Didactic Teaching Methods and Student Correction

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Abstract: Cet article se propose de présenter des méthodes didactiques de correction des fautes des élèves, en les analysant par là-même en dehors de la sphère d'influence du didacticisme entendu comme méthode d'enseignement systématique, rigoureusement contrôlée par le professeur, qui offre des principes et des structures rigides. La correction des fautes doit être faite, étant, de surcroît, attendue et désirée par les élèves. En revanche, les élèves qui sont corrigés de manière répétée pour des fautes mineures sont inhibés et évitent de prendre part aux activités. Ce résultat d'éviter la communication est l'effet opposé de celui escompté par le professeur de langues étrangères.

Keywords: didactique, communication, étudiant, erreur, langage, correction.

How do people learn things in everyday life? By doing things themselves rather than by being told about them? By reading a manual and following the instructions? By trial and error? By sitting next to a teacher who can tell them what to do and give the feedback on whether they are doing OK?

Learners are not simply receptacles for passed-on knowledge, who may bring a pen and a paper to the lesson, but fully functioning humans with their own needs, wishes, life experience, worries, fears and joys.

The experiential learning cycle often involves five steps: doing something, recalling what happened, reflecting on that, drawing conclusions from the reflection, using those conclusions to inform and prepare for future practical experience. *(Do-> Recall-> Reflect-> Conclude-> Prepare-> Do)*.

Counselling, instruction, demonstration, support, examples, feedback, teaching, guidance, information may come in at any of the five steps of the cycle but the essential learning experience is in doing the thing yourself.

Worrying less about teaching techniques, allowing our students practical experience in doing things (e.g. in *using* language rather than simply listening to lectures *about* language), helping students become more aware about how they are learning, telling them it is OK to make mistakes, to try things wrong and learn from that, may make us become better teachers.

A major part of the teacher's job is to assess the students' work, to see how well they are performing. Errors can be of many kinds. Sometimes language can be grammatically correct but inappropriate in the context. Errors can also be made in intonation and rhythm; wrong intonation seems to cause more unintended offence to native speakers than almost any other kind of error. The main types of mistakes that need to be corrected are:

- *Grammatical mistakes* (mistakes of verb tenses, preposition use, etc.).
- *Vocabulary mistakes* (incorrect collocations, idiomatic phrase usage, etc.).
- *Pronunciation mistakes* (errors in basic pronunciation, errors in word stressing in sentences, errors in rhythm and pitch)
- *Written mistakes* (grammar, spelling and vocabulary choice mistakes in written work).

Jim Scrivener mentions five questions that should be posed when working with oral errors in class:[1]

1. **What kind of error** has been made (grammatical? Pronunciation? etc).

2. **Whether to deal with it** (is it useful to correct it?)

3. **When to deal with it** (now? end of activity? later?)

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[1] Scrivener Jim, *Learning Teaching*, Macmillan, 2005, p. 299.

4. **Who will correct** (teacher? student self-correction? other students?)

5. **Which technique** to use to indicate that an error has occurred or to enable correction.

The correction can be made at different moments: immediately, after a few moments, at the end of the activity, later in the lesson, at the end of the lesson, in the next lesson, later in the course, never. These "moments" are identified by Jim Scrivener who also states that an important distinction should be made between accuracy and fluency.

"If the objective is accuracy, then immediate correction is likely to be useful; if the aim is fluency, then lengthy, immediate correction that diverts from the flow of speaking is less appropriate. We either need to correct briefly and unobtrusively as we go (see *Scaffolding* below) or save any correction for after the activity has finished or later."[2]

Main objective of speaking activity	When to correct
accuracy	focused immediate correction *or* later *or* not at all
fluency	later *or* brief, unobtrusive, immediate correction (**scaffolding**) *or* not at all

There are two basic correction stages: showing incorrectness indicating to the student that something is wrong and using correction techniques.

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[2] *Ibidem* 1.

Jeremy Harmer identifies a number of techniques for showing incorrectness: repeating, echoing, denial, questioning, expression.[3]

The process of student self-correction is considered to be an important and useful part of the learning process while showing incorrectness should be seen not as reprimand but as a positive act.

If students cannot correct themselves teachers can resort to correction techniques which include: "student corrects student" and "teacher corrects student".

In the case of the first technique, if another student is asked to help the student who has made the mistake and he can supply the correct information it will be good for his self-esteem. If the teacher uses the technique insensitively, the students who make mistakes may feel humiliated.

Teachers should correct students and re-explain items of language which are causing the trouble when it is obvious that the majority of the class are making the same mistake. After the re-explanation teachers can move to choral and individual repetition if necessary. They should also ask the student who originally made the mistake to give a correct answer.

Another type of correction which involves showing the student that something is wrong but not asking for repetition is "gentle" correction. In this case the student doesn't have to repeat his or her sentence correctly; it is enough that the mistake has been acknowledged. If this kind of correction is used in the right way it will not damage the atmosphere of pairwork or conversation.

Teachers should provide students with opportunities to use their knowledge of the target language in creative ways. Whether teachers conduct conversation sessions during portions of a class hour, in classes devoted exclusively to conversation or at con-

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[3] Harmer Jeremy, *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Longman, 1991, p. 68.

versation clubs and similar social gatherings, classroom exercises should progress to real communication.

Teachers should never program conversation sessions if they are not sure their group is ready for them and it is far preferable to postpone conversation until the student can truly benefit from it. If the student does not have sufficient command of English and he is "pushed" into an activity he is not prepared for, he will make many errors or just adjust to a passive role.

Students who study a new language should acquire skill in evaluating their own speech in order to make progress.

In this way the student should be able to recall possible errors in his statements during conversation practice. Listening carefully to what other students say and silently evaluating them, he should become more aware of his own errors and areas of difficulty.

There are also frequent situations when students would like to express themselves in English but are afraid to derivate from the safety of the sentences they have practiced and the words they have memorized. Teachers should help them by pointing out that students should be able to think of a way to put the words and structures they already know together in order to express their thoughts. That will increase their self-confidence and encourage them to solve the problem on their own.

If there are novel speech situation that the student does not understand immediately, the teacher should think of a way to help the student work out the meaning of a word or structure, for example by encouraging him to guess meaning through the process of deduction, a vital survival skill in English conversation in and beyond the classroom door.

Immediate correction of errors that occur during conversation may inhibit the student as conversation practice may "lead" to some errors in pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary. Inevitably some students will make mistakes and in some cases they are not sufficiently prepared in order to engage in this type of activity. But, a few errors here and there, however, indicate that they are going through a natural stage in communication practice.

In these situations teachers should not interrupt the flow of conversation for constant minor corrections and it is preferable to wait until the students finish what they have to say.

Teachers should also encourage students to speak loudly when they are the focus of attention as this in turn will give them a certain measure of confidence and will keep the other students awake and alert.

The manner in which teachers correct students plays a vital role in whether students become confident in their usage or become intimidated. Correcting students as a group, in correction sessions, at the end of activities, and letting them correct their own mistakes all help in encouraging students to use English rather than to worry about making too many mistakes. Correction needs to take place, and is expected and desired by students.

Most teachers believe that students who are continually corrected become inhibited and cease to participate. This results in the exact opposite of what the teacher is trying to produce – the use of English to communicate.

In other words, teachers can set up an activity during which each mistake (or a specific type of mistake) will be corrected. Students know that the activity is going to focus on correction, and accept that fact. However, these activities should be kept in balance with other, more free-form, activities which give students the opportunity to express themselves without having to worry about being corrected every other word.

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