CAMBRIDGE TEACHER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Series Editors: Marion Williams and Tony Wright

This series is designed for all those involved in language teacher training and development: teachers in training, trainers, directors of studies, advisers, teachers of in-service courses and seminars. Its aim is to provide a comprehensive, organised and authoritative resource for language teacher training and development.

Teach English – A training course for teachers
by Adrian Doff

Training Foreign Language Teachers – A reflective approach
by Michael J. Wallace

Literature and Language Teaching – A guide for teachers and trainers*
by Gillian Lazar

Classroom Observation Tasks – A resource book for language teachers and trainers*
by Ruth Wajnryb

Tasks for Language Teachers – A resource book for training and development*
by Martin Parrott

English for the Teacher – A language development course*
by Mary Spratt

Teaching Children English – A training course for teachers of English to children*
by David Vale with Anne Feunteun

A Course in Language Teaching – Practice and theory
by Penny Ur

Looking at Language Classrooms – A teacher development video package

About Language – Tasks for teachers of English
by Scott Thornbury

Action Research for Language Teachers
by Michael J. Wallace

Mentor Courses – A resource book for trainer-trainers
by Angi Malderez and Caroline Bodoczky

Alive to Language – Perspectives on language awareness for English language teachers
by Valerie Arndt, Paul Harvey and John Nuttall

Teachers in Action – Tasks for in-service language teacher education and development
by Peter James

Advising and Supporting Teachers
by Mick Randall with Barbara Thornton

* Original Series Editors: Ruth Gairns and Marion Williams

A Course in Language Teaching

Practice and Theory

Penny Ur

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

▶ Unit Five: Giving feedback on writing

This unit describes various problems associated with the giving of feedback on original writing in the foreign language, and gives some advice as to how to deal with them. This advice is to be related to critically, as suggested in the Discussion task below.

Task **Critical discussion**

After reading each section think or discuss: how far do you agree with the advice? Would you (or do you) use the recommended feedback strategies?

1. What should feedback be mainly on: language? Content? Organization?

The problem
When a student submits a piece of original writing, the most important thing about it is, arguably, its content: whether the ideas or events that were written about were significant and interesting. Then there is the organization and presentation: whether the ideas were arranged in a way that was easy to follow and pleasing to read. Finally, there is the question of language forms: whether the grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation were of an acceptable standard of accuracy.

Many teachers are aware that content and organization are important, but find themselves relating mainly to language forms in their feedback, conveying the implicit message that these are what matters. This is for various reasons:

1. Mistakes in spelling or grammar catch the eye and seem to demand to be corrected; they are very difficult to ignore.
2. Students also want their language mistakes to be corrected. (Ask them! And see Leki, 1991.)
3. Language mistakes are far more easily and quickly diagnosed and corrected than ones of content and organization.

Advice
We should, I think, correct language mistakes; our problem is how to do so without conveying the message that these are the only, or main, basis for evaluation of a piece of writing. One possibility is to note corrections within the body of the text, and devote comments at the end to matters of content and organization, followed by the evaluation. Alternatively, we may correct mistakes and make suggestions as to content and organization, but not evaluate; and give the evaluation only on the basis of the rewritten, polished version.

2. Should all mistakes be corrected?

The problem
If we accept that language (including punctuation) should be corrected, another problem arises: should *all* language mistakes be noted, even if there are so many

that the page will be covered with corrections? If not, how do we judge which to relate to and which not?

Advice
The problem is one of potential conflict between two of our functions as teachers: language instruction versus support and encouragement of learning. The correcting of mistakes is part of the language instruction, but too much of it can be discouraging and demoralizing. Also, over-emphasis on language mistakes can distract both learners' and teachers' attention from the equally important aspects of content and organization.

Some kind of compromise is obviously called for, which will vary according to context. In principle, it would seem reasonable to say that language mistakes should be ignored if there is a danger that to correct them would hinder learning more than help it. We might correct only mistakes that actually affect meaning (that is, might lead to misunderstanding or confusion on the part of the reader), and/or those which are very basic; or, of course, vary our response according to individual need.

3. Should learners rewrite, incorporating corrections?

The problem
When we receive written work, we normally correct and comment on it and give it back. The question is whether to insist on the students rewriting the compositions, incorporating our suggestions for improvements. This can be tedious, and students do not like doing it; on the other hand, it does probably help to reinforce learning of the correct forms.

Advice
I think rewriting is very important: not only because it reinforces learning, but also because rewriting is an integral part of the writing process as a whole. However, if we demand rewriting on the part of the students, they have a right to demand from us that we reread – and value – what they have done. It makes sense to see the first version as provisional, and to regard the rewritten, final version as 'the' assignment, the one that is submitted for formal assessment. This helps to motivate learners to rewrite and to appreciate the value of doing so.

4. Should we let students correct or give feedback on each other's written work?

The problem
Correcting written work is very time-consuming, particularly if we have large classes. One possible solution is to let students correct and edit each other's writing. They may not be able to see or define all the good qualities or shortcomings of an assignment, but they will detect at least some of them. The problem is: will students feel uncomfortable correcting, or being corrected by, their peers? Will they accept criticism (positive or negative) from each other?

Advice
In general, yes, peer-correction can be a time-saving and useful technique; also, critical reading for style, content and language accuracy is a valuable exercise in itself. This does not release us from the duty of checking and evaluating student writing; but it can be a substitute for first-draft reading. Students can work together on their first drafts, giving each other feedback on content, language and organization; they then rewrite and give in the final version to the teacher.

The question of personal relationships, trust and willingness to accept criticism and help from one another remains. This is not a problem that can be solved by particular teaching techniques; it depends on the general classroom climate, which in its turn is created by the attitudes of both students and teachers.

Notes

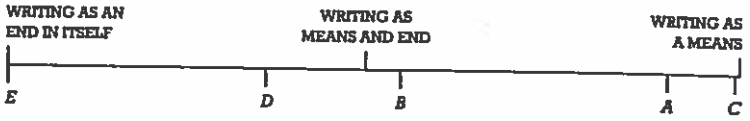
(1) Differences between written and spoken discourse

The essential difference is, strictly speaking, between formal, detached discourse and informal, interactive discourse: usually, it is true, the first is writing and the second speech, but not always. For example, passing notes between participants during a meeting or lecture is writing but displays many of the characteristics of informal speech as described in this unit; and the reading of a paper at a conference, a news broadcast, a poetry recitation, are instances of speech with many of the characteristics of formal writing. This has led some writers to prefer to distinguish between 'autonomous' (usually corresponding to formal written) versus 'non-autonomous' (usually corresponding to informal spoken) prose (see Tannen, 1982). In rare cases we may even find mixed genres in either writing or speech: informal, non-interactive (a comic monologue), or formal, interactive (a Shakespeare play). However, in the vast majority of cases the differences are, as suggested in this unit, applicable to writing as opposed to speech and as such, I think, provide helpful terms of reference for teaching.

(2) Should students be aware of the differences?

More advanced, adult students – particularly those who are studying the language for academic or business purposes and may need to do extensive writing themselves – may well benefit from a formal presentation of such information. Other learners may simply be made aware of differences at the level of individual language item: that colloquial expressions, such as *cop* or *glitzy*, are not usually used in writing; that contractions such as *don't* and *he's* are usually written out in full, and so on.

(3) Suggested solution to 'Classifying writing exercises' task



(A) is essentially reading comprehension; it provides little practice in writing beyond the copying. (B) is a vocabulary exercise which also requires brief creative writing. (C) is a grammar exercise (transformation of present tenses into pasts), contextualized into a story. (D) involves a combination of reading and writing. (E) is clearly a writing activity.

(4) Writing: My own composition process

Preparation
I think for a while, make very brief notes on a slip of paper in no particular order, and then launch straight into the writing, ordering and organizing as I go.

Process
I get nowhere without deleting or changing; do so constantly, as I write, and then again during subsequent rereadings. I frequently leave an unsatisfactory section and come back to it later; deliberately write later sections before earlier ones; change the order of sections. I edit both form and content throughout the writing process, including spelling, punctuation and typing errors, though the final editing sessions usually concentrate on 'micro'-aspects: changing words, letters and punctuation marks rather than whole sections.

