

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Classroom management is an area of teaching which is particularly broad and difficult to define as it includes **'everything that goes on'** in the classroom. This encompasses the **physical** and **affective** dimensions of the class and involves the **strategies** and **procedures** that teachers use to create a **positive** learning environment in which learning can take place as intended.

In this handout, the focus will be limited to an overview of the **roles** and **styles** of the teacher, **interactions** in the classroom, the **task cycle** and the management of **resources**.

TEACHER ROLES & STYLES

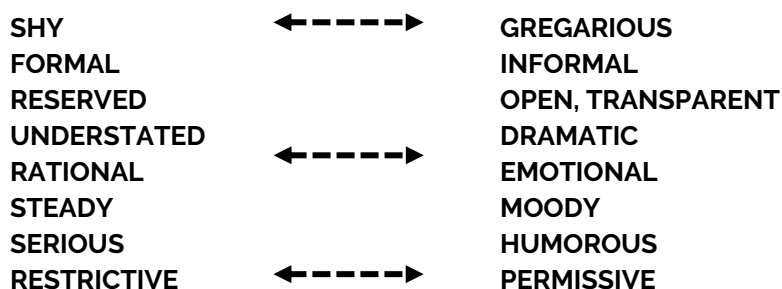
The understanding of teacher roles and the assumptions made about these roles are often affected by the prevailing **culture** of teaching and learning where instruction takes place. Different cultures view **education** from different perspectives and the importance attached to different roles can vary substantially. In some contexts, teachers may be valued for their ability to impart knowledge, whereas in others they may be respected for helping learners realize their potential.

Despite different orientations, there are many **roles** and **responsibilities** that a language teacher has to fulfil. The following is a list of some basic ones.

- **INSTRUCTOR:** provides information about language and clarifies difficult aspects
- **FACILITATOR:** sets up tasks and manages individual and group interactions and contributions
- **MODEL:** provides language models and demonstrates how to do things
- **APPRAISER:** gives feedback on performance and achievements
- **SUPPORTER:** monitors learners' challenges and makes himself/herself available as a resource
- **COACH:** provides motivation and encourages self-confidence and independence
- **HUMAN BEING:** is sensitive to learners' needs and wants, and listens to what learners have to say
- **LEARNER:** learns more about teaching through the experience of teaching

Developing **professional expertise** involves learning how to play and **balance** these roles according to the educational **context** of the classroom.

The **affective** dimension of the classroom is often influenced by the **style** of the teacher, which is generally traceable to individual **personality** traits and **social** expectations. Teaching styles can be said to move along a **continuum** of possibilities represented by the following characteristics.



Brown (2001: 201)

Effective teachers have been observed to display any of these traits. Some teachers may be more reserved and serious, whereas others may be more extroverted and humorous. The important is to be **genuine** and **comfortable** with oneself, and to understand the **expectations** of the learners and the wider educational **context**. This can be a defining element in **perceptions** about professionalism and effectiveness.

It's also important to understand that effectiveness requires **fairness**. Teachers should be **consistent** in their roles and styles if they want to avoid conflicts, and ensure they deal with all learners in an **equal** way.

