Because of the importance that student affect plays in language learning, I feel that at the beginning of a new class it is necessary to create an atmosphere of safety and encouragement where students can take risks with the language without feeling embarrassed. Usually in the first few classes, I try to focus more on the student's message rather than on the accuracy of their statements. I strive to be aware of how and when I correct mistakes. I do correct students on the first day if it is absolutely necessary because I want my students to feel confident that I am there to help them learn. However, I try to do so in a way that is non-threatening and does not add to an individual student's stress by not singling individual students out. I also help students develop realistic expectations of themselves so that they know that they are not supposed to be fluent or have perfect pronunciation.

Model the Attitudes and Behaviors You Expect

The personal presence of the teacher can have a profound effect on the procedural and interpersonal norms that become established on the first day. (Ehrman and Dornyei, 1998, p.173) My attitudes and actions will shape my students' understanding about what is acceptable behavior in my classroom. Because a

teacher's attitude is infectious; I try to model the attitudes and behavior I expect from the students on the first day.

The routines and regulations I practice, as well as the materials and activities I select, the rhythm and pace of activities I set and the overall aesthetics of the classroom I create can establish important precedents for procedural norms on the first day. By arriving on time, being organized and prepared to teach and feeling enthusiastic I can also set examples I want the students to follow.

I believe that how learners treat each other in class is just as important as the details of my lesson, so I also try to set the example for interpersonal norms in my classroom on the first day. By being aware of the quality of my interpersonal relations with the students I can directly influence they way the will act and interact with one another. Paying careful attention to how I behave towards the students means that I am aware of quality of my speaking when I address the students, my tone of voice and the language I use. I also take care to be aware of the quality of my listening. I try not to cut them students off, interrupt them, or talk when someone else is speaking. I also try to listen not only to the language produced by the students, but also to the person behind that language. Additionally, the manner in which I react to their questions or confusion and correct their mistakes is also important.

Learners get important cues both from what I do and what I do not do on the first day. Therefore, I also try to be aware of the non-verbal messages I send my students on the first day. Because my students will pick up on my implicit signals as much as on my explicit ones, I try to make sure I do not send the wrong signals. I pay

careful attention to my energy level, my appearance, my body language and gestures, my facial expressions, and my movement and position in the room.

In this chapter I have presented strategies that outline what I feel are the key factors necessary for creating a hospitable learning environment on the first day. I have also suggested different activities to explore these various factors in the classroom. By anticipating my students' uncertainties on the first day and taking steps to resolve them, I am able to provide students with entry into my course and make them feel less anxious and more secure.   By establishing a positive rapport with my students, I can lay the foundations of mutual respect and trust and begin creating a classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable taking risks. By fostering a sense of community, I give my students the opportunity to create a warm and positive group feeling and promote a supportive atmosphere that facilitates learning. In personalizing the language my students use in the classroom, I am able to help students personally invest in what they are doing and make their learning more meaningful. By arranging the classroom consistent with my learning goals, I can establish an intimate environment and foster a cohesive group dynamic. By familiarizing my students with class routines on the first day, I am able to provide a secure learning environment. By striving to create an atmosphere of success, I allow my students to experience competence with the language and foster positive feelings of self-worth in my learners. In modeling the attitudes and behaviors I expect, it is possible for me to create a classroom climate that is encouraging, positive and accepting.

Chapter Four

CONCLUSIONS

I began this inquiry because of my reaction to certain challenges I faced in my classroom. These challenges led me to investigate the complex web of personal, intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural dynamics that exists in a language classroom at the start of a new class and to look closely at how I prepare and approach for the first day. In doing so, I have considered the importance of learner affect in the classroom and examined the profound influence that group dynamics play in language learning and how the first few meetings of a new class can shape the direction these dynamics take. I have also researched the leadership role the teacher assumes in the classroom on the first day and how that role can impact learner's beliefs and feelings about learning as well as influence group processes. Finally, I have looked closely at the role that culture plays in impacting what happens in a classroom on the first day.