I find writing absorbing and satisfying; often I get more satisfaction from rewriting and polishing than from the initial composition. Comments and suggestions from critical, knowledgeable readers during rewriting are sometimes painful at first, but eventually very helpful, in some cases essential.

Product
The final result is often quite different from the original conception, but usually I feel pride in it, and want people to read it. I like reading what others have written on the same topic, and am interested in hearing their reactions to my writing.

Further reading

BACKGROUND

Freedman, A., Pringle, I. and Yalden, J. (eds.) (1983) *Learning to Write: First Language/Second Language*, London: Longman.
(A series of articles on various aspects of learning to write: accounts of research, discussions of problems)

Hedge, T. (1988) *Writing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
(A summary of some main issues, followed by discussion of the teaching of various types and levels of writing, with plenty of illustrative tasks)

ule 17: Giving feedback

► Unit One: Different approaches to the nature and function of feedback

Preliminary definition: What is feedback?

In the context of teaching in general, feedback is information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance. Some examples in language teaching: the words 'Yes, right!', said to a learner who has answered a question; a grade of 70% on an exam; a raised eyebrow in response to a mistake in grammar; comments written in the margin of an essay.

Feedback has two main distinguishable components: assessment and correction. In assessment, the learner is simply informed how well or badly he or she has performed. A percentage grade on an exam would be one example; or the response 'No' to an attempted answer to a question in class; or a comment such as 'Fair' at the end of a written assignment. In correction, some specific information is provided on aspects of the learner's performance: through explanation, or provision of better or other alternatives, or through elicitation of these from the learner. Note that in principle correction can and should include information on what the learner did right, as well as wrong, and why! – but teachers and learners generally understand the term as referring to the correction of mistakes, so that is (usually) how it is used here.

stion **Are the two components of assessment and correction completely separable? In other words, can you have assessment without correction, or correction without assessment?**

Read on for a possible answer to this.

The relationship between assessment and correction

It is, of course, perfectly possible to give assessment without correcting, as when a final percentage mark on an exam is made known to a learner without the exam itself being returned or commented on. The other way round is very much less feasible: it is virtually impossible to comment on what is right or wrong in what a learner has done without conveying some kind of assessment. If a correction is supplied, the learner is very aware that this means the teacher thinks something was wrong; if comment is given on why something was appropriate, there is necessarily an underlying message of commendation.

Teachers are sometimes urged to be 'non-judgemental' when giving feedback; in my opinion this is unrealistic. Any meaningful feedback is going to involve

some kind of judgement. It is more useful, perhaps, to accept that there is judgement involved, but to try to make the attitude to this more positive: that mistakes are a natural and useful part of language learning; that when the teacher gives feedback on them, the purpose is to help and promote learning; and that 'getting it wrong' is not 'bad', but rather a way into 'getting it right'.

Approaches to the giving of feedback

In Boxes 17.1 and 17.2 you will find expressions of selected opinions on the nature and functions of assessment and mistake correction; these are based on different theories of language learning or methodologies. It is not essential for you to be familiar with the names or details of the theories for the purposes of this bit of study; but if you are interested in reading further on any of them, see McLaughlin (1987) and/or Richards and Rodgers (1986); or references provided with specific items.

The opinions as stated here are obviously simplified, and expressed in 'strong' forms, as these are likely to provide more interesting and fruitful departure-points for discussion.

BOX 17.1: THE PROVISION OF ASSESSMENT: DIFFERENT OPINIONS

Audio-lingualism
Negative assessment is to be avoided as far as possible since it functions as 'punishment' and may inhibit or discourage learning. Positive assessment provides reinforcement of correct responses, and promotes learning.

Humanistic methodologies
A crucial function of the giving of assessment is to preserve and promote a positive self-image of the learner as a person and language learner. Assessment therefore should be positive or non-judgemental.

Skill theory
For successful acquisition of a skill, the learner needs feedback on how well he or she is doing; hence the importance of the provision of constant and honest assessment (Johnson, 1995).

Task ***Stage 1: Study***

As you read, think about or discuss how far you agree with the various statements.

Stage 2: Discussion

After reading: can you summarize your own opinion on the functions of assessment and correction? Write down your own statements in a format similar to that shown in Boxes 17.1/2; if you are working in a group, compare your ideas with those of colleagues.

If you are interested in comparing your own opinion with mine, look at the Notes, (1).

BOX 17.2: THE CORRECTION OF MISTAKES: DIFFERENT OPINIONS

Audio-lingualism
Learner mistakes are, in principle, avoided by the limiting of progress to very small, controlled steps: hence there should be little need for correction. The latter is, in any case, not useful for learning; people learn by getting things right in the first place and having their performance reinforced.

Cognitive code-learning
Mistakes are regrettable, but an unavoidable part of learning: they should be corrected whenever they occur to prevent them occurring again.

Interlanguage

Mistakes are not regrettable, but an integral and important part of language learning; correcting them is a way of bringing the learner's 'interlanguage' closer to the target language (Selinker, 1972, 1992).

Communicative approach
Not all mistakes need to be corrected: the main aim of language learning is to receive and convey meaningful messages, and correction should be focussed on mistakes that interfere with this aim, not on inaccuracies of usage.

Monitor theory
Correction does not contribute to real acquisition of the language, but only to the learner's conscious 'monitoring' of speech or writing. Hence the main activity of the teacher should be to provide comprehensible input from which the learner can acquire language, not to correct (Krashen, 1982).

▷ Unit Two: Assessment

Note: In literature on education, a distinction is sometimes made between assessment (of learner performance), evaluation (of innovation or change in, for example, school organization or a course syllabus) and appraisal (of teacher performance). This unit is concerned only with feedback on learning, and the terms 'evaluation' and 'assessment' are used interchangeably.

Most of the feedback we give our learners is ongoing correction and assessment, directed at specific bits of learner-produced language with the aim of bringing about improvement; the type of evaluation involved here is sometimes called 'formative', since its main purpose is to 'form': to enhance, not conclude, a process. Distinct from this is the evaluation usually termed 'summative', where the teacher evaluates an overall aspect of the learner's knowledge in order to summarize the situation: how proficient he or she is at a certain point in time, for example, or how much he or she has progressed during a particular course.

Summative evaluation may contribute little or nothing to the ongoing teaching/learning process; but it is a part of the teacher's job, something we need to know how to do effectively.

Below are descriptions of various ways of gathering the information which will serve as a basis for assessment, and of some common criteria used for assessing it.

Gathering information (1): Tests

The most common way of gathering information for assessment is through tests (see Module 3); the usual criterion is an arbitrary level which the learner is expected to have reached; and the result is generally expressed through percentages.

Question **Can you remember taking an exam or test at the end of a programme of study, or in order to be accepted into a course or profession? What was the criterion for success, and how was your result expressed?**

Gathering information (2): Other sources

There, are, however, various problems with tests as a basis for summative evaluation: they are a one-off event which may not necessarily give a fair sample of the learner's overall proficiency; they are not always valid (actually testing what they say they are) or reliable (giving consistent results); and if they are seen as the sole basis for a crucial evaluation in the learner's career, they can be extremely stressful.

Other options do, however, exist. These are summarized below; or see Brindley (1989) for a more detailed discussion.

1. **Teacher's assessment.** The teacher gives a subjective estimate of the learner's overall performance.
2. **Continuous assessment.** The final grade is some kind of combination of the grades the learner received for various assignments during the course.
3. **Self-assessment.** The learners themselves evaluate their own performance, using clear criteria and weighting systems agreed on beforehand.
4. **Portfolio.** The learner gathers a collection of assignments and projects done over a long period into a file; and this portfolio provides the basis for evaluation.

Question **Have you yourself any experience of any of the above, as teacher or learner? How valid or useful were/are they, in your experience?**

Criteria

Having collected the 'evidence' of the learners' proficiency in one or more of the ways described above, what will be our yardstick in deciding how good it is? The following are some of the possibilities.

