



# Foreign/Second Language:

## Languages and Relationships

### What if elementary foreign language lessons encouraged good relationships?

Bill taught French in his elementary school. He was unhappy with the number of disconnected words and sentences in his French teaching. He decided to reframe the lesson in terms of relationships while still covering the grammar and the vocabulary he needed.

“During the lunch hour I set up three role-playing areas:

- Playing with friends
- Being at home
- Working at school

“In each area, the students learned how to say a sentence or ask a simple question in French, learning both sentence and response in pairs. I chose situations where people could develop good relationships, instead of focusing on things like shopping or travel. They also improvised a pantomimed action, showing their sentence and response. For example, some were catching a ball, or helping a younger brother or their mom. In each role-playing area I had some simple sentences recorded, which the students could play; but they always came in sentence–response format, and each sentence-response pair focused on relationships. The sentences were also in written format in speech bubbles. For example:

- I like playing ball / I'll play with you.
- I need some help / I'll help you.

“After the class tried the different sentences and responses, we talked about what we had learned and made a list of things they would like to learn to say in order to respond to others.”

## What's going on here?

Bill saw his language teaching in terms of a range of relationships and language as a way to build community. This made his teaching more relational.

He engaged students in experiencing a series of simple role-play interactions that focused their attention on relationships and cooperation, and helped them reflect on their learning.

He reshaped his practice by using his classroom space to create role-playing areas, by providing recordings to guide students interactions, and by choosing his topic and examples to encourage a relational focus.

## What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Bill understood that at the heart of the Christian faith lies a relationship. The Trinity is God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who are in a relationship of love. People are made in the image of God, and Christians should reflect loving relationships into the world. Jesus's summary of the law of Moses is couched in terms of relationships: "Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke10:27). Language learning can serve this ideal of making relationships a high priority.

## What difference does it make?

Sometimes learning can feel impersonal and disconnected from life. Knowing what purpose you are developing language skills for, and connecting that purpose to caring about others, helps orient the students to a different way of seeing a subject.

## Where could we go from here?

Throughout the curriculum, relationships can be emphasized by the way in which a subject is taught. In a health or civics class, the emphasis can be moved to people in relationship rather than “my personal development.” In history, the study of significant individuals can be approached as individuals in relationship, rather than lone rangers.

## Digging deeper

The Bible is the story of God’s relationship with humanity. Throughout the Bible God comes into relationship with individuals, groups, and a whole nation—Israel ([Deuteronomy 7:6](#)). Christianity is centered on a relationship with God through faith in Christ, which gives people a fresh start ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). This relationship matures over time as people grow in faith, hope, and love. This means that good relationships are central to Christians. Much of Western society has seen a breakdown of relationships. This has hit children the hardest. Relationships are where the hurt has happened, but relationships are also the context for healing and hope. The Christian model of relationships is about redeeming the past and giving people a new start with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Christian faith is about people living out their relationship with God as a community ([Romans 14:7](#)). The Bible compares Christ to the head and the people to the body, with all the parts depending on each other ([Ephesians 4:15-16](#)).

*We can be human only in fellowship, in community, in koinonia, in peace.  
We are not made for an exclusive self-sufficiency but for interdependence.  
A person is a person through other persons. Bishop Desmond Tutu*



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