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Curriculum Design Assessment

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# English Language Introduction: Adult Refugees Same Classroom Different Countries.

Community is the core of classroom learning.

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## Context

The students are all at A1 level in English and varying levels of academic education in their L1.

The class convenes at Ascentria Refugee Intake Center in Westfield MA. There are approximately 25 adults from 20's to 60's in age from Iraq, Syria, Belorussia, Ukraine, Congo, Nepal, and Bhutan.

Many are from refugee camps with no academic education in their L1. They overcome hurdles to get here and are determined to succeed. Others have a fairly good grounding in their language and experience with skilled employment in their home country. This translates into numerical literacy as well as linguistic. All the students are engaged and participatory in class.

The stakeholders are the US Government, the state of Massachusetts, the administrators of the center, and the local communities, where the refugees live.

Some of them live close enough to walk, some drive, and some take more than one bus.

Socio-economically, Westfield appears to be middle and lower middle class, with a suburban feel. There do not seem to be any cultural opportunities.

The ultimate objective is to enable the students to adjust to USA cultural norms, as well as advance to the English level they need for successful employment.

They have limits on their funding from the government, with deadlines for job placement.

### **Objective challenges of students**

Open class: students come and go as they either advance or get jobs. Students enter at different levels than the class is at any moment. They need medical care frequently vis a vis traumatic history, inadequate living environments, and overall poor health. They are also absent to take care of family responsibilities.

### **Objective challenges of Ascentria**

Inadequate classroom size. Inadequate supplies and facilities. Poor staff training re psychology of interacting with refugees.

This is a report describing a lesson plan for four hours of my six week internship. I hope you will be able to use my approach and content in any class of complete beginners, refugee or not.

## Letter to students

(This will be illustrated and demonstrated as much as possible, as the students will not be able to understand the language.)