My research has led me to the conclusion that the student, group, teacher and culture are key variables that determine not only how the first day turns out, but also how it can be planned advantageously. A teacher's awareness of what is at stake in

the first few classes and careful attention to such dynamics can dramatically influence the outcome of the course and the growth of the students. With insight, forethought and planning a teacher can reduce learner anxiety, develop a cohesive, well-balanced group and establish conditions for optimal learning. Time invested preparing for the first few classes is time well spent as the teacher and the students will continue to reap the benefits of preparation throughout the duration of the course. As the say in Korean, "시 작 이 반 이 다," well begun is half done.

When I began the work presented in this paper I was determined to get off on the right foot in my classes on the first day. It is an ongoing process, one that is constantly evolving. Beginnings come twice a year in my line of work as a university English instructor. It has now been four cycles of beginnings since I completed my practicum. Although the journey continues, I can definitely see that the changes I have implemented with regards to how I start my courses have had a profound effect on my teaching.

I have come to believe in the strategies presented here because they have boosted my students' confidence and willingness to participate. They have also helped some students overcome negative feelings and attitudes they had from previous language learning experiences. My students are now able to work with less fear of facing challenges and taking risks than before. My approach to the first day has also enhanced the learning that takes place in my class because it helps my students understand that my teaching style and methodologies are chosen not to make them feel uncomfortable, but because I believe they are effective and maximize our learning

time. This understanding has helped my students to trust me more and has enabled me to forge a learning alliance with them. As a result, students feel added warmth toward themselves, towards each other, toward the teacher and toward the foreign language class itself.   It has revolutionized not only what my students and I do in the classroom on the first day, but also what we do in the classroom everyday.

The guidelines and activities presented here are based on my assertion that the teacher needs to be an effective leader at the outset of a new course. While I definitely believe that this is true, in the future I would like to search for more ways to share power with my students from the start. I would like to explore methods and activities that actively encourage student leadership and autonomy and further level the power imbalance between my students and I. Working together to negotiate syllabus topics, evaluative norms and assessment criteria would further empower my students and develop stronger group cohesiveness.

The strategies detailed in this paper are a personal account of how I have tried to prepare for the start of a new course based on my individual experience, reflection, teaching style and philosophy of education. While I believe these guidelines and activities can be adapted to any teaching context, I feel it is necessary to emphasize the importance of each teacher discovering what works for her and what fits her personal goals, teaching style and philosophy. I would suggest other teachers interested in getting off on the right foot on the first day begin by making a "wish list" of things they would like to change in their classes. Contemplating the final destination one would like to arrive at can shed light on the best point from which to

start. By better understanding what the actual classroom situation is, most teachers can take steps to turn their wish lists into reality.

I would also suggest that teachers reflect on their emotional reactions to their own language learning experiences. This can help to develop a genuine understanding of the learner's situation on the first day. Taking an honest look at oneself as a teacher is also important. It is only through understanding and accepting "who we are" when we teach that we can truly actualize change in the classroom

Some of the ideas presented here may seem obvious to others with teaching experience others may not. When I began this journey, these ideas were not obvious to me at all. I present them all here in their entirety, obvious or not, because they represent the various steps I have taken on this journey of personal and professional development. It was a journey that took me to places within myself and my teaching that I had never imagined. It set me off in a new direction and caused me to re-evaluate, not only how I approach the first day of a new class, but also how I teach in general. The journey I have been on continues to inspire me to dig deeper and become more aware and I hope it inspires others as well. I hope that the information contained in these pages will also help other to get off on the right foot.

Appendix 1
Class Handbook

Appendix 2
Activities for
Sharing a Common Classroom Language

2.1   Norms Clarification

Purpose: To promote a feeling of interaction and cooperation in a new group
To provide students with an opportunity to responsibly create classroom rules.

