

## Self-management Tips for the Teacher in class & Use of Central Focal Points

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In communication with language teachers, It can often be heard that teacher training and other academic presentations are too esoteric with little relevance to the practical realities of our classrooms. With this in mind, this paper sets out to review concisely some practical, often physical, self management and classroom management points for teachers. Covered are lesson planning and student interaction, the teacher, the blackboard and finally other visual aids.

### Lesson Planning & Student Interaction

When discussing practical classroom realities, few would disagree that (at some point) practical reality needs first to be faced outside the classroom with lesson preparation. We should perhaps begin by considering the lesson's aim, new language, main stages and what to do at each stage. (Doff 1992, p.93)

Lewis and Hill Suggest that teachers Plan the following:

- a. what you are going to teach
- b. necessary material
- c. practical details (#of copies, equip.)
- d. make sure technical media is in the right position
- e. preparing text material (order, examples, words in text, etc.)
- f. have 2-3 five minute filler activities (Lewis & Hill 1985, p.56)

Once the above have been planned, teachers may want to follow these guidelines for most effective ordering of lesson components:

Put the harder tasks earlier

Have quieter activities before lively ones

Think about transitions

Pull the class together at the beginning and the end.

End on a positive note (Ur 1996, p.217-18)

To help prevent boredom, activities should be varied when necessary. Ur suggests the following variations in lesson components:

1. Tempo
2. Organization
3. Mode and Skill
2. Difficulty
5. Topic
6. Mood
7. Stir-settle
8. Active-passive (Ur 1996, p.217),

‘Courses and lessons need an overall structure,’ for both long and short term, and this preparation ‘should be concrete.’ Yet teachers should ‘avoid preparing too much or too rigidly.’ Neither should they let the course-book dictate, ‘be afraid to change the order of the book,’ or hesitate to cut or supplement as need dictates. The lesson should always be subject to change to take advantage of student interest and to accommodate ‘any particular difficulties which may emerge during the lesson’. ‘Sticking to a plan merely for the sake of a plan,’ defeats the purpose. When the plan stops helping the students, it should be revised. (Lewis & Hill 1985, p.56) Student-student L2 interaction is imperative if student speaking time is to be maximized. Gower suggests the following:

1. Redirecting students’ inquiries to other students and only answering them yourself as a last resort.
2. Not supplying everything yourself. Get them to lend each *other* pens, to share books, to open windows and so on.
3. Getting students to help each other
4. Letting the students correct one-another. Don’t jump in unless you have to.
5. Getting students to evaluate each other’s work
6. Checking comprehension through student-created questions about lesson material.
7. Allowing the students to take over the teacher’s role
8. Getting them to help you prepare their timetable for the coming series of lessons while being careful to have in advance, a clear idea of what you think they need.

9. Encouraging students to talk about the classes.
10. Encouraging students to circulate and not just stick with one partner.
11. Providing an abundance of 'pyramid' or 'snowballing' activities students get together and agree on lists of most important necessities for a given problem or situation, then confirm or change these through a series of group changes.
12. Exploiting information gap activities. (Gower 1988, p.155-56)

In other words, the teacher should provide models of new language presented and then arrange the remainder so that he She is the facilitator of a carefully planned course of student interaction.

Little influences the learning process more than the teacher's relationships with students, his/her classroom communication, motion and body language. The next section provides practical hints for effectiveness in these three areas.

### The Teacher In Class

This section deals with what is undoubtedly the most important resource available to any class – the teacher. This section is divided into three parts. The first part is concerned with the teachers rapport with students and other affective considerations, the second part deals with his/her classroom position, movement and gestures and the final section deals with metalanguage and other teacher talk.

**Rapport and Other Affective Considerations** – There are several rapport-promoting actions which a teacher may perform. Most fundamentally are: 'showing personal interest in the students', 'being interested in their progress', asking for comments on the classes', 'having the right manner' (it is generally best to be polite) and 'responding and reacting to what students say.' (Gower 1988, p.28-29)

In larger classes or classes that spend relatively few hours with you per week it is difficult to be 'concerned with how students feel about each other, or to be able to relate learning activities to feelings except in a vague and general way.' Nonetheless,

...in all classes, no matter how large, you should at least try and develop a cooperative atmosphere, with students taking each other into account as much as possible and learning to share language and ideas. (Gower 1988, p.28-30)

Interactive and cooperative atmospheres will likely also be energetic. When you want to get

the attention of students who are talking at the beginning of a lesson, want to stop them from doing something or just want to regain control of a noisy classroom, it is best not to yell or bang on things. It is often more effective to exaggerate certain features of your voice, dwelling longer than usual on certain syllables and making a joke of it.' (Gower 1988, p.23)

However important kindness and gentleness are in the classroom, this does not indicate that firmness does not have its place in a classroom:

