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Shifting Responsibility for Learning From the Teacher to the Student

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SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING

FROM THE TEACHER TO THE STUDENT

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The project is organized into two main sections. The first is a dis-
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Table of Contents

I. Introduction

The main theme of this paper deals with the teaching and learning of language. It is a humble attempt to combine some years of personal learning experience in the field of ESL with several years of ESL teaching experience.

The paper discusses one of the ways which I believe facilitates learning a language: student-centered learning.

It is my intention in writing this paper to first describe some of the rationale behind, and implications of, an approach to teaching which encourages a shift of the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the learner, and second, to describe some of the ways that this approach can be implemented in the classroom.

My intention is not to propose that a total transfer of teacher responsibility be placed on the shoulders of the learner, but rather to examine ways in which the teacher can best utilize the power and authority which she brings to the classroom to encourage greater student responsibility and initiative-taking in the learning process. Student-centered learning is a key factor for success in most learning situations, but especially in language learning, for certainly one of the primary objectives of any language course should be to make the student independent of the teacher, both in terms of knowing how to use the language correctly for himself and in enabling him to continue the learning process on his own outside the classroom. In a sense, by teaching the student in this way, we are not only teaching the language, but also teaching the student how to learn.

I have made a conscious decision to work on developing the skills described in this teaching approach as a result of my own efforts in the classroom by trying to develop ways to facilitate the learning of my students.

It should be noted that in writing this paper I have chosen a particular third-person-pronoun style when referring to students and teachers. Simply for reasons of efficiency I will hereafter when referring to the teacher use the pronoun "she" and when referring to the student, "he."

My hope in writing this paper is that via the discussion of assumptions, rationale, implications and techniques and activities of a student-centered teaching approach, it may serve other colleagues in the field who are investigating and grappling with the issues herein raised. It is hoped that those teachers who are interested in developing a personal approach to teaching that increasingly fosters student initiative and responsibility-taking in their own learning process may benefit from my understanding and experience of the issue.

II. Rationale

In recent years there has been a shift of focus in the ESL field
away from the teacher and the subject matter, to the learner. The
shift can be witnessed in the so-called "humanistic" teaching
approaches that have been developed and which are becoming increasingly
popular.

The assumption behind this shift is that for too long teachers
have neglected that element in the classroom situation which is crucial
for success--the learner. Previously much attention was given to the
mechanics of teaching and the methodology employed. It was presumed
that by examining the linguistic nature of the language and what the
teacher did with it, a cure-all method could be developed that would
work in all situations. All learners were treated as objects that
could be manipulated in the same way to achieve the same ends.
Approaches to teaching that reflect this assumption are the pure Audio-
lingual Method and the Direct Method. The rationale was that if the
right stimuli were applied, the desired linguistic response would be
forthcoming. These methods have been referred to as "behavioristic"
approaches to teaching.

In contrast, the "humanistic" approaches emphasize the human
element of the learning process, i.e., the affective factor. There
have been several approaches to teaching developed that have captured
the interest of a great number of ESL professionals and which are based
on the assumption that taking into account and involving the student's
feeling and what he already knows can greatly facilitate the learning

experience. Some of the methods that directly address the learner in this way are: Suggestopaedia, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response and Silent Way.

Reflected in these approaches, and in the general ESL profession today, is an increased interest in the affective domain, i.e., the emotional and psychological aspects of the learner. The attitudes of the teacher and student are seen as important, human sensitivity as crucial, and the quality of interaction as a significant variable.

Equally important, and inherent in many of the approaches to teaching which address the affective needs of the learners, is a realization that for maximum learning to take place, the learner must take on a greater share of the responsibility for his own learning-- responsibility which is often kept from the student and retained by the teacher. Built into these approaches are activities and teaching techniques that allow for, and encourage, student initiative and responsibility by providing the student with choices within limits set up by the teacher. "Initiative," as I am using it here, refers to decisions about who says what, to whom, and when in the classroom.

This attitude represents a shift away from the traditional teacher-dominated or teacher-centered classroom and is based on new assumptions about learning. In fact, many of the new innovations in education in general, such as open classrooms, non-graded schools, learning laboratories, community schools and non-traditional study programs, are based on this student-centered assumption about children and youth as learners.

With the shift of focus to the learner and the emergence of the new methodologies supporting this shift, there has been increasing debate in the field of education concerning how students learn best and how we, as teachers, can best serve them by facilitating their learning and not hindering it. On one side, there are those who feel that the teacher-centered learning process can best serve the students, and on the other side are those who advocate a student-centered teaching process or a variation of it.

At this point, I would like to describe some of the basic assumptions about the learner according to these two approaches and compare their rationales.

By "teacher-centered" I am referring to a traditional type of teaching, as well as "behavioristic" approaches which I believe share many of the same characteristics in this regard -- a type of teaching which assumes that the learner's experience is of less value as a learning resource than that of the teacher and the textbook. The learner's experience is not utilized to facilitate learning--it is to be built upon rather than used. For example, "using" a student's experiences can mean assessing students' learning strategies and allowing them to use these strategies to learn in the classroom. In a teacher-centered classroom, the students' experience is not consulted as a resource, since the teacher already knows what is best for them.