Materials: Board, newsprint, and markers

Procedure: 1) The teacher presents the idea of norms as 'shared feelings' to the class.
2) Each student writes examples of possible norms on pieces of paper. Allow 10 minutes.
3) Then the students share their ideas in small groups of 4-5 students and make a group chart on a piece of newsprint that represents the consensus of the group.
4) Each group posts their chart and the students circulate and discuss the various items listed.
5) The students then decide which norms they would like to adopt for the class and make a master chart.
5) As an ongoing activity, the teacher and students look at the chart each week and make changes.

_____

2.2   Attitudes Exploration

Purpose: To share attitudes and beliefs in a non-threatening manner
To allow students to discover similarities between themselves and others.

Materials: Newsprint, markers

Procedure: 1) Divide the class into groups of 4-6 students.
2) The teacher hands out a piece of newsprint with a term like "*teacher*," "*student*," "*America*," "*English*," "*homework*" written in the center to each group.
3) Each group discusses their term and makes a mind map of the ideas they associate with it. Allow 10-15 minutes.
4) After the groups have finished, display the mind maps around the room and discuss the classes feelings and attitudes to each of the terms.

_____

2.3   Teacher and Student Responsibilities

Purpose: To share attitudes and beliefs in a non-threatening manner.
               To discuss and define the roles of students and teachers

Materials: Board, paper

Procedure: 1) The teacher and the students individually list what they think are the
               responsibilities of teachers and of students.
               2) After everyone is finished writing, the teacher elicits suggestions
               from the students and makes a master list of responses on sheets of
               paper or on the board, one for the teacher, one for students.
               3) The teacher then reads the role descriptions and the students discuss
               their responses, agreements and disagreements.
               4) Finally the class decides what roles they would like the teacher and
               students to adopt for the duration of the course.

_____

2.1   What Makes a Good Teacher?

Purpose: To discuss and define the roles of students and teachers

Materials: List of positive adjectives to describe teachers, board

Procedure: 1) The teacher writes the word "teacher" on the board and ask the
               students to volunteer any words they think about in connection with
               teachers. Don't write them down at this stage.
               2) Now divide the board into two, and write two headings – good on
               left side, and bad on the right. Elicit any words or phrases that students
               associate with good or bad teachers, and write a few on each side.
               3) Give the students the list of positive adjectives that could be used to
               describe a well-liked teacher. Ask them to work individually and to
               circle at least five adjectives that they could apply to a past teacher they
               really enjoyed learning with. They may add any adjectives they feel
               are missing.
               4) In pairs, allow time for the students to tell each other which
               adjectives they circled and to talk about their well-liked teacher.
               5) Finally, ask the students to choose the one adjective they consider to
               be essential in a good teacher, and finish it off with a round starting
               with *"I think a good teacher has to be . . ."*

Variation: Repeat the activity for bad teachers. Learners could also choose five adjectives and incorporate them into a piece of writing describing the teacher and why they did/didn't like him or her.

_____

Appendix 3
Activities for Establishing Rapport

3.1   What's the Truth?

Purpose: To help students get acquainted with each other and the teacher.
            To stimulate curiosity about each other.

Materials: Board, slips of paper

Procedure: 1) The teacher lists five statements about herself on the board, two
            statements that are false and three statements that are true. For
            example:
>   *I love to cook and eat Italian food.*
>   *I can speak three languages: English, Russian and French.*
>   *I am married and have two children*
>   *I love to do yoga and go hiking.*
>   *I have lived and worked in Korea for 2 years.*

2) The teacher tells the students that some of these statements are true
while others are false. The teacher then reads each one aloud to the
class and records the students' votes as to whether it is true or false.
3) Next, the teacher reveals the three true statements and asks the class
which ones they would like to know more about. The students ask
questions and the teacher spends a few minutes talking about herself.
4) Now the students play the game. On a sheet of paper each student
writes two false statements and three true statements about themselves.
Allow 5-10 minutes
5) After the students have finished writing put them in pairs and have
the students play the guessing game with each other. After the true
sentences have been revealed students must choose one sentence or
topic to elaborate on. Allow 10 minutes per person.
6) Have students take turns introducing their partner to the rest of the
class and telling one true interesting fact about their partner.