INTERACTIONS

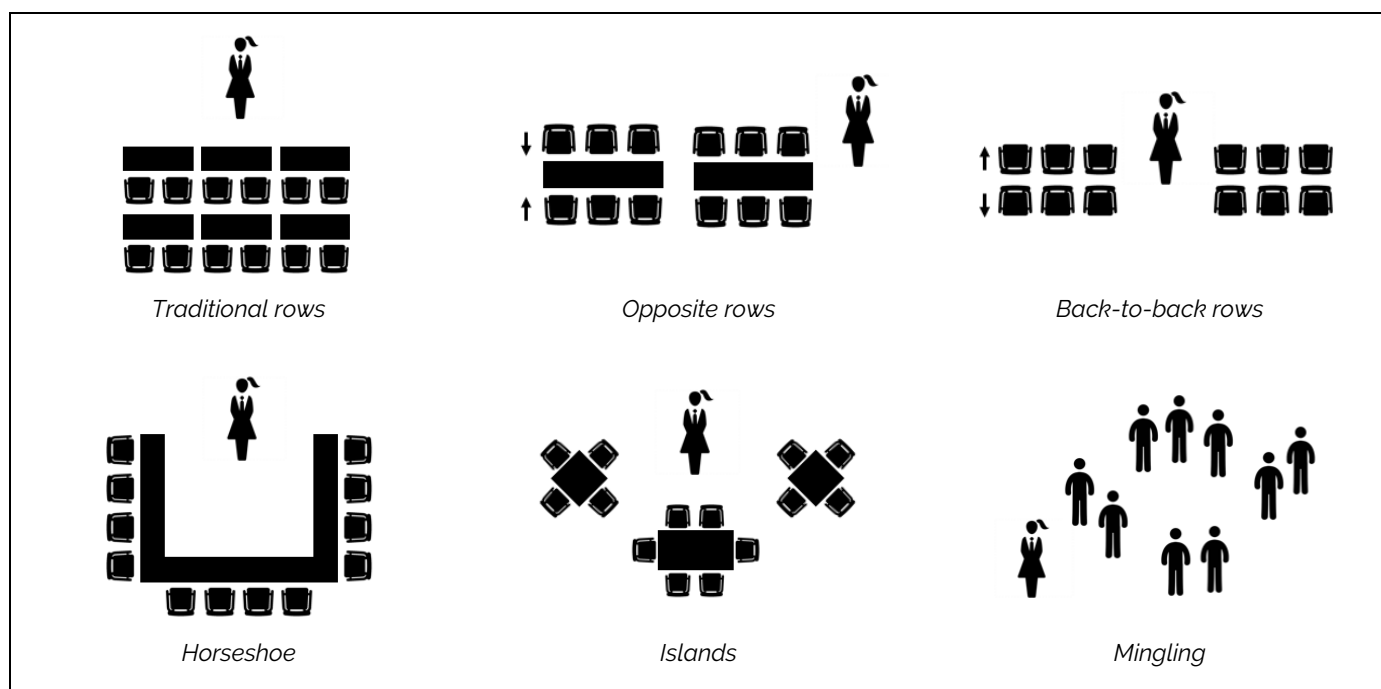
The advent of **communicative language teaching** and more learner-centered approaches to education prompted a re-evaluation of the traditional teacher-led class with the teacher at the front and the learners sat behind rows of desks. **Autonomy**, **collaboration** and **cooperation** emerged as some of the key principles of **learner-centeredness**, and classroom interactions and layouts adapted to promote more pair and group work.

LAYOUT

In classrooms where the **physical** objects can be moved around, the **layout** can change according to the type of **activity** learners are required to carry out and the desired patterns of interaction. This can be an important factor in the success of the activity.

The following are some important **considerations** to make.

- Can the learners see and hear the teacher?
- Can the learners see the board?
- Can the learners hear and see each other?
- Is it easy for the teacher to move around?
- Is it easy for the learners to move around?



In classrooms with **fixed** seating arrangements, instead of moving the furniture, teachers can ask the learners to move. For example, in a 'traditional rows' setting, learners can be asked to work with someone next to them or behind, move around and sit with someone different, or stand in any available open space (e.g. aisles, the front or the back of the classroom).

WHOLE-CLASS WORK (Teacher ↔ Students)

The teacher works with the class in a **teacher-fronted** way and interacts with the entire group or individual learners. It's a pattern that is often used when the teacher needs the **attention** of the entire class. This may be at the beginning of an activity when giving instructions to a task, when demonstrating something, when introducing and modeling new language, when eliciting new information about language and skills, when clarifying information and checking understanding, when checking and validating answers to a task, when collecting or giving feedback to a task or discussion, etc. It is important to remember that this pattern of interaction may result in the teacher **dominating** the class and doing more **'talking'** than necessary. It may also create **anxiety** among learners as they would have to expose themselves to the entire class or work at a pace which is less suitable to their **abilities**.

PAIR & GROUP WORK (*Students ↔ Students*)

Learners work in small groups of 3 to 6 people. It's a pattern that **maximizes** of opportunities for interaction, collaboration and autonomy, and reinforces the **social** nature of language use. It is often used in activities such as brainstorming ideas, interviews, dialogues, discussions, simulations, role-plays, games, problem-solving tasks, information-gap activities, and anything else which requires an exchange of facts, opinions, etc. It can also be used for other activities which are traditionally completed individually. Learners can collaboratively work on grammar- or vocabulary-focused activities, gap-fill or multiple-choice exercises, and any other task which may benefit from peer-teaching and support.

