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24. THIS IS ME

*Using “I” Statements and Narrative Writing to
Introduce Students to Each Other*

ABSTRACT

For many students, walking into a new classroom is like walking into a new neighborhood. Students are looking for a way in, a way to be known, learn about classmates and prepare for what they hope will be a positive learning experience. The ‘This is Me’ statements and poster activities presented here are integrated with narrative writing to help introduce students to each other at any point in the school year. These activities can be adapted for use with small groups, a whole class, or used as an introduction when a new class student joins the classroom community. To support English language learners’ comprehension, these activities encourage speaking, writing, listening and reading.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

“Am I welcome here? Who are the students sitting in the desk next to me?” These are two questions students ask themselves when they enter a new classroom. English language learners may also ask “is this a safe space for me to learn?” When teachers help their students answer those questions, we create a community-centered classroom environment more likely to engage students and enhance motivation (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Turner, 2011).

Successful work with English language learners begins with knowing your students (Cary, 2007; Freeman, Freeman, & Ramirez, 2008). It is critically important to know your ELL students, know where they come from, and know what strengths they bring into the classroom (Freeman, Freeman, & Ramirez, 2008). Group activities are a recommended strategy to help ELL students make connections to each other and the school:

Group activities provide ELL students an opportunity to listen to an speak more English, to repeat vocabulary, paraphrase as needed, have more control of their usage of English, clarify any misunderstanding, and lower their anxiety and stress in the classroom. (Cruz, Nutta, O’Brien, Feyten, & Govoni, 2003, p. 24)

One group activity to help build classroom community and introduce students to each other is to ask each student to create a This is Me (TiM) poster. Like all

S. L. TURNER

students, ELL students have two stories teachers must attend to—the outside story, what happens away from school, and the inside story, the learner’s experiences in schools (Cary, 2007). TiM helps English language learners combine both aspects of their story. On the TiM poster, students share their autobiographical information with each other and try to guess whose story they are hearing. The questions on the TiM poster can be revised to reflect subject, complexity or age levels.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to use narrative writing to identify their interests, characteristics and personal goals;
- Students will be able to create an autobiographical poster that will introduce themselves to other students.

PROCEDURE

1. Prepare the materials needed: $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ paper, poster paper, markers, tape, and crayons.
2. Instructor asks students to sit in a circle or arrange desks in a “U” shape with the instructor at the front, the open part of the “U.”
3. The instructor asks students open-ended questions that address identity and classroom community:
 - a. “How would you describe yourself?”
 - d. “If I say we have something in common, what does that mean?”
 - e. “What do you like to do when you are not in school?”
 - f. “Do we have to know each other to be kind to each other?”
 - g. “What are your goals for the school year?”
4. The instructor explains answering these questions are a part of establishing classroom community and welcoming every student into the classroom.
5. The instructor shares his or her completed This is Me (TiM) poster with autobiographical information and answers to the questions previously asked. The instructor’s TiM poster is posted on the wall for student reference.
6. The instructor models how to create a TiM poster by answering the seven TiM prompts on a blank sheet with help from the students.
7. Students are asked to think about how they might answer those questions and introduce themselves to each other by sharing their interests and goals.
8. Students are given $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ paper or poster paper, markers, tape, and crayons and asked to create their own TiM poster.

Seven Prompts for a TiM Poster

1. The first line is the student’s name or is left blank.
2. Written on the second line are two adjectives that describe the student:

- a. Two words that describe me are _____ and _____.
3. The third line lists two activities the student enjoys doing:
 - a. Two activities I enjoy are _____ and _____.
4. The fourth line shares one movie, tv show, or one book the student enjoys:
 - a. The _____ I enjoy most is _____.
5. The fifth line identifies a place the student would like to visit:
 - a. A place I would like to visit is _____.
6. The sixth line shares how they will show kindness or respect to class members:
 - a. I will show kindness to my classmates by _____.
7. Seventh line is a goal they have for the school year:
 - a. My goal for the school year is to _____.

The first line on the TiM poster is the student's name. If the name is on the poster, students can introduce themselves and share what is on their TiM poster. If the students' names are left off and the first line is blank, the TiM posters can be presented anonymously and the class can try to guess whose poster is being presented. Please see Figure 1 for an example of a TiM poster.

My name is Chris

Two words that describe me are adventurous and curious.

Two activities I enjoy are skiing and swimming.

The book I enjoy most is Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.

A place I would like to visit is the factory where they make M & M's.

I will show kindness to my class mates by offering help when they get stuck.

I know I have a good teacher when she smiles a lot and gives do-overs.

My goal for the school year is to make new friends and have fun!

Figure 1. An example of a TiM poem/poster

ELL Support with TiM

An important element of supporting English language learners in the classroom is a focus on communication—especially the modalities of speaking, writing, listening and reading (Cary, 2007). If used as a whole class or small group activity, TiMs offer opportunities for English language learners to practice all four modalities of communication. If a teacher models the TiM activity by first presenting a TiM poster of his or her own, or creating a sample student TiM poster, students will have a visual roadmap they can use to approach their TiM work.

Can I Really Use TiM Posters with Older Students and Adults?

Walking into a classroom is like walking into a new neighborhood for students. Students are looking for a way in, a way to situate themselves and prepare for what

they hope will be a positive learning experience; this is the case especially at the beginning of a school year when students are learning about each other. TiM posters are especially adaptable and can be structured to fit class topics, levels of complexity and differentiated for different age groups (always with a reminder to keep TiM responses G or PG). Strategies for adapting TiM posters for older students and adults include revising the “I” questions.

A few examples for revising “I” questions include:

My favorite subject in school/college is _____.
The subject is most challenging to me is _____?
In this class, I hope to learn _____.
A special talent or an interest I have that would surprise people is _____.
A past accomplishment that made me feel proud was _____.
At the end of the school year, I hope my teachers will say that I _____.
After high school/college I would like to _____.
I know I have good classmates when _____.
I know I have a good teacher when _____.
My favorite quote is _____.

Two other strategies to adapt TiM activities in class are a TiM book and Sharebox.

1. *TiM Book.* Use each question from the TiM poster to create a TiM Book—instead of answering each question on one poster, each question becomes a page in a book. Students add pages to the book all year as they learn and experience new things.
2. *TiM Sharebox.* Give students a brown paper bag or a shoebox to take home, and ask them to place three items that will tell the class something about them—example include photos, a ticket stub, a favorite book, a card, then each student shares with the class why the item is important or significant.

REFLECTION

Whatever the subject being taught, when a teacher has one or more English language learners in their class, that teacher becomes a language teacher. What helps English language learners is a focus on communication. The TiM activity presented here combines elements of communication including writing, speaking, listening, and reading and helps introduce students to each other while establishing the classroom as a shared community where every student is valued and has a place. To establish a shared community students first need to hear each other’s stories. TiM activities can be a good first step to welcome students into the classroom community.

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