...For a class to learn effectively, you must know how to be firm and directive when necessary as well as unobtrusive when students need to be left alone. In other words, you need to subtly alter your role according to the activity without going to the extremes of dominating a class or leaving it without anything to do. (Gower 1988, p.2)

As tempting as it may be to come across as an all-knowing 'authority,' on language or culture, this is often detrimental to rapport. Teachers who are native speakers of the L2 will likely be unaware of many of their students cultural nuances. Similarly, non-native teachers will likely have times when they are unable to answer student questions or other aspects of the material being taught. Admission of ignorance followed up with consultation of students or colleagues on the principle or item in question is the best way to deal with the problem. 'Ad hoc' answers mislead students and are likely to be discovered. Thus, to avoid a breakdown of trust and ultimately rapport, 'fudging' should be avoided. (Lewis & Hill 1985, p.49)

**Classroom position, movement and gestures** – Where the teacher is placed in class tells students 1)the activity type 2)your role 3)their expected role 4)who will be attended to, who will/will not be attended to and 5)'whether you expect a student to talk to you or not.' Being in front of the class allows you to 'maintain control through gesture and eye contact' (which should be maintained whenever possible) and to allow the entire class to focus on you and see any visuals and mimes you provide. But care should be taken not to 'be totally frozen,' or to move about or pace too much, or to 'rock back and forwards from one foot to the other.' You should be careful not to stand so close or far away that you can't be seen or heard or block visuals or writing on the board. (Gower 1988, p.15)

Gestures and eye contact perhaps enjoy some overlap into the rapport/ affective realm since the everyday gestures of one culture may be offensive to another. To prevent accidental rude or obscene gestures, a teacher may want to practice avoidance of gesture by using facial expression or eye contact instead of gestures or names when selecting students for activity. (Gower 1988,

p.9)

Conversely, Lewis and Hill advocate 'use of hands to encourage and direct students:'

...There are two main reasons for using your hands – you avoid unnecessary language which can distract students and while remaining completely clear, your hands can be used to increase the pace of the lesson...A simple gesture can indicate who is going to answer a question, or which pair of students should now read a dialogue. Simple gestures can also indicate that something is wrong – for example, holding up one hand and shaking it from side to side – or that a student should repeat something – a circular “rolling motion” with one hand. (Lewis & Hill 1985, p.41)

Perhaps turning an ear to student advice on gestures is the best idea. 'It's worth discussing different gestures to find out what to be wary of.' (Gower 1988, 12) However, some gestures stand more of a chance of neutrality than others. If there has been neither the time or the means to accomplish this prior to the first class or so, Lewis suggests use of the back of the hand when pointing. (Lewis & Hill 1985,42).In addition to gestures, it is also advisable to pay attention to any other potentially irritating habits such as excessive grinning or blinking or 'language ticks' such as “OK,” or “all right”.(Gower 1988, p.12)

**Metalanguage and other teacher talk** – Metalanguage is the language used for direction of the class. It 'should generally be below the level of the language being taught' so that it is immediately understood. (Gower 1988, p.25)

Whenever possible, 'demonstrate rather than explain,' As 'demonstrating reduces the amount of unnecessary teacher language, is explicit, gives an idea of timing, and is generally more effective than any explanation. (Lewis & Hill 1985, p.51)

When you speak, students will likely listen and not perform the task at hand. Therefore, teachers should 'keep their language to a minimum when students are doing something.' We discussed ways to stay out of the way of student interaction above, Lewis and Hill provide the following specifics:

- Do not interrupt students unnecessarily while they are preparing something.
- Do not dominate discussions yourself
- Do not tell students what they want to say
- Do not use more language than is necessary to direct and control classroom activity.

(Lewis & Hill 1985, 56)

Spoken language by nature implies that people should be talking to each other. This is nearly impossible if students are 'sitting in rows looking at the back of each other's necks.' Horseshoe formation, or facing pair or group formation will promote communication if classes are not too large. 'The seating should suggest that students are encouraged to talk to each other,' and allow the teacher to get out of the 'central, dominating role during certain activities. (Lewis & Hill 1985, p.40)

In spite of the importance of student-student interaction, learners generally expect considerable language modeling and communication directly from the teacher. For provision of this, teachers may want to 'contrast certain features of sounds, stress and intonation'; 'stress the syllable containing the sound' (immediately repeating it in normal pronunciation); exaggerate mouth movements; or incorporate gestures to remind students of sounds. A 'word or utterance' may also be 'broken down into syllables, sounds or words and each segment associated with one of your fingers,' which are then pointed to. Similarly stress and intonation may be indicated through visuals ranging from gestures to illustrations to marks on the board.(Gower 1988, p.164-66)Use of pauses may also indicate to students where punctuation might appear in language orally modeled or presented in absence of its written text. (Lewis & Hill 1985, p.42). As central the Teacher's self-management may be to effective lessons and classroom, this should not detract from the importance of the blackboard and other visual aids. The next two sections deal with these "media of the message."

