Building A Trusting Climate in the Foreign Language Classroom

by

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1. Promising Trends in Foreign Language Education

During the 1960s, following Sputnik, much effort was put into curriculum innovation in the United States. Emphasis was on science in schools. Emphasis was on the cognitive. There has been a tremendous increase in the rate of dropouts since the 1960s. The "person" has often been lost in education — especially in foreign language teaching. C.Rogers (1: 40-1) has aptly summarized too much concern for the cognitive or "intellectual" part of learning:

They have focused so intently on the cognitive and have limited themselves so completely to 'education from the neck up,' that this narrowness is resulting in serious social consequences. . . . As a consequence of this over-stress on the cognitive, and of the avoidance of any feeling connected with it, most of the excitement has gone out of education.

Such curriculum reform did not change the existing situation. Education is now in deeper trouble. And foreign language instruction is a leading contender. Such curricula innovations do not concentrate on or introduce change in the most critical area of all: the quality of human interaction in the classroom, that is, the way we relate to one another (2 : 9). Foreign language teachers have been intent on providing information. Our major failures do not arise from lack of information. They come from our inability to help students discover the personal meaning of the information we provide them. Our overconcern with information has dehumanized our schools, alienated our youth, and produced a system irrelevant for most students.

Many students remain disenchanted with school and the subjects they take. They spend boring hours in listening to and learning by heart insignificant minutiae. And school has long been a place where many come to have a low regard for themselves both as learners and as human beings.

It is time traditional education be reformed in two ways. One of them is the reform of modern language curricula, and the other is that of approach to the language class. Humanistic approaches, such as the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Counseling Learning/Community Language Learning and Humanistic or Confluent Education, have been paid attention to in the 1970s. The "person" is regaining wholeness and identity in foreign language education. In addition to the cognitive domain, the affective and interactive domains should be discussed, for these domains embrace the concept of "whole person" learning. I will concentrate on the interactive domain to find out a psychological climate where students grow most.
II. Self-Concept and Successful Language Learning

Students frequently enter the foreign language classroom with fears and anxieties. The students’ anxieties prevent interaction in the classroom and hinder the acquisition of a foreign language. I. McCoy (3:185) identified the following anxiety-causing factors: 1. inability to learn another language, 2. inability to pronounce strange sounds and words, 3. not knowing the meaning of words and sentences, 4. inability to understand and answer questions in the new language, 5. not knowing and understanding the goals and requirements of the course, 6. testing, especially the oral part, 7. encountering different cultural values and customs, 8. the teacher in general — native-speaker teachers especially, 9. previous unsuccessful language learning attempts, 10. the reputation of language classes for failure and poor grades, 10. peer derision and criticism. The first half of the list is included in the cognitive domain, and the rest are in the affective and interactive domains. Students feel anxiety in a threatening atmosphere. They are afraid of failure in language learning. They must defend or protect themselves in such a climate. They can’t be themselves whatsoever.

These anxiety-causing factors very frequently cause failure in language learning, and give them negative self-concepts. K. Chastain (4:188) stresses the importance of a good self-concept for successful language learning. Students who think highly of themselves tend to do better work in school. According to F. Grittner (5:3), self-concept is a greater motivational factor in achievement than intelligence. Contributing to their self-concept is the concept students believe others have of them. Positive attitudes from teachers or friends probably give students positive attitudes about themselves and a more positive self-image. Students who are more likely to develop poor concepts of themselves continue to underachieve because this is what is expected. Self-concept is closely related and linked to interpersonal relations.

T. Yeomans describes fully functioning individuals as those who recognize survival needs in three areas of concern: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal (6:226). Intrapersonal includes the domain of the psyche, subconscious processes, and the basic needs system. This corresponds to the affective domain. Interpersonal refers to energies transacted when individuals meet with one another. This is the same as the interactive domain. Extrapersonal refers to a person’s relationship to extrinsic materials such as subject matter and factual information. This is called the cognitive domain. Intrapersonal and interpersonal areas are closely related to each other and influenced by each other. Experiences one has in interpersonal relationships form the contents of the intrapersonal area, while what one is has a great influence on how one interacts with the other person(s). These are the ‘personal’ domains. The extrapersonal area includes the ‘impersonal’ domain, which is the contents of curricula. The intrapersonal area is not directly linked with the extrapersonal area. It is vital to combine the former with the latter. This was termed “confluent” approach by G. Brown. The interpersonal area connects the one with the other. What one wants to express in a foreign language is his own inner world, which B. Galyean called ‘meaning nodes.’
III. Building a Positive Climate for Language Learning

As I said earlier, learning is affected by how students feel about themselves. So the role of the self-concept in language learning is viewed as crucial to their growth. The role of foreign language teachers is to help students form positive self-concepts in the first place. According to H. Satoh (7 : 67), about 45% of the failure in foreign language learning is caused by “personality and behavior problems.” “Indifference” is the biggest problem in the item. Teachers must not be indifferent to various student factors in language learning. It is teachers’ patience and warmth that counts. Several characteristics which are rated as important in successful foreign language teaching are: patience, agreeable manner, encouragement of students, tact during correction, prevention of ridicule of students by each other, and rapport with students (8 : 136). Rapport with students is the basic element of a positive climate for language learning. I will refer to this point later.

