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Getting ready

This chapter includes both non-verbal and verbal activities. None of them take very long to do. All of them are intended to get students in the mood for more extended drama activities. More specifically:

- They all involve a degree of physical activity, thus helping to restore the balance between thinking and doing.
- They help put students in a relaxed, less inhibited state, in which they are more receptive than they might otherwise be. This helps to lower the threshold of unconscious resistance to learning a foreign language, and to foster more open, creative work in subsequent activities.
- They help to develop confidence and cooperation with others. Being aware of others and how we relate to them is an important aspect of class bonding.
- They can help students to make a smooth transition from their activities outside the class (perhaps a lesson in a different subject, or the stress of coming from a job in heavy traffic) to the learning atmosphere of the language class.
- They may also be used to make smooth links between one activity and the next.

There are four main types of activity:

1. non-verbal warming up
2. non-verbal relaxation / cooling down
3. activities involving language
4. group formation activities.

The way you choose to use the activities is up to you. As you come to get the feel of your class group, you will know best which ones to use at which moments. There is no grading, though activities are presented in clusters when they share common elements.

There are a number of further general points to be made:

- Most of these activities involve physical activity. You will need to be vigilant to ensure that things do not get out of hand, and that students observe care and attention for others.
Some of the activities recommend lying on the floor. This must be at your discretion. If there is insufficient space, or if surfaces are too hard or dirty, students can usually do the activity standing or sitting.

Many activities involve physical contact between students. In some societies, such contact is taboo. Make sure that it is acceptable before launching into it. (Note that it is often possible to do these activities if males are paired with males, and females with females.)

Many of the activities are good ways of warming up a group of students who do not yet know each other. It is important therefore that they change partners as often as possible so as to interact with a larger number of other students.

For many of the activities you may need to demonstrate the procedure with one of the students.

Non–verbal warming-up activities

1.1 Handshakes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>To have everyone in the group meet and have contact with everyone else</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>5–10 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure

1. Clear space in the room so that students can walk around freely.
2. Tell students to walk around the room. As they do so, they should shake hands with every other member of the group as they meet them. Each time they shake hands, they should make eye contact with the other person and hold it for a few seconds, and smile.

Variations

1. Students mill around in the space. As they do so, they must try to meet as many other students as possible. When they meet, they should shake hands, smile and say: I’m (name). Nice to meet you. Repeat the activity. This time, they say: Hello (name of the other person). Nice to see you again. How are things? Obviously, you can vary the phrases they say to each other.

2. If students have trouble recalling names, the person being greeted should help them out. You can also teach the ploy: Hello. Nice to meet you again. Now you are … (hesitation when the other person will usually
supply his/her name!) as well as some useful face-saving expressions, such as: *I’m very good at faces but I’m terrible with names*, etc.

3 You may wish to set the occasion for the greeting. For example: a reunion party for school friends who have not met for ten years; a wedding bringing together family members who have not met since the last wedding ten years ago; a funeral gathering of an ex-colleague, etc. Alternatively, give students a theme word, such as *Cheerful, Sad, Disappointed, Hurry*. They then shake hands in a way that reflects the theme word. Change the theme word several times.

1.2 **Hand catching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>To release some of the nervous energy students often bring with them to class – this helps prepare them for more sustained activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>5–10 minutes</td>
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</table>

**Procedure**

1 Students stand in pairs facing each other. One partner holds out both hands, palms facing inwards, about 25 cm apart (see illustration).

2 The other partner tries to quickly pass his/her right hand vertically between the partner’s hands without getting caught in the trap, which can close at any time.
3 Reverse roles: the one caught becomes the catcher. After a few turns, change partners.

Variations
1 Student 1 holds out two hands palms down. Student 2 places hands, palms facing up, underneath. Student 1 tries to catch one of Student 2’s palms by a quick slap down. Student 2 tries to move before getting slapped.
2 Students face each other in pairs with their left hands behind their backs, palms facing outward. When you say Go, each student tries to touch their partner’s left palm with their right hand while avoiding being touched themselves. After a couple of minutes, change partners. Continue changing partners every few minutes.

1.3 Mirror hands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>To develop concentration and anticipation of what a partner will do next</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure
1 Students stand in pairs facing each other with their hands raised to shoulder height, palms facing outward, and as close to their partner’s hands as possible without actually touching (see illustration).
2 One student is the ‘leader’ and begins to move both hands in a plane, i.e. always keeping the palms facing toward the partner’s hands. The partner must try to follow the movements as accurately as possible, as if in a mirror.

3 After a few minutes, the other partner takes the role of ‘leader’.

Variation
Students face each other in pairs with hands raised to shoulder height and palms touching their partner’s palms (see illustration). They move their hands slowly in as many different directions as possible without losing palm contact. After a few minutes, pairs become threes and continue the movements. A few minutes later, threes become fours and continue.