1. **Criterion-referenced:** how well the learner is performing relative to a fixed criterion, where this is based on an estimation of what it is reasonable or

desirable to demand from learners at the relevant point in their development (age, career, level, stage of a course).
2. Norm-referenced: how well the learner is performing relative to the group. In this case, a group of slow learners would be assessed according to different, easier, norms than a group of faster ones.
3. Individual-referenced: how well the learner is performing relative to his or her own previous performance, or relative to an estimate of his or her individual ability.

Question **What criteria do/would you yourself use in assessing learners' performance? Would you combine different criteria? Would you take into account learners' effort, motivation and progress in deciding on a final grade?**

Assessment grades

Percentages are probably the most common way of expressing assessment grades, but there are others.

1. Letters, words or phrases: 'A' or 'B'; 'Good', 'Excellent'. These look a little less impersonal, less definitive than percentages; but in fact learners often 'read' them as definitive number-type grades, exactly as they read percentages.
2. Profiles: a totally different kind of expression of assessment, comprising a number of separate grades on different skills or sections of knowledge, so that there is a possibility of describing the performance of an individual learner in more detail, showing his or her various strengths and weaknesses.

Summary question **What is the most common way of gathering information, assessing proficiency and awarding grades in your own teaching context? What changes or improvements would you like to see introduced?**

▶ Unit Three: Correcting mistakes in oral work

Preliminary note. On the whole, we give feedback on oral work through speech, on written work through writing; and although there are occasional situations where we might do it the other way round (for example, discuss an essay with a student in a one-to-one tutorial, or write a letter providing feedback on speech) these are very much the exceptions and will not be dealt with in this unit and the next.

There are some situations where we might prefer not to correct a learner's mistake: in fluency work, for example, when the learner is in mid-speech, and to correct would disturb and discourage more than help. But there are other situations when correction is likely to be helpful.

Question **Would you support the recommendation to refrain from correcting during fluency-oriented speech, and to do so only during accuracy-oriented exercises? Can you add any further comment?**
Read on for my answer to this.

The recommendation not to correct a learner during fluent speech is in principle a valid one, but perhaps an over-simplification. There can be places where to refrain from providing an acceptable form where the speaker is obviously uneasy or 'floundering' can actually be demoralizing, and gentle, supportive intervention can help. Conversely, even where the emphasis is on getting the language right, we may not always correct: in a grammar exercise, for example, if the learner has contributed an interesting or personal piece of information that does not happen to use the target form; also, when they have got most of an item right we may prefer not to draw attention to a relatively trivial mistake.

Techniques of oral correction

Oral corrections are usually provided directly by the teacher; but they may also be elicited from the learner who made the mistake in the first place, or by another member of the class. Corrections may or may not include a clarification of why the mistake was made, and may or may not require re-production of the acceptable form by the learner.

The objective of the inquiry project suggested below is to ascertain which of these techniques are in fact most used in a selection of lessons taught locally, and which are preferred by learners. Some practical conclusions may be drawn from the results.

Inquiry **Correction techniques in the classroom**

Stage 1: Preparation

Look at the set of oral correction techniques listed in Box 17.3. Reword, or add further items as you feel necessary. Think about and note down for yourself: which do you expect to be used most frequently in the classroom, and which do you imagine most learners actually prefer?
Make copies of the list for use at Stages 2 and 3.

Stage 2: Observation

Observe some lessons, taught, if possible, by different teachers; or watch video recordings of lessons. Every time you hear a correction, try to identify to which category it belongs and put a tick in the appropriate box. At the end, count your ticks, and note down which kinds of correction are most often used and which least.

Stage 3: Interview

Interview some learners to find out which kinds of correction they find most useful. If you are working on your own try to find ten or so respondents; if you are working in a group, then each participant can interview one or two, pooling results later.

The same list of techniques as used for observation can function as a basis for the interviews. Plus or minus signs can be inserted in the appropriate boxes to show which your respondents preferred or disliked.

The learners should be interviewed one by one, but the interview may be held in various ways. You may simply show them a copy of the list, and ask them to identify which techniques they prefer; or read out the options and ask them to comment; or ask them a general question like: 'Do you like the teacher to correct your mistakes, and if so, how?' – interpreting their answers yourself in order to fill in answers. The interview may, of course, be conducted in the learners' mother tongue, if you feel this is appropriate.

Summarize the most, and least, popular techniques in the same way as you did at the end of Stage 2.

Stage 4: Summary and conclusions

Discuss or think about what you have found out. Some interesting questions to consider might be the following:

- Did your results differ from your expectations as recorded at Stage 1? If so, how?
- Did the teachers you observed actually correct in the way learners say they prefer? If not, how would you account for the differences?
- As a general conclusion, which would seem to be the most helpful way(s) of correcting? And under what circumstances might you do something different?

Comments

One of the crucial issues which will emerge in this discussion is the discrepancy between what teachers think is best, or usually do, and what learners find most useful. Given that there is a discrepancy, whose opinion should be more respected? The learner has reliable intuitive knowledge about what kind of correction helps most; but teachers – especially experienced ones – have a different kind of knowledge which may be no less valid. My own feeling is that learner preferences are on the whole a reliable guide; and if I choose to disregard these I should be very clear in my mind why I am doing so.

How the correction is expressed

At least as important as what the correction consists of is how it is expressed: gently or assertively, supportively or as a condemnation, tactfully or rudely. On the whole, of course, we should go for encouraging, tactful correction; but it is less easy to generalize about gently/assertively: some learner populations respond better to the one, some to the other. In general, in fact, learner responses to different expressions of feedback are often surprising: a teacher correction that seems to an observer a humiliating 'put-down' may not be perceived as such by the learner to whom it was addressed; or an apparently gentle, tactful one may give offence. A good deal of teacher sensitivity is needed here.

BOX 17.3: ORAL CORRECTION TECHNIQUES

*Class observed .....

*Learner interviewed .....

Teacher's responses to mistakes	*Observation / Learner opinions*
1. Does not react at all.	
2. Indicates there is a mistake, but does not provide any further information about what is wrong.	
3. Says what was wrong and provides a model of the acceptable version.	
4. Indicates something was wrong, elicits acceptable version from the learner who made the mistake.	
5. Indicates something was wrong, elicits acceptable version from another member of the class.	
6. (May go with any of 3–5 above) Asks the learner who made the mistake to reproduce the corrected version.	
7. (May go with any of 3–5 above) Provides or elicits an explanation of why the mistake was made and how to avoid it.	

*Delete or fill in as appropriate.

Task **Observation and inquiry**

Pick out five or six instances of correction in a lesson, and for each note down briefly what happened and then add some adjectives you would use to describe the manner in which it was given (e.g. gentle/loud/hesitant/brisk/supportive?). If you were observing together with a colleague, compare your descriptions after the lesson: did your opinions tally? If not, is there any way of finding out whose perception was truer?

If feasible, find out from the learner(s) how they felt at the time, and compare their impressions with your own.

Unit Four: Written feedback

Learners' written work includes not only written compositions, but also assignments on grammar or vocabulary, answers to comprehension questions, tests and so on; and teachers are expected, as part of their job, to respond to such work, providing appropriate (written) feedback.

How can this feedback be made optimally effective?

Question **Can you remember how you felt about the ways teachers responded to your own written work when you were learning a foreign language (or even your own)? Try to recall particular instances, and perhaps share with colleagues.**

The following task invites you to experiment with correcting written work yourself; if you do not actually do it, you may find it interesting and helpful simply to look at the examples of learner writing in Box 17.4 and then read straight on to the *Comments* below.

ɔeriential task

Correcting written work

Stage 1: Reading

Look at the written assignments provided in Box 17.4. The first is a grammar exercise mainly on the present perfect tense, which the students did for homework. The second is a test on vocabulary, which is also intended to check their mastery of the use of relative clauses in definitions. The third is a short piece of writing done in class as an individual summary of a group discussion, and given in to the teacher at the end of the lesson.

Stage 2: Giving feedback

Imagine these are assignments done by your own students, and write in your corrections and other feedback either on the page itself or on a copy. Do this on your own rather than collaboratively.

Stage 3: Reflection

If you are in a group, come together with other participants when you have finished to compare your responses. Perhaps work in pairs, reading each other's corrections and discussing differences.