Teacher behavior is categorized as follows: indirect influence and direct influence. Indirect influence includes 1. accepting feelings, 2. praising or encouraging, 3. accepting or using ideas of student, and 3. asking questions. Direct influence is: 1. giving information, 2. giving directions and 3. criticizing or justifying. Naturally teachers should be indirect. Several researches indicate that students taught by teachers trained in interaction analysis (FLint System) worked better in school. Thus, the behaviors of teachers as perceived by the pupils influence the nature and extent of (1) the motivation of pupils, (2) communication with pupils and (3) the classroom experiences of pupils which may instigate pupil behavior resulting in pupil change (9 : 70). Teachers’ indirect behaviors help build a positive climate for language learning.

Students grow most only in a warm, supportive and non-threatening atmosphere. The essence of this positive atmosphere or climate is rapport with students. Rapport will be established as a result of teachers’ indirect behaviors, which are composed of congruence, empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard (10 : 90–95). In the first place, C. Rogers hypothesizes that personal growth is facilitated when the teacher is what he is, when in the relationship with his students he is genuine and without “front” or facade, openly expressing the feelings and attitudes which at that moment are flowing in him. This hypothesis is termed “congruence.” It means that he comes into a direct personal encounter with his students, meeting them on a person-to-person basis, and that he is being himself, not denying himself. The second hypothesis in the relationship is that the teacher is experiencing an empathic understanding of his students’ private world, and is able to communicate some of the significant fragments of that understanding. To sense the students’ inner world of private personal meanings as if it were your own, but without ever losing the “as if” quality, this is empathy. This is briefly acceptance of feelings. Now the third hypothesis. He hypothesizes that growth and change are more likely to occur the more that the teacher is experiencing a warm, positive, acceptant attitude toward what is in the students. It means that he prizes his students as a person, in a non-possessive way, in a total, rather than a conditional way.

These three hypotheses can build a helping relationship between teacher and student.
and maintain a trusting climate. Why does the teacher need to create an atmosphere of trust in the language classroom? Trust is necessary for stable cooperation and effective communication. Students will more openly express their thoughts, feelings, reactions, opinions, information, and ideas when the trust level is high. Trust, acceptance, and affirmation are absolute musts if you and the students wish to engage in honest sharing about yourselves (11 : 7). The best way to come to know ourselves is through interpersonal sharing and student-to-student communication. Others can know us only to the extent that we disclose ourselves and can respond accurately only to the extent that we have let them know us as we are (12 : 39).

IV. Conclusion

The role of the teacher is to facilitate language learning. Facilitative learning takes place in a positive climate, which creates emotionally close bonds between teachers and students. The facilitative atmosphere is composed of three conditions: congruence, empathy and place, and unconditional positive regard. These conditions are based on the supposition that self-acceptance and acceptance of others are mutually related (cf. Sheerer: r = .51; E.M.Berger: r = .36 -.69). This indicates that the intrapersonal area is closely related to the interpersonal area. The extrapersonal area should be combined with these other two areas. Thus, meaningful learning takes place, influencing students to be intrinsically motivated. Motivation cannot be externally imposed but must come from within.

In conclusion, I must suggest that human relations training be introduced into the foreign language training programs in future. L.Jakobovits and B.Gordon (13 : 29) recommend that the teacher hold small encountergroup sessions with students to examine their attitudes as well as their learning styles in the study of a second language. These encounter sessions can serve to establish a personal and human relationship between the teacher and student, and can create a greater awareness of the self as a learner. Foreign language teachers must be more concerned in the development of the individual rather than in the acquisition of a body of knowledge or a set of skills.

References:

(3) I.R.McCoy, "Means to Overcome the Anxieties of Second Language Learners," FLA, 1979, 12.3.


外国語教室における信頼の雰囲気の醸成

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縫 部 義 憲

従来の外国語教育の最大の問題は、認知面を強調しつつて、学習者は因、つまり、情意面を軽視、時に無視してきたことである。情意面は、相互作用領域と相関が高いことがわかった。この両者をベアーゼとして、認知面との結合という方程式の外国語教育の中核に位置づける観点から、つまり、合流教育の視点から、このアプローチが成立するための前提である教室環境（人的な面）づくりを考察する。カウンセリングのアプローチの外国語教育への応用を試みた。内発的動機づけのストラテジーとしての雰囲気づくりが、本論文の主眼点である。

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