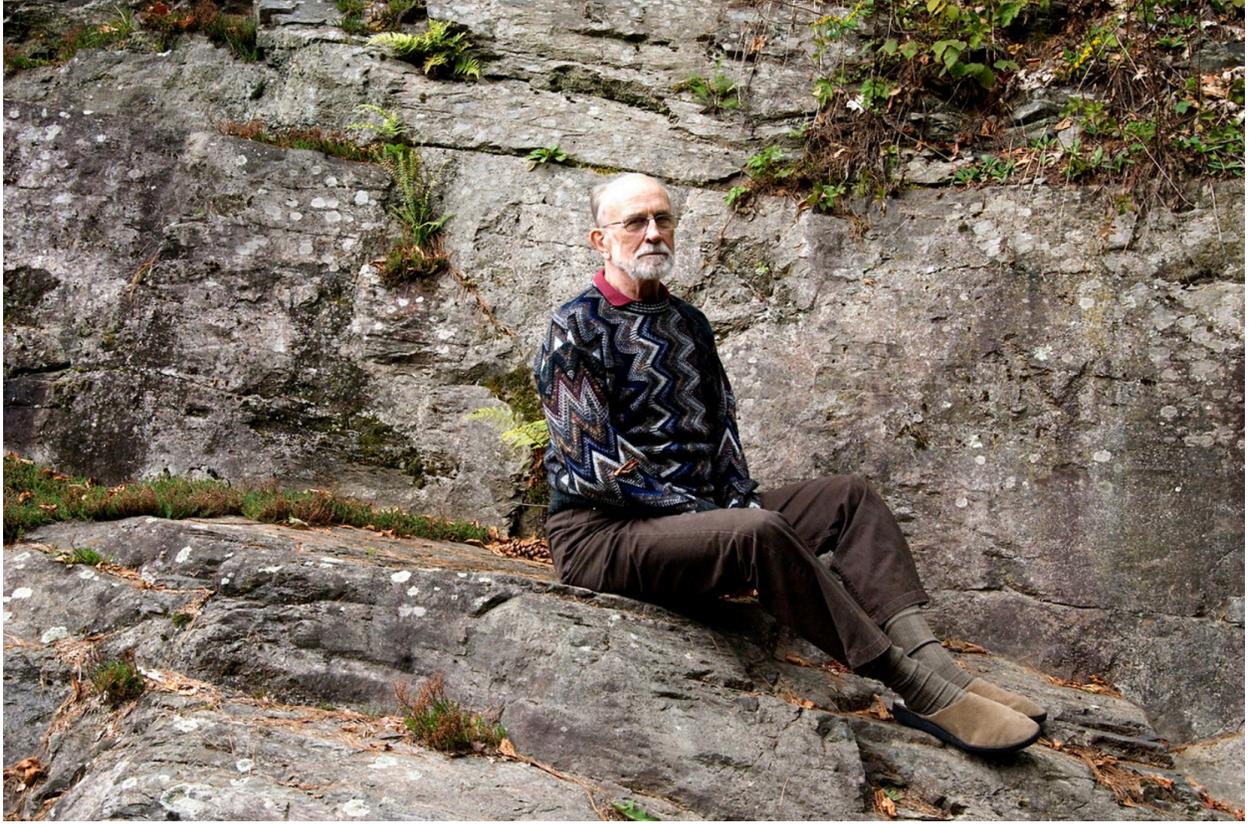
Dear Students

Hi, my name is France. I'm from a small village in the state of Vermont and now live in a little village in the state of New Hampshire.



It is an hour and a half drive from here by car.  
I will show you on our wall map.

I live with my husband, Andy,





our cat, Anteros,  
and all the mice he has not caught.



I like to climb rocks,



paddle kayaks,





run on trails,



and hike up mountains.

Most of all, I like to help people learn English, and I am very happy to have you as my students.

I look forward to your success.

France

## Beliefs

Community is the core of classroom learning. This is the sea in which we live. The splash is our learning and teaching moment. The droplets are the outcomes.



The more effectively we communicate with others, the more effectively we can be our true, human, selves.

"Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning." - Paulo Freire

Teaching must be based on how students learn, if they are to learn. They must have reasons to learn and we, as teachers, must also understand the reasons for their responses.

Some examples: They may be carrying the norms of their former classroom into yours. They may never have been in a class are are intimidated.

Questions to ask yourself: Are you being clear? Do they understand the subject? The concept? What is the meaning behind their responses?

Are they feeling well? Do they have family concerns that are occupying their focus? Are they confused about syntax in English and are carrying their L1 into the class lesson?

Learn how to address effects of trauma on language learning.

Be aware of global politics and how it affects students' lives.  
Know how to make learning and teaching socially and culturally relevant to your students.  
Reflect their lives as you enable them to learn English.

My beliefs for teaching are aligned with my beliefs for living. Successful interaction with others on every level travels through respect and acceptance. Tolerance is a judgemental act as it implies a "putting up with," which indicates measurement. Allow others to open to you as is their need, not yours.

Effective teaching requires finding a way to make knowledge accessible. Sociocultural knowledge and intercultural competence pave the way to this accessibility.

An essential component of successful teaching is self-awareness. Are you interjecting your own cultural norms and linguistic behavior into your class? Are you assuming an understanding from your students that does not exist? Have you learned enough about their culture to avoid behavior that could be offensive or puzzling to them?

Assume nothing and be intrepid. Language teaching and learning is analogous to life learning. Language is a multidimensional force for community. For the beginning student there are cultural conflicts and unknowns along with the challenges of learning the language itself. Therein lies power as citizens in their new culture.

## Goals & Objectives

**GOAL: Sociocultural competence and comprehensible English output**

**OBJECTIVES:**

**What they need to know**

- English for employment and self esteem
- discourse competence

**Considerations**

- their level of education in L1, if at all
- their economic variances: different expectations from class and from life in general

**What they want to know**

- how to adjust to personal freedom
- to understand USA communication between sexes
- to learn USA norms to showing respect  
(there is often a different “everything”)

**What I want them to know**

**How I want them to learn**

**STRATEGIES**

- listening
- pronunciation

phonics (eg., minimal pairs)  
reading  
writing  
speaking  
basic syntax and grammar