The orientation in the teacher-centered class is subject-centered; that is, learning is seen as accumulating the subject matter. Student readiness to learn depends on the level of his maturation, and therefore

a given group of learners will be ready to learn the same things at a given level of maturation. The motivation of the learner is directly related to external rewards and punishments, e.g., grades, diplomas, awards, approval of parents and teachers, etc. Finally, the concept of the learner is essentially one of a dependent personality; dependent on the teacher who has the responsibility for deciding "what" and "how" the students will be taught. The atmosphere in the teacher-centered learning situation is authoritative and formal, competitive and judgmental.

In contrast, the assumptions behind the student-centered learning recognize the learner's experience as a rich resource for learning which should be exploited along with the resources of experts. Unlike the view that readiness to learn depends on the learner's level of maturation, readiness to learn develops from life tasks and problem solving. Class orientation is therefore task or problem-solving centered. Learner motivation is seen as directly related to internal, personal incentives such as the urge to grow, the development of self-esteem, the satisfaction of accomplishment, and curiosity.

The atmosphere in the student-centered situation is informal, collaborative and supportive. Relationships of mutual respect are fostered between teacher and students and among the students themselves.

The following chart (Malcolm Knowles, Self-Directed Learning)[1] is a comparison of assumptions about the learner of teacher-centered learning vs. student-centered learning:

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[1] Malcolm Knowles, Self-Directed Learning (New York: Associated Press, 1975), p. 60.

Assumptions

About	Teacher-directed	Student-directed
1. Concept of learner	dependent personality	increasingly self-directed organism
2. Role of learner's experience	to be built upon more than used	a rich resource for learning
3. Readiness to learn	varies with levels of maturation	develops from life tasks and problems
4. Orientation	subject-centered	task or problem-centered
5. Motivation	external rewards and punishments	internal incentives, curiosity
6. Climate	formal authority-oriented, competitive, judgmental	informal, mutually respectful, consensual, collaborative, supportive

The assumptions supporting student-centered learning have come about as a result of another assumption about learning--i.e., that learning of the subject matter and the necessary skills is done primarily by the learner and not by direct manipulation by the teacher.

It can also be asserted in this context that too often in the traditional teacher-centered classroom, the teacher advertently or inadvertently does not allow the students to take the kind of active role in their own learning which is vital for success. "We [teachers] too sometimes control our students...most of all when we make them permanently our dependents by doing for them what they could do for themselves."[2]

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[2]Earl W. Stevick, A Way and Ways (Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1980), p. 284.

In order to allow students an active role in their learning, one would have to avoid the kind of classroom management that encouraged student dependence on the teacher. To achieve this independence, the teacher must ask the students to participate in their learning in a new way, a way they may not be accustomed to in the classroom.

Ultimately, the teacher is asking the students to become equal partners in the learning and teaching process, but partners with different functions and responsibilities.

I agree with Earl Stevick when he says, "The teacher is by far the most powerful figure in the classroom."[3] Society and our students expect that we as teachers will stand at the center of language education and will not shrink from the responsibility they have invested us with. We must be careful, in our efforts to help the students take on more responsibility, not to abandon them. This can be as detrimental to learning taking place as too much teacher control. In sharing control and allowing students to develop personal responsibility, the teacher does not have to relinquish the power that she is naturally invested with, but must learn to use it in a new way--a way in which the teacher is able to keep control while at the same time the learner is exercising personal initiative. Traditionally the control that the teacher exercises is not used in this way.

> What so often happens, of course, is that the
> teacher, in the name of "exercising control,"
> also monopolizes initiative, telling the students
> which line of the drill to produce, which question
> to ask (or how to answer it), whom to talk with,
> and so on.[4]

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[3]Ibid., p. 17.

[4]Ibid., p. 20.

In consciously making a decision to control what goes on in the classroom in a way that allows the learner to make decisions about how and what he will learn, the teacher is exercising her "power" in a way that helps the learner take initiative in learning and develop a deeper sense of responsibility towards his role.

> There is convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn more things, and learn better, than do people who sit at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners). They enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation. They also tend to retain and to make use of what they learn better and longer than do the reactive learners.[5]

In addition, the rationale for the use of teacher power and control in this way is that as the students become directly involved in the success or failure of the class and their own learning, they become more fully invested in the process of learning. Personal experience has led me to believe that as a result, students' learning becomes more personally meaningful.

At this point, I would like to suggest that my purpose in writing this paper is not to propose the development of one of these approaches to the exclusion of the other. On the contrary, it is my belief that in the past, teacher-centered learning has dominated the performance of teachers and that a more balanced approach, integrating these two approaches, can facilitate the present and future learning of our students. It is for this reason that, in my own teaching, I have shifted the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the

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[5]Knowles, p. 14.

student, to afford the student an opportunity to become more self-directed in his learning.

I recognize that not all teacher-centered learning is necessarily bad and that not all student-centered learning is necessarily good. I have found there are learning situations in which we are indeed dependent on the expertise and knowledge of a teacher, as when approaching an entirely new field of inquiry. Regardless, I feel that the more responsibility the learner has as a learner, the more he will enter any learning situation in a searching, probing frame of mind and will exploit these situations as resources for learning.