Whether working on your own or with others, you might find the set of questions shown in Box 17.5 useful to stimulate thinking. My own answers to these appear in the Notes, (2).

BOX 17.4: SAMPLES OF LEARNERS' WRITTEN WORK

1. Grammar exercise on the present perfect tense, given as homework

14.1 *You are asking someone about things he has done in his life. Use the words in brackets to make your questions.*

Example: (you ever / be / to Italy?) Have you ever been to Italy?

1 (you ever / be / to / South America?) Have you ever been to South America?
2 (you / read / any English books?) Have you ever read any English books?
3 (you / live / in this town all your life?) Have you ever ... in this town all your...
4 (how many times / you / be / in love?) how many times have you been in love?
5 (what's the most beautiful country you / ever / visit?) What's the most beautiful country have you ever visited?
6 (you ever / speak / to a famous person?) have you ever spoken to a famous...?

14.2 *Complete the answers to these questions. Use the verb in brackets.*

Example: Is it a beautiful painting? (see) Yes, it's the most beautiful painting I've ever seen.

1 Is it a good film? (see) Yes, it's the best film I'ev ever seen
2 Is it a long book? (read) Yes, it's the longer book I'ev ever read
3 Is she an interesting person? (meet) Yes, she's the most interested gril I have ever met.

(From Raymond Murphy, *English Grammar in Use*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 29)

2. Test on vocabulary and relative clauses

Define the following words, using who/which/that/whose/when/where.

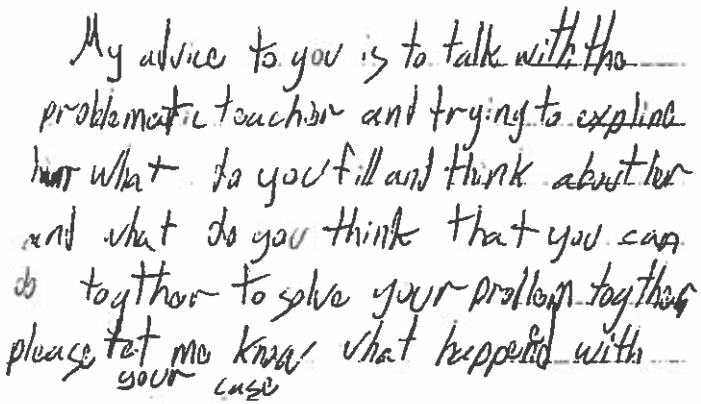
For example: a deserted house = a house where nobody lives

1. a temple: a house where religious people lives in.
2. a motionless tree: a tree which not moving at all.
3. an illusion: a false sight.
4. courage: a man who not have any Fear.
5. sweat: its like terrible but more then this.
6. a PR man: a man who work on a public relations.
7. a virus: a thing which make people sick.
8. an antibody: a thing which help the man get over the sickness.
9. a host: a man who takes visitors to his house
10. a paw: a part of a animal.

Writing following a discussion

Dear Helpful Harriet,
I have a problem with this teacher at school. He is always shouting at me, though I don't disturb more than lots of other pupils in the class. It's true that I sometimes don't do my homework, but I know his subject very well, always get high marks on the tests, so there is no point doing silly homework. He gave me a much lower mark than I deserve at the end of the term. It's not fair. And it's no good saying go to the class teacher, she always backs him up. What can I do?

Yours,
FRUSTRATED STUDENT



ollow-up scussion

Conclusions

Can you draw some conclusions as to what makes feedback on learner writing more or less effective? Try writing down what for you would be the three most important principles in giving written feedback, and share with colleagues.

If you wish to explore this topic further, you might like to look at Module 11: *Teaching writing*, Unit Five; for the topic of feedback on more advanced writing, see Zamel (1985).

BOX 17.5: CONSIDERING WRITTEN FEEDBACK

1. Did you use a red pen for your comments? Or another colour? Or a pen or pencil? Can you account for your choice?
2. For which of the assignments, if any, did you give some kind of assessment at the end ('Good', for example)? Why, or why not?
3. Did you correct all the mistakes? If so, why? If not, on what did you base your decision which to correct and which not?
4. Those mistakes you corrected: did you write in the correct form? Give a hint what it should be? Simply indicate it was wrong? Why?
5. Did you note only what was wrong, or did you give some kind of indication of what was right or particularly good?
6. Did you provide any kind of informative feedback other than mistake correction and overall assessment, designed to help the student improve? (e.g. 'This was good because...', or 'Take care when you...')
7. When responding to the assignment that entailed expression of personal opinion, did you provide a response of your own to the content? ('I agree with this point', 'Yes, but have you considered...?')
8. Did you require the student to redo any of the assignment? Can you say why, or why not?
9. Finally, try rereading your corrections imagining you are the student: what do you think the student will feel about them?

▷ Unit Five: Clarifying personal attitudes

This unit asks you to define your own attitudes to various aspects of the topic of feedback; it focusses particularly on the feelings and relationships which may be affected by the giving and getting of feedback.

Task **Agree or disagree?**

In Box 17.6 there is a list of statements, with an 'Agree–Disagree' continuum below each. You may like to add more statements in the spaces provided.

Put a cross on the continuum for each statement to indicate how far you agree with it. Perhaps look first at the *Comments* section below, which may help (or complicate!) your thinking. My own opinions are expressed in the Notes, (3).

Comments on Box 17.6

1. In relating to this question try to free yourself from the superficial negative connotations often associated with the phrase 'power hierarchy'. Power hierarchies may in some circumstances be necessary, productive and fully compatible with good human relationships.
2. In answering this question, teachers often conveniently overlook the word 'potentially'! Note: the question is not whether assessment humiliates, but if

BOX 17.6: STATEMENTS ABOUT FEEDBACK

1. The fact that the teacher gives feedback on student performance implies a power hierarchy: the teacher above, the student below.
   Very much agree ⟷ *Totally disagree*
2. Assessment is potentially humiliating to the assessed person.
   Very much agree ⟷ *Totally disagree*
3. Teachers should give their students only positive feedback, in order to encourage, raise confidence and promote feelings of success; negative feedback demoralizes.
   Very much agree ⟷ *Totally disagree*
4. Giving plenty of praise and encouragement is important for the fostering of good teacher–student relationships.
   Very much agree ⟷ *Totally disagree*
5. Very frequent approval and praise lose their encouraging effect; and lack of praise may then be interpreted as negative feedback.
   Very much agree ⟷ *Totally disagree*
6. Teachers should not let students correct each other's work, as this is harmful to their relationships.
   Very much agree ⟷ *Totally disagree*
7. .....
   Very much agree ⟷ *Totally disagree*
8. .....
   Very much agree ⟷ *Totally disagree*

there is or is not such a potential. (And if so, what should or may be done about it?)

3. The main controversial feature in this statement is the word 'only' in the first line.
4. In considering this question it might help to ask yourself: can I conceive of (or recall) a good teacher–student relationship where the teacher gives or gave very little positive feedback? Can I conceive of (or recall) one where there is or was plenty of positive feedback but relationships are or were nevertheless bad?
5. Can you recall a situation where the teacher over-praised? Or is the opposite usually the case?
6. Again, your answer to this will very much depend on your own experience.

Notes

(1) The value of assessment and correction for learning

In general, both positive and negative assessments should, in my opinion, be made available to the learner, as honestly as possible: mainly because in my experience this is what learners feel, and say, they want. However, it is essential for such assessments to be given in an atmosphere of support and warm solidarity, so that learners feel that the teacher's motive is honestly to promote and encourage their learning, not to put them down. The problem in negative assessment is often not the assessment itself, but rather the accompanying implications of aggression on the side of the assessor and humiliation on the side of the assessed – which can, and should, be eliminated.

As to correction: I think there is certainly a place for correction. Again, most learners ask for it; and it does contribute to some extent to learning. However, we should not over-estimate this contribution; most experienced teachers are familiar with the phenomenon of recurring corrections of the same mistake which do not seem to lead to improvement. I would rather invest time and energy in creating opportunities for learners to get things right as much as possible than in painstaking work on correcting mistakes. This is one point on which I am in agreement with the presently unfashionable audio-lingual method.