### **My role**

- provide culturally based vocabulary in authentic language applicable to their lives
- encourage students from different countries to collaborate with each other
- provide explicit information about social behavior that could cause misunderstandings
- give specific pronunciation help for those whose L1 has no equivalent sound in English
- bridge variations of students' experiences so that everyone has a positive learning experience
- make the classroom a place of openness, acceptance, and community
- be sensitive to how I place students together, but also push them a bit to come out of their shell

### **Post trauma considerations**

- living in refugee camps is a life of dependency.
- many have never known another life
- living within physical violence
- war
- personal abuse
- lack of family support

# Mind Map



## SCOPE & SEQUENCE

**The course introduces recently arrived refugees to the language and cultural norms of the USA.**

I have based my course on Freire's statement, which is the core of my language teaching belief.

"Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning." - Paulo Freire

Every sequence builds on the preceding one. Each one overlaps to reinforce students' learning and to make them feel comfortable and safe in an academic setting.

Though the actual course covers a six week time frame, I have prepared this lesson plan to cover four, one hour sequences. That is enough for you to build upon with your own beliefs and course context.

Each class within a unit lies along a sequence of specific language presentations interspersed with physical activities to reinforce linguistic elements preceding it. These are repeated in every class, but are altered to reflect the learning of the day, and to reinforce the learning of the preceding day.

Think of it as down and up: down is the new topic(s) for the class, and up is the physical activity which reinforces that topic.

The organization is cyclical and overlapping in a slight overlap to the preceding cycle to reinforce learning. This overlap, including physical activity, helps the students relax and be more creative in their class participation.

The course can be implemented successfully with the barest of tangible materials. No technology is needed. Pens or pencils, crayons, markers, paper, scissors, and whatever objects are at hand will be sufficient. A white board is helpful, but paper could be used as well. The students themselves participate to illustrate concepts.

# Units with lesson plans and materials

## 4 hours of a 6 WEEK COURSE for newly arrived refugees

Iraq, Syria,  
Belorussia,  
Ukraine, Congo,  
Nepal. Bhutan

### HOURS

HOURS 1 -2

unit = one hour

### SOCIOCULTURAL

introduce themselves to each other: where from, where live now, children? etc

consider inhibitions from L1 culture

use culturally based vocabulary (throughout all lessons) to help them adapt to cultural norms of USA

### skills

pronunciation of letters and sounds within beginning vocabulary, esp. for people whose L1 does not have EN sounds. writing their names & addresses

comprehensible output, able to read addresses clearly

know alphabet, days of week, months, numbers, start to learn names for parts of body

## activities

▶ write their names in EN on the board for all to see, and speak them aloud to work on pronunciation and to re-introduce themselves

cut up small pieces of paper, have 2 teams race to see which team is first to write letters of alphabet on papers and place in correct order (as a surprise, winners get the cookies first, but everyone gets them)

be able to write & state which day, month, & year it is

I write them on board with gaps and have them come up at random (volunteer first) to fill in the correct day, month, year

give them pieces of papers, each with months and days of week and have them place them in correct order

play "Simon Says" for body parts

intersperse between more "academic" activities to get them moving and keep engaged