III. Meeting the Affective Needs of the Learner

An important aspect of helping students become self-directed
learners deals with the affective factor of the learner. I have
mentioned this factor previously, but would now like to explain
further why this element is crucial.

One aspect of the affective needs of the learner deals with
meeting the individual's needs for security. One of these needs that
I have observed in my students is a sense of belonging, i.e., the
individual's place in a group. The sense of belonging can affect the
learner's self-image and esteem, which in turn can affect how he per-
forms. I have found that in order for students to develop the
necessary confidence to become self-directed learners, they have to
feel good about themselves as learners. Student self-esteem can be
nurtured by the acceptance and appreciation of others. For this
reason, I feel it is important for me to work at creating a sense of
solidarity and unity among the members of my classes. This unity not
only fulfills the individual's need for security but also allows
students to view themselves and their peers as learning resources
that can be utilized and shared to enrich their learning, in
addition to the teacher. Unity of purpose creates the kind of
climate necessary to cultivate student-directed learners, i.e., one
that is supportive and collaborative. In this kind of climate
students are able to work together to solve collective and individual
problems, thus freeing themselves from overdependence on the teacher.

In order for this unity to take place, an environment must be created that will allow for it. This is where the role of the teacher is instrumental. It is the teacher, more than any other individual in the class, who sets the tone for the interpersonal atmosphere. The atmosphere, in turn, may address the students' emotional needs and create a solidarity among the learners or it may deny these needs and promote a competitive, judgmental interpersonal climate.

In order to cultivate the former, it is necessary for the teacher to behave and interact with the individual and the class as a whole in a way that communicates sincere interest and respect. In addition, the teacher should try not to act in a manner that is judgmental. Anyone who has enrolled in a foreign language course knows what a threatening experience it can be. It can be so intimidating because one's personal self-esteem and image of self-worth are threatened with failure. This intimidation exists in any learning situation, but in some ways it is more acute in the foreign language classroom because of our perceived vulnerability in relation to our lack of knowledge and expertise of the foreign language. Consequently this intimidation creates emotional blocks as defense mechanisms which can inhibit performance.

By treating the students as intelligent adults whom we sincerely care about and are interested in, we are freeing them from inhibitions and the need to defend themselves from what the self perceives as aggression against itself. As a result, the student opens himself up to new experiences in a greater way which permits him to interact with

the content (language) more fully, using more of the faculties at his disposal.

I believe Stevick is referring to this kind of climate when he writes, "I have begun to suspect that the most important aspect of 'what goes on' is the presence or absence of harmony--it is the parts working with, or against, one another."[6]

One of the ingredients which I have already touched upon but would like to describe further is the importance of the non-judgmental response on the part of the teacher towards what the students say.

It is my belief that one of the goals of any language course should be that the learner develop a personal vocabulary which is relevant to his feelings and needs. However, this is not usually the case. Instead, teachers often follow a course syllabus which dictates what areas of the language the students will learn and even what vocabulary will be learned. If the students touch on an aspect of the language which they are interested in, but which does not fall within the syllabus, it is ignored. I have found that when limiting the students in this way, excellent teaching and learning opportunities are missed.

In her work Language from Within, Beverly Galyean calls this personal vocabulary "meaning nodes."[7] According to Galyean, these meaning nodes are organic to each of us, teachers and students alike, and, when tapped, they release tremendous potential for learning in the way of personal motivation. This is because meaning nodes are directly

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[6]Stevick, p. 5.

[7]Beverly Galyean, Language from Within (Long Beach, CA: Ken Zel Consultant Services, 1976).

related to our emotions. Both teachers and students are energized by their emotions, in relation to what is going on in the world around them. Some of the natural meaning nodes Galyean feels are important to consider are: feelings, interests, concerns, wants, likes and dislikes, hopes, beliefs, fears and needs.

The assumption which Galyean is making and which I agree with is that whenever a student recognizes one of these meaning nodes within himself and discusses it, natural energy is released. It is this energy that we want to harness for learning in the classroom. These meaning nodes reflect the individual's striving for relevance and should not be stifled; on the contrary, they should be encouraged. Once the learner has expressed himself freely in this manner, the way in which we respond to his expression is extremely important.

Galyean states that when we, as teachers, question the learner in a judgmental, evaluative manner, the learner must defend his utterance, which interrupts the expressive process that he is involved in. Therefore, if the student knows that these inner feelings which he is attempting to express and share with the others will be evaluated, he will be less likely to volunteer them in the future. On the other hand, if the student knows that the questioning will be value-free, and that respect and affirmation will be given to him, he will be encouraged to take risks and use the language to describe his personal feelings. The student will then be free to reflect, assess, respond, and discover new insights into self-awareness. In the process he acquires a personal vocabulary, and because student investment and the

release of energy is great, the personal vocabulary which is part of a person's survival system is more quickly and more thoroughly learned. The assumption here is that the learner will learn more easily because he needs or wants to learn it and because it touches him on a deep level of concern. My own experience has reinforced this assumption about learning.

I have been working with this objective for some years, but only recently have I understood the importance of the non-evaluative response to what the students try to express. I found I needed to detach myself from my own "meaning nodes" temporarily in order to best listen to what the students were saying and give them the kind of support they need to become more confident in the language. I remember judging students' emotional responses, not by anything I said, but by my facial expressions. These students, unless they were extremely self-confident to begin with, were much less likely to express themselves freely after-wards. I noticed a marked difference since making a conscious effort to respond in a more detached, supportive manner.