(2) Comments on the questions in Box 17.5

1. I usually use a coloured pen for corrections, simply in order to make them maximally clear and visible to the learner. The exception to this is when providing feedback on advanced writing (essays, papers, other forms of self-expression); here, if the writer has printed or written in ink, I give comments in pencil in order to convey a less authoritative, more diffident message: I'm suggesting, not telling.
2. I provided an assessing comment on the grammar exercise, in order to let the student know how well I thought he or she had mastered the material. Similarly, I gave a grade on the test, partly because this is what people who do tests usually expect and want. For the third assignment, however, I did not: this is a piece of spontaneous composition where the main activity was discussion, the writer had little chance to reread or polish, and I did not think it fair to judge it as a sample of the learner's writing.
3. I corrected virtually all the mistakes in the test. In the grammar exercise I corrected all the mistakes which had to do with the target forms, but ignored most of the others: learners can only use just so much feedback information: to give too much may simply distract, discourage and actually detract from its value for learning. In the third assignment I did not mark in corrections in the body of the student's text, but noted below some points they might attend to for the future: this was because I see this kind of writing not, like the others, as a presentation of language samples for display, but mainly as a form of self-expression, to be respected as such.
4. I wrote in the full correct forms. I do not see much value in demanding that students focus again on the wrong form and try to work out what is wrong

about it – besides, many of them never bother to do so! I would rather confront them with the acceptable forms as quickly and clearly as possible. (However, in the case of a first draft of an essay which a student is to rewrite, I might simply indicate there is a mistake, knowing that they are going to take the trouble to find out how to correct in order to make the final draft as good as possible.)

5. Yes. I put in ticks here and there indicating my appreciation of a difficulty overcome, or a note such as 'well expressed' in the margin. These responses can draw learners' attention to their successes, thus boosting morale and reinforcing learning.
6. Yes. For example, I noted for the student who did the relative clause exercise that she needed to review the irregular third-person forms of the present tense. If we can give information that makes students aware of their particular problems and suggest what they might do about them, this is one of the most valuable kinds of feedback we can provide.
7. Again, yes. I think it is very important to respond to an expression of opinion with one of my own: 'Yes, I feel the same...', 'I'm not sure about this. What would happen if...?'. This kind of comment makes it clear that the message is important, and that I see it as valuable enough to respond to as interlocutor.
8. Asking learners to re-do all their corrected work as a routine can be tedious and discouraging. For these exercises I did not require rewriting, though I did give another very similar grammar exercise to the one shown here a week or two later, having reviewed what I saw as the main problems. One instance where I do consistently request rewriting is for longer compositions or essays. In this case, the first draft does not get graded, only corrected, with constructive suggestions for the second version. The student then knows that, if he or she incorporates all the corrections and suggestions, there is a very good chance of getting a high mark, and the procedure is immediately rewarding as well as learning-valuable.

(3) Statements about feedback

1. Feedback implies a power hierarchy.

In my opinion a power hierarchy in the classroom, with the teacher in charge and students subordinate, is inevitable: the right of the teacher to correct and assess is one expression of it. Underlying, and to some extent offsetting this apparent dominance, however, is the teacher's role as server and supporter of the learners: the two roles are not only compatible, but, I think, complementary and essential for healthy classroom relationships.

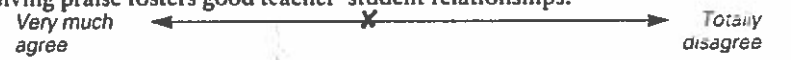
2. Assessment is potentially humiliating.

If you have recently undergone assessment yourself, you may recall the experience of real, or feared, humiliation. It is important to recognize that the potential exists in order to be able to ensure that it is not realized.

3. Teachers should give only positive feedback.

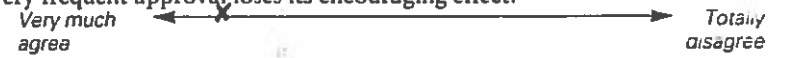
It is true that positive feedback tends to encourage, but this can be overstated, as here. Negative feedback, if given supportively and warmly, will be recognized as constructive, and will not necessarily discourage.

4. Giving praise fosters good teacher–student relationships.



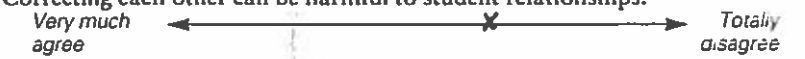
Yes, up to a point. But if there are good relationships, praise often becomes unnecessary; frank, friendly criticism is probably more appropriate and contributes more to the further strengthening of the relationship. And see the next question.

5. Very frequent approval loses its encouraging effect.



I have seen this happen: the giving of praise can easily be devalued through overuse. Students come to expect it as a matter of course, cease to be particularly encouraged by it, and are hurt if it is not forthcoming. In fact, overused, uncritical praise can begin to irritate.

6. Correcting each other can be harmful to student relationships.



If peer-correction causes conflict or tension between individuals, this probably means that relationships were not particularly warm or trusting in the first place. In other words, I do not think that peer-correction in itself can hurt if students feel good with one another in general; it may, however, do so if there was previous dislike or lack of trust between them.

Further reading

Bartram, M. and Walton, R. (1991) *Correction: Mistake Management – A Positive Approach for Language Teachers*, Hove: Language Teaching Publications.
(A compact, clear, systematic and, as it says, practical guide to the subject; interesting and relevant reader tasks help to clarify)

Brindley, G. (1989) *Assessing Achievement in the Learner-Centred Curriculum*, Macquarie University, Sydney: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research.
(A comprehensive and readable overview of ways of assessment in language learning)

Edge, J. (1989) *Mistakes and Correction*, London: Longman.
(A simple, practical handbook: suggests various techniques for correcting in different situations)

Harmer, J. (1984) 'How to give your students feedback', *Practical English Teaching*, 5, 2, 39–40.
(Practical guidelines on ways of correcting in the classroom)

A Course in Language Teaching

Practice and Theory

Penny Ur

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

▶ Unit One: What is discipline?

Discussion task

Brainstorm and definition

The phrase 'classroom discipline' has for most teachers an immediate and clear meaning, but it is in fact quite a complex concept, and hard to define in words. One way into such a definition is to start by brainstorming all the ideas that seem to you to be comprised in it: 'control' for example, or 'rules'.

Try brainstorming a list of such words for yourself, or in your group, and then look at the one shown in Box 18.1. Add to the latter whatever items you think I have missed, delete any you think irrelevant; finally put a circle round the ones you think most basic and essential. Using these, you may now find it easier to formulate a satisfactory definition.

You may be interested in comparing your definition with that given in a dictionary, or with my own as suggested in the Notes, (1).

Optional follow-up study

There are, of course, more subtle and interesting distinctions to be discovered within the concept of 'discipline'. Try discussing the distinctions between the following pairs:

1. 'control' v. 'discipline';
2. 'authoritarian' v. 'authoritative';
3. 'power' v. 'authority'.

Simplified versions of the distinctions between the above pairs of concepts appear in the Notes, (2). For more detailed and careful discussion see: Wilson, 1971: 77–80; Widdowson, 1987: 83–8; Peters, 1966: 237–47.

BOX 18.1: THE CONCEPT OF DISCIPLINE

control	contract	(ground) rules
agree	accept	responsibility
rewards	routine	punishments
respect	smooth	behaviour
norms	power	authority
obey	consistent	authoritative
authoritarian	efficient	cooperation

▶ Unit Two: What does a disciplined classroom look like?

Task Examining assumptions

Stage 1: Assessing

Imagine an ideally disciplined classroom. Then have a look at the set of statements in Box 18.2. Put a double plus (++) by statements which seem to you to describe a characteristic which is always typical of the disciplined classroom, and a single one by those which describe a characteristic which is fairly typical but not inevitable. Where you think the characteristic is entirely irrelevant or not very important, put a double or single minus (–); and a question mark where you feel uncertain. You may, of course, make any other combinations you like, or note reservations in the margin.

Stage 2: Rethinking

Read the *Comments* section below, and share ideas with colleagues. Would you, as a result of reading and discussion, alter any of your responses?