### **Use of the Blackboard and Other Central Points of Focus**

Most teachers would feel hampered without a blackboard in their classroom, yet relatively little thought or planning goes into its effective use. (Hubbard, et al 1983, p.105)

Inclusion of planning of blackboard work in lesson planning is a necessity. Use of the "H" model often makes board work appear neater and better organized. The board is divided by an "H"-shaped pattern into four sections in which blackboard content is written. Teachers may want to select one panel for permanent or reference material, another for the development of the lesson, and the final for impromptu work or notes and reminders. (Hubbard, et al 1983, p.106)

Once a plan for organization and division is complete, consideration of effective writing may begin. Three principles for effective blackboard writing are: 1)'Start with a clean board' with no remnants from other teachers' lessons' and 2)'Write legibly,' even practicing outside of class, if necessary, (Gower 1988, p.159) and 3) write in a straight line. This may be accom-

plished more easily if the board is divided into shorter sections (not the whole board) (Doff 1992, p.44). Hints for effective blackboard drawing are covered in **Other visual aids**, below.

'Standing on the right of the board as students see it,' allows you to face the students as you are writing and 'what you write is revealed to the class as it goes up.' In addition to facing students, talking to them as you are writing, asking them what to write, asking them to guess what you are about to write as well as any other lesson-related interaction will help involve students in the subject being taught, assisting them in focus on the lesson. (Hubbard, et al 1983, p.106)

The overhead projector is often under/used because language teachers are not aware of its advantages. Those who make use of the OHP do so because:

- it is easier to write on a transparency than on the blackboard
- the transparencies can be prepared in advance
- important transparencies can be re-used, with different classes, or from day-to-day with the same class
- the teacher can build up a file of transparencies, giving frequently-needed exercises and clear, well-prepared examples for the most common grammar points
- information can be revealed 'at exactly the speed you wish to go at
- time normally taken for blackboard writing can be spared
- unlike with the blackboard, teachers can be sure everyone is looking at the same material (Lewis & Hill 1985, p.52)

Perhaps the most important difficulty associated with OHP use is 'it is extremely annoying to be asked to look at a projected transparency where the text is too small.' Before class, teachers need to test-view font and image sizes to make sure they are appropriate to both group and room sizes. While concern for the board, OHP or other central focal point is important, care must be taken not to become so wrapped up in board writing that interaction with students becomes impossible and students lose focus on the lesson.

### **Other Visual Aids**

Visuals may be used for, among other things, to 'create a new need for language, which the teacher then satisfies', 'elicit already known language', 'supply a context for an activity, like a role play', or 'stimulate discussion.' (Gower 1988, p.157) Visuals include realia, pictures, wall-

charts, TV and video and blackboard drawings, to name a few.

The cardinal rule with visuals, as with any material or technology is to only select visuals that add something to the lesson. While visual aids such as interesting videos or comics may be enjoyed occasionally as a treat for students, care should be taken that the aids are 'clearly integrated into the teacher's overall plan and contribute to that plan.' (Lewis & Hill 1985, p.59)

Once appropriate visuals have been selected make sure:

1. They are big enough to be seen. A minimum size of A 4 (8-1/2" X 11") is a rough guide for most classrooms.
2. They are unambiguous (i.e., simple as can be for the purpose) unless ambiguity is deliberate and productive
3. They are presentable, preferably mounted. Pictures simply ripped out of magazines look scrappy and unprofessional (Hubbard, et al 1983, p.105)

Many teachers avoid drawing due to "lack of artistic ability." While planning and practice outside of class is key, anyone can learn to draw simple stick figures, 'simple pictures for drills, or picture compositions.' (Hubbard, et al 1983, p.105-110). There are a few secrets to simple and easy blackboard drawing which may be applied to any type of illustration. They include:

- draw objects instead of actions (e.g., draw a bed for 'she got out of bed')
- be sure faces are large enough to be seen by all
- face direction can be changed by changing the nose
- Sex or age can be indicated by drawing hair
- a wide range of emotion may be indicated through simple changes in mouth and eye shape
- generally, stick figure bodies are twice as long as heads, arms same length as bodies, and legs are slightly longer.
- actions can be indicated by bending the legs and arms'
- buildings and towns may be indicated with labeled pictures
- motion or direction can be indicated with pointed signs of place-names, and lines extending off the backs of moving items (Hubbard, et al 1983, p.105-110)



## Conclusion

With the many educators who are not heavily involved with educational or linguistic theories in mind, we have covered many of the practical aspects of teaching including lesson planning, student interaction, the teacher, effective use of the blackboard and other central display areas and visual aids, in general. While this paper has striven to be concise and has not intended to be comprehensive, it has covered many important practical hints and techniques in these areas.

## Sources

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