Chapter 1

Building Strong Relationships with Students

Ivana was a seventh grader who recently came to West Sacramento from the Ukraine. She had been doing well in our self-contained class of English language learners (ELL) but was feeling frustrated by not being able to remember the past tense of irregular verbs. She ignored my suggestions not to worry about it for now—it would come with time, but it clearly continued to bother her.

She had asked to spend time after school to receive tutoring on this issue one day. Instead of providing direct instruction, I began by asking her a little more about her life—what did her family do in the Ukraine? Why did they come here? What were some of the challenges she and they were facing? What were her interests? She was a little reticent to share at first, but eventually she opened up, especially after I shared that I came from an immigrant family.

"I love ballroom dancing," was one of the things she told me. She had taken years of classes in the Ukraine and couldn't stop talking about it now. She had a short video at home of one of the contests she had participated in when she was living there. "Could I bring it in and show a little of it to you?" she asked. I told her yes as an idea began percolating in my mind.

The next day she showed me the video of her and her partner doing a flawless dance routine. I then shared my idea with her. The day before she had told me about various different dances and their difficulty level. Would she be interested in developing a board game, I wondered, with four different levels mirroring ballroom dances? She could prepare cards with questions about irregular verbs, and have to answer them correctly to advance to the dance levels. She could hardly contain her excitement. She recruited two friends and they spent three days after school planning and decorating a game board and game pieces, and preparing cards. They regularly played the beautifully designed game—the first board game, I would wager, in the history of

the world that used ballroom dancing to teach a second language. Ivana gained more confidence in her English and became less concerned about having to get every irregular verb perfect. Other students in the class then decided they wanted to make their own board game, too.

Ivana had hit a roadblock. Instead of focusing initially on the *task* of remembering verb tenses (and, as a second-language-learner of Spanish, I certainly remembered how numbingly awful that experience could be), I spent time developing a *relationship*. I began developing that relationship by asking questions about Ivana's life and sharing about my own. It was not a one-way interview—it was an *exchange*. A new tactic—the ballroom dancing board game—that helped Ivana respond to her challenge came out of this relationship-building experience, and she took ownership of it.

What Do You Mean by Building Relationships?

The phrase "building relationships" can sometimes conjure up visions of touchy-feely love-fests. In the context of the kind of classroom this book will be describing, nothing could be further from the truth.

There can be a tendency in our society to focus on accomplishing the task to the detriment of developing relationships. Community organizers try to place the relationship as the priority and, as a result, tend to find that tasks get accomplished more effectively. Doing the same in schools can create a better environment for educators to challenge students (and themselves) to move outside comfort zones (in a *stimulating* and not a *stressful* way) (see Figure 1.1).

Applying an intentional relationship-building practice in the classroom can contribute toward building a challenging and engaging academic atmosphere. Many students, like most people, enjoy talking about themselves and like it when others are interested in hearing what they have to say. In addition, many students would like to develop more connections with their peers and with their teachers. The examples in this chapter help channel these desires into rigorous language development activities.

IN TASKS	IN RELATIONSHIPS
We talk, they listen.	We have a two-way conversation.
Leads with the mouth.	Leads with the ears.
Takes your energy.	Builds on student energy.
Views students as a jar to be filled-up. Involves selling.	Invites students to think through ideas and concepts. Focuses on drawing out.
Can use manipulation, cajoling, tricks.	Uses values and self-interests to tap intrinsic motivation.
Tends to look at short-term results.	Tends to look at long-term results.
Might work in your classroom.	Tends to work in your classroom and beyond.

Figure 1.1 Chart showing the differences between "task" and "relationships."
This chart is modified from one developed by Mike Miller of the Organize Training Center in San Francisco ("Task versus Relationship," Organize Training Center, April, 1985, used with permission of the author).

The relationships built and the information learned about the student's self-interests can be used to stimulate students to deepen engagement in language learning. One way to do this is by framing the work in the context of their self-interests—their visions for themselves, what they want to learn, and how they want to learn it. Having a trusting relationship increases the likelihood that people will share their true self-interests and not just the ones they think the teacher and other students wants to hear. It's about *probing* (defined in the dictionary as "to search thoroughly") and not *prodding* (defined as "to poke with a stick" or "to goad"). Teachers can then frame propositions or invitations for action in the context of students' self-interests and help them tap into their own intrinsic motivation.

Classroom Story

Students are generally aware of their self-interests but sometimes may need to be reminded or helped to clarify them. One of my students was feeling less than enthusiastic about completing an in-class writing assignment. I was being gently supportive, but it was clear he was getting ready to give up. I asked him, "Isaac, you've told me in the past that you wanted to be a carpenter and run your own business. Is that still what you hope to do?" He responded that he wanted to pursue that dream. I went on, "I know you can do it. If you really want to, though, you're going to need to fill out building permits and other government forms. How are you going to be able to do that if you can't write well in English?" I went on to tell him that as long as he told me that was the career he wanted, I would push him on developing the skills he would need to accomplish it. Ultimately, I told him, it was his choice to make—I wasn't going to nag him. Another old organizing adage is if you don't give people the opportunity to say no, you don't give them the opportunity to say yes, either. Without people having that power, they tend not to own their response.

Isaac decided to try his best on the writing assignment. Most importantly, it was *his* decision to do so—*his* energy. In a relationship-oriented classroom, the energy tends to come from students. In a task-oriented classroom, the bulk of the energy tends to come from the teacher. Could I have tried to control the situation by just telling him to get back to work, and telling him he would get an "F" if he didn't complete it? Sure. Would he have done it? Yes, he probably would have at least gone through the motions of doing so. Of course, it would have been my energy moving it forward, it is unlikely to have been his best work, and it certainly would not have helped him develop any sense of intrinsic motivation.

Of course, it was possible that he would have responded to my question by saying he didn't want to be a carpenter and own a business any longer. What would I have done in that case? First, it's important to use this tactic carefully. Based on my ongoing relationship with Isaac, and our numerous conversations, I knew he was very committed to that vision for himself. However, if he had surprised me by saying no, I might have asked him if he could really think of a career he might want to do where writing was not going to be important. I might have asked him to think about it for a few minutes and had him make a list of other careers he might be interested in. I might then have come back to talk and see if we agreed that he wouldn't need to write in English to be successful in them. And if that didn't work, I might have just asked him to take a break from the assignment, given him several other choices of things to do, and then revisited the issue later that same day or the next.

But the point of developing a relationship is not just to manipulate people to do something you want. The Indo-European roots of the word "relationship" mean to "carry back." A genuine relationship is an exchange. It's not only considering how you can affect the other person, but also being open to see how that other person can affect you. It's sharing parts of your story as well as listening to theirs. My life is richer from learning about Ukrainian culture from Ivana and from what I have learned from others and about myself during these listening efforts.