As my students develop confidence and self-esteem in the new language, they incorporate the language into their personal world of meaning and it becomes a part of them. I have discovered that as the students develop confidence, they take on more responsibility and in so doing reach a certain level of independence in the language.

IV. Redefining the Role of the Teacher

What is the role of the teacher? I feel any person professionally involved in the field of teaching must seriously ask herself this question and search for answers. Some of the traditional definitions of the role of the teacher set forth by Malcolm Knowles include: 1) the teacher is content-transmitter in the classroom, 2) the teacher is the source of knowledge and expertise of the content, 3) the teacher knows best how and what the students will learn, 4) the teacher's job is to exercise strict control over what is learned and how it is learned in order to ensure success.[8]

It appears to me that these definitions were developed based on certain assumptions about how students learn. New assumptions about how the learner learns, and which I discussed in the first chapter, have called most of these definitions about teaching into some question. My own experience has been that teaching according to the above-mentioned assumptions makes the students' only task one of consumption of content. At the same time, the students' dependence on the teacher for that content seems to be reinforced. Therefore, taking into account the new assumptions about how my own students learn, it seemed that a redefinition of my role as a teacher was needed. I decided that if my goal as a teacher was to help my students become self-directed, respon-sible learners, then I would have to teach in a manner that would enable them to take on more responsibility for directing their own learning.

[8]Knowles, p. 29.

I have found that to change my teaching approach to one that is more student-centered, I have had to consider many important aspects. One aspect concerning attitude is that in order for a shift of responsibility to take place, I had to believe that the learner was capable of taking on more responsibility for his own learning. I could not expect the learner to become independent and self-directed if I did not really believe it was possible and did not have confidence that he could accomplish such a task. That lack of confidence will be reflected in the teacher's interaction with the learners. For this reason, it was imperative that before asking my students to readjust their learning styles, I had to do some readjusting of my own attitudes and teaching style:

> When I started encouraging students to be self-directed learners, I initially assumed that they would change but I would perform the same. The only difference would be that they would take more responsibility for making use of my transmissions, planning their outside reading, and producing more creative term papers. I had a couple of early shocks as a result of this assumption. The first was when I discovered that my students didn't want to be self-directed learners; they wanted me to teach them. Then, when I got them over that hurdle--through strategies I will describe shortly-- they really got turned on about being self-directed learners and forced me to change my role.[9]

The teacher must change as well, from what Knowles refers to as a "teacher-transmitter" to a "teacher-facilitator." The essential difference between these terms as he explains it is that while the former implies that the teacher concentrates on herself and transmitting content (language), the latter implies focusing on what is

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[9]Ibid., p. 33.

happening in the student. This requires that the teacher divest herself of the protective shield of an authority figure and expose herself as she is--an authentic human being with feelings, hopes, aspirations, insecurities, strengths and weaknesses. It also means exercising self-discipline in controlling the compulsion to overcontrol the learner and pose as the only authority on the language. Instead, it means joining the students as a co-learner.

I found that once my attitude changed, that in turn affected and modified the set of functions I had previously performed as a teacher. Some of the new skills I discovered I needed as a "teacher-facilitator" were: climate setting, planning, diagnosing needs of learners, setting goals, designing a learning plan (optional models of plans), engaging in learning activities, evaluating learning outcomes (in such a way that will enhance rather than diminish the learner's self-concept as a self-directed learner).

My own experience implementing a student-centered approach has revealed several conceptual problems when presenting this new role to the learners. One question that must be asked is, "How quickly and to what degree should the teacher expect the students to take on more responsibility for learning and become self-directed learners?"-- especially when the students may be using learning strategies developed in a more traditional classroom environment. Most students enter into a second-language learning situation feeling a deep need for the security of a clear structural plan: course syllabus, textbook and timetable. They also want teachers who know what they are doing and

who are in charge. Students who are not accustomed to the kind of freedom that exists in a student-centered course may find the experience somewhat threatening at first. It takes time for the students to settle into the course and to appreciate and take advantage of the new system they find themselves in.

Therefore, I have found that it is important to provide students with a certain degree of structure which they expect and assure them, via management of the class, that I am in charge. In some instances I have found that it is necessary to start with activities with more teacher responsibility for both structure and content and, over time, allow the students to take on more and more of this responsibility themselves. Students need to learn how to work in a student-centered class situation or they can easily lose their self-discipline.

Depending on the group and their past learning experience, it seems that a gradual transition would be beneficial. However, by continually addressing the learners' affective needs, I am in effect freeing students from natural inhibitions relative to new experiences, thus facilitating adjustment and accelerating learning.

V. Redefining the Role of the Learner

In this chapter I will discuss some of the necessary attitudes
and strategies that I have found the learner needs to develop to take
on more responsibility for learning and to excel in a student-centered
classroom.

