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Classroom management

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BEFECTETÉS A JÖVŐBE

1. Introduction

Classroom management is a complex issue with an abundance of topics to discuss. In the present material you are going to learn about

- how teaching as a profession can be conceived by learners and teachers
- how complex the task of a teacher is and how many different roles they need to assume in order to manage the task of teaching
- what classroom discipline is and how to maintain it

2. Metaphors for learning and teaching

In methodology courses it is popular to ask the students to come up with metaphors for the language classroom or the language lesson as well as the role of a teacher in it (e.g.: Harmer 2007: 107, Ur 2012:14). The kind of metaphor that comes to your mind, so it is assumed, offers an insight into what kind of a preconceived idea you harbour in your mind about the business of teaching and learning.

An example could be the following:

‘To me learning English is like a long walk across a hilly terrain. The lessons are the individual stages of the walk. The teacher is the coach who doesn’t walk with me (he knows the language) but hovers in a helicopter above my head and dictates the tempo and corrects my false steps. We are walking together, my classmates and me. But at a very different pace – so there are huge gaps between us. We are trying to communicate with each other, about more pleasant things than the walk, but the teacher always shuts us up and anyhow we have to look where we are going. So it’s basically sweat and not much fun. But occasionally it’s nice to look back and see how far we have got. But then you get a glimpse of your destination way, way ahead of you in the fog – it seems like a mirage that is not even there perhaps...’

just an
Example



Introductory question

What would be your metaphors? Think about them a while and finish the sentence: To me language learning is like _____, a language lesson is like _____, in which the teacher is like _____ and the learners like _____.



Thinking task

Now think about *why* you came up with these metaphors of all. Your conceptions are probably influenced by

1. your own experiences, good or bad, as a learner,
2. the cultural expectations of the era and/or the environment you live in towards teaching and the teacher,
3. the current trends in methodology
4. and your own personality.

If you like, think about these issues – it is worth examining our preconceived ideas critically and replace unconscious conditioning with informed convictions before we start working in our chosen profession.

3. The roles of teachers

Whatever metaphor you came up with in the task above, you probably realised that it was not very easy to consistently squeeze your conception about teaching and the role of the teacher in it on the one side, and learning and the role of the learner on the other. Whenever you came up with a metaphor, probably a number of memories or imagined scenarios occurred to you right away, which didn't fit in neatly in the chosen metaphor.

This is only very natural – and very well so. Teaching and learning are very complex notions that can be approached from various perspectives. And as regards the role of the teacher and the learner in this process, these also depend on a number of factors, which we will come back to soon.

But first let us look at a list of some 'textbook' roles that teachers can assume in the language lesson.



Task 1

- a) Below is a list of *teacher roles* (1-8). Think about what each of them means and when teachers 'act' the part.
1. Instructor / Imparter of knowledge
 2. Organiser / Manager
 3. Model
 4. Tutor / Coach / Supporter
 5. Prompter
 6. Provider of feedback / Assessor
 7. Participant
 8. Resource
- b) Now open the following link: https://redmenta.com/?solve&ks_id=11078560. here you can find the definitions for each role. Match the roles with the definitions. Please note that in the literature you will find different terminology for the most important roles – a few more popular synonyms are given here.
(For the traditional version of same task cf.: Appendix 1.)
- c) Extra question: Which role combines another three roles?

(based on and adapted from Ur 2012 and Harmer 2007)



Key

the role of tutor/coach/supporter combines the roles of prompter, resource and giver of feedback.

While most teachers feel more comfortable in one or the other role, in the course of the lesson teachers keep changing the roles they adopt, depending on what stage of the lesson they are in, what the class are doing at the moment.



Task 2

In this task you can read descriptions of stages and steps of an imaginary lesson. Open the following link and select the most appropriate teaching role for each. For some there might be more: https://redmenta.com/?solve&ks_id=270719239

In the key to the test, a detailed explanation is available.

(For the traditional version of same task cf.: Appendix 2.)

4. Discipline in the classroom

4.1 What is classroom discipline?

How would you define the term *discipline*? And a disciplined student? A disciplined classroom? It is one of those terms that we keep hearing – and interpreting automatically according to our own paradigms. It is only when our unconscious paradigm does not match that of someone else and a conflict arises out of it that we pause for a moment and think our default definitions over.

Penny Ur gives the following very general definition of classroom discipline:

'Classroom discipline exists when teacher and students accept and consistently observe a set of rules relating to classroom behaviour in order to facilitate smooth and efficient teaching and learning.' (Ur 2012:244)

The undeniable merit of this definition is that it can probably be universally agreed to. However, it is exactly that 'set of rules' that gives rise to a large variety of interpretations of the term.

What would your set of rules include?