_____

3.2   What's the Question? What's the Answer?

Purpose: To become acquainted with each other.

Materials: Board

Procedure: 1) The teacher lists several cues about herself on the board. For
              example:

                                33
                                Chicago
                                Yoga
                                Purple
                                February 11th

              2) The teacher then uses the cues to elicit the appropriate introduction
              questions and answers from the class.
              3) In pairs, the students then take turns asking and answering the
              questions substituting personal information.
              4) If time permits, students can change partners several times
              or introduce their partner to another group.

Variation: The teacher lists cues that match the information he or she would
              like the students to write on their Student Identification cards. As a
              follow up, students then fill out their individual cards.
_____

3.3   Name Chain

Purpose: To warm up a new group of students.
              To help students learn each other's names and get acquainted with each
              other.

Procedure: 1) The students form a circle. Have everyone say his or her name once.
              2) The teacher begins by saying his or her name and why he or she
              likes it. For example*:*

                  "My name is _____ and I like my name because..."

              3) Each student takes a turn saying his or her name and reason after
              reciting all the previous names and reasons first.

Variation: Favorite foods, colors or hobbies can be attached to the name.
_____

3.4   Name Echo (adapted from *New Games for the Whole Family*)

Purpose: To warm up a new group of students.
              To help students learn each other's names and get acquainted with each
              other.

Procedure: 1) The students form a circle.
2) Each student takes a turn saying his or her name and making a sound or movement that suits his or her name.
3) Others students simultaneously duplicate or echo the sound or motion of that student.
4) Continue around the circle until everyone has had a turn.

Variation: 1) The teacher or another students starts by saying someone else's name with a motion or sound.
2) One student at a time repeats the name and sound or motion until it reaches the chosen person. That student begins the cycle again with someone else's name.

_____

3.5   The Story of My Name

Purpose: To become familiar with the names of classmates.
To draw pairs of students closer together.
To recognize similarities in the naming traditions of various cultures

Materials: Board, newsprint, markers or colored pencils

Procedure: 1) The teacher writes the heading *"My Name"* on the board and introduces the theme of names.
2) In a circle each student writes his or her name on a piece of newsprint and takes a turn saying their name out loud.
3) The teacher elicits associations around the theme from the students and organizes them on the board as a mind map. For example: *spelling, sound, meaning, personal feelings, family history, Chinese characters, and nicknames*, etc.
4) Using a family picture, the teacher then shares the story of his or her name. For example:

> *My name has special meaning for me because*
> *I am named after my grandmother. My first name, Stephanie,*
> *is the female version of the name Stephen which means in*
> *"the crowned one" in the bible. My family name, Downey,*
> *is Irish. My name has a lot of letters - 26 in total – so when*
> *I was a little girl I thought it was very long and hard to write.*
> *I think the way my name sounds in English sounds beautiful.*
> *My close friends and family call me by my nicknames – Steph*
> *or Stephie.*

5) Have the students work in pairs to retell the story of their teacher's name once. Then have the students retell the story again together as a class.
6) Next have the students return to their written name and think about the story of their own names. The students then draw a visual of the story of their name on the other side of the paper.
7) When they are finished have the students share the story of their name with a partner.
8) When both partners have spoken, have the students introduce their partner and the story if his or her name to the class.

Variation: Have the students write a short paragraph explaining the stories of their names instead of drawing a visual.
_____

3.6 Identification Cards

Appendix 4
Activities for Community Building

4. 1   Line Ups

Purpose: To exchange and compare personal information.