## HOURS 3 - 4

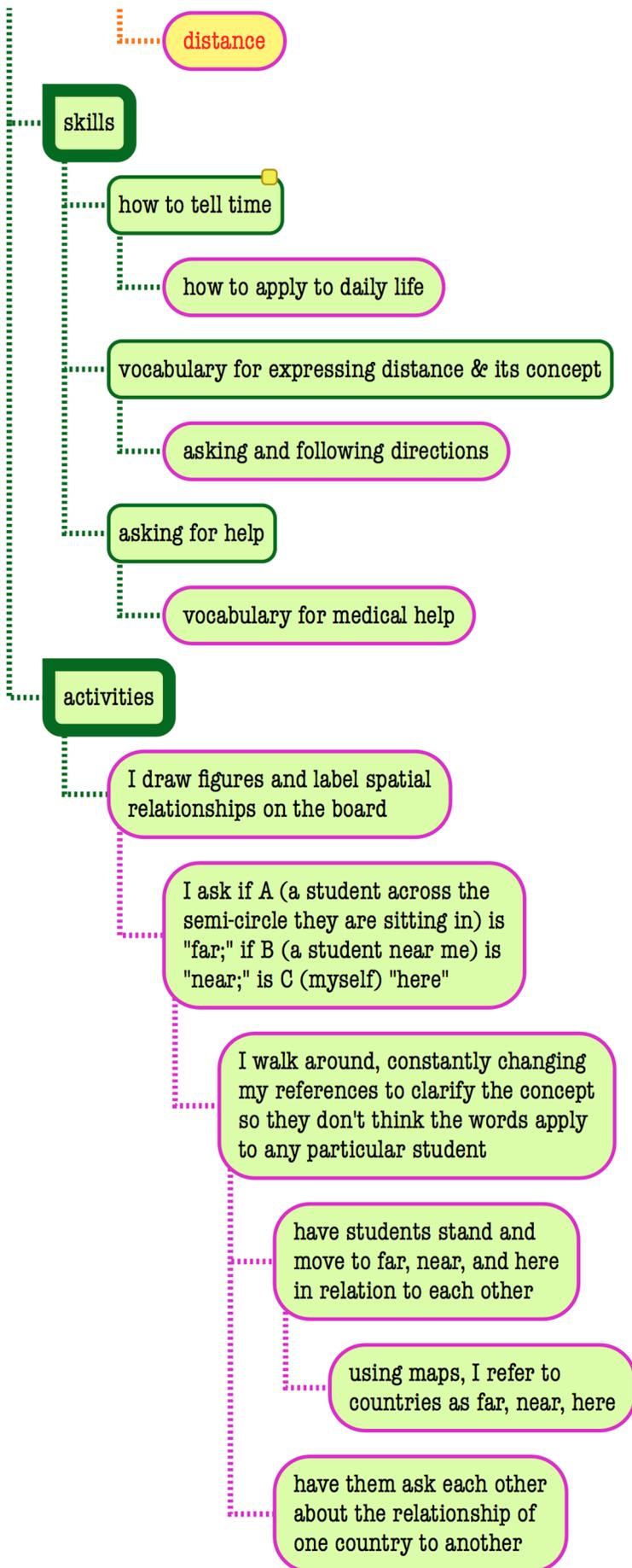
unit: 1 hour

### SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL CONCEPTS

directions

time

distance



## **Detailed descriptions of unit scope and sequence.**

### ***SOCIOCUTURAL ACTIVITIES***

#### **Introduce themselves to each other: where from, where live now, children?**

Eg., I start with my introduction to one student. "Hello, my name is France. I'm pleased to meet you." Gesture that they should do the same. If they don't understand, I point to my mouth and then to them ...gesturing with a "come on' hand gesture (depends on their culture) and nodding yes, while smiling, helps a great deal. Repeating it a few times enables their understanding of this skill.

#### **Consider inhibitions from L1 culture**

Be aware of gesture meaning in different cultures if you want to use a strong one. Eg., our "come here" gesture means "go away" elsewhere.

Shaking hands can be restricted to gender in their culture and students must learn that it is de rigueur here.

#### **Use culturally based vocabulary (throughout all lessons) to help them adapt to cultural norms of USA**

Teach them how to address others, how little we use honorifics, and how we interact between genders.

As they advance and start to ask about expressions they have heard, start to teach the meaning of expressions with the caveat that they learn when and where they are appropriate.

Eg., how to express disagreement in a civil manner, how to not talk about people in a negative manner, etc.

### ***SKILLS***

#### **Pronunciation of letters and sounds within beginning vocabulary, esp. for people whose L1 does not have EN sounds. Writing their names & addresses.**

As I introduce them to the letter sounds of the alphabet, I have them all repeat each sound after me. I hear everyone's pronunciation and stop the class to point out differences due to their L1. We all practice the letter(s) a person has difficulty with, and then move on. I strive to make everyone feel included in this way. They start to help each other.