My own opinions are given in the Notes, (3).

BOX 18.2: POSSIBLE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISCIPLINED CLASSROOM

1. Learning is taking place.
2. It is quiet.
3. The teacher is in control.
4. Teacher and students are cooperating smoothly.
5. Students are motivated.
6. The lesson is proceeding according to plan.
7. Teacher and students are aiming for the same objective.
8. The teacher has natural charismatic 'authority'.

Comments

1. The question of the relationship between discipline and learning in a lesson is a crucial one. It seems fairly clear that in a disciplined classroom it is easier to activate students in the way the teachers want, and that time will be probably spent on-task, rather than wasted on organizational problems or disruptive behaviour. However, I have seen well-disciplined classes in which little or no learning was taking place, simply because the activities had themselves little learning value: see, for example the first scenario described in Box 2.2, on page 25, and the following comments. Thus, the existence of a disciplined classroom does not, in itself, necessarily imply that learning is taking place. There is, certainly, a link between the two: but it is not a consistent or inevitable one. (Note, however, that the converse is more likely to be consistently true: that is, that little or no learning will take place in a thoroughly undisciplined atmosphere.)

2. It is easy to claim that this criterion is irrelevant: what about well-disciplined classes where noisy pair or group work is going on?

   But there are other relevant questions which might lead you to a different conclusion. For example: pair and group work involving noisy talk take up only a part of lesson time – what about the rest? Or: imagine yourself walking down the corridor of a school and listening at the door of each classroom. Half are noisy, half are quiet. If you had to guess which were the more disciplined ones, what would you say? I would go for the quiet ones (unless I knew that all the teachers used interactive group work at least half the time!).

   A further argument: disciplined classes may or may not be quiet; undisciplined ones are usually noisy. There is, therefore, arguably some positive correlation between quietness and the level of discipline.
3. The fact that a teacher is in control of proceedings does not necessarily mean that he or she is standing in front of the class telling everyone what to do. The initiative may have been handed over to the students to do what they decide in a particular activity: nevertheless, it was the teacher who took and implemented the decision that there should be such a handover of initiative, and who may, at any point, take it back. However democratic the setup, the underlying responsibility for the control of any disciplined classroom has to be, surely, in the hands of the teacher: how authoritarian or liberal, rigid or flexible he or she is in the operation of this control is another question.
4. Smooth-running process is the main outward manifestation of discipline in the classroom, as it is in any other organization; and there has to be cooperation of participants in order to produce this. It must be noted however, that cooperation between students, or between students and teacher, is not necessarily either willing or democratic: it may well be a result of coercion or fear. There are all sorts of ways of bringing it about: you will have your own ideas about what methods are ethically, educationally, personally or practically acceptable and which are not.
5. Can you imagine a class of unmotivated students which is disciplined? Or a class of motivated students which is undisciplined? My answer to both of these is yes: which means that the correlation between the two is not absolute. The association is one of probability: if the class is motivated to learn, it is more likely to be easy to manage.
6. Again, we have here a case of probability rather than inevitable cause and effect. A lesson which is going according to plan is more likely to be disciplined: the teacher knows where he or she is going, activities are well prepared and organized; and the awareness that the process is clearly planned tends to boost teacher confidence and student trust, which in their turn also contribute to discipline. On the other hand, changes and improvisations do not necessarily lead to indiscipline, and may even prevent it.
7. Students may be quite unaware of the objective of the lesson, and yet be amenable to the control of the teacher, and the class as a whole disciplined. On the other hand, if they actually have and wish to implement opposing objectives of their own – for example, they want to discuss something in their own language when the teacher wants them to do so in the target language – the result may well be chaos, unless they can be persuaded to forgo their own objectives, and do as they are asked. The latter is what in fact happens in many classrooms, especially with younger or adolescent learners in schools.

A shared knowledge of and agreement on lesson objectives is not, therefore, absolutely necessary for a disciplined classroom, but it probably contributes to it, by raising motivation and the likelihood of cooperation.

8. There is no doubt, in my opinion, that there exists such a quality as charismatic 'authority'; that some teachers possess it while others do not; and that the possessors of this quality find it much easier to control classes. The good news is that the classes of teachers who do not possess natural 'authority' (and I speak as one such myself!) can be equally disciplined: we just have to work at it harder.

▷ Unit Three: What teacher action is conducive to a disciplined classroom?

Factors that contribute to classroom discipline

The idea that some teachers have a kind of natural 'authority', as suggested at the end of the previous unit, is not very helpful to the rest of us: what may be helpful is a study of the kind of teacher behaviours that are available to anyone and that are likely to produce a state of discipline in the classroom. These are not limited to classroom management skills, such as knowing how to organize the beginning of a lesson, or how to get students to raise their hands instead of shouting out answers. The choice of an appropriate methodology, for example, is likely to ensure that students feel they are learning in a way that is 'right' and useful for them, and they will therefore be more willing to cooperate. The fostering of interpersonal relationships – feelings of respect and goodwill between individuals – is obviously another important factor. Then there is the question of good planning: a carefully and clearly organized lesson makes for purposeful and orderly process. Finally, student motivation is extremely important, and can be enhanced by teacher action: the more interesting and motivating the learning activity, the more likely it is that students will be cooperative and stay on-task.

To recap: some important factors that contribute to classroom discipline and are potentially within the control of, or influenced by, the teacher are:

- classroom management
- methodology
- interpersonal relationships
- lesson planning
- student motivation.

Question **Have a look at the hints for teachers in Box 18.3. Can you pick out at least one example that has to do with each of the above?**

Task **Practical hints**

Stage 1: Prioritizing

Read through the list of practical hints in Box 18.3, and decide which, for

you, are the ten most important. You may, of course, add any you feel are missing.

Stage 2: Discussion

If you are working in a group, compare your answers with those of other participants and try to come to a consensus on the 'top ten'. If you are working alone find, if possible, an experienced teacher to compare notes with; and/or look at the following section, which gives some comments. My own selection appears in the Notes, (4).

BOX 18.3: PRACTICAL HINTS FOR TEACHERS ON CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

1. Start by being firm with students: you can relax later.
2. Get silence before you start speaking to the class.
3. Know and use the students' names.
4. Prepare lessons thoroughly and structure them firmly.
5. Be mobile: walk around the class.
6. Start the lesson with a 'bang' and sustain interest and curiosity.
7. Speak clearly.
8. Make sure your instructions are clear.
9. Have extra material prepared (e.g. to cope with slower/faster-working students).
10. Look at the class when speaking, and learn how to 'scan'.
11. Make work appropriate (to pupils' age, ability, cultural background).
12. Develop an effective questioning technique.
13. Develop the art of timing your lesson to fit the available period.
14. Vary your teaching techniques.
15. Anticipate discipline problems and act quickly.
16. Avoid confrontations.
17. Clarify fixed rules and standards, and be consistent in applying them.
18. Show yourself as supporter and helper to the students.
19. Don't patronize students, treat them with respect.
20. Use humour constructively.
21. Choose topics and tasks that will activate students.
22. Be warm and friendly to the students.

Adapted from Wragg (1981:22)

Comments

The original list on which this version is based was derived from the responses of student teachers when asked which hints from experienced teachers they had found most useful. The order of items 1–20 is the same as that in the original, and represents the respondents' overall order of importance. In other words, the most useful hint, for most people, was 'Start by being firm...', the least useful 'Use humour constructively'.

I added Item 21 (the activation value of tasks) as particularly relevant to language teaching, and worth discussing. I would not, however, include it in my top ten. It is necessary to be fairly rigorous here in your thinking: activation of students (particularly in an activity involving talk and/or physical movement) is

certainly important for learning, but it is a double-edged weapon for classroom discipline as such. It may get students involved and thoroughly cooperative on the one hand, but can over-enliven and unsettle them on the other. (However, we might sometimes consider it justifiable to risk a little unsettling for the sake of the learning!)

Item 22 (which also did not appear in the original) is a misleadingly attractive one: teacher warmth and friendliness, while undoubtedly a positive attribute in itself from other points of view, makes no direct contribution to classroom discipline, and may in some circumstances detract from it.