People may very well risk more in the context of a trusting relationship and in the context of a group of trusting relationships. When community organizing groups get into tense political battles and are attacked in the media and through other avenues, most members do not desert the organizations even though some might be under tremendous pressure to do so. Many often stay less because of the political issue and more because of their commitment to relationships with other members and with the organizers.

There is an old organizing saying that goes like this: A group of people in a room that don't know each other can be a mob. A group of people in a room that are in relationship with one another is power. The same holds true for a classroom.

What Does Research Say about Building Relationships in the Classroom?

There is a great deal of research documenting the importance of relationship building in the classroom to promote student achievement, particularly with English language learners.

This section will focus on three elements of this research:

- How teacher–student and peer relationships create a classroom climate, and its effect on English language learners.
- The critical importance of using schema, or students' previous experience, in helping English language learners understand new concepts.
- The effect self-interest has on student motivation, especially on English language learners.

When considering the last two points, it's important to remember what was discussed earlier in this chapter—it's difficult to learn what has been important in a person's life, and their hopes and dreams, without having a genuine relationship.

Relationships and Classroom Climate

Studies have documented the effect that positive relationships in school have on students. The Search Institute is a national organization that has developed a list of positive assets students need in order to succeed based on research and a survey of 2 million students between the grades of 6 and 12. They have found that

> young people who said they had 'caring and fair staff' at their school were much more likely to also feel confident about their ability to succeed academically—73% had academic confidence—than were students who didn't see their staff as caring and fair, only 47% of whom had academic confidence. (Starkman, Roberts, and Scales 5)

Developing self-confidence, of course, is essential in learning a second language.

In a review of 4,000 studies and articles on cooperative learning involving students between grades six and nine in 2006, the Cooperative Learning Institute computed the impact that relationships had on student achievement. They found that "over 3/4's of the variation in academic achievement was explained by the quality of interpersonal relationships." The study went on to say that "a teacher's secret strategy for increasing student achievement may be building more positive relationships among students" (Johnson, Johnson, and Roseth 3).

Dr. Jami Jones highlights research that documents the importance of relationships in developing teen resiliency (the ability to persevere and adapt in the face of challenges). Jones cites research done by Emmy E. Werner and Ruth Smith, who list "making connections and being mentored" and "social skills" as two important factors in teen resiliency.

Robert J. Marzano, the well-known and respected education researcher, also emphasizes the importance of relationships in the classroom. "If the relationship between the teacher and the students is good," he writes, "then everything else that occurs in the classroom seems to be enhanced" (Marzano 150). A 2009 study on the importance of relationships in student success had similar findings (Bergin and Bergin 1).

A recent major study focusing on how supportive relationships affect the school life of immigrant youth emphasizes the significance of such relationships for English language learners. After following over 400 recently arrived youth over a five-year period, Carola Suarez-Orozco, Allyson Pimentel, and Margary Martin concluded that these kinds of relationships are particularly critical for English language learners so they can develop feelings of safety and see possibilities of academic success (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, and Martin 15).

Research on learning and the brain highlights why the development of a supportive web of classroom relationships is critical for the English language learner. The brain goes into survival mode when it feels threatened. Eric Jensen, a pioneer in brain-based research, has found that when students feel threatened (for example, through potential embarrassment) "the brain is put on alert, defense mechanisms and behaviors are activated, which is great for survival, but not good for learning" (Jensen 237). When the brain is feeling threatened, higher-order thinking skills are impaired.

Stephen Krashen makes another point specifically for English language learners. He writes, "The best [second-language teaching] methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low-anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear" (Krashen, *Principles and Practice* 6).

A safe environment for English language learners is one where they feel confident to take risks. Placing a priority on building relationships is one strategy to help create that kind of atmosphere.

Research in Action

At the beginning of each school year, and now and then throughout the subsequent months, one potential way to reinforce this kind of classroom culture is by leading a discussion on the differences between a classroom of students and a community of learners. The Latin and Indo-European root words for "community" mean an "exchange shared by all." Without this kind of community, we instead create a "class"

or a "classroom," which is defined in many dictionaries as just "a group of students meeting together to be taught."

One topic to cover might be how classes respond to student mistakes. Students might say that typically in their classes (if, of course, they've ever been in school before) those who make mistakes are ridiculed. The educator could then explain how in a community of learners, those students are supported for taking risks. Students could then decide what kind of culture they would prefer, why, and what the educator and students have to do together to create it.

Using Schema

Schema is the background knowledge that we bring to learning a new concept, text, or situation. It is the lens through which we see and interpret something that is new to us.

English language learners often have very different background knowledge than what native speakers bring to class. By learning about students' lives, educators can more effectively connect those experiences with new classroom content (Alliance for Excellent Education 2). In other words, developing relationships helps teachers gain an understanding of students' background knowledge that they can then relate to academic content.

Research in Action

A class of predominantly Hmong students was learning a Native American folktale from the Iroquois people. Their teacher was able to use the knowledge gained through conversations with students about the several major Hmong clans, and the oppression the Hmong had experienced by the Chinese and then other Laotians as they were expelled from their homes, to very quickly help them gain a basic understanding of Native Americans and their history.

Brain-based research also demonstrates that whenever something new "is presented in such a way that students see relationships [with existing knowledge], they generate greater brain cell activity and achieve more successful long-term memory storage and retrieval" (Willis 15).

There will be more about the importance of schema in the next chapter, "Accessing Prior Knowledge through Stories."

Student Self-Interest

Research shows that in order for effective learning to take place, students have to feel that what is being taught is relevant to their needs.

Writers and researchers ranging from Stephen Krashen (*Principles and Practice* 66), William Glasser (21), and researchers who have applied Lev Vygotsy's theories to second language learning (Lantolf and Appel 212) have confirmed this conclusion. No matter how many different creative tactics an educator might employ in his or her classroom, many students will not be engaged in learning unless they perceive the content to be helpful to their lives. Whether these are immediate and short-term goals or longer-term hopes for the future, it is difficult for

educators to know what these needs truly are without having a relationship where students feel comfortable sharing them.

Of course, sometimes people are not necessarily clear on their self-interests and need some agitation to help clarify them. A student might not initially see a reason to learn about how the U.S. legislative process works. However, if you know from engaging with the student that he misses his grandfather in Mexico, you might explain the lesson in the context of why or why not an immigration reform bill will pass Congress, and the impact that bill will have on whether his grandfather would be permitted to join his family in the United States.

One of the best ways to teach English is to first find out what content students really want to learn, and then have them use English to learn it.

What Are Examples of Building Relationships in the Classroom?

It's important to recognize that building and maintaining relationships happens over time, and self-interests continually change. Many of the classroom activities shared in this chapter can happen at the beginning of the school year *and* on a regular basis during the entire school year.