#### **Comprehensible output; able to read addresses clearly.**

This exercise is concurrent with work on pronunciation of letters individually and in words, pointing out where the sounds are different between a single letter and its use within a word.

This is also concurrent with their memorization of their addresses.

**Know alphabet, days of week, months, numbers, start to learn names for parts of body.**

Relate these elements to the need for them to memorize their addresses. Relate their need to communicate for medical help with the learning of names for parts of the body.

### ***ACTIVITIES***

**Play "Simon Says" for body parts**

Use this activity in every lesson and increase the vocabulary with each game. Start with major body parts and extend the vocabulary to include clothing. Build on the words in each subsequent game.

Intersperse between more "academic" activities to get them moving and keep engaged.

**Have them write their names in EN on the board for all to see, and speak them aloud to work on pronunciation and to re-introduce themselves to each other.**

Learning each other's name increases their self esteem and sense of comraderie. Some students are illiterate in their L1. Some are unfamiliar with academic education. They may need help in learning to hold and use a pencil. They may be overwhelmed by a classroom setting and may need individual encouragement to participate. Above all, they must be made to feel that their lack of previous education is OK.

**Cut up small pieces of paper, have 2 teams race to see which team is first to write letters of alphabet on papers and place in correct order** (as a surprise, winners get cookies first, but everyone gets them)

They need to understand what a team is, and what a race is. They could think they need to race against each other, individually, and it may take a second attempt for them to understand racing in a group - the concept of team.

**Be able to write & state the day, month, & year.**

The idea of units of time vis a vis before and after need to be introduced and illustrated. Eg., It is also an illustration of place (in front and behind, which can be included if you think the students would comprehend at this point). Have some students (the ones with the least schooling to make them feel included) stand in a row and ask if X is after Y and is Z before X, etc.

Write them on the board with gaps and have them come up at random (volunteer first) to fill in the correct day, month & year.

**Give them pieces of papers, each with months and days of week and have them place them in correct order.**

Also an example of reinforcing the concept of working together, as in the alphabet race.

## SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL CONCEPTS

Directions

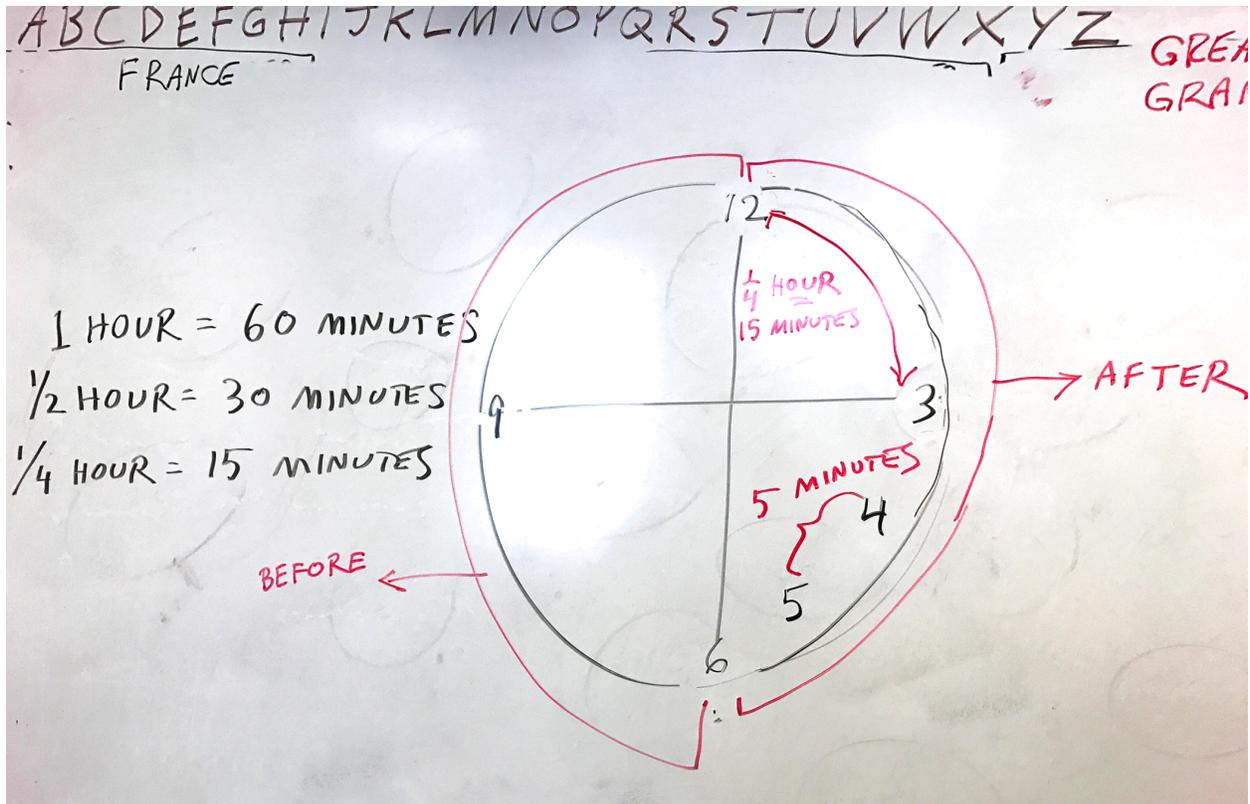
Time

Distance

### SKILLS

How to tell time.

How to apply it to daily life



Vocabulary for expressing distance & its concept.

Asking and following directions

Asking for help

Learning vocabulary for medical help

### ACTIVITIES

Telling time.

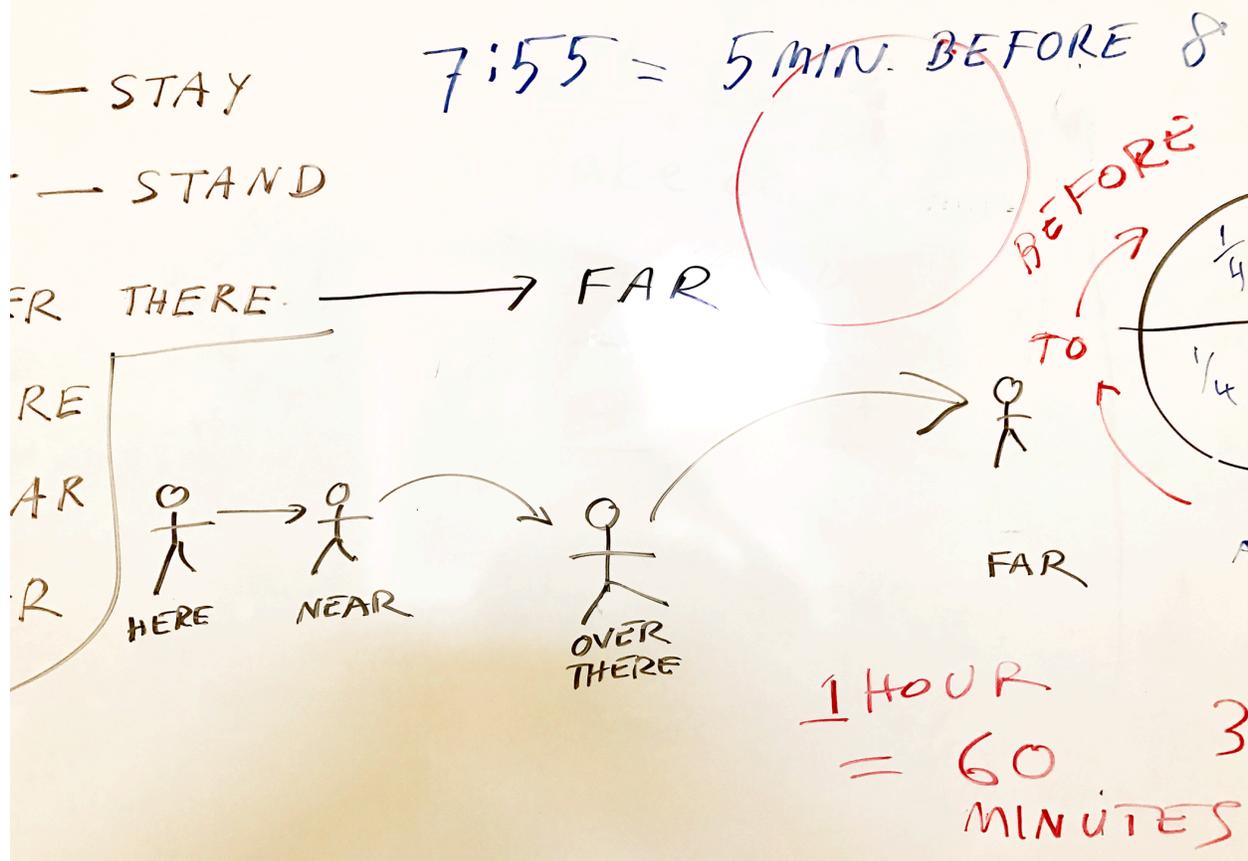
Learn the numbers, their sequence, and the concept of less than and greater than. Illustrate with numbers of the same object. Using the students themselves, repeat the demonstration for before and after.