The next step: learner self-discipline

Although the immediate responsibility for the maintenance of classroom discipline in most situations is the teacher's, the ultimate goal is to reach the point where learners take on or at least share this responsibility. The ability to self-discipline is to some extent a function of the maturity of the learner, but can be fostered by the teacher. The way to do this is not simply to try to hand over responsibility to the learners for running the lesson – this teaches little, and can be disastrous – but first to get them used to the 'feel' of orderly classroom process, then gradually to begin to share decision-making based on this.

▶ Unit Four: Dealing with discipline problems

Like the previous unit, this one deals with practical recommendations, but this time the focus is on the prevention and treatment of discipline problems as they arise in class, rather than, as up to now, on the creation of a disciplined atmosphere in the first place.

Below is some advice in the form of directions on how to deal with deviant student behaviour in class. These are based on my own experience as a teacher who had to learn the hard way how to teach unruly classes of adolescents in a foreign country. I hope you find them useful: try as you read to recall classroom events in your own experience, as learner or teacher, which are relevant to the different topics.

In spite of the prescriptive tone, do not treat these directions as any kind of objective 'truth'! They should be regarded as one possible expression of classroom realities, which can be tested against your own experience and may furnish a starting-point from which you may develop strategies that work for you.

Before the problem arises

The teachers who are most successful in maintaining discipline in class are not those who are good at dealing with problems, but those who know how to prevent their arising in the first place. I suggest three main preventative strategies:

1. Careful planning
When a lesson is clearly planned and organized there is likely to be a constant momentum and a feeling of purpose, which keep students' attention on the task in hand (or in anticipation of the next) and does not allow the formation of a 'vacuum' which may be filled by distracting or counterproductive activity. Moreover, the awareness that everything is planned and you know where you are going contributes a great deal to your own confidence, and to your ability to win the trust of the students.

2. Clear instructions
Problems sometimes arise due to student uncertainty about what they are supposed to be doing. Instructions, though they take up a very small proportion of lesson time, are crucial. The necessary information needs to be communicated clearly and quickly, courteously but assertively: this is precisely what the task involves, these are possible options, those are not (see Module 1: *Presentations and explanations*, Unit Three). This is not incompatible with the existence of student-teacher negotiation about what to do: but too much hesitation and mind-changing can distract and bore students, with obvious implications for discipline.

3. Keep in touch
You need to be constantly aware of what is going on in all quarters of the classroom, keeping your eyes and ears open: as if you have sensitive antennae, or a revolving radar dish constantly on the alert, ready to pick up 'blips'. This achieves two things: first, students know you are aware of them all the time which encourages participation and personal contact on the one hand, and discourages deviant activity on the other; second, you yourself are able to detect a student's incipient loss of interest or distraction and do something about it before it has become problematic.

When the problem is beginning

Inexperienced teachers tend to ignore minor problems, in the hope that they will go away by themselves. Occasionally they do; but more often they simply escalate. In principle, it is advisable to respond immediately and actively to any incipient problem you detect.

1. Deal with it quietly
The best action is a quiet but clear-cut response that stops the deviant activity, keeping the latter as low-profile as possible. For example: if a student has not opened his or her book in response to an instruction from you, it is better quietly to go up to them and open the book yourself than draw the attention of the whole class by a reprimand or loud, repeated instruction. Over-assertive reactions can lead to the very escalation you wish to avoid.

2. Don't take things personally
This is a difficult instruction to obey sometimes, but an important one. Inexperienced teachers of adolescents are often upset by remarks that were not intended personally; or allow incidents of unpleasant conflict to rankle long

after the student has forgotten they ever happened. Try to relate to the problem, not the student, as the object to be attacked and dealt with. A more difficult piece of advice: even if you are quite sure the criticism was meant personally, do your best to relate to it as if it was not: don't let the student pull you into personal conflict.

3. Don't use threats
Threats are often a sign of weakness; use the formula 'if you...then...' only as a real, factual option that you are ready to put into practice, not as a weapon to make an impression or intimidate.

When the problem has exploded

The priority here is to act quickly in order to get the class to revert to smooth routine as fast as possible. Often it is preferable to take a decision, even if not a very good one, fast, than to hesitate or do nothing.

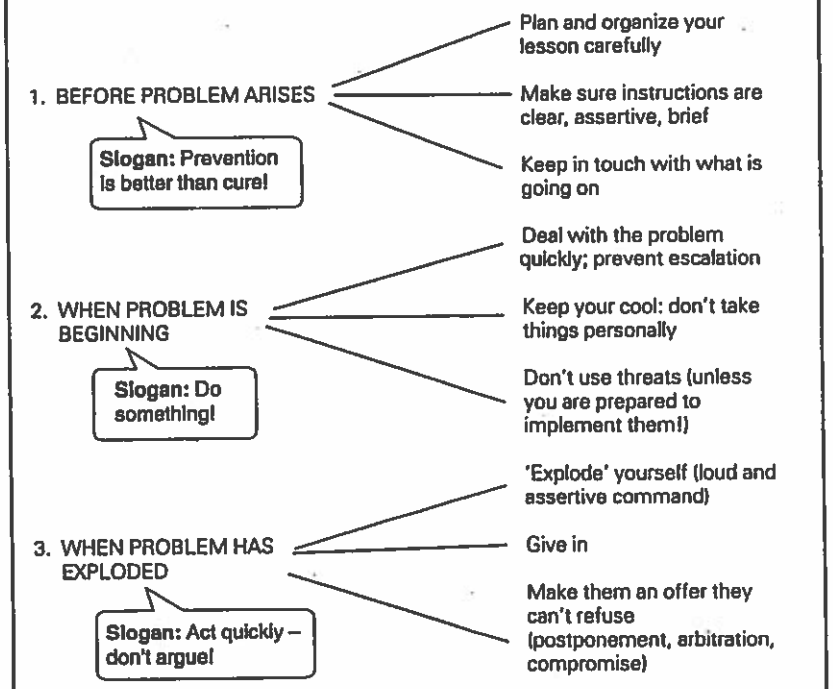
1. Explode yourself
Often a swift, loud command will do the trick, with a display of anger: provided, of course, that you do not really lose your temper or become personally aggressive! The trouble with displaying anger is that you cannot do it too often, or it loses its effect.

2. Give in
For example, if students refuse to do homework you might say, 'All right, don't'. This is a perfectly respectable option, which is unfortunately shunned by many teachers who feel they risk loss of face. Its advantage is that it immediately defuses the situation, and if done quickly and decisively, will not be seen as dishonourable surrender! It also puts you in a position to fairly demand something from them in return! But again, it cannot be used too often, for obvious reasons.

3. Make them an offer they can't refuse
If they are pushing you into a confrontation, and you cannot give in but do not wish to impose your will by getting over-assertive – look for a way of diverting or sidestepping the crisis. Some strategies are: postponement ('Let's come back to this tomorrow at the beginning of the day. Now, to get back to...'); or compromise ('I'll tell you what: you have to do all the assignments, but I'll give you extra time to finish them...'); or arbitration ('Let's discuss this with the class teacher, and accept his or her decision...').

The above guidelines are summarized in Box 18.4.

BOX 18.4: ADVICE ON DEALING WITH DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS



▷ Unit Five: Discipline problems: episodes

In this unit you are asked to apply your own expertise or knowledge of the subject of classroom discipline to critical analysis of actual classroom incidents. It is, of course, far easier to criticize and recommend when it is someone else's problem, and when you have plenty of time to consider and weigh alternatives than it is to take the right decisions when you yourself are involved in a real-time classroom crisis! Nevertheless, vicarious experience and decision-making like this has its uses for professional thinking, and is an interesting exercise in itself.

Task Analysing episodes

Read through the descriptions of episodes shown in Box 18.5. Deal with them in any order that you like and think about or discuss the following questions:

- What caused the problem?
- What could the teacher have done to prevent it arising?
- Once it had arisen, what would you advise the teacher to do?

My own comments follow.

