

Chapter One

Classroom Activities and Shy Students

Usually language teachers recognize good learners through classroom activities. However, the present author noticed that some of students in language classes withdraw and resist to, consciously or unconsciously, participate in class activities. Nevertheless, it appears that some of those learners are high achievers in homework assignments, written tests and quizzes.

In an intended pilot study, private interviews with sixteen of those students revealed that shyness is a major reason for some students' lack of participation. Thus, the present chapter is devoted to study the phenomena of shyness and its effect on participation in classroom activities. The main emphasis will be on analyzing the characteristics of shy students; and suggesting methodological and managing modes that cope with their traits and needs.

Characteristics of Shy Students

Shyness is not a problem unless it becomes habitual rather than situational. It may begin as a fear of the unfamiliar and can lead to loneliness, unresponsiveness, dependence, and lack of self-confidence (Cassidy, 1994; and Bullock, 1989). Buss defined shyness as discomfort, inhibition, and awkwardness in social situations. In addition, Thompson and Rudolph (1992) mentioned that shyness refers to diffidence about entering social situations, discomfort, and inhibition in the presence of others, exaggerated self-concern, and negative social self-concepts. Moreover, Zimbardo (1977) displayed the characteristics of shy students as follows: (1) they do not volunteer; (2) they do not initiate a conversation with the teacher, (3) they are less active than their peers, (4) they are obedient, (5) they are not trouble makers; (6) they are reluctant to ask for help, and (7) they may perform poorly as a result of teacher criticism. Furthermore, Brophy (1996) described shy students saying that they are quiet, unobtrusive, insecure, unwilling to draw attention to themselves, do not talk from a distance, and have a poor self-image.

Recently, the communicative approaches of language teaching consider language learning to be a result of social interaction that takes place between the students and their peers and/or with their teachers (Ommagio-Hadley, 1993). Consequently, shy students, as described above, get apprehended in communicative classes. They resist to participate in class activities as a result of their fear of the novelty of communicative approach principles such as cooperative work, working with peers, learner-centered tasks, and role playing activities. In the language classroom, as in any other class, shy students tend to be the receivers and avoid productive activities that require responsive behaviors in class (Koplow, 1983).

The Treatment of Shy Students

Literature on the treatment of shy students included several suggestion based on field studies, teachers' experiences, and experts' recommendations. For the most part, educators mentioned that the relationship between teachers and students plays a considerable role in modifying shy students' participation in class (English, 1985; Hewett, 1980; and

Jacoby, 1994). Specialists recommended two major planned actions for teachers to take when dealing with shy students.

Firstly, assigned tasks need to be used in class with shy students so that they will be activated in class (Askew, 1987; and Johnson, 1987). Bond (1984), Brophy, and Everston (1981), and Koplou (1983) illustrated that these classroom tasks need to be oral, and require preparation of shy students, in advance, before being involved in verbal interactions. In these tasks, the students are expected to discuss, respond actively, initiate contacts, and receive positive and encouraging feedback from the teacher. Brown (1994) referred to successful tasks as these having meaningful communicative goals. Nunan (1991) listed five characteristics of an effective task-based course saying that they should:

1. Emphasize learning to communicate through interaction in the target language;
2. Introduce authentic texts into the learning situation;
3. Provide opportunities for learners to focus not only on the target language but also on the learning process itself;
4. Enhance learners' own personal experiences as important

contributing elements to classroom learning; and

5. Attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom.

Secondly, these classroom activities should be based on stimulating cooperative work (Lew, Mesch, Johnson, and Johnson, (1986). As Brown (1994) mentions, cooperative work is not competitive, but rather collaborative. The absence of competition makes shy students feel more secure. In addition, cooperative work gives shy students more opportunities for social interactions which they would otherwise consciously resist to be engaged in (Taylor, et al, 1986). In that sense, cooperative learning provides shy students with chances to interact with their peers and share success with them (Penello, 1995). Cooperative activities help shy students decrease their loneliness. Furthermore, such activities lead them to build friendships which consequently increase their self-confidence in interacting more effectively with the surrounding world and overcoming their loneliness. This loneliness has been mentioned to be the major threat to them. Goswick, and Jones (1981) found out, through an

experimental research applied on a sample of (126) undergraduate university students, that shyness was linked with the increase of loneliness. In that study, a control group of (76) students was taught by lecturing for ten weeks, whereas the fifty students of the experimental group were enrolled in small experimental courses designed to enhance interpersonal relationships. Shyness significantly increased in the lecture group while loneliness remained stable. On the other hand, the experimental group showed significant decrease in both shyness and loneliness. That study concluded with a recommendation that social cooperative work should be used to overcome shyness and loneliness.

There are more suggestions given by educators for the sake of solving the problem of shy students who resist to participate in classroom activities. Selected suggestions are listed below.

Based on interviews with a number of experienced teachers, Johnson (1956) compiled the following suggestions for assisting students to overcome their shyness.