Materials: List of questions

Procedure: 1) The teacher calls out a question. For example,

> *When is your birthday?*
> *How many hours a day do you commute?*
> *What time do you usually get up in the morning?*
> *How many people are in your family?*

2) The students line up in the correct order according to the calendar, clock, or lowest to highest number, etc. by asking classmates the necessary question to determine their position in the line-up.
3) When the students have organized themselves in the correct order, have each one introduce themself and tell their answer.
4) Repeat several times with various categories.
5) Then ask the students to reflect on the composition of the class and their position in it and discuss it with a partner.

_____

4.2   Center Circle

Purpose: To become better acquainted with classmates.
                  To share common events in students' lives.

Procedure: 1) Have the students stand in a circle.
                  2) The teacher reads out a question. For example:
> *Who likes classical music?*
> *Who likes to play tennis?*
> *Who has more than two brothers?*
> *Who has traveled to another country?*
> *Who knows how to play a musical instrument?*

3) If the students can answer "yes" to a particular question, they should step into the center of the circle and give details about their answer.
4) After the students in the center have finished answering, have them step back into the larger circle.
5) Repeat several times with different questions.

_____

4.3   Odd Man In

Purpose: To warm up a new group of students.
              To develop a feeling of camaraderie.
              To discover similarities among classmates.

Procedure: 1) Have the students arrange their chairs in a circle with the teacher
              standing in the center.
              2) Ask the students to remember what they did yesterday.
              3) The teacher calls out an activity and the students change seats if they
              did that activity the day before. For example:
                   "If you listened to music yesterday, change seats."
              4) The teacher sits down in one of the seats while the students are
              changing places, leaving one student standing in the middle.
              5) The student standing in the middle then calls out an activity and the
              students change seats again.
              6) Repeat several times with a new person left in the middle each time.

Variation: Ask the students to remember what they did last weekend, last month,
              during summer vacation, in elementary school etc.

_____

4.4   Personality Introduction

Purpose: To become better acquainted with members of a group.
              To develop an atmosphere conducive to group interaction.

Materials: Board, A4 paper

Procedure: 1) Write the following words on the board and ask learners to think
              about themselves in terms of these categories:

              family   future plans   background
              hobbies   likes   dislikes

              2) Demonstrate by using these categories to tell the class something
              about yourself. For example:
                   My name is Stephanie and I am from Boston. I
                   have been married for four months and I have no children.
                   I have been living and working in Korea for six years and
                   am studying Korean in my spare time. My hobbies are
                   yoga, swimming and skiing. This year I am going to learn
                   how to scuba dive, and my husband and I hope to
                   take a vacation to Hawaii in the winter.

3) At the end of your introduction, allow the class time to ask you questions about anything you've said.
4) Put the students in pairs. Give A's two minutes to tell B's as much information as possible about themselves using the categories on the board as a guide. After two minutes, B's have the chance to ask A's any questions. Then have the pairs exchange roles.
5) When both partners have spoken, give each learner an A4-size piece of paper. They should write their partner's name at the top and then the main points of what their partner has said.
6) Next have the students mingle and find out as much as they can about other classmates. Allow 15 minutes. While the students mingle display the partner descriptions around the room with the names folded back.
7) Ask the students to then try and identify the person from the descriptions. They can write their guesses at the bottom of the paper.
8) Finally fold back the name a reveal the person's identity.

_____

4.5   Two Minute Conversations

Purpose: To get students to mix with one another.
                To facilitate becoming acquainted.

Materials: Question handout (see below)

Procedure: 1) Divide the class into two equal groups of A's and B's.
                2) Arrange the chairs in a double circle with the outer circle facing inwards and the inner circle facing outwards so that each student in the inner circle is facing a student in the outer circle.
                3) Distribute the conversation sheet (see Appendix) and explain that students will have two minutes to discuss the first conversation with their partner.
                4) After two minutes is up students change partners and ask the questions in conversation #2 with their new partner.
                5) Continue until all the conversations have been practiced.

