

Group Building in the Classroom

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Kyoto JALT

Greetings gentle readers. All of these activities and ideas have come to me through the wonderful people I have met in my few years of teaching. Thank you all!

These activities are all very simple to explain and understand in person, but harder to grasp in writing. To simplify matters, please imagine a room, sun pouring through wide open windows on to a carpeted floor cleared of everything except chairs and enthusiastic participants, who we will arbitrarily name Michi, Bjorn, Catherine, Asami, Oana, and Warren. (Thanks to all of the other enthusiastic participants whose names aren't mentioned here.)

Part 1- Names

Name toss:

1. Stand/Sit in a circle.
2. Throw soft harmless objects to each other while calling out names.
3. Warren says "Hello Oana" and throws a teddy bear to Oana.
4. Oana catches the teddy bear and says "Hello Warren."
5. Oana says "Hello Bjorn" and throws the bear to Bjorn.
6. Bjorn catches the bear and says "Hello Oana"
7. Increase the number of objects until there nearly everyone is either throwing or catching at the same time.

When you start out you can have name tags and then after a while you turn them over. If you don't remember the name you have to ask the person before throwing "What's your name?"

Name slaps:

1. Stand in a circle.
2. Everyone holds one hand face-up in front of them.
3. One person, Asami, is chosen at random to stand in the middle.
4. To start of a person, Warren, says a name of someone else in the circle, "Catherine."
5. Asami tries to slap Catherine's hand.
6. Catherine tries to say another name before her hand is slapped.
7. If Asami slaps Catherine's hand, Catherine is in the middle.
8. If Catherine says "Michi" before Asami can slap her hand, then Asami will try to slap Michi's hand. And so on.

9. Asami will stay in the middle until she slaps someone's hand.

If someone pulls their hand away he/she is in the middle.

Name Curtain

1. Divide into two teams.
2. Have two people hold a curtain, tarp or blanket between the two teams so they can't see each other. Place one chair on each side facing the curtain (and each other)
3. Each team will choose one person to go sit in the front, directly behind the curtain. Team 1 chooses Michi and Team 2 chooses Catherine.
4. When the curtain is dropped, and Michi and Catherine can see each other, they race to say the other person's name first.
5. If Michi says "Catherine" first, Catherine will join Michi's team and come over to team one's side of the curtain.
6. Continue until one of the teams has only one or two members left.

Name Rhythm

1. Sit in a circle
2. Start a four beat rhythm by (1) slapping knees, (2) clapping, then saying a name (3) and a word (4), for example "(1) slap...(2) clap...(3) Warren...(4) From"
3. Warren must continue the rhythm and say "(1) slap...(2) clap...(3) I'm from...(4) Maryland," followed by "(1) slap...(2) clap...(3) Michi...(4) Hobby"
4. Now Michi must continue the rhythm and say "(1) slap...(2) clap...(3) My hobby is...(4) Yoga," followed by (1) slap...(2) clap...(3) Catherine...(4) Hobby"

This can be adapted to many different target phrases and also general silliness. My favorite is to say "(1) slap...(2) clap...(3) Bjorn...(4) English" and have everyone stand up and shout "I LOVE ENGLISH." For the May 31st workshop we changed this to "I LOVE JALT" and our shouts resounded around downtown Kyoto, hopefully providing some good publicity for the organization.

Alphabet Arrangement & The List

1. Participants arrange themselves in a circle of chairs in alphabetical order by their first names.
2. Upon completion, everyone writes their name, in alphabetical order on the board.
3. Everyone copies this list. "The List" can be used in any sort of communicative activity as a checklist. If people check off names as they interact with different people they can use the list to ensure that they have interacted with everyone else.

People to People

1. Mingle about aimlessly.

2. This rounds “Shouter” calls out a body part, for example “head”
3. Everyone must make a group of three (or what number you have decided) and touch heads.
4. Tick off the people you have grouped up with.
5. The next “Shouter” calls out the next body part.
6. Continue until someone/everyone has ticked off all people on The List

Part 2: Building Trust in Pairs

The Mirror

1. Stand facing your partner.
2. The leader makes slow movements which the follower attempts to mirror.
3. While engaged in this motion, the leader makes a statement volunteering information, “I enjoy trigonometry.”
4. The follower replies with a sentence with the same structure, “I enjoy climbing trees.”
5. Change the roles of the leader and follower after a minute or so.

*Directions

1. Oana closes her eyes.
2. Bjorn gives her verbal directions “go straight, stop, turn left” to guide her through a maze of chairs.
3. Change roles after completion of the maze and repeat.

*Find your partner

1. Each pair creates a question and answer, for example, Catherine asks Warren “Are you ambidextrous?” and Warren says “No, but I can make my own fermented soybeans.” (Any question and answer is suitable as long as it is distinctive.)
2. After deciding the question and answer, partners go to opposite sides of the room or a hallway, the farther away the better.
3. Everyone closes their eyes, and by Catherine shouting “Are you ambidextrous?” and Warren shouting “No, but I can make my own fermented soybeans,” the two can find each other. Of course other people are also looking for their partners and shouting to each other, so it is good practice in projecting voices, and listening carefully in a noisy environment

Part 3: Group Work

*Everybody up

1. Groups of 2-6 people sit on the floor, put their feet together, link arms and try to pull each other up.

*Shark attack

1. Designate a blanket or tarp as a boat.
2. The surroundings are shark-infested waters.
3. Everyone gets on the boat and counts to ten slowly.
4. If everyone can stay on the count to ten, fold the tarp in half and repeat the process.
5. Continue until the boat is very small but still possible for everyone to stand on with a bit of teamwork and communication.

Helium Stick

1. Prepare a tent pole or long straight stick.
2. Have each person stand with the pole resting on top of their pointer finger.
3. The task is to lower the pole to the ground without anyone's finger ever coming off.
(This would appear to be simple, but the pole always tends to rise.)

Thanks again to all of those people along the way who have introduced these ideas to me. I hope that all who read this will take these activities, adapt and improve them in their classrooms, and pass them on again.

Thanks also to everyone at Kyoto JALT for inviting me up to Kyoto for a good day of group-building.

If anyone has a question or comment about anything here, please contact me at wdecker2000@yahoo.com.

*Be careful not to hurt yourself or students if you try the activities marked with an asterisk.