Again, I refer to Knowles regarding the basic competencies a
learner should develop.[10] Initially, he suggests that the student has
to have a basic understanding of the differences in assumptions about
learners and the skills required for learning in a teacher-centered
class as opposed to a student-centered class. The student needs to
develop a concept of himself as being a non-dependent and self-
directing person. At the same time, he must be able to relate to his
peers collaboratively, to see them as resources for learning, giving
help to them and receiving help from them. The learner has to increas-
ingly develop the ability to diagnose his own learning needs with help
from teacher and peers. Once the learner has recognized certain needs,
it is useful if he can then translate them into learning objectives.

In addition, the student has to be able to relate to the teacher
as a facilitator, helper, consultant, and take the initiative in making
use of resources. The ability to identify human and material resources
is also an important quality for the learner who is becoming progres-
sively self-directed. Finally, the ability to consciously select
effective strategies for learning and for making use of resources is
valuable.

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[10]Ibid., p. 23.

Needless to say, depending on the learner's past experience, he may bring some or all of these competencies with him to the classroom. On the other hand, he may bring strategies developed in a teacher-centered process which worked well for him in that situation. The competencies required to excel were: the ability to listen to the teacher carefully, the ability to take careful notes, the ability to read speedily, and the ability to predict exam questions and cram for them. As helpful as these abilities may be in a content-oriented learning situation where lengthy explanations are the general procedure in teacher transmission of content to students, in the ESL classroom these skills will not necessarily be adequate.

This is because the major emphasis in ESL classrooms today is on teaching students how to speak English as opposed to learning facts about the language. Class time should be spent performing activities that require skills other than note-taking and cramming for tests. The students may be asked to learn how the language works and how to use it for communication which is meaningful to them. Of course, depending on the particular needs of a group of learners, other areas of competency that the learner may need to develop besides speaking are: listening and comprehension, reading, writing, or a combination of all of these skills. In order to develop communicative competence, i.e., having an understanding of English and the ability to use it as native speakers would in social interaction to perform a wide variety of functions, it may also be necessary for the learner to develop "para-" and "extra-linguistic" features of English such as gestures, distance or pitch,

and sociolinguistic features such as register. Therefore, the students need to practice manipulating the language in these areas. This means that the format of the class should not be one of lectures and lengthy explanations from the teacher. It means that students' talking time should be increased, while teacher talking time is decreased.

In addition, with a shift in the format of the ESL classroom from acquiring knowledge and facts about the language to acquiring the skills that will enable the student to use the language for himself, the form that testing and evaluation takes will be affected. If the course is designed to help the student develop the ability to speak and comprehend spoken language, the type of evaluation will need to be designed to measure the student's progress in these areas. Testing may not take the traditional form of a written exam but may be in the form of an oral interview.

For these reasons, some of the skills that our students may have acquired in the past, e.g., effective note-taking, cramming for exams, etc., may not guarantee success in the ESL classroom. However, I am not proposing that students forget everything they have acquired in the past in the way of learning skill, rather that they keep what they have already learned, using it when the situation is appropriate, and add the new learning competencies which I have mentioned above to help them become more independent learners.

VI. Activities and Techniques for Encouraging Greater Student

Responsibility for Learning

In this section I will describe various activities and techniques
that can be used to encourage greater student responsibility for learn-
ing. I have divided the activities into the following three categories:

1. Orientation Activities: Activities that can be used at
the initial stages of a course to raise the issue of
self-directed learning and develop greater student
awareness of what it means to take on responsibility
for learning.

2. Classroom Management: Techniques that can be used in an
ongoing manner throughout the course which allow for
greater student participation in the day-to-day running
of their own class.

3. Teaching Activities and Techniques: Techniques and activi-
ties or exercises that can be used during the course which
provide a context for the students to work within, but
within which allowance is made for student decision-making
and initiative in the area of content.

Some of the activities, primarily at the orientation stage, deal
with meeting the affective needs of learners. This is done because
I feel that addressing these needs is crucial for creating the climate
which will facilitate greater responsibility-taking on the part of
the learner.

These activities are not meant to be used prescriptively, but rather are offered as examples of what I have used to encourage students to become more self-directed, independent learners. In addition, there are many activities which teachers are already using that can be adapted to lend themselves to encouraging greater student responsibility for learning.

Each activity will include a brief explanation of its aim and purpose, and the general procedure for how it could be used in the classroom.

A. Orientation Activities

1. Orientation - "Climate-Setting"

This first activity (or variations of it) is one that has been used by many teachers before. I first came across it while teaching in Portugal some years ago.

The teacher asks the students to interview their neighbors. The interviews can last from 10 to 15 minutes, after which time the students report back to the class, introducing the student they interviewed. Depending on the level of the class, the teacher, after explaining the activity, may want to elicit from the students or give them a basic idea of the kinds of questions they might ask in addition to basic information, such as: likes and dislikes, interests, hobbies, reasons for studying English. The teacher may want to list these ideas in the form of cues on the blackboard to assist the students in their interviews.

This activity on the first day of class is particularly useful for several reasons. First, the teacher is asking the students to work together, which may be new for some of them. In doing so, she is setting the climate of the class and creating a student-centered situation. The aim is to help students become aware from the start that they will be an important part of the class and that they and their fellow classmates are co-learners. Secondly, it is an excellent way for the teacher to get a basic idea of the level of proficiency of the students and what their strenths and weaknesses are. Therefore, it can serve as a diagnostic tool for assessing students' linguistic needs. Affectively, since the student himself is the topic of the activity, he is more emotionally involved and feels a greater need to express himself. On the other hand, the fact that the students will be reporting back to the class about another person and not about themselves alleviates some of the pressure. The learner becomes more detached from himself and is able to function with fewer inhibitions. This activity also serves as a relationship-builder between the students themselves. Rather than alienating them from each other, the teacher is asking them to work with each other and to support one another.