There are various specific projects related to building relationships that students can create during the course of a year. For example, they could do one project each quarter, including an oral presentation, which would be coordinated with regular individual assessments. These presentations provide an opportunity to create follow-up individual conversations (since strong relationships are generally built on a one-to-one basis) and maximize the potential for their success. In addition, these student projects are ways that students can also develop their writing, speaking, listening, and reading skills.

The introductions lesson plan is for one of these projects. Others listed in this section can follow similar steps.

Introductions Lesson Plan

Instructional Objectives

Students will:

1. Learn to write grammatically correct sentences, including questions.
2. Learn and practice public and one-on-one speaking skills.
3. Learn and practice listening skills.
4. Learn new vocabulary.
5. Demonstrate their reading fluency.

Duration

Three 55-minute class periods for teacher modeling, student preparation, and student practice (this could be reduced to two days if necessary).

Fifteen minutes at the beginning of the following class and 15 minutes at the end of class for five additional days of student presentations.

English Language Development Standards
California English Language Development (ELD) Domains

1. Students use English for everyday communication in socially and culturally appropriate ways and apply listening and speaking skills and strategies in the classroom.
2. Students will apply the conventions of standard English usage orally and in writing.

Materials

1. One copy for each student of a sentence-starter sheet saying:

Who am I?

My name is _____.

My loves: I love _____ because _____.

My joys: I feel joy when I _____ because _____.

My worries: I worry about _____ because _____.

My sadnesses: I feel sad when _____ because _____.

My hopes and dreams: I hope _____ because _____.

2. Poster sheets at least 11" × 14" for each student
3. Colored markers
4. Old magazines, scissors, and glue (optional)
5. Teacher-prepared model poster
6. One copy for each student of a question-starter sheet saying:

What is your favorite _____?

Can you tell me about a time you _____?

Who is your favorite _____?

7. Simple public speaking rubric listing a few key elements:

Did I try my best on the poster?

Did I look at the audience while I spoke?

Did I speak loudly and clearly?

Procedure

First Day

1. Teacher explains that one way we can get to know each other better and practice our English skills is by introducing ourselves. As part of that the class is going to first review the meaning of some words. The words *love, joy, worry, sad, hope,* and *dream* are written on the board. Students are asked to write the words down and write or draw a picture as a definition of each word if they can; they are told it's okay if they guess or don't know. After

students finish, they are divided into groups of three for five minutes to share their definitions with their group. Teacher circulates and identifies students who have particularly good images or word definitions and asks them to be prepared to share with the class. Teacher ends small groups and calls on those students to share with the whole class. (If time is an issue, this whole section could be eliminated and teacher could just review vocabulary terms with students and start poster preparation during the second half of this class).

2. Teacher distributes the sentence-starter sheet and reviews it with the class. She explains that she will do it first.
3. Teacher then presents her poster.
4. Teacher asks class what she did well in the presentation and highlights certain techniques (letters in poster are clearly written, look at the audience, speak clearly and loudly, not chewing gum).
5. Teacher explains that students will have one full class period to prepare their posters, and part of a class period to practice. Teacher assigns a student schedule for presentations.

Second Day

1. Teacher reviews sentence-starter sheet and leaves her poster on the board as a model. She explains as students are working on their posters that she will call them over to her individually to have them read to her for a minute. She explains it is not a test and is just a way for her to become a better teacher for them. She distributes posters and markers (and magazines, scissors, and glue if she decides to use them). Students have whole class period to work on their own poster.
2. While students are working on posters, teacher has individual students read a simple passage at the appropriate reading level. Without obviously watching the time, she records how many words are read accurately in one minute (mispronounced words are not included). More importantly, this brief time is used by the teacher to learn a little more about the student by asking questions.

Third Day

1. Students are divided into groups of three and practice their poster presentations for 20 minutes. Teacher explains that each student should be prepared to say one thing they liked about the others' presentations and one thing that they think could be improved. Teacher models some examples.
2. Teacher distributes and reviews question-starter sheet, and explains that students will be given a chance to ask questions of each student speaker. She reviews her poster and models some potential questions based on it.
3. Teacher asks students to think about what a good listener does, then write it down, and then share with a partner. Teacher circulates and asks particular students to share, and reviews expectations of a good listener: watching the speaker, not making noise, writing good questions down (if time is an issue, this part could be eliminated, and teacher could just review expectations).

Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Day

1. Students make their presentations during the first and last 15 minutes of class. After each presentation, teacher encourages at least one question to be asked and calls on individual

students to share what they thought the presenter did well and what they could have done better. In addition, each student completes a rubric grading themselves after their presentation.

Assessment

Students and teacher uses simple public speaking rubric listed earlier. If desired, teacher can develop a similar rubric for students to assess their listening skills.

Possible Extensions/Modifications

Students in the preproduction stage of language acquisition can show their poster without speaking.

In the lesson plan, note the importance of teacher modeling, small groups, and presentation logistics—there is nothing deadlier than 20 or 30 consecutive presentations over a day or two, so it's best to schedule 2 or 3 at the beginning and 2 or 3 at the end of each class over four or five days. Individual assessments are less about gathering data and more about spending a few minutes with each student to have a conversation. One student at a time can come to the teacher's desk to check in (How are things going your classes? What do you like most about school? How are your brothers and sisters?) for several minutes, and then they can spend one minute reading orally.

Student–student relationship building can continue with 10-minute one-on-one conversations that each student can have with every other student in the class over a period of weeks following all the presentations. Two of these individual meetings can happen each day—one at the beginning of class and one at the end.

The sheet shared in the lesson plan of question starters that don't necessarily lead to yes-or-no answers (though, of course, depending on the English level of students there might be some of those, too) can help students prepare for these individual meetings. Educators can also model an individual conversation with students before they begin doing them, and they will also have had their experience of a similar conversation during the individual assessments. It's important to highlight that it's not just a question and answer session and that students can share unsolicited thoughts.

Here are some examples of what students have written under the categories in their "Who am I?" posters. There is certainly an enormous amount of grist in them to be used in individual conversations (potential follow-up questions are in parentheses):

My Loves: I Love . . .

Thailand (What do you love about Thailand? Why did your family leave?)

My family (How many brothers and sisters do you have? Are you the oldest? Youngest?)

Soccer (What position do you play? What other sports do you play?)

My Joys: I Feel Joy When . . .

I sing (What do you like to sing?)

I'm with my girlfriend (Can you tell me about her?)

When I go shopping (Where do you like to go shopping? What do you like to buy?)

My Worries: I Worry About . . .

Not passing the high school exit exam (What is the hardest part for you? Why?)

My sister (Why?)

My English (What is the hardest about learning English for you?)

My Sadnesses: I Feel Sad When . . .

I have homework (What class gives you most homework? What is the hardest?)

My dog died (What kind of dog was it? What did it look like?)