Notes
1 The need to concentrate on another person is analogous to the sort of anticipation demanded in verbal exchanges. It also develops a high degree of eye contact between partners.

2 You may suggest to students that they use the whole space available, i.e. from high above the head to the feet, and from side to side.

3 You may also need to remind them that this is a cooperative, not a competitive, activity!
1.4 Numbers in your head

<table>
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<th>To give physical shape to numbers in a foreign language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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</table>

**Procedure**

1. Each student finds a space to stand in. With eyes closed, everyone traces the shapes of the numbers from 0 to 9 simply by moving their heads only (no movement of the trunk, etc.) to follow the shapes. As they trace each number, they ‘say’ the number silently (in the foreign language!) in their heads.

2. Then ask one student to call out numbers at random, e.g. 51, 93, 66, etc. The other students keep eyes closed and make the shapes of the numbers with their heads as they are called out.

3. In pairs, facing each other with eyes open, one partner makes a number with the head, the other guesses what it is.

**Variations**

1. Ask students to make the letters of the alphabet in this way too.

2. Students find a place to stand where they can extend their arms fully without touching anyone else. One student is chosen to call out numbers between 0 and 9. As each number is called, the other students try to form its shape using their whole bodies. They hold the shape until the next number is called.

3. In groups of seven or eight, students decide on a word with the same number of letters as the number of group members (e.g. for a group of seven, bananas would fit). Each student then becomes one letter of the word. They have to form the shape of the letter with their whole body. Each group then presents its word to the others, who try to guess what it is.

4. In pairs, students take turns to use their index finger to trace in the air the shape of a number from 0 to 9. The partner guesses the number being traced. Students then change partners and move on to the letters of the alphabet, and to writing two- and three-digit numbers for each other to ‘read’. Finally, they write simple words in the air for their new partner to interpret.
Notes
1 Numbers are notoriously difficult to master in a foreign language. By reinforcing the number shape using body movement, the activity helps students to apprehend numbers in a more profound way and to integrate them physically. They feel as well as see and hear the numbers. By presenting the numbers in an unfamiliar way, involving the kinaesthetic dimension, the numbers and letters are reinforced through another modality.
2 Speaking the numbers silently is also important for reinforcement.
3 The activity gives excellent exercise to the neck and throat muscles, so important in producing speech!

1.5 Clap around the circle

<table>
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<th>Aims</th>
<th>To develop quick reactions; to facilitate non-verbal contact between students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>10–15 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure
1 Students stand in a big circle, if possible leaving about one metre between each student.
2 The teacher chooses one student to start. This student turns towards the next student on the right and claps hands towards that student, as if throwing the clap for them to catch.
3 The student ‘catches’ the clap by clapping, then turns to the right and claps to the next student, who also catches this clap, turns to the right and throws a clap to the next student … and so on, all round the circle.

Variations
1 When the clap returns to the student who started, reverse the direction, i.e. to the left.
2 Choose two students on opposite sides of the circle. One will send the clap to the right, the other to the left. Students need to be very alert, especially when the two claps cross over!
3 Choose one student to start. They clap towards any other student in the circle. This student claps as they receive it, then sends it to any other student in the circle. The clapping messages criss-cross the circle.
4 As in 3, but students add a short message as they clap. For example: A Here you are. B Thanks a lot.
5 Instead of clapping, students throw an imaginary ball, object or small animal to each other. Each time a student receives something they must transform it into something else before throwing it on.

Notes
1 This is a lively activity which keeps students alert and on their toes.
2 You will need to make sure students both catch and throw their claps – so each student claps twice each time. Try to get a fast pace going.
3 With a very large class, students can form several circles, depending on space available.

See also 1.7 Catch the ball.

### 1.6 Swings

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<th>To develop mutual trust and confidence among students; to develop group cooperation; to help students relax before more demanding activities</th>
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<td>Levels</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>5–10 minutes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Procedure**

1 Students form groups of eight.
2 Seven students form the swing (see illustration): three on each side and one to support the head of the eighth.
Drama Techniques

3 The eighth student lies on the swing formed by the other students. They then slowly and gently swing the reclining student backwards and forwards a few times.

4 Everyone has a turn in the swing.

Variations

1 In pairs, one student stands behind the other. The student in front falls backwards, and is caught by the student behind (see illustration). Students alternate several times as ‘fallers’ and ‘catchers’. They then do the activity again, this time facing each other.

2 Students form threes. The student falling stands between the other two and falls first backwards, then forwards. Each time, the catching student will gently push the falling student upright again. Take care, especially with teenagers!