_____

Activity 4.5   Two-Minute Conversations

Two-Minute Conversations

Conversation #1
1. Hi! What's your name? My name is _____.
2. How do you spell your name?
3. I'm from _____. Where are you from?
4. How old are you? When is your birthday?
5. What are your hobbies?

Conversation #2
1. What kinds of movies do you like?
2. How often do you see a movie?
3. Who's your favorite actor/actress?
4. When do you usually watch TV?
5. What's your favorite television show?
        What time is it on?

Conversation #3
1. What do you usually do after class?
2. What are three things you usually do everyday?
3. What time do you usually study English?
4. How often do you use a computer?
5. What's your favorite computer game?
6. Do you play any sports? How often do you play?

Conversation #4
1. How many people are there in your family?
2. Tell me about your parents. What do they do?
3. Do you have any brothers and sisters?
4. What is your brother /sister doing these days?
5. How many cousins do you have?
6. Do you have any nieces and nephews?

Conversation #5
1. When were you born? Where were you born?
2. Where did you go to high school? When did
        you graduate?
3. What's your major? How do you like your major?
4. Do you have a girlfriend /boyfriend? When did
        you fall in love?

Appendix 5
Activities for Personalizing the Language

5.1   Multi-Introductions (adapted from *Personalizing Language Learning*)

Purpose: To get students to mix with one another.
             To help students become better acquainted.
             To learn about classmates interests.

Materials: Board, slips of paper

Procedure: 1) Write the following headings on the board:
     Name   Favorite Food   Hobby   Extra Information
             2) Write in information about yourself beside each heading.

             Name: Stephanie
             Favorite Food: Pizza
             Hobby: Swimming
             Extra Information: Got married this year

             3) Ask the students to do the same on slips of paper. Explain that
             'extra information' can include anything they would like to share with
             other people, for example, favorite color, etc. Elicit other possible
             ideas from the students.
             4) Ask one student to introduce you to the class as if he or she didn't
             know you at all. For example:
             I'd like to introduce Stephanie. She likes to eat
             pizza and enjoys swimming. She recently got married
             earlier this year.
             5) Divide the class into A's and B's. A's are going to introduce their
             partner to someone else. B's are going to give their slip of paper to A's
             to use as a cue.
             6) In pairs, they approach another pair and A's introduce their partners.
             When both A's have spoken, they exchange papers and partners and
             introduce their new partner to another pair. At the end of this, they
             exchange papers and partners and repeat again. Have the students
             continue several more times.
             7) After 5-10 minutes, have A's and B's exchange roles.
             At the end of this activity, collect the slips of paper and read out the
             extra information. Challenge the class to remember who the student is.
_____

5.2   Tag Exchanges

Purpose: To learn more about classmates.
             To build a cohesive group.

Materials: Name tags

Procedure: 1) Give the students name tags and ask then to print their names and
               put them on.
               2) Have the students introduce themselves to someone in the class for
               two minutes.
               3) Call time and ask the students to exchange name tags with
               their partner and then go and meet another student. Each student will
               then talk about the person whose name tag they are wearing.
               4) Call time again and have the students switch name tags once more
               and repeat the process of talking about the person whose name tag they
               are wearing with a new partner.
               5) Continue this process until most of all of the students have had a
               chance to talk to each other.
               6) Finally have students find their own name tags and wear them. Ask
               students to share interesting facts they learned about their classmates.

Variation: Have the students talk about a specific theme such as what they did
               during the summer vacation or their goals and aims for the class.
_____

5.3   Personal Timelines

Purpose: To become acquainted with interesting events in the past lives of
               classmates.
               To draw pairs of students closer together.

Materials: Newsprint, markers and crayons.

Procedure: 1) The teacher asks students to draw a timeline of their lives including
               those events that they feel were significant in bringing them to where
               they are today. Allow about 15minutes for drawing the timelines.
               2) In pairs, the students then share their timelines with a partner.
               Allow 20 minutes for the sharing of timelines: 10 minutes per person.
               3) When the pairs have finished sharing, have each student introduce
               their partner to the class and describe two or three of the most
               significant events in their partner's life.
_____

5.4   Favorite Times

Purpose: To become better acquainted.
                To share personal preferences with a partner.