I can't help myself (What things can't you do?)

My Hopes and Dreams: I Hope That . . .

I will see my dog (What kind of dog is it? Is it lost? What does it look like?)

I will be a newspaper reporter (Why? What do you want to write about?)

I will be a better student (What do you want to do better?)

Additional Student Presentation Projects

Here are some additional student projects that could use very similar lesson plans (All meet the same academic standards listed in the lesson plan):

Complete a series of sentence starters, including "My name is_____. I'm from _____. This is a map of my native country. This is a picture of me. This is a picture of my family. This [an object they bring to school] is important to me because _____. [You can ask students to bring up to five objects.]

Make a collage of pictures from magazines of things they like and/or that represent them, and write a sentence describing what each one is and why it represents them (with sentence starters, again).

Present an "I'm Good At . . ." poster, where they describe the things they're good at, ranging from playing soccer to making tamales to playing video games.

Design a family tree that also includes what people did (and do) as their profession, stories about them, and so forth.

Create a "Life Graph" (Burke 240) where students make a timeline of their life with images and text. In addition, the timeline is in a graph form where student rate how positive or negative each experience was. One modification of this project could be having students extend the timeline and project potential future events in their lives, too.

Draw a map of their neighborhood, including examples (in art and in text) of their experiences at different places (their route to school, a party they attended, etc.) (Burke 245).

Tech Tip—Online Slideshow

Students can take any of the presentation project ideas and make high-tech versions of them—both as a change of pace and as an opportunity for others outside the classroom to view them and leave text or audio comments. Students can take

digital pictures with their cell phones or classroom cameras and/or grab images off the Web (see Appendix 1 for information on copyright issues). There are slideshow tools for every English and technology level. There are super-easy sites like Bookr (<http://www.pimpampum.net/bookr/>) and Smile Slideshow (<http://www.colgate.com/ColgateSmile/mashup.srv>) that don't require registration and have photos available that can be used. PhotoPeach (<http://photopeach.com/>) is only very slightly more complicated, and also lets users include quizzes in their creations. Then there are sites that are only a little more complex that let users provide audio narration, like VoiceThread (<http://voicethread.com/#home>), Show Beyond (<http://www.showbeyond.com/show/home>) and Slide Six (<http://slidesix.com/>). Of course, both students and teachers should be acquainted with online safety issues before using the Internet. See Appendix 1 for more information.

Tech Tip—Online Timelines

There are several free Web tools that students can use for creating online timelines of their lives. xTimeline (<http://www.xtimeline.com/index.aspx>) is just one, and others can be found in Appendix 1. Students can either use their own images or grab ones off the Web to illustrate important events. Privacy settings can be used to restrict access.

Writing Projects

Students also can maintain a personal journal that they write on individual sheets of paper that they later put into a binder (instead of an educator having to cart home 30 notebooks) where they write about their lives. One day each week students can write a few sentences and draw about something they did—usually including at least two good things that happened and one not-so-good thing that occurred. They can also write what they could have done differently to have helped make the not-so-good occurrence better. Of course, newcomers might only draw at first, and that works fine, too. Sometimes teachers can ask students to imagine something that they would have liked to have done, but did not do. Depending on the English level of the class, teacher-provided sentence starters can help students begin their journal writing (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3).

Students can share these journal entries with their peers orally (as well as showing their pictures) as another relationship-building activity, and they provide the educator with helpful information for use in personal conversations with students (and their parents, if and when educators go on home visits with an interpreter, if necessary). These journals are also important tools to assess student writing progress and to identify common challenges.

Whether it's family members who are ill, parties, feeling angry about something, or concerns about doing something for the first time, there are plenty of things that students will find in common no matter what country they're from or language they speak. And students are developing their English skills at the same time as they are strengthening relationships.

Students can write a version of a dialogue journal. Typically, these are letters that might be written back and forth between teachers and their students. In these letters, instead of