I have found that when students are not familiar with this type of activity and are naturally tense and anxious, being with people they do not know on the first day of class, it is helpful for the teacher to model the activity by allowing the class to interview her. This procedure also gives the students an idea of the kinds of questions they may want to ask each other.

When the students report back with the information about a class-
mate it gives the teacher and class an opportunity to expand on what is
reported and find out more about each other. The attitude of the
teacher here is very important. If the teacher takes a sincere interest
in each student and shows mutual respect for each, the students them-
selves are more likely to behave in like manner. This activity can be
a real "ice-breaker" on Day One, while at the same time the teacher is
sending a definite message to the learners about the teacher's role, and
about her relationship with the students, i.e., the teacher is perceived
as a friend and co-worker.

2. Defining Responsibilities - Discussion

This is an activity which I used during my teaching internship,
a requirement of my Master's program, and which I found useful for
developing the students' awareness of their role as self-directed
learners as well as my role as a teacher.

The activity takes the form of a discussion in which the teacher
becomes facilitator. The teacher facilitates a discussion on teacher
and student responsibilities during the course. Students are asked to
reflect on some of the responsibilities that the teacher has for
promoting learning and then some things the students can do to promote
their own learning. This activity can be done as a class or, if the
class is a large one, it could be done in pairs. As the teacher elicits
ideas, it is useful to list the responsibilities on a large sheet of
paper divided in two columns, one for the students' responsibilities
and the other for the teacher's. The list can then be hung somewhere

in the classroom for referral throughout the course.

Among the ideas students generated when I used this activity was:
"Students should listen and pay attention to the teacher." I was able
to expand this to: "Students should listen and pay attention to the
teacher and to each other." We then discussed what that meant and
whether it was beneficial or not. As a result, the class unanimously
decided that it should be on their list of what students should do.

This activity can lead to a discussion of a comparison of the
assumptions and strategies between teacher-directed learners (reactive
learners) and self-directed learners (proactive learners). Malcolm
Knowles suggests distributing a chart which he has designed that clearly
describes these assumptions and strategies to aid the students in their
discussion and heighten their awareness of the different kinds of
learners.[11] In using this chart, he suggests that the teacher ask the
students to scan the left side of the chart and raise questions about
the assumptions, then scan the right side and do the same. A discussion
of the differences can go on for 15 to 30 minutes during which the
teacher can elaborate on her perception of the teacher's role as a
facilitator and the students' role as self-directed learners.

This activity cannot be used in beginning level classes in the
target language but can be done in the native language if the class is
monolingual and the teacher is fluent in their language. It can be used
in the target language at higher levels. Again, the whole aim of the
activity is to raise the issue with the students and focus their

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[11]Ibid., p. 60.

attention on it--to become aware of it. I realize that simply discussing the importance of responsible proactive learners will not transform them into self-directed learners immediately, but it is one step in the process towards that goal.

3. Setting Goals

Another activity which develops student awareness in this area is goal setting. This activity is a variation of an activity described by Knowles.[12] In this activity the teacher asks the students to define their own goals as individual language learners and as a class. Defining their own goals can, of course, be difficult, especially if students have never been asked to do this before.

The teacher will have to set up the activity and perhaps give a basic list of factors students should consider in coming up with personal goals, e.g., why are they studying, what are their strengths and weaknesses, what skill areas do they wish to improve (such as reading, writing, speaking), etc. The teacher should give the students sufficient time to reflect and think out their goals. They should be encouraged to write their goals out and, in doing so, to be as specific as possible. The teacher can facilitate the goal-setting process by asking questions, thus helping the students focus on specific concerns.

After developing a list of goals, the teacher asks the students to share them with the rest of the class. By hearing what other students have to say, they realize that they share many of the same concerns, while at the same time some of their problems may be very

[12]Ibid., p. 35.

different. As a result, students develop a sensitivity to each other's difficulties.

After each student has stated his goals, the class as a whole discusses them and makes a class list on a large sheet of paper to be hung in class and serve as an ongoing reminder. Additionally, knowing the students' concerns and goals will help the teacher diagnose needs and translate them into learning objectives which are relevant and meaningful to the students.

With beginners, this activity would have to be done in their native language if it is a monolingual class and if the teacher can speak the students' language.

B. Classroom Management

1. The Student as Teacher – Vocabulary Lesson

An activity I have used and which has gone a long way to developing responsible self-directed learners in my classes is to ask students to teach a lesson themselves. One way to approach this is to ask them to choose a vocabulary item which they have recently learned and teach it to the class. In doing so, the teacher is allowing students to participate in their own class in a responsible way.

In using this activity, I have found it best to ask for volunteers. In this way the more confident students go first and pave the way for those who are less secure. By the students taking on the role of the teacher in this way, the class understands that something can be learned from everyone. During the activity the teacher steps back and only offers help if it is sought by the class. As each student introduces

a new word, a list can be kept on display in the classroom for future reference. I have found that even the shyest students enjoy this activity and after doing it once, often volunteer to do it a second or third time.