Pair or group work is also a regular activity after a task or exercise. Teachers tend to start the **feedback** sub-stages by allowing learners to compare and review their answers. This allows learners to help each other and better prepares them for follow up whole-class work (as it provides more thinking time and doesn't involve taking risks in front the class). It also allows teachers to **monitor** the learners' performance and collect data on success rate, inaccuracies, doubts, etc. which can then be addressed in whole-class feedback and **debriefing** sessions. Pair work (as opposed to group work) is generally favored for short activities, and those which require simpler and more controlled language, perhaps in preparation for group work. Pair work is also 'logistically' easier to set up (e.g. learners can simply work someone next to them or behind).

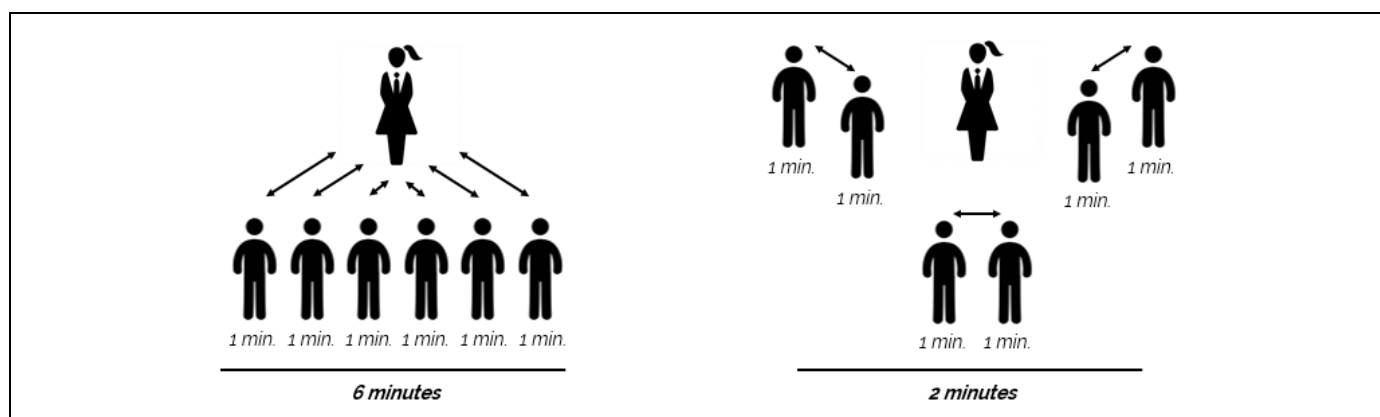
Despite the multiple benefits of pair and group work, teachers should be **aware** that in some contexts, learners may value the **teacher** more than their **peers**, and believe that working with a peer doesn't contribute to their language development. Some learners may prefer to work on their **own** and feel that working with someone else **slows** them down or gives them **pressure**. Some learners may be more **dominant** and reduce opportunities for the more **reserved** ones. These **challenges** require the teacher to openly '**educate**' learners about the benefits of pair and group work, **monitor** closely and be **reactive** to the changing dynamics between learners, pair/group learners **strategically** according to ability, personalities, cultures, etc. and add **variety** to the pairing/grouping and seating arrangements so that no one feels 'stuck' with the same person for an entire lesson.

INDIVIDUAL WORK (*Student*)

Learners work on their own. It's a kind of set up that is often used when learners need some **private space** such as reading or listening activities, completing an exercise, writing a text, etc. This allows learners to work at their own **pace** and level of **ability**. It also allows the teacher to monitor individual performance, and provide feedback and support in a more **personalized** way.

Like many other aspects of a lesson, **variety** is key. When planning lessons, teachers should consider what patterns of interaction would be more appropriate for a particular activity and find ways to **maximize** opportunities for learner interaction and **talking-time**.

These opportunities can simply be increased by allowing learners to work in pairs or small groups. Consider the diagrams below.



For example, if the teacher engages a class of 6 students in **teacher-student** mode and each student can talk for 1 minute, it will take 6 minutes to allow every student to talk, 5 of which each student will just wait for the others to finish. These numbers grow in proportion to the size of the class.

If instead the teacher employs **pair work**, it will take only 2 minutes to allow each student to talk for 1 minute as pairs of students work simultaneously. Each learner will only wait for 1 minute for the partner to finish. These numbers stay the same whether it's a class of 6 or 60 students.

TASK CYCLE

Most of the activities in a lesson, be it a quick discussion, a written exercise or a role-play, will involve 3 basic steps: **instructions & task set up**, **task execution & monitoring**, task **feedback**.

INSTRUCTIONS & TASK SET UP

The first step is to tell learners what to do and how to do it. Teachers often follow this process.