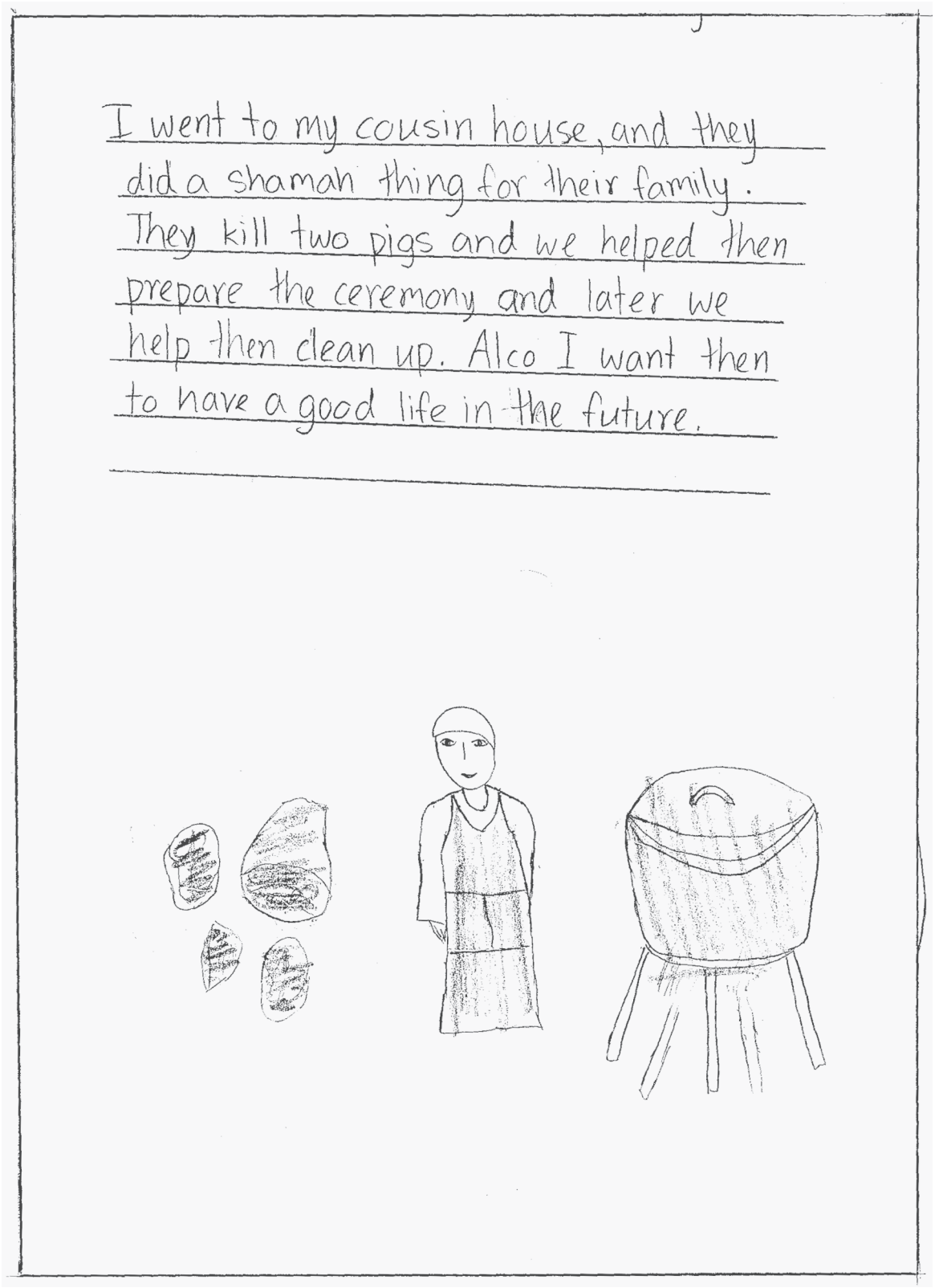

Figure 1.2 Student journal example showing what they did during the week.

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I went to visit my aunt and my cousin in thailand because they are important to me. They lived in a good place to safe themself. They have to work on them self and they don't money but, they have to live nearest at the forest they can find fruit and crops to eat. Most the time they planted some crops. but when it summer time they planted some crops it not grows then they have to go to the forest and find some food to eat that time when that time pass and the crops can grows up than they get more food to eat every year.

Figure 1.3 Student journal example showing what they *wanted* to do.

educators critiquing incorrect grammar, in the context of their response they instead model the correct form. For example, a student might write, "Yesterday, I help mi muther cook." An educator could then respond, "That's neat that you helped your mother cook yesterday. When I was your age, I helped my mother cook, too."

In one adaptation of these types of journals, students write these letters to pen pals in a class of native speakers in the same school. Not only do these letters create opportunities for relationship building with students outside of English language learner classes (this type of sister class relationship can also include periodic face-to-face meetings), but the teacher in the more advanced sister class can use it to help her/his students develop better grammar skills, as well. It fits in with the adage you never really learn something until you have to teach it. A similar project can be useful in a mixed-class of native speakers and English language learners.

All this student writing, in addition to helping facilitate relationship building, also provides an enormous amount of material to use to teach vocabulary, reading strategies, and grammar. More specific examples of how to do this will be included in chapter 4, "Learning by Doing." The student projects in this section correlate with California ELD domains 5 and 6.

Tech Tip—Writing Online

If a computer is available, having students either write their journals in a word processing document or on a blog is an option. The automatic grammar and spell-check features available in most software can be particularly helpful to English language learners, though it might be best to have students write initial drafts in by hand so that the corrections do not inhibit their writing. According to a study of Maine's ambitious program of giving a computer to every middle-school student, improved writing has been the major measurable academic benefit. One of the study's authors says that computers "make it easier for students to edit their copy and make changes without getting writer's cramp. . . . As a result, students are writing and revising their work more frequently, which leads to better results. And it's important . . . that those skills translated when the test was taken with pen and paper, too" (eSchool News 1). Writing in a blog has also been shown to be particularly helpful to English language learners (Fellner and Apple 15). The possible use of blogs for cooperative projects with classes in other parts of the country and/or world will also be explored further in chapter 4, "Learning by Doing." Details on blogs can be found in Appendix 1.

Games

Doing class work through cooperative learning groups and dividing the class into small groups to compete in learning games are other ways to help build relationships and reinforce what is being studied at the same time. (You can find a list of simple games requiring little equipment or preparation in Appendix 2.) The educator can choose the teams (at least for the first part of the year) to ensure that students are not staying with the same students all the time and that there's a mixed ethnic and English competency level in each one. The student projects in this section correlate with California ELD domain 1.

Connecting to Student Self-Interests

It's obviously not feasible to work on everyone's immediate self-interests at the same time. We may be covering subjects at times which, for some of our students, might be a stretch for them to see how it's relevant to their lives. We can help them to see how it is. At the same time, through our relationships with them, we can also find other ways that connect to their broader self-interests. These could include a desire to work on projects together with other students even if they are less than enthralled with the project itself. Playing games, demonstrating with pride to their family about a job well done, or just satisfying a hunger to learn new things might be other self-interests felt by our students, and it's incumbent on us as teachers to learn what they are. Good teaching is a process of drawing out and not just filling up.

Reading Projects

The examples shared in this chapter so far demonstrate students using the concept of relationship-building and self-interest to also strengthen writing, speaking, and listening skills. These same concepts can enhance reading.

One way that was mentioned earlier in the chapter to introduce the importance of developing a supportive classroom atmosphere was by contrasting how a community of learners would respond to people making mistakes differently than would a classroom of students. Another way to reinforce the importance of relationships is by having students read some very short stories connected to the concept. In addition, these stories are opportunities for students to: develop word analysis skills, vocabulary knowledge, and reading fluency by making them into clozes (fill-in-the-blank), asking for students to identify and categorize words, and practice reading the stories in pairs. Students can also apply various other reading strategies depending on their English level, including sharing if and how they can make a personal connection ("This reminds me of when . . .") to the story.

School librarians might be particularly helpful in identifying written stories (both from student cultures and from others) and videos that emphasize the concept of relationship building.

Various stories can be used as templates and changed to reflect student ethnicity, background knowledge, and English level. One template is a story about Martin Luther King, Jr. that comes from the book *Parting the Waters* by Taylor Branch:

> While many previous pastors at his [Martin Luther King, Jr.'s] first church always asked members "*What* are you doing?" King always asked everyone *how* they were doing, usually following with a personal question about their health or the kids. Moreover, he would linger over such conversations against all competing obligations. (Branch 119)

In addition to the reading skills and strategies students use with this story, discussion questions can include: "Would you like this person? Why or why not?" and "Have you ever known anyone like him/her (depending on which gender used in that particular version of the story)? If so, who was he/she and what did he/she do?"

The student projects in this section correlate with California ELD domains 2, 3, 4, and 6.

How Can Technology Be Used to Develop and Deepen Face-to-Face Relationships?

Stephen Krashen, in "Free Voluntary Reading," has documented how having students read books of their choice can be an extraordinarily effective method of language acquisition. It certainly fits into the idea of making classroom content relevant to students' lives—most will see reading what they want to as being in their self-interest. Krashen's theory of free voluntary reading (it's also called pleasure reading) can be implemented particularly effectively through the use of computers, and at the same time technology can be used to deepen face-to-face relationships.

How do you implement Krashen's theory of free voluntary reading (letting students choose to read what they want) when you are teaching classes of preliterate high school Hmong students who have just arrived from Thailand?

That was one of a number of questions facing Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento when many Hmong teenagers—part of a group of 2,000 Hmong refugees—arrived in the area in 2005.