Materials: Board, slips of paper

Procedure: 1) Write these four headings on the board:
                        Season   Month   Day   Time of Day

                2) Have the students think about each category and write down their
                favorite answer.
                3) Each student writes their answer for each category on a slip of paper
                and shares their answers with a partner.
                4) When the pairs have finished sharing, have each student introduce
                their partner's answers to the class.
_____

5.5   Tell Me Three Things

Purpose: To become better acquainted.
                To share personal preferences with a partner.

Materials: Board, slips of paper

Procedure: 1) The teacher writes a category on the board and three subcategories.
                For example:
                        Food
                        a.   your favorite food
                        b.   a food you hate
                        c.   the most unusual food you've eaten
                2) Each student writes their answer for each category on a slip of paper
                and shares their answers with a partner.
                3) When the pairs have finished sharing, have each student introduce
                their partner's answers to the class.
_____

5.6   What Kind of Language Learner Are You?

Purpose: To discover similarities between students.
                To become sensitive and supportive of each other.

Materials: Questionnaire sheet (see below)

Procedure: 1) Have the students complete the questionnaire individually. Allow
              10-15 minutes.
              2) After the students have finished, put them in pairs and have them
              discuss their answers with a partner. Allow 20 minutes - 10 minutes
              per person.
              3) Discuss attitudes and feelings toward language learning as a class.
_____

5.7   How Do You Like To Learn?

Purpose: To discover similarities between students.
              To become sensitive and supportive of each other.

Materials: Questionnaire sheet (see below)

Procedure: 1) Have the students complete the questionnaire individually. Allow
              10-15 minutes.
              2) After the students have finished, put them in pairs and have them
              discuss their answers with a partner. Allow 20 minutes - 10 minutes
              per person.
              3) Discuss attitudes and feelings toward language learning as a class.
_____

Activity 5.7: What Kind of Language Learner Are You?

What Kind of Language Learner Are You?

1. Check the activities that you think are most similar to language learning and tell why.

   Do you think learning a language is like:

   ___ learning to play the piano   ___ learning to play chess
   ___ learning to ride a bike   ___ learning to a math formula
   ___ learning to swim   ___ learning dialogue in a play
   ___ learning to walk   ___ learning dates for history test

2. What are the most useful ways for you to study a language?
   Number the items below: 1=most useful and 10=least useful

   ___ memorizing lists of vocabulary
   ___ learning grammar rules
   ___ doing a lot of grammar exercises
   ___ writing essays and having them corrected by the teacher
   ___ listening to English tapes, radio programs and television shows
   ___ speaking as much as possible in class
   ___ reading English articles, newspapers and books
   ___ writing down the translation of every new word or phrase
   ___ trying to think in English and not translate into your own language
   ___ getting the teacher to correct you every time you make a mistake

3. What aspects of English do you feel you need to study the most?
   Circle the number that best describes your needs. 1=the goal I would like to reach and 5=I am a long way from my goal.

Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5
Dealing with grammar	1	2	3	4	5
Learning Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5

Activity 5.8: How Do You Like to Learn?

When you study English, do you like . . . ?	Yes	No	?
1. Do you like to learn by reading in class?			
2. Do you like to listen to language tapes in class?			
3. Do you like to play language games in class?			
4. Do you like to learn by speaking in class?			
5. Do you like to learn by reading in class?			
6. Do you like to learn by writing in class?			
7. Do you like to study grammar?			
8. Do you like to study new words?			
9. Do you like to study pronunciation?			
10. Do you like the teacher to explain everything?			
11. Do you like the teacher to tell you your mistakes?			
12. Do you like to study in pairs in class?			
13. Do you like to study in groups in class?			
14. Do you like to ask the teacher for help?			
15. Do you like to ask other students for help?			

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