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Classroom interaction

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BEFECTETÉS A JÖVŐBE

1. Classroom interaction patterns

(based on Ur 2012)

1.1 Who is talking to whom

An important element of the dynamics of a lesson is who interacts with whom and whether it is true interaction or one-way talk. In the course of a typical English lesson we can probably identify the following patterns in this respect:

One-way interaction types – rather ‘speaking to’ than ‘interacting’

- $T \rightarrow S$, $T \rightarrow SS$ = the teacher is speaking to a student, or several or all the students
- $S \rightarrow S$, $S \rightarrow SS$ = a student is speaking to another student, or some or all the students
- $S \rightarrow T$, $SS \rightarrow T$ = one student or several students are speaking to the teacher

Two-way, real interaction types

- $T \leftrightarrow S$, $T \leftrightarrow SS$ = the teacher interacts with a student, or several or all the students
- $S \leftrightarrow S$, $S \leftrightarrow SS$ = one student interacts with another student, or several or all the students
- $SS \leftrightarrow SS$ = several or all the students interact among themselves

Now open and study **Task 1**. Please use the attached **Key** to confirm your answers.

1.2 Interaction patterns

It follows from the above, that based on who is actually talking to whom and in what specific situation, there are plenty of possible interaction patterns.

Open **Task 2** and do the exercise while thinking about the most common interaction patterns. The task is followed by a **Key** which contains explanations based on Ur (2012:18-19).

Please go on to the next task only when you have fully understood the interaction patterns detailed in **Task 2**. In **Task 3** you are going to look at the same lesson plan as in **Task 1**, and this time, try and determine the interaction pattern the teacher planned to use in the individual stages of the lesson. A **Key** is provided to help you check your answers.

2. Seating Arrangements

In a traditional teaching environment, where the teacher and the learners are simultaneously present in the same room, another aspect of classroom management has to be considered: how the learners sit in relation to each other and the teacher.



Thinking task

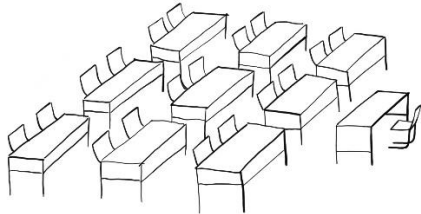
Think back on your school and any other learning experiences you may have had. What did the seating arrangement look like? You have probably experienced several different ones. Draw a simple sketch of the major ones that you can recall into the first column of the table below. Then write what you liked and what you didn't like about that arrangement.

Seating arrangement	What I liked about it	What I disliked about it

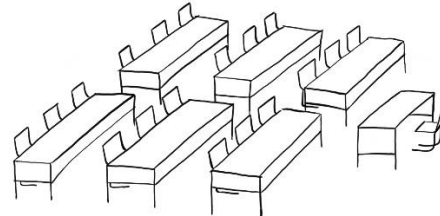
Sometimes the teacher has no influence whatsoever over the arrangement of the desks and/or chairs in the classroom – and has to adapt his or her management of the lesson to the physical parameters of the learning environment. While planning a lesson or a whole course, however, it is fruitful to ponder the question: What sort of seating arrangement would be ideal for the activities that I am planning for the lesson? And how would my learners prefer to sit? This might induce the teacher to make some changes in the arrangement, even if it is not conventional or not quite easily solved. The following task aims to set you off on this road.

Below are some popular seating arrangements:

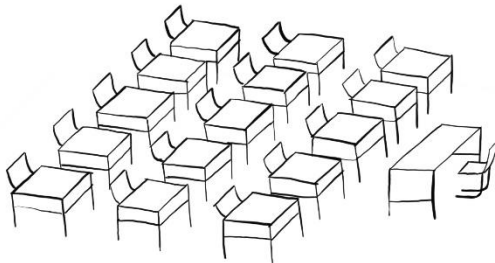
1a Orderly rows



1b Orderly rows

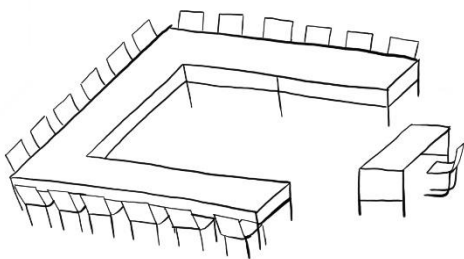


1c Orderly rows

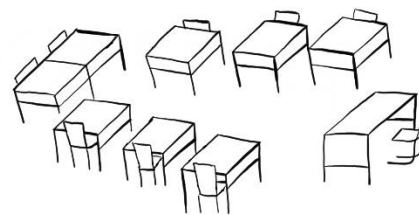


In *1a-c* the students sit in rows – in pairs, threes or individually, depending on the size of the tables. Many schools arrange their classrooms like this. All the students have their attention on the teacher and the board, and can only see part of their groupmates (and mostly their backs only).

2a U-arrangement

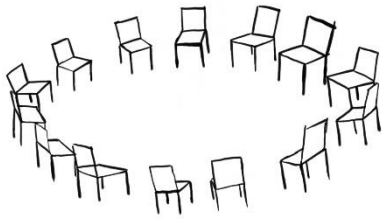


2b U-arrangement



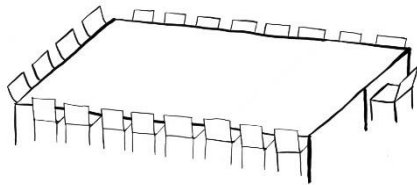
2a and *2b* represent the so-called horseshoe or U-arrangement. This arrangement, too, is popular in schools, language schools and company meeting rooms. The focus of attention is divided between the board and the teacher on the one hand, and the students sitting opposite on the other.

3. Circle



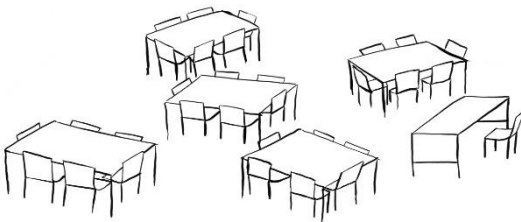
In 3 the students sit in a circle – often without desks, just the chairs. The teacher is part of the circle. The board (provided there is one and is used) offers a kind of focus of attention, which can be emphasized by the teacher choosing to sit in front of the board, or counterbalanced by the teacher choosing a different seat in the circle.

4. Meeting room arrangement



If you teach at companies, you will often find arrangement 4 as it is a popular arrangement for meeting rooms. The participants can see each other and the board equally.

5. Desks scattered across the room



5 is a popular arrangement for interactive workshops and you might also meet it at modern liberal schools or language schools. The desks are scattered across the room, and the teacher either has a desk somewhere or has none, but keeps moving around. There may or may not be a board.

Now open **Task 4** and think about the answers. A **Key** is provided to help you.

3. Working modes

(based on Harmer 2007 and Ur 2012)

Another aspect of classroom management is how we decide to group our learners for an activity or stage of the lesson.

You can decide to work with your *class as a whole, in so-called lockstep* (where the teacher controls everything and the students are expected to do the same thing at the same time at the same rate), or you can organize them into *pairs* or *groups*, or you can make them *work individually*.

All four basic working modes have their advantages and disadvantages, which make them appropriate or inappropriate for certain activities or stages of the lesson.

Now open **Task 5** and think about some advantages and disadvantages of the working modes. A **Key** is also provided for reference.



Summary

The aim of the present material was to provide you with insights regarding classroom interaction patterns. By now you have learnt about

- possible classroom interaction patterns.
- seating arrangements and
- working modes.

in the English language classroom. You have thought about when to apply certain interaction patterns, how to arrange your classroom for different activities and what working modes are preferable in different situations. Having contemplated the advantages and disadvantages, you probably have plenty of ideas to consider when you start teaching.

References

Ur, Penny. 2012. *A course in English Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harmer, Jeremy. 2007. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.