Comments

Episode 1
The causes of this were, possibly, that the book is indeed boring, coupled with Terry's wish to disrupt, challenge, or simply take a break from routine. Apart from choosing a different text, it is difficult to see how the teacher could have foreseen or prevented the incident. Now the priority is to neutralize the challenge and get the class back on task. I would say something like: 'Yes, we do have to do this book; we'll discuss whether it's boring later' – and get someone else to go on reading. I would, however, as promised, discuss the book later with the class or with Terry himself, and devote some thought to the selection of the next text.

Episode 2
This situation is a very common one, rooted in lack of firm and consistent rules in the classroom, or the teacher's failure to insist on them: the result is that a number of students are getting little or no learning value from the lesson. The teacher should have insisted on quiet and attention from the start, and stopped each murmur as it began. Possibly she is afraid of losing popularity: her reproaches when they occur, lack 'attack', are rapidly disregarded, and the result is that constant inattention and chat is tacitly accepted as the norm.

To reverse the situation when it has got as far as this is extremely difficult. It may be necessary to hold a serious discussion with the class, agree with them on explicit new ground rules and then insist strictly on their implementation from then on.

Episode 3
Here, the incident was caused by the teacher's over-lengthy explanation, the child's impatience, and the failure of the teacher to pick up and stop the disturbance when it started. Most people's intuitive reaction would be to reprimand John; but probably a more effective response would be to use the silence to instruct the class firmly to start work on the worksheet, promising to deal with any further problems in response to raised hands. Once the class is working, the teacher could go to John, make it clear that his behaviour is unacceptable, but that the incident is now over and he should be working. A further word or two with him after the lesson may make it less likely that he will repeat the behaviour.

Episode 4
The immediate cause of this incident, given the confident and cheeky character of members of the class, was the teacher's mistake in getting into an argument with one boy in the middle of an organizational routine involving all the class – an argument which escalated rapidly into a full-class disturbance. He should have finished distributing and collecting books and dealt with the notebook

BOX 18.5: EPISODES: DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS

Episode 1
The teacher of a mixed class of thirteen-year-olds is working through a class reader in an English lesson. He asks Terry to read out a passage. 'Do we have to do this book?' says Terry. 'It's boring.' Some members of the class smile, one says 'I like it', others are silent awaiting the teacher's reaction.

(from E. C. Wragg, *Class Management and Control*, Macmillan, 1981, p. 12)

Episode 2
The teacher is explaining a story. Many of the students are inattentive, and there is a murmur of quiet talk between them. The teacher disregards the noise and speaks to those who are listening. Finally she reproaches, in a gentle and sympathetic way, one student who is talking particularly noticeably. The student stops talking for a minute or two, then carries on. This happens once or twice more, with different students. The teacher does not get angry, and continues to explain, trying (with only partial success) to draw students' attention through occasional questions.

(adapted from Sarah Reinhorn-Lurie, Unpublished research project on classroom discipline, Oranim School of Education, Haifa, 1992)

Episode 3
The teacher has prepared a worksheet and is explaining how to do it. He has extended his explanation to the point where John, having lost interest in the teacher's words, begins to tap a ruler on his desk. At first the tapping is occasional and not too noticeable, but John begins to tap more frequently and more noisily, building up to a final climax when he hits the table with a very loud bang. The class, startled by the noise, falls silent, and looks at both John and the teacher to see what will happen.

(adapted from E. C. Wragg, *Class Management and Control*, Macmillan, 1981, p. 18)

Episode 4
The teacher begins by giving out classroom books and collecting homework books.

Teacher (to one of the boys): This book's very thin.
Boy 1: Yeah, 'tis, isn't it.
Teacher: Why?
Boy 1: I've been drawing in it.
Boy 2: He's been using it for toilet paper, sir.
(Uproar)

(adapted from E. C. Wragg, (ed.) *Classroom Teaching Skills*, Croom Helm, 1984, p. 32)

Episode 5
The students have been asked to interview each other for homework and write reports. In this lesson they are asked to read aloud their reports. A few students refuse to do so. The teacher tells these students to stand up before the class and be interviewed by them. They stand up, but do not relate to the questions seriously: answer facetiously, or in their mother tongue, or not at all. The teacher eventually sends them back to their places, and goes on to the next planned activity, a textbook exercise.

(adapted from Sarah Reinhorn-Lurie, Unpublished research project on classroom discipline, Oranim School of Education, Haifa, 1992)

problem later, privately. Now that there is uproar, he should immediately abandon the individual problem, and devote his efforts to regaining order and finishing the book collection and distribution as quickly as possible. The problem of the mutilated notebook may be taken up again after the lesson with the boy alone.

Episode 5

The cause of this was the lack of authority of the teacher (her inability to demand and get student obedience), and the mistaken tactic of allowing obviously undisciplined students, in a group, to take over centre-stage. What I usually do if students do not want to read aloud something they have written is take it and read it aloud myself: they accept this because I can make it sound much better than they can, and my main objective (displaying students' work to each other) is gained.

Given the very uncomfortable situation of students actually making fun of a teacher-directed learning task, the reaction of stopping it and going on to the next bit of the lesson was the right one, although late. Certainly, however, the teacher should talk to the students later, one at a time, in order to make it clear that this behaviour was unacceptable and to try to prevent a recurrence.

Notes

(1) Defining classroom discipline

A possible definition: Classroom discipline is a state in which both teacher and learners accept and consistently observe a set of rules about behaviour in the classroom whose function is to facilitate smooth and efficient teaching and learning in a lesson.

(2) Distinctions between pairs of concepts

'Control' is imposed from above by an authority who is invested with superior influence; 'discipline' is accepted by participants in the activity of studying as an essential and integral part of that study (compare the use of the term 'discipline' to denote an area of study such as philosophy or science).

'Authoritarian' describes a teacher whose authority derives from some exterior empowering agent, or who is 'bossy'; 'authoritative' describes one who is obeyed because he or she is trusted to know best about the subject of study and how to learn it (hence the phrase 'to be an authority on...').

'Power' is the sheer ability to impose one's will on others, through physical coercion, or other forms of pressure; whereas 'authority' is the demand for cooperation and obedience that is accepted because it is rooted in a law, social order or accepted value system.

(3) Possible characteristics of classroom discipline

My responses would be as follows. Where I have found it difficult to make a clear decision, symbols in brackets indicate possible alternative choices.

1. Learning is taking place. +(?)
2. It is quiet. +
3. The teacher is in control. ++
4. Teacher and students are cooperating smoothly. ++
5. Students are motivated. ?(+)
6. The lesson is proceeding according to plan. +(?)
7. Teacher and students are aiming for the same objective. ?(+)
8. The teacher has natural charismatic 'authority'. ?(+)

My reasons are discussed in the *Comments* section within the unit.

(4) Practical hints for classroom discipline

My chosen 'top ten' would be: 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 15, 17, 19.

Further reading

Charles, C. M. (1992) *Building Classroom Discipline* (4th edn.), New York: Longman.
(Practical and readable, written for trainee or practising teachers; a summary of various models of classroom discipline and guidelines for practical application)

Cohen, L. and Manion, L. (1977) *A Guide to Teaching Practice*, London: Macmillan.
(A valuable practical guide to all aspects of school teaching)

Kounin, J. S. (1970) *Discipline and Group Management in Classrooms*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
(An analysis of various aspects of discipline, some interesting and useful perspectives)

Maclennan, S. (1987) 'Integrating lesson planning and class management', *ELT Journal*, 41, 3, 193–7.
(On alternating lively and quiet activities in the lesson process)

Peters, R. S. (1966) *Ethics and Education*, London: George Allen and Unwin.
(Philosophical analysis of various aspects of education; see particularly Part Three: 'Education and social control')

Underwood, M. (1987) *Effective Classroom Management*, London: Longman.
(Not just on discipline, but on a variety of aspects of classroom management and lesson planning: practical and comprehensive)

Widdowson, H. G. (1987) 'The roles of teacher and learner', *ELT Journal*, 41, 2, 83–8.
(An analysis of the different roles of the teacher as authority, and resulting interaction between teacher and learner)

Wilson, P. S. (1971) *Interest and Discipline in Education*, London: Routledge.
(A philosophical discussion of the two concepts: see particularly the analysis of discipline versus control, pp. 77–80, quoted in Wragg, 1984)