The Hmong are an ethnic group from Laos that provided tens of thousands of soldiers to the CIA during the Vietnam War. The U.S. government had promised that, if they lost the war, they would bring the Hmong to the United States. Thousands have come over the years, and one of the last Hmong refugee camps in Thailand, housing 10,000 people, was closed in 2005. California's Central Valley and St. Paul, Minnesota have the largest concentrations of Hmong residents. Since this last resettlement program was based on family connections, many of these final refugees arrived in these same two areas.

Few of the new students had ever attended school before. Even fewer others in their families had, either. It was indeed a great opportunity. How often can high school educators say that their class is the first experience of school for their students?

As educators began to help students learn English and become acclimated to their new country, they began to think more and more about how to implement free voluntary reading. It was a key component of many of the mainstream English classes at the school, and it certainly fit in with the organizing philosophy of assisting people to freely choose and act on their own behalf. Burbank didn't have tutors who could work individually with each student, so they needed to find another way.

Teachers decided to explore how they could take advantage of computer technology to help implement free voluntary reading with their students *and* develop strategies to use the same technology to help students develop and deepen face-to-face relationships.

The school created a Web page (<http://larryferlazzo.com/english.html>) with links to a few of these free sites, and opened a before- and after-school computer lab for Hmong and other English language learner students. Within two weeks over 100 students were coming each day, plus 15 bilingual students who offered to volunteer as peer tutors. Students were provided headphones and were able to access any of growing number of links on the Web site (it now has over 9,000 links that are specifically accessible to English language learners related to all academic subjects). In addition to just engaging with the computer screen,

students would discuss in class what they were reading and make recommendations to each other.

Though the students attending were predominantly Hmong, a growing number of recent immigrant students from other countries began attending the lab (over half of the school's student population is composed of English language learners). In another initial effort to use computers to build face-to-face relationships, students would regularly be paired with someone who spoke a different native language to introduce themselves and compete with each other in their favorite online language development games, which can be found both on the Web site and in Appendix 1.

Within four months, students participating in the lab had a 50 percent greater improvement on reading fluency and cloze (fill-in-the-blank) assessments than students in a control group (for more information, see my Web site, <http://larryferlazzo.com/familyliteracy.html>). As a result of teacher home visits, a family literacy project was also begun by providing home computers and Internet access to immigrant families. You can read more about that project in Ferlazzo and Hammond's book *Building Parent Engagement in Schools*.

The school librarian also assisted in this effort by identifying and acquiring paper books on topics that students had identified as being of high interest and that they had discovered on the computer.

The school continues to explore ways to use the Internet to facilitate face-to-face relationships. One way has been to take advantage of Web 2.0 advances to enable students to easily create content that can be posted on the Web and accessed by students and their families. This content can then be shared and time made in class to discuss their creations. By using computers as a tool to promote interpersonal relationships, we can maximize individual achievement in English language development.

The projects shared in this technology section correlate with California ELD domains 1, 5, and 6.

Tech Tip—Using Viral Marketing

The recent craze of viral marketing—which includes companies creating video clips, games, cartoons, and other applications that computer users can modify to send to friends—are a boon to ELL classes. Many of these free tools have text-to-speech or easy audio recording features. Students have created talking cartoon scrambled eggs to discuss what they eat for breakfast and singing e-cards describing how they spend their holidays. Sharing these creations can be excellent relationship-building activities. You can find links to these sites, descriptions on how to use them, and examples of student work in Appendix 1.

Tech Tip—Online Video Games

Students playing online adventure and puzzle video games that have walkthroughs (step-by-step instructions on how to win) are another example of using computers for group work. Students are paired up at one computer and have to work together to follow the instructions to finish the game. Usually, everyone ends up helping

everyone else. Students can also easily use Web 2.0 applications to record screencasts of these walkthroughs (or write and record their own) while they are actually playing the game (again, see Appendix 1 for Web site addresses and details). Very animated—and student initiated—discussions in English can occur regularly during and after these game-playing sessions. In fact, now students can use Web applications that allow them to quickly design video games and write instructions on how to play them. Other students can play their games, write comments about them, and discuss them in class. Again, you can find Web sites and their details in Appendix 1.

Tech Tip—Audio Slideshows

Students can also work in groups to easily create audio slideshows on different topics. Digital cameras can be used to take photos for uploading, or, even easier, most online slideshow applications let you grab images off the Web. Students can create a simple storyboard in class on, for example, introducing themselves. After one class period spent preparing the storyboard (a simple series of boxes on a sheet of paper where students write their commentary and decide what image would go with it), a group of two or three students could use an application like VoiceThread to complete a short 10-slide show highlighting the ethnic culture of each student, what they like to do for fun, their favorite book, and a goal they have for the future. Their creations could be posted on a Web site or blog and shown to the entire class if a computer projector is available. Most of these free Web tools also let users leave comments on other people's slideshows. In an idea explored further in the chapter 4, "Learning by Doing," it could also be accessed by sister classes around the world. Again, see Appendix 1 for more information.

How Do You Assess Relationship Building?

As discussed earlier in this chapter, education researchers and neurologists have convincingly determined that placing a priority on building relationships, and its resulting classroom atmosphere, is an objectively valuable educational strategy that results in increased student academic achievement. Moreover, as mentioned previously, English language learners participating in Luther Burbank High School's use of technology to enhance face-to-face relationships had a 50 percent greater increase in their English literacy over those who were not in the program.

What are some ways to determine if one has been effective in developing these solid and supportive educator–student and student–student relationships?

Here are three simple ways to assess success:

One is seeing if a fair amount of present students like to "hang out" in the classroom before school and during lunch, and if students from previous years like to do the same. If they do, then that's a good indicator that an educator has been successful in developing solid relationships with students.

Another way is by letting students choose members of their small cooperative learning groups periodically (instead of the teacher choosing them) to see if they mix them up, or

if they always choose the same group members. If they are mixed, that, too, is a fair measure that students have done a good job of developing relationships with other students in class and that there's a greater sense of solidarity among them.

Finally, two or three times a year an anonymous, in-class survey can be distributed. It's actually a two-part survey (done on two separate days)—one focusing on relationships with the educator, and the other on student–student relationships. Figure 1.4 contains a reproducible survey form

Classroom Story—Student Survey

This section will contain the questions and a sample of answers written by students in the author's class, along with a short analysis.

Survey on Student–Teacher Relationship

Do you think Mr. Ferlazzo tries to know you better and cares about what happens in your life? If you think he does, how does he show it? If you think he does not, how does he show he doesn't care?

- ✦ Yes, he ask me question and look at my work.
- ✦ Yes, because sometime I don't understand and he try to help me to understand.
- ✦ Of course he does! He is nice with me and ask me how everything going; school and stuff. He smile and show interest in me.
- ✦ Yes, because when you no come to school he take time explaining what you need to do or ask what happened to you.
- ✦ Yes, I think Mr. Ferlazzo worry about me because when I look sad or something like that he ask me if I am ok.
- ✦ Yes, he make me not a gangster in school.