Using a real, large wall clock, move the hands, show them different times, explain how one side is after the hour, and one side is before. Show the "after" side (the right side between 12 and 6, and the "before" side between 6 and 12).

Start a conversation about when they get up, go to sleep, & why they do when they do. The conversation will flow as students learn about each other.

### Spatial relationships

Draw figures and label spatial relationships on the board



Ask if A (a student across the semi-circle they are sitting in) is "far;" if B (a student near me) is "near;" is C (myself) "here."

Walk around, constantly changing references to clarify the concept so they don't think the words apply to any particular student.

Have students stand and move to far, near, and here in relation to each other, and have them do the asking and direct the moving.

Using maps, refer to countries as far, near, & here. Have them ask each other about the relationship of one country to another. Use their countries of origin to make the lesson inclusive.

# ASSESSMENT PLAN

## INITIAL ASSESSMENT

### **What, who, why, when, and how I made my assessments.**

In order to establish a starting point for my lesson plan, I need to know what my students already know. Since I have been told they are A1, and that some are illiterate in their L1, I start by introducing myself and asking their names and country of origin. I ask them to come up to the board and write their names.

By their understanding - or lack of - this activity, I am able to get a sense of their individual levels of English comprehension and comprehensible output. I also ask them where they live, and to come up to the board to write their addresses.

Their writing ability gives me a sense of their L1 level.

As they perform these tasks, I help them as they need. Eg., for those who cannot write, I hold their hand with the marker in their hand and guide their writing until they can do it themselves. I write their names and addresses for them to copy.

The assessment is a learning experience for them. It is an authentic need, as required to speak and write their names and addresses for applying to a job; their most important next step in adjusting to life in the USA.

## ONGOING ASSESSMENT

I assess the students each day and use my assessment to build the following day's lesson. Each lesson element is based on their essential, communicative needs. I strive to make each lesson FOR, OF, and AS learning. I believe this method embeds learning most deeply. Through active and enjoyable exercises, it relaxes the students and makes them aware of participation in and creation of the learning itself.

Eg., As an assessment of their vocabulary knowledge, I play the "fly-swatter" game every day. I have the students supply words to write on the board, call them out and keep score. Each time we play, I guide them to include more words.

Each assessment is ongoing and provides a ground for the subsequent lesson.

Because I have no curricula, or written assessment requirement from the stakeholders, I use photos of the students' work and my continuous observational assessment of class participation to reference their progress throughout the course.

This is the most meaningful and practical way. It is completely authentic.

## **FINAL EVALUATION**

On the last day in the course, I engage the students in a class conversation about all the life subjects we cover.

The only “test” I give is to have them memorize their addresses and be able to speak them clearly and comprehensibly.

The group conversation is a learning experience in every way. It also brings them closer together. We use their newfound vocabulary to speak about life events. They are able to make each other laugh. That is my evaluation.

With very beginning students, I believe the best assessment comes from designing activities that they can create and direct themselves with linguistics and socio-cultural elements I provide. Their performance becomes the evaluation.