1. Enhance self-esteem and confidence:

- a. Take every opportunity to praise every learner.**
- b. Give them recognition by talking to them during group sessions (looking directly at them from time to time and using their names to designate groups, e. g., Moustafa's group).**
- c. Give them responsibilities by assigning them important tasks.**
- d. Find areas or activities in which they feel secure enough to participate.**
- e. Ask for their advice when this may be helpful.**
- f. Give them objective descriptions of their progress in learning.**
- g. Help them when they need help to avoid failure.**

2. Encourage contact with peers: Place withdrawn learners in group activities with friendly peers, or seat them near outgoing classmates.

3. Gently move them toward participation: Allow them to remain relatively quiet at first and yet to participate in the

group.

4. **Other methods:** Discuss with them the importance of participating in activities and sharing with peers, help them to feel secure in the classroom, and develop a climate of relaxed calmness.

Blanco and Bogacki (1988) collected recommendations from school psychologists in order to deal with shyness. Among other suggestions, they advised teachers to encourage students to join volunteer groups or social organizations outside of school, to involve them frequently in small groups, to urge them to interact with peers, to use them as peer tutors, to praise them frequently and minimize criticism, to wait patiently for them to respond, to let them practice answers beforehand, and to call on them only when sure that they know the right answer

Dealing with shy students, Spaulding (1983) suggested that teachers need to emphasize specific concrete academic tasks and clear structuring of demands in making assignments

for them, assign them to work near supportive peers, provide structure and support while they work on assignments, reinforce all emerging active, pro-social, or productive behavior, and minimize criticism.

Apter and Conoley (1984) mentioned that teachers need to establish personal relationships with shy students by talking to them, privately, every day, give them easier tasks such as being the group reporter, reward them when they make any contribution, increase demands as they begin to gain self confidence, involve them in small-group projects, and train them on social skills such as making introductions, asking for help, giving help, initiating and sustaining conversations or convincing others.

Related Field Studies

Field studies have proved that the change of teaching styles and activities used in class can lead to significant change in students' behaviors, personal characteristics, and reactions. For example, Hawkins, Doueck, and Lishner (1988) reported the effects of a package of instructional methods on the

academic achievement, behavior, and social bonding of seventh grade students who were low achievers in math. In that package, proactive classroom management; interactive teaching; and cooperative learning methods were included. Low achievers in experimental classrooms showed a more favorable attitude toward math, more bonding to school, greater expectations for continuing schooling, and less serious misbehavior as measured by suspensions and expulsions from school than did their low achieving control counterparts at the end of one academic year.

Jacob, Rottenberg, Patrick, and Wheeler (1996) found that cooperative learning opportunities, given to a sample of sixth graders in a social studies classroom, influenced these learners' acquisition of English as a second language. Observations showed that these learners were able to give and receive help in academic English considering academic terms, difficult academic concepts, and para-academic knowledge. Findings led the researchers to recommend course developers to take context into account, and to use classroom tasks to support the desired opportunities given to second language

learners.

Further studies such as Bender and Smith (1990), Borich (1990), and Summak, et al (1994) illustrate that task-based and cooperative learning have proven effective impact on the performance of shy students in language classroom.

Brophy and Everston (1981) found that teachers usually reached out actively toward shy students by trying to involve them in lessons and discussions, responding positively when they did initiate contact, praising them when they did respond or do good work, minimizing criticism, and communicating positive affect. Nevertheless, these students generally persisted in avoiding teachers except when they needed help.

Brophy (1996) interviewed a sample of (98) teachers with, at least, three years of teaching experiences. Questions about their treatment of (12) kinds of problem students were given to them to be answered at home. After about one week, they came back, with note taking, to be interviewed concerning how they deal with these problem students. Considering shy

students, the analysis of interview responses revealed that a large majority of (71) of the teachers mentioned providing some form of instruction, training, modeling, or help designed to enable shy students to become more participatory or responsive. In addition (48) mentioned attempts to encourage, reassure, build self-confidence, or provide a supportive environment. A group of (31) teachers mentioned attempts to shape increased responsiveness through successive approximations. Thus, instruction, support, and shaping strategies predominated in teachers' responses to how do they deal with shy students. The most commonly mentioned segmental strategies were: changing the social environment (44), encouraging or shaping increased responsiveness (38), minimizing stress or embarrassment (33), building the students' self-concept (29), adapting instructional methods (27), praising (26), involving other professionals to help solve the problem (23), trying to ensure that shy students would enjoy positive experiences when they did participate (23), building close relationships with them (20), communicating encouragement and positive expectations (19), and providing support through physical proximity, voice tone, or eye contact.

Previously Designed Programs

Schmidt (1983) mentions that the idea of having problem students in language classes should be accepted, analyzed, and studied. Thus, planned efforts have been made by interested educators in order to construct organized programs which deal with involving shy students more in classroom activities. The following is a description of three of these programs:

A. The Orange County Middle School Peer Counseling Curriculum (1990)

This is a curriculum guide for a peer counseling course in the Orange County, Florida Public School System. This course is an 18-week elective course for eighth graders. The major emphasis of this course is