Thinking task

Twenty years, that is a generation ago, a methodology tutor at a university asked her students to list what they considered the *10 most common discipline problems* in school lessons. They came up with the following list:

1. chatting to a classmate
2. scribbling, doodling
3. daydreaming
4. fidgeting, being generally disturbingly noisy
5. talking back to the teacher
6. non-compliance (not doing what the teacher wants them to do in the lesson)
7. not doing homework, not preparing for the lesson
8. forgetting to take the book and copybook to school
9. copying homework, cheating in tests
10. skipping lessons, truancy

How have times changed in this respect? What would your list of top 10 ways of raising the teacher's hair on end look like?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Did you manage to come up with 10 at all? Some teachers nowadays say that there are only two discipline problems in schools today: being constantly on the mobile phone and not doing any/enough school work. Did you manage to think of any more?

4.2 Managing classroom discipline

4.2.1 Getting to the root



Task 3

Now choose what *you* consider to be the most important 5 instances of misbehaviour, and think about some possible reasons behind these types of misbehaviour: why does the student behave in that way? What could be the underlying reasons behind his behaviour? One example is given to you in order to illustrate the potential multiplicity of the underlying reasons.

	PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR	POSSIBLE REASONS BEHIND THE BEHAVIOUR
0.	<i>Example Chatting to a classmate in the lesson</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>S not interested in what is going on in the lesson</i> 2. <i>S is not interested in the subject, not motivated to learn</i> 3. <i>S doesn't respect the teacher</i> 4. <i>S can easily multitask – is also paying attention to the teacher while he is chatting</i> 5. <i>S is generally interested but now has something to discuss with the classmate which he considers of higher priority</i> 6. <i>S is very interested and involved indeed, and is actually discussing the subject matter with the classmate</i> 7. <i>S is paying attention and is interested, but is a chatterbox in general – can't restrain from commenting on everything he hears or sees.</i> 8. <i>(your own idea)</i> 9. <i>(your own idea)</i>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		



Key

As you were listing the different types of problem behaviours and their possible underlying reasons, you have probably realised that *the actual discipline problems are nothing else but mere surface manifestations of much deeper roots*. Thinking about the possible roots, you might come up with the following possible causes:

- lack of interest in the subject matter, in English in general or in learning in general
- the lesson is not interesting/professional enough
- lack of respect for the teacher/for the others
- self-esteem problems, lack of confidence – and compensation for that
- although generally interested and motivated, currently the learner is preoccupied with some other task or an emotional problem → English loses in priority temporarily at least.
- some environmental distraction – noise, the other learner, discomfort through illness or temperature problems or the classroom is simply too uncomfortable



Please note

The aim of the above tasks was to make you become (more) aware of the fact that successfully managing the discipline problems in the classroom is

- 1) trying to understand why certain misbehaviour patterns occur,
- 2) why they manifest in what they manifest,
- 3) what the potential causes are and then finally,
- 4) getting to the real root of the problem and solving that.

4.2.2 Preventing disruptive behaviour and promoting discipline

Whatever ideas you might exactly have in mind about undisciplined behaviour, or behaviour that disrupts the smooth flow of the lesson, the good old adage ‘Prevention is better than cure’ applies here as well: taking a proactive attitude to potential discipline problems might save a lot of trouble and is definitely much more beneficial for classroom atmosphere and your rapport with your students than correcting or punishing misbehaviour.

Creating home rules together

The most essential component of preventing disruptive behaviour is *to establish a set of rules that the students (and you yourself!) need to keep to in*

the course of your work together. There are some overall rules to observe in any institution you might teach in in the future. They are usually laid down in some sort of document – and you should study and keep to the guidelines outlined there as well as remind your students to do so consistently. There are, however, a number of smaller or bigger classroom issues that are generally not covered in any kind of central regulation or policy. Decisions such as how much chatting or off-task behaviour (when the student deals with something else than what the teacher is expecting him to do at that moment) to allow, or how to react to the student not doing homework regularly etc. are basically left up to you to make. It might be a good idea to involve your students and create a set of classroom rules together – they will feel that they are regarded as partners in the teaching-learning process, and will probably observe the rules much more conscientiously if they contributed to creating them and agreed to them willingly at the outset.

Motivating lesson

Learners are much more likely to remain on-task (i.e. deal with what the teacher would like them to deal with) in phases of the lesson which they find interesting and relevant. Most learners

also appreciate it if *the lesson is well-planned and skilfully delivered* – i.e. professionalism. A thorough knowledge of your subject area (English), as well as of methodology and pedagogy will empower you in this respect, and as you gain more and more teaching experience, you will be able to assert yourself more and more convincingly.

Personality of the teacher and rapport with the learners

You can probably remember from your time as a student that you had teachers who found it much easier to maintain discipline in the classroom as others.

Apart from the obvious advantage of having charisma (which is a very elusive term indeed), *the teacher's personality and behaviour*, as well as *his rapport with the students* play a key role in the successful management of the lesson.

This is a huge and complex area, but let us just summarize the most important points here:

Being firm and consistent, but at the same time kind and fair, spiced with an appropriate amount of appropriate humour is definitely a winner. You should also take care to lead by example and make sure that your appearance and speech are professional.

