

## 10 ideas for Personalizing the Language Classroom Every Day

by **Karen Rowan**

*“I think I’m going to have to change schools. I don’t have any friends here. The friends I used to have, have started being really mean since one of my best friends started dating my ex-boyfriend. I lost him and them all at the same time and I’m sad all the time.”*

*“Things are better since my mom finished chemotherapy. We’re just trying to spend a lot more time with her right now, so I’m not really focused on school as much as I should be.”*

*“I have this sleep paralysis thing that the doctors can’t figure out. It makes me really tired when I wake up because I don’t sleep well.”*

*“My back has been really hurting since the car accident. It’s hard to get comfortable in a desk.”*

*“My parents kicked me out, so I’ve been living in my car and showering in the locker rooms. Sorry I’ve been falling asleep in class.”*

These are actual responses from the extra-credit question, “Tell me what’s going on in your life?”, a question originally suggested by Blaine Ray over fifteen years ago.

Personalization of language instruction is one way to make comprehensible input compelling and even riveting. Our primary goal becomes to connect with students in a way that allows them to be who they are and then learn to express their selves in another language.

Some of these ideas work best in a storytelling classroom. Most will work in any classroom that is providing ample comprehensible input:

1. Use student’s names. Give them nicknames.
2. Start the year with a student interest inventory. Ask questions and leave blanks.
3. Use those inventories while talking with the class. Talk about one or two students at a time, highlighting some of the interesting things about them in a story or conversation.
4. Provide students with short lists of questions throughout the year. (Favorite celebrity, activity, food.) Swap those lists with other students. When you ask questions, students are responsible for talking about other students or comparing their own likes to those of the paper they were handed.
5. Talk about your students in the target language. Don’t just ask them about their weekends. Instead, ask other students what students did this weekend. Ask them to confirm what they did or didn’t do. When students were in the same place, pretend one was spying on the other and ask for inside information and confirmation.