- **GRAB THE LEARNERS' ATTENTION**
Use your voice, clap your hands, tap the marker pen on the whiteboard or desk, etc.
- **RE-ARRANGE THE CLASS**
Pair/group learners according to abilities, gender, age, names in alphabetical order, a sequence of numbers, etc. Draw the new layout on the whiteboard and ask learners to help you move the furniture.
- **SHOW THE WORKSHEET**
Hold the worksheet in front of you, place it on the OHP, put it on a PPT, etc.
- **DESCRIBE HOW TO DO THE TASK**
Use simple, concise, well-focused and well-paced language. Use the worksheet to exemplify. Use the whiteboard to record key information.
- **CHECK UNDERSTANDING**
Do an example with the class, demonstrate how to do the task with the help of a learner, check that learners understood, etc.
- **SET A TIME LIMIT**
Set the duration of the task. Use time warnings to encourage learners to complete the task.
- **DISTRIBUTE WORKSHEETS**
Hand out the worksheets yourself, ask learners to distribute the worksheets among themselves, ask learners to come to the desk and pick up the worksheets, etc.
- **CHECK THAT EVERYONE IS ON TASK**
Go around the classroom and make sure everyone is doing the task correctly. Give assistance as needed.

The effectiveness and efficiency of a task set up is usually influenced by the **language** used by the teacher. The following are examples of problematic instructions:

- **too advanced** *As pictures are being drawn, team members standing in front of the wall should prepare to say the word whereas those sitting at the table should sprint to the board to record it.*
- **too chaotic** *Alright, in pairs, hmm, where's my worksheet? Oh, here... can you see? Take a look at Ex.1. Yes, it's below the, hmm, this thing here. Hold on, let me put it on the OHP, better? So, match these and these. How many are there? 1, 2, 3, 4 here and 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 here... hmm... I think one is extra... Got it?*
- **too colloquial** *Ok. You two lads, get together and have a chat about the stuff we read.*
- **too courteous** *If you wouldn't mind, I'd be grateful if you could compare and contrast your answers please.*
- **too crammed** *First, take a look at the ideas on the worksheet and write things that are true for you. Then stand up and mingle with your classmates. As you mingle, collect ideas from your classmates by asking questions. As soon as you finish, return to your seats and exchange your data with the person sitting on your right.*
- **too simplified** *One and two, talking. Yes, no alone, with friend.*
- **too technical** *Fill the gaps with one of the de-lexicalized verbs in the box.*
- **too vague** *Individually, write a reasonable number of sentences that are true in your country then see if your partner has the same. Talk for a bit.*

Adapted from: Thaine (2010)

It is important to use **simple** language, **break down** the instructions into single steps, and **wait** for learners to complete that step before moving on to the **next** one.

It is also good practice to **demonstrate** what to do: teachers can show how to do an activity, answer the first question of an exercise with the class, record key information of an activity on the board, etc. This should ensure that learners won't have to ask each other what to do (a clear sign that instructions were unclear) and that learners won't start the activity in the wrong way, thus wasting valuable time.

TASK EXECUTION & MONITORING

After instructions have been given and learners start the activity, teacher should start **monitoring** immediately and **verify** that learners are carrying out the activity as **intended**. This involves going around the class **quietly** and **unobtrusively** and stepping in only if someone needs to be told again what to do.

Once learners are **on task**, the teacher may want to give them some space and **disappear** for a while. The constant presence of the teacher may be **counterproductive** and cause **interference**. On one hand learners may feel the **pressure** of the teacher observing them (e.g. being afraid of making mistakes), on the other they may become **dependent** on the teacher (e.g. asking for help instead of trying to solve a problem independently), or **attracted** by the presence (e.g. wanting to talk with the teacher instead of a peer). Teachers often stop making eye contact and 'pretend' to be busy with their own things (e.g. reading a worksheet, taking notes, etc.) as a **strategy** to reduce their **profiles** and create some **privacy**.

This doesn't mean that the teacher should ignore the learners. On the contrary, teachers usually do a lot of 'hidden' work while learners are on task. The first thing is to observe from a distance or listen in to be able to provide **support** in case someone is overly challenged. The teacher is there to offer **help**. Or casually make eye contact and **acknowledge** the good work being done (e.g. smile, thumbs up, etc.). The teacher is there to **motivate**.

The second thing is to collect **performance data** for feedback purposes. This may be content- or language-related. **Content-related** data refers, for example, to ideas discussed during an activity, the number of correct and wrong answers to an exercise, the easiest and most challenging parts of a task, etc. **Language-related** data refers to the language used in language-focused activities, like for example correct and incorrect language models, variety and range of models, complexity of models, etc.