Try to get to know your students as much as possible (respecting their boundaries), and relate to them positively and with respect. It might benefit them and the learning process if you establish a healthy degree of authority in the lesson, but avoid insisting on too much authority, and most notably avoid humiliating or picking on a student in any way. On the other hand, it is equally important not to get too informal but observe a healthy professional distance – an easy task, isn't it?



Further reading

This topic has been widely researched in the past decade. Search the net entering the keywords '*teacher personality*', '*effective classroom management*', '*maintaining discipline in the classroom*' for a multitude of further reading.

4.2.3 Correcting disruptive behaviour

Whether you are keeping yourself (and your students) to a classroom behaviour policy of the institution that you teach for, or a set of rules that you drew up together with your learners (or a mixture of the two), your students are very likely to violate it again and again. Should this happen, you will probably find it helpful to gently *remind the students of the rules established together* as well as to *remind them of the corrective measures* that you had previously agreed

upon. Hopefully this will prevent having to apply the punitive measures, which should only be the last resort if nothing else seems to work.



Further reading

Read Harmer (2007:153-160) to find out more about how to treat discipline problems.



Summary

In the present unit you were guided through some important points of classroom management. You were asked to think about the complex nature of the teaching profession and about the complexity of the teachers' roles in the different classroom situations. You were also asked to think about issues related to classroom discipline and you were presented with ideas how to prevent discipline problems and what to do about them if they do occur.

References

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

Harmer, Jeremy. 2007. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Pearson Longman Ltd.

Appendix 1

Task 1 (Cf.: https://redmenta.com/?solve&ks_id=11078560)

Below is a list of teacher roles (1-8) and a list of definitions for them (a-h).

1. Instructor / Imparter of knowledge
2. Organiser / Manager
3. Model
4. Tutor / Coach / Supporter
5. Prompter
6. Provider of feedback / Assessor
7. Participant
8. Resource

Match the roles with the definitions. (In the literature you will find different terminology for the most important roles – we give you a few more popular synonyms here.)

- a) In this role the teacher plans the lessons, sets up and monitors the activities, gets the students involved, gives instructions and maintains discipline.
- b) When the learners are working more or less autonomously on a task, especially on a project or a longer assignment, the teacher in this role encourages them and suggests helpful resources, useful strategies, and directions they might not have thought of.
- c) Sometimes teachers decide to join in an activity as a (relatively) equal member. The students often enjoy this, but the teacher has to proceed with great sensitivity and care in order not to dominate the activity.
- d) Learning language involves learning a large amount of information about the sound system, vocabulary and grammar, as well as the use of the language items in communication. In this role the teacher provides the material with clear explanations.
- e) When learners get stuck in the course of an activity, the teacher can softly and discretely help them forward with an idea, without taking the initiative away from them.
- f) Learners need to be exposed to good examples of the language. The teacher also has to set a good example in behavioural and work ethical aspects such as punctuality, discipline, diligence, involvement, cooperation, respect, etc.
- g) Teachers adopt this role when, in the middle of an activity, a student needs some information – a word or phrase, a useful resource or some facts. The teacher simply provides the required information.

h) In order to make progress in learning, the learners need to know how they are doing and what they need to do differently. The teacher often has to evaluate learner performance in the form of graded tests and assignments.

Key

1d 2a 3f 4b 5e 6h 7c 8g

Appendix 2

Task 2 (Cf.: https://redmenta.com/?solve&ks_id=270719239)

Below are descriptions of stages and steps of the lesson. Select the most appropriate teaching role for each. For some there might be more.

1. Teacher is setting up a group work activity – is putting the students into groups and explaining what they have to do and how.
2. The students are working on a written assignment individually.
3. The class are involved in a discussion activity.
4. The teacher is explaining a new grammar item
5. A students ask the teacher a question
6. There is a discipline problem to be dealt with
7. The students are working on a longer project that spans several lessons/days or weeks

Key

1. organiser/manager
2. resource, prompter, provider of (partial) feedback
3. organiser/manager: giving instructions on how to proceed, moderating the discussion, helping with turn-taking and keeping to the point etc.
OR participant
OR simply as a resource: giving information if that is asked for
OR prompter if the discussion gets stuck, “nudging” the students on
4. instructor / Imparter of knowledge
5. instructor / Imparter of knowledge – if the teacher answers and explains
prompter – if the teacher gives a hint and leaves the rest to the learner to figure or find out
resource – if the teacher simply gives some missing information
6. provider of feedback/assessor – if the teacher evaluates the behaviour
organiser/manager – when dealing with the problem
7. organiser – when launching the project
impartor of knowledge – if the teacher gives some initial input
prompter – if the learners get stuck or deviate in the wrong direction
resource – if the learners need some information
tutor/coach/supporter – all along the project work
provider of feedback – again and again in the course of the project work

provider of feedback / assessor – at the end of the process