Is it important for your teachers to want to know you better and care about what happens to you? Why or why not?

- ✦ Yes, because sometimes people want somebody care about them.
- ✦ Yes, because if they know about me they can help me more.
- ✦ Yes, because I like people caring about each other. I think that's the right thing.
- ✦ Yes, because sometimes I can express with the teacher how I feel if I have some personal problems I can see teacher friend.
- ✦ I think yes because whichever happen in your life affect when you come to school.
- ✦ Yes because they need to understand how I feel.
- ✦ Yes because some students are happy when they come to school but when they at home they are sad and feel sad.

Does Mr. Ferlazzo listen to your ideas and the ideas of other students in the class? Do you think he cares what you think? How does he show he does care or that he doesn't care?

- ✦ He shows it by asking me "Why I've been absent" or "Why do you so happy today?"
- ✦ Sometimes he listen but I think is hard for him to listen to everybody.

SURVEY ON TEACHER–STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

1. Do you think your teacher tries to know you better and cares about what happens in your life? If you think he does, how does he show it? If you think he does not, how does he show he doesn't care?

2. Is it important for your teachers to want to know you better and care about what happens to you? Why or why not?

3. Does your teacher listen to your ideas and the ideas of other students in the class? Do you think he cares what you think? How does he show he does care or that he doesn't care?

4. Have you tried to get to know your teacher? If so, how have you tried? If not, why haven't you tried?

SURVEY ON STUDENT–STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

1. Have you gotten to know other students in the class better this year (semester)? If you think you have, what have you done in class that has helped you get to know them better?

2. Is it important to get to know other students better? Why or why not?

3. What more could we do in class to help you get to know other students better?

4. Did you learn anything from other students in class this year (semester)? What?

Figure 1.4 Student survey form for evaluating relationships.
From English Language Learners: Teaching Strategies that Work by Larry Ferlazzo. Santa Barbara, CA: Linworth. Copyright © 2010.

- I think he care what I think and he show me to solve my problem.
- Yes, he listen to everybody in class because he want to know students ideas.
- Yes. When he listen to me and say: Oh, that's a good idea or something like that. He is respectful.
- Yes, but sometimes he don't listen because he is so busy.
- Yes, but sometimes he just listen but not take it to heart.
- He try to talk to me and ask do I have any problem at home.
- Yes, he pay attention when I speak and have some question.

What more could Mr. Ferlazzo do to show he cares about you?

- Give me some money.
- When he see me like sad he ask me if there something he can help.
- Maybe he can give us little prizes for our effort so we are motivated and we want to do more.

Have you tried to get to know Mr. Ferlazzo? If so, how have you tried? If not, why haven't you tried?

- I have tried to know Mr. Ferlazzo when I asked him how old are he on his birthday.
- No, because there are so many students in this class, and he don't have enough time to let me try to get to know him.
- Yes because I try to talk to him more and more.
- I don't think so because I'm scare because I cannot speak English.
- No, because he is so grumpy.
- Yes, I've asked him about his life, how he is, what does he like to do.
- I don't want to try because he is teacher, me is student and I don't want to try to know him.
- Yes, I try to talk to him more because he is friendly to us.

From these survey results, I would say that students feel like it is important to them that their teachers truly care about what happen in their lives, and not just about what happens in the classroom. It also appears that most students feel that I do care about them.

I think the responses to the question about if I listen to students are very insightful. It seems like I do an okay job of it, but could be a little more present to students and be less preoccupied with doing tasks.

Finally, the issue of being preoccupied with tasks comes up again in the final question. It sounds like I could work on being a little more approachable. Three or four students actually used the word "grumpy," which we had learned in a lesson right before they completed the surveys.

These results also reflect my own self-assessment of my work during that semester. It also points to the importance of not waiting until the end of the school year to do this kind of evaluation. I was able to take these comments to heart at the end of the first semester, and it was clear that students felt more positive about my listening skills and approachability by the time June came around.

Here are the questions, and representative answers, about the quality of relationships among students during a recent year:

Survey on Student–Student Relationships

Have you gotten to know other students in the class better this year (semester)? If you think you have, what have you done in class that has helped you get to know them better?

- ✦ I know them from doing small group.
- ✦ Yes, I know other students because they have helped me.
- ✦ Yes, I know other students in this class. Sometime I don't understand I can ask if they can help me read better.
- ✦ Yes a little bit. Some of them switched seats and that makes me talk with them. Also work in groups.
- ✦ Yes, because I come to this class and students interview each other and have a conversation.
- ✦ Yes, we work in a group, then we share our ideas how to present our presentation. We talked to each other.
- ✦ I know other people because we share reading.

Is it important to get to know other students better? Why or why not?

- ✦ Yes, I know other students because the students help me and me have more friends.
- ✦ Yes, because they are my good friends.
- ✦ Yes, because in that way we can work better and maybe get friends.
- ✦ Yes, if we know each other we can help each other.
- ✦ Yes, because we learn from each other.
- ✦ Yes, it's very important to know other students because we can learn about their cultures and know who they are.
- ✦ Yes, it is important because I can help them to do something they do not know how to do.

What more could we do in class to help you get to know other students better?

- ✦ We have to talk to other students more.
- ✦ More activities to help each other.
- ✦ Yes, reading and talking to each other.
- ✦ Maybe let us chat but without working.

Did you learn anything from other students in class this year (semester)? What?

- ✦ No, I did not learn anything new from my friends.
- ✦ I learn about new word and the word I don't know how to read.
- ✦ Yes, I learn nice word.
- ✦ Yes they help me learn about the geography.
- ✦ Yes, I learn some Spanish and Hmong words.
- ✦ Yes, that I have to respect their ideas because I'm not always right. Also that I have to be patient because we don't work as the same time. Everyone is different.

- ✦ I learned that students don't like to do the same things.
- ✦ Yes, I learned about Mexican and Chinese food.
- ✦ Yes, I learn how to deal with different people.
- ✦ Yes, they have some idea that different from me.

Clearly, a good sense of community was developed during the school year evaluated here, and students saw value and benefit in it. A focus on building relationships provided an enriching experience during that period of time. Even more importantly, based on the comments that many students wrote, one can hope that they now value it enough to initiate more relationship-building activities on their own in their future classes and in other aspects of their life.

What Are the Challenges to Making Building Relationships a Priority in the Classroom?

What are some challenges to educators implementing relationship building, along with the other elements of the organizing cycle, in their classroom?