Teachers should keep a **record** of this data so that it can be used to provide effective and efficient **feedback** once the activity is completed.

FEEDBACK

Feedback is information about performance, i.e. how someone performed an activity. As mentioned in the previous section, useful **feedback** starts with useful **monitoring**. If the teacher knows exactly how learners are completing an activity and their areas of success and improvement, feedback will be **relevant** and **responsive** to the learners' **needs**.

Feedback can be **immediate** (i.e. during an activity) or **delayed** (i.e. after an activity).

Immediate feedback may be provided to offer support, scaffolding and encouragement. For example, if learners lose focus during an activity, systematically answer incorrectly, reaching the wrong conclusions, etc., the teacher may decide to offer some guidance and briefly provide some input (e.g. *review questions 2 and 4 / review the order of these steps as one is incorrect / think about 2 more topics, like traffic and healthcare / etc.*).

Delayed feedback is provided to acknowledge and validate the learners' work, and this is something which should feature after any kind of activity. Feedback may include eliciting ideas after a discussion, confirming correct answers to an exercise, evaluating the outcomes of a task, etc.

Delayed feedback usually starts with the learners working **pairs** or **small groups**. This allows them to compare and review their ideas, answers, etc. and give each other some support in preparation for whole-class feedback.

Whole-class **strategies** to confirm answers to an exercise may include: eliciting answers and recording them on the board, asking learners to record answers on the board, showing an answer key, etc.

As already mentioned, the effectiveness and efficiency of whole-class feedback is dependent on the quality of the monitoring. Knowing exactly what answers proved easier or more difficult, enables the teacher can go through answers more quickly or in more depth according to needs.

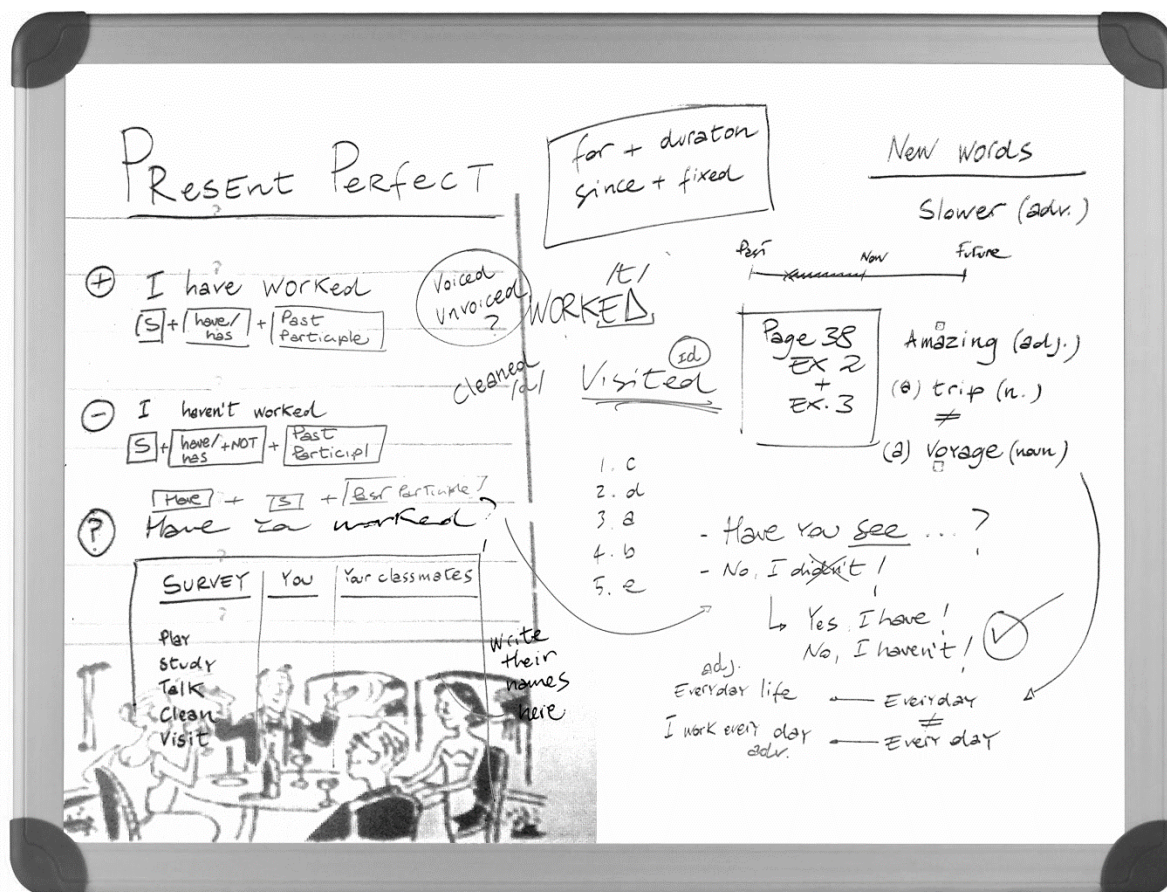
Helping learners with errors is also an area of feedback and this is dealt in more detail in the following handout:

- **Error correction**

THE BOARD

The board is a piece of **equipment** which is generally found in all classrooms and it is an important teaching **tool**. Very often, it is possible to understand the aims and take away of a lesson by simply looking at the board, without even observing the lesson! Experienced teachers organize their boards **neatly**, write **clearly** and record information **accurately**.

Let's look at an example of a '**problematic**' board.



The recommendation for this teacher would be to:

- divide the board into **sections** and group information according to their focus: e.g. grammar, vocabulary, error correction, answers to exercises, etc.
- be consistent with the **style** and **size** of writing;
- be consistent with the use of upper and lower **cases**;
- avoid joined-up writing and capitalized words (unless they are headings) as they are **harder** to read;
- check your **spelling** and provide **accurate** models;
- be consistent with the **symbols** used to represent pronunciation and their position;
- avoid **superimposing** images on written information; neither can be seen clearly;
- use different **colors** to make important information stand out;
- leave a section of the board '**free**' for things that don't need to be kept on the board and can be erased.

It is important to be aware that learners **record** on their notebooks what teachers write on the board. If the board is messy and inaccurate, learners will end up with messy and inaccurate notes.

Planning the board in advance and drawing **designated** spaces for different purposes, can be helpful to avoid letting the board become too **cluttered** and having to **erase** important information which may be useful to keep for longer periods of time.

Also, regularly **stepping back** and looking at the board from a **distance** can help teachers notice errors, inconsistencies, etc. and the overall look of the board work.

TEACHING TIPS

- Make use of pairs and small groups to maximize opportunities for students to speak. Do this even in the middle of a longer whole-class stages, i.e. after every task before feedback.
- If possible, arrange seating so that students can all see and talk to each other.
- Remember that you don't always need to be at the front of the class. Encourage interaction between students rather than only between student and you, and you and student. Get students to ask questions, give explanations, etc. to each other, rather than directly to you.
- Plan the use of the board, perhaps leaving designated spaces for different purposes. Avoid letting the board become too cluttered.
- Use upper and lower case appropriately. Avoid joined up writing as it is harder to read and pay attention to spelling.
- Grade your language to the level of your students: with lower levels, avoid very idiomatic expressions, complex grammar and vocabulary.
- Use gestures, pictures and other things that will support what you are saying to make it easier to understand.
- Speak with natural rhythm and intonation. Don't be tempted to use broken English.
- Speak at natural speed, but pause slightly longer after each 'chunk', if necessary.
- Become aware of your own instruction-giving (listen to yourself; record yourself; ask others to observe you and give feedback).
- Pre-plan essential instructions. Analyze the instructions beforehand so as to include only the essential information in simple, clear language, and sequence it in a sensible order. Use short sentences - one sentence for each key piece of information. Don't say things that are visible or obvious (e.g. I'm giving you a piece of paper). Don't give instructions that they don't need to know at this point (e.g. what they'll do after this activity is finished).
- In class, separate instructions clearly from the other chit-chat, telling off, joking, etc. that goes on. Create a silence beforehand, make eye contact with as many students as possible, find an authoritative tone, and make sure they are listening before you start. Use silence and gestures to pace the instructions and clarify their meaning.
- Demonstrate rather than explain whenever possible.
- Check that students have understood what to do. Don't assume that everyone will automatically understand what you have said. Get concrete evidence from the students that they know what is required. Getting one or two students to tell you what they are going to do is one very simple way of achieving this.
- Show handouts during demonstrations and distribute them only after you are sure that everyone understood what to do.

FURTHER READING

- Brown, H.D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles. An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. Second Edition*. White Plains, USA: Addison-Wesley Longman. Chapter 13.
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