2. Homework Folder

The homework folder is a folder which is kept somewhere in the classroom to be accessible to the students. A correct example of the homework is placed in the folder for the students to check their own homework against. The responsibility for doing the homework and then correcting their errors is left up to the learners. Of course, if the students have further questions relating to the homework, I encourage them to talk to me or other students. There are certain homework assignments, such as compositions, which cannot be corrected in this manner. In the case of compositions, it is more beneficial for students if they correct their own errors. I have used "correction symbols" (see Appendix) which indicate the area and nature of the error without giving the correction. Using this technique I have found that the students learn better from their mistakes and are less likely to repeat the same error.

I have found that using a homework folder in this way has affected the majority of the learners positively. Once they realize that they are doing the homework for themselves and not for someone else--the teacher--their motivation increases and they eagerly take on the new responsibility. This activity also frees the teacher from the time-consuming burden of correcting endless piles of homework and enables

her to concentrate more on planning imaginative activities for the classroom.

3. What's in the Bag?

This activity was shared with me while teaching at the English Language Office of the School for International Training during my teaching internship. In this activity I ask the students to select an object to bring to class. The object is put into a bag and the class has to guess what it is. This activity is useful for teaching and practicing descriptive adjectives and information questions. The students ask their classmate with the bag questions about the object without directly asking what it is. Students ask questions in the target language, but they will also want to ask questions that they do not know how to form. In this case, if I know the native language, I elicit the correct form from the class or give it to them. During this activity I write out the sentences which are not grammatically correct on a ditto and give the class copies to correct for homework. This activity, if used frequently, helps the students practice and retain the new words they learn, since many of the expressions recur, e.g., Is it made of wood? Is it used for cooking? Is it expensive?

C. Teaching Activities

1. Student Presentations

The students are asked to choose a topic--something of personal interest to the student. A topic which I have used successfully, especially in a multicultural class, is "Country Talks." Because the talk is about the student himself, there is a high degree of student

investment in this activity. If there are several students from the same country, they can work as a group and approach the talk from different angles. For example, one student discusses the economic situation, another discusses the religious or political life, while another may discuss the cultural life or sports in their country. In this way each student can choose the particular area that he is most interested in.

After the group or the individual has worked on the presentation, it is presented to me for suggestions. I try to make sure that the way the students have approached the subject will be of interest to the rest of the class. Depending on the student, the level of the class, and the topic, these student-talks may last anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes.

Before the talk, encourage the students who will be listening to the presentation to think of questions they will want to ask. Another technique is to ask the presenter to write up a list of ten questions relevant to his talk and give them before the talk begins. This technique will help the students listen for specific information. Some students may also want to pre-teach pertinent vocabulary items before giving the talk.

Another idea related to students' questions that also helps the presenter prepare his talk is one that Nancy Clair of the English Language Office at the School for International Training has developed. The teacher puts up a large sheet of paper a week before the talks begin. This paper is divided into squares and labeled with the name

of the presenter and the topic of his talk. The students are encouraged to write questions in the different boxes of their fellow students pertaining to the topic. In this way the presenter has a better idea of the kinds of things to talk about in order to make it interesting to his classmates.

2. Teaching Vocabulary to Beginning Students

Another technique I have used and which worked successfully concerns teaching of vocabulary, in this instance parts of the body and adjectives.

In order to do this activity the teacher must bring several large pieces of drawing paper and plenty of markers. The students, working in triads, are asked to draw a person and label the parts of the body.

Students were able to do this by writing words they already knew or by asking other students, or by asking me for translations. As the activity progressed the students became more enthusiastic and started labeling parts of the body that hadn't occurred to me, e.g., "nipple," "fingernail," "belly button." In this way, the students were contributing to their own learning content.

The drawing can then be hung in the front of the classroom and students can take turns leading the class in a pronunciation drill of the parts of the body. This can be done by first demonstrating the technique of pointing to the part of the body and having students practice saying the word. After the teacher has demonstrated, students can volunteer to lead the drill.

An activity that can grow out of the parts of the body activity is

one in which students use descriptive adjectives to describe the parts

of the body, e.g., "long hair," "big nose." Students will want to

describe parts they may not know how to say, and in this case they ask

the teacher for a translation. In the process, the students not only

generate content that the teacher provides, but they also take the

opportunity to add content which they think is appropriate.

From here, students can use the material generated from their

pictures to work on making sentences with the verb "to be," e.g.,

"His hair is long," "Her feet are dirty," etc., thus also working on the

differences between singular and plural.

3. Using Rods

Activities using cuisenaire rods can be used to encourage

student-generated language. One such technique is based on the "Islama-

bad" procedure developed by Earl Stevick. This technique consists of

a student in the role of the "originator" using the rods to construct

a representation of a place that the rest of the class is unfamiliar with.

As the originator places the rods, he explains what they represent. The

explanation can be done entirely in the target language, or the native

language can be used when necessary if the teacher is proficient in it.

The teacher then retells what the originator has said, entirely in the

target language. Finally the whole class joins in retelling the

description and asking questions about it. The teacher may need to

demonstrate the technique by constructing a place before asking the

students to be the originators.

In pairs, the students are given time to accomplish the task of

constructing a place with rods and explaining as much of it as they can in English, with help from the teacher for translation when necessary. After the originators have constructed their place (hotel, airport, discothèque, home, etc.) and have described it and what the people are doing there, the rest of the class describes what they understood. The originators then list the vocabulary they used to describe the place on the blackboard. From the items on the vocabulary list, students are asked to use the items to orally make sentences about the place. This part of the activity could be done in written form for homework.

4. Strip Story

A "strip story" can be used to provide a context for the learners in which they are able to use language in a natural, creative way. It also strengthens group solidarity and gives them the responsibility of working together, unaided by the teacher, to solve a common problem.

The teacher chooses a short story or narrative with the same number of sentences as there are students in the class and which she feels is linguistically appropriate for the class. The story is cut into strips. After the teacher gives the instructions for the activity and clearly states their objectives, each student receives a sentence from the story. The teacher asks the students to silently read and memorize their sentences. The students are asked not to write their sentences, but to memorize them only. After a minute, the strips are collected and the students are left on their own to put the story back together again. The teacher withdraws to the back of the room and busies herself with

correcting homework or doing some other activity. There will naturally be an awkward moment or two at first when the students realize they are on their own. They will usually try to solicit the teacher's aid, but she should ignore their pleas and let them work out the problem for themselves. Gradually the students organize themselves. This may happen as a group, or an individual may emerge as a leader and act as facilitator. When the class feels they have put the story back together in a logical sequence, they call the teacher back to check their work.

The fact that each student has a piece of information which the class as a whole needs to accomplish their task is important. It means that each student has something to contribute that is unknown to the rest of the group.

In the process of hearing each other's sentences and deciding on the best sequence of the material, the students (almost unconsciously) need to use a wide variety of interactional language: agreeing, disagreeing, arguing, giving opinions, making suggestions, using connectors and ordinal numbers--i.e., "I am second and then your sentence is third."

Another advantage of this activity concerns the correction of pronunciation. I have found, particularly in upper-level classes, that students sometimes resist pronunciation corrections made by the teacher. This may be due to the fact that the student does not hear a particular sound or has been saying a word in a particular way for so long that he feels no need to change. He may feel that the teacher is being overly critical. In the process of sharing his sentence or phrase with the

class, I have observed that this same student encounters difficulty being understood because of a pronunciation problem that makes a word unintelligible even to his peers. After several unsuccessful tries, one of his classmates would finally figure out the word and say, "Oh! You mean_____!" pronouncing it more accurately. In this way the student became aware, via his peers, that he was not approximating the native pronunciation as well as he had thought. Therefore, this activity encourages the students to use each other as learning resources and gets them into the habit of listening to each other more carefully --one of the learning competencies of the self-directed learner.

These are just some of the activities I have used with some success. Needless to say, there are many activities which teachers are already using that can be adapted to lend themselves to greater student responsibility for learning.

VII. Conclusion

In this project I have described my point of view and the views of others that support an approach to teaching that asks the learner to play a much greater role in the learning process. I have referred to this approach as student-centered. I have discussed my rationale for such an approach and the implications for both the teacher and the student in its implementation. I have arrived at these conclusions as a result of my own experience as a teacher and learner, and based on the experiences of others in the ESL field. These experiences have led me to believe that learning in the ESL classroom is facilitated when the learner takes on more responsibility for his own learning. I have presented several important steps that I feel must be taken in order to achieve this objective.

In addition, I have described various activities which are designed to develop in the learners the kinds of learning competencies necessary to enable them to take on a greater share of the responsibility for their own learning. Regarding student responsibility, I have found that it is necessary to start with activities with more teacher responsibility for both the structure of the activity and the content and, over time, allow the students to take on more and more of this responsibility themselves. Students need to learn how to learn in a student-centered classroom or they can easily lose their sense of security which is necessary in a healthy learning environment. This of course depends on how much time the teacher has with the students. If the length of the course is short, the process may have to be accelerated.

In general, the teacher must develop an intuitive sense of what the students need. In some cases, their needs may dictate that the teacher approach the class in a more traditional, teacher-transmitter manner, while in other situations it may call for a teacher-facilitator approach. It is also likely that other situations may call for a combination of both approaches. In other words, the teacher should remain openminded and flexible to be able to vary her goals and techniques according to the learners' needs and the situation.

What I feel is at the base of this approach is the teacher's commitment to the students as learners. The teacher should tell them through her behavior that she respects them and that she has confidence in their ability to become increasingly responsible learners. I conclude that not only does the teacher have a responsibility to provide expertise, knowledge, and skills but also to provide a human element to the classroom experience that will enable the students to release their true potential as learners. My experience has shown me that this human exchange is as equally important as linguistic expertise in facilitating the students' learning. As the students grow into more self-directed learners through the support and guidance of the teacher, they learn increasingly to use their intellectual and creative resources and take initiative in directing their own learning.

Appendix

CORRECTION SYMBOLS

T – tense mistake

G – grammar mistake

W – wrong word

/ / – omit a word or phrase

∧ – add a word

s – spelling mistake

w.o. – wrong word order

? – I don't understand

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