3 Students work in groups of about eight. They form a circle. One student stands in the middle of each circle. This student folds arms and closes eyes. The other students stand about 30 cm away from him or her, and raise their hands to about shoulder height, with palms facing outward. The student in the middle then falls in any direction. The others must gently stop him or her falling, and gently push him or her in another direction (see illustration).
Notes
1 This is a very relaxing and enjoyable activity requiring considerable coordination and cooperation between students.
2 Make sure students understand the importance of doing the activity gently! For this reason, it may be an activity you would not do with teenagers! It is also best done on a carpeted floor, though this is not essential provided due care is taken not to drop the swinger!
3 The activity (and the Variations) is important for developing both self-confidence and mutual confidence; both of these are important qualities for drama work. Some students will be afraid of letting themselves fall. Gradually, however, if you do the activity more than once, they will develop the self-confidence to let themselves go.

1.7 Catch the ball

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>To develop physical anticipation, cooperation and rapport</th>
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<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>5–10 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedure**
1 Students work in pairs. They stand opposite each other and throw and catch an imaginary (invisible) ball to and fro between them.
2 After a few minutes, change partners.
Drama Techniques

Variations
1. Students stand in two lines of equal length, facing each other. The ball is then thrown by one student on one side to any student on the other.
2. In pairs, students play an imaginary game of table tennis.

Notes
1. Explain that it is important for students to really ‘feel’ and ‘see’ the ball – its size, weight, texture, etc. To help them do this, suggest the type of ball they are throwing: football, balloon (very light), tennis ball, ping-pong ball, medicine ball (very heavy), etc. If done well, it should almost be possible for an observer to ‘see’ the ball as it moves between them.
2. The activity is good preparation for some of the activities in chapter 3 (Working with mime).

See also 1.5 Clap around the circle.

1.8 Beat out that rhythm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>To encourage disciplined cooperation by learning to fit in with and respond to others’ physical actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>10–15 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure
1. Students work in groups of about ten. They should sit in a circle, preferably on the floor.
2. Designate one student to begin beating out a simple, not too fast, regular rhythm on the floor (or by clapping hands, clicking fingers, tapping a chair with a pen, etc.).
3. Once the rhythm is well established, the next student to the right adds in a variation to the main rhythm. Then the next student to the right adds another element, and so on, until a composite beat results.
4. If there is more than one group, let each group perform its rhythms for the others.

Variations
1. When a group has more or less finalised its ‘performance’, they may wish to polish it up, for example by varying volume – starting off very soft, working up to a climax and fading away at the end.
2. The groups may like to add words to their performance in the form of a simple chant which will fit the main rhythm.
Note
This activity requires a lot of self-discipline and concentration; students need to tune their contributions so that they do not drown out those of others. They also need to hold on to their own beat in spite of all the other sounds going on around them.

See also 4.11 A vocal tapestry.

1.9 Touch it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Aims</strong></th>
<th>To encourage observation of the classroom environment; to make sure students mix freely with each other in a friendly atmosphere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level</strong></td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>5–10 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedure**
1. Students form a group in the middle of the room.
2. The teacher then calls out a number of objects, surfaces, colours, textures, etc. in turn, e.g. *Touch something smooth*. *Touch something red*, etc. Students carry out the instructions as quickly as possible.

**Variation**
With more advanced students, the instructions can be made correspondingly more demanding (e.g. *Touch something with a corrugated surface*. *Find something used for perforating paper*, etc.).

**Note**
A very good mixing activity, which can also involve some vocabulary reinforcement.

1.10 Blind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Aim</strong></th>
<th>To develop confidence, trust and mutual consideration between members of a group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level</strong></td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td>Bring in suitable items to act as blindfolds (optional); you will need to rearrange the classroom furniture to make a kind of obstacle course.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Procedure**

1. Students choose a partner, and decide who will be the blind person and who the guide. Blind people either bind their eyes with a blindfold or close their eyes tightly (no cheating, please!).

2. The guides then take their blind partner by the arm, and silently and gently guide them around the room, taking care to avoid banging into any objects on the way.

3. Partners then change roles and repeat the process. If there is time, repeat the activity with a different partner.

4. If there is time, discuss briefly how students felt, both as guide and as blind person.

**Note**

In a large class, it may be better to limit the numbers of pairs operating at one time, to avoid collisions.

*See also* Chapter 11, *Warming up*.

**Non-verbal cooling-down activities**

1.11 **Breathing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>To help students control their breathing; to develop concentration and a sense of calm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedure**

1. Students find a space to stand in, then stand erect with their eyes closed.

2. On your word, students breathe in deeply, then release the breath slowly and evenly.

3. Students continue to do this for ten breaths. Each time, they should hold the air longer before releasing it. They should also try to release the air more slowly each time. You can help them by counting aloud for them: *In – two, three, four. Hold – two, three, four. Out – two, three, four; In – two, three, four, five*, etc.

4. Then ask students to sing a given note (*Aaaaah, Uuuuu, Oooooh*, etc.) as they exhale. Repeat this several times.