The major challenges tend to fall into three categories:

- ✦ Developing a clear vision of and commitment to how you might want to integrate the organizing cycle into your teaching strategy
- ✦ Making the time to do it
- ✦ Demonstrating to administrators and other teachers that it is pedagogically sound and connects to state standards

Developing a Clear Vision

> A man went by a construction site and encountered a bricklayer working. The man asked him what he was doing. The bricklayer replied, "I'm making bricks." The man walked a few feet further and came upon another bricklayer. He asked him the same question. The bricklayer answered, "I'm making a wall." He then walked by another bricklayer and once again asked the same question. This worker replied, "I'm building a cathedral."

Without careful and strategic planning, we can tend to teach lessons that make bricks and walls instead of cathedrals. We can get caught up in the task of covering the curriculum and lose sight of the fact that spending time on building relationships actually helps our students learn the curriculum better.

This kind of thoughtful planning is the first step in re-imagining our classrooms and our work. Then, as Peter Drucker, the well-known writer on organizational and business development wrote, "The best plan is only . . . good intentions unless it degenerates into work" (Drucker, *Management* 128).

Or, if you prefer a more pithy commentary, there is supposedly an old Chinese proverb: "A person has to stand still for a long time with their mouth open before a roast duck will fly into it."

How do we create time in our busy lives to make these plans and visions a reality?

Making Time

It's important to not do something new without giving up something old—it's challenging, and unpleasant, to try to squeeze blood from a stone as we continue to add things that we want to do to an already full plate.

Prioritizing relationship building in the classroom doesn't really take up much class time to implement. The time it does take generally comes in the form of thinking, planning, and preparing outside of class. Given that, let's look at a general time management framework developed by the Industrial Areas Foundation called *opportunities* and *operations.*

Opportunities are the things that give us the most energy. These occasions might be reading a book, talking to a colleague about some new ideas, reflecting on successes and mistakes, or taking a risk and trying something different. *Operations* are the things that drain us of energy. These are things we should do, have to do, or are expected to do.

Peter Drucker uses a similar framework by distinguishing between "the ability to do things right" and the "ability to get the right things done." He's also referred to the division as "efficiency" versus "effectiveness" (Drucker, *The Effective Executive* 2).

We don't have opportunities all the time. But many operations are just not worth doing, or not worth doing well.

One operation to consider reducing is correcting grammar errors on papers. Much research has shown, as Stephen Krashen concluded in his review of the literature, "Applying the Comprehension Hypothesis," that this kind of error correction has a minimal effect on acquiring language.

John Truscott has also been influential with his contribution to this research. After reviewing the available research, and conducting his own, he, too, concludes that typical grammar error correction (writing notes on students' papers and returning them) is not only ineffective but potentially harmful. He cites many comparative studies that show little or no difference between groups of students who have been in classes where errors have been corrected and other groups where they have not been corrected. In fact, some studies have demonstrated the error correction groups as having lower assessments. He finds that even though error correction might make sense intuitively, it does not fit well into how the complicated process of language acquisition operates. In addition, he writes that this kind of grammar error correction contributes toward stress that further inhibits language learning.

However, that does not mean an educator should not spend time on grammar error correction. It does suggest one should spend less time writing on students' papers, and should, instead, use other strategies including, but not limited to: teaching inductively and the instructional method called "concept attainment" to help students self-correct their errors (these two methods are discussed in the "Learning By Doing" chapter), teacher modeling, the dialogue journals discussed earlier in this chapter, games described in Appendix 2, and other ways.

One other way to create more time for our opportunities is to recognize what might be an operation for us could be an opportunity for someone else. What are the tasks that make up our to-do lists?

Perhaps an educator could become less invested in making sure that *his* classroom or school library looks exactly the way he wants it to look. Instead, educators could work with students to try to make it *his and their* classroom (or school library). This means that students are involved in deciding what furniture and what books go where, how the desks are arranged, and what goes up on the wall. And because it is *their* classroom or library, too, many students could have housekeeping responsibilities that might take them a minute every other day and all spend a few minutes together once each week tidying up the room. Most students can find a task they enjoy doing, whether it's neatening up the nonfiction books or vacuuming the rug. And many students might like a frenzied five minutes spent each Friday cleaning things up. Students don't have to be required to do it, but it might be surprising how few choose not to do the work.

This is an example of turning what is an *operation* for an educator into an *opportunity* for students. As a result, educators spend less time cleaning the room outside of class time, students find a task they enjoy (and book cleaners and dusters get to become more familiar with books they might like), and cleaning time on Friday is yet another experience of relationship building.

Finally, identifying allies, such as other teachers, school librarians, or administrators who are interested in also moving in the direction of the organizing cycle can help with lesson planning and discussing how to overcome obstacles that arise. The next chapter will also include information on using the Internet to expand these personal learning networks (PLNs).

Talking to Administrators and Other Allies

Change in general is hard. Change in schools can be excruciatingly difficult and painful. We are all typically much more comfortable with how we have been doing things than with trying something new.

It's possible that you might be in a school and district where administrators and many other teachers are open to new ideas and are certainly committed to the importance of relationship building. On the other hand, you might be teaching in an entirely different environment where you need to defend changes you might want to consider making after reading this book. You might be in a situation where you must only use certain supposedly research-tested teaching strategies, provide voluminous daily written lesson plans connected to state standards, and stick to a district-mandated textbook each day.

If you feel you need to talk with your administrator about your wanting to emphasize relationship building (or anything else discussed in this book), first keep in mind that it's important to have a relationship with *her*—make sure you know her personal story, her self-interests, her goals. In your conversations, you might also find these following points useful

Research

Extensive research is cited in every chapter of this book that documents the educational value of each element in the organizing cycle, including prioritizing relationship building in the classroom. There are also many other studies that demonstrate relationship building's contribution toward increasing student achievement.

State Standards

Every suggestion shared in this chapter, and in other parts of this book, is directly connected to typical English language development standards for reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In fact, each idea can be tied to *multiple* specific standards. Obviously, each state has different standards. It should, however, be fairly easy for a teacher to make connections to his or her own state requirements.

Mandated Textbook

Many of the relationship-building activities discussed here really don't take up that much class time, so they shouldn't be seen to be conflicting with a textbook-based curriculum. And most teachers are allowed to supplement their texts with supportive materials and exercises, which could certainly include the ideas in this chapter. Many textbook exercises can easily be adapted for use in cooperative learning groups and in classroom games so you can reinforce a sense of community—there certainly isn't a requirement that all students complete all of the questions entirely on their own. In addition, usually some stories found in a textbook can be used to emphasize the importance of building relationships

Building relationships is not an add-on or an ancillary benefit of doing other things in class. It can be a central goal in working with our students, and it can result in extraordinarily enriching experiences for students and educators alike. One of those positive results can be increased student academic achievement and higher levels of English proficiency.

English Language Learners

Teaching Strategies that Work

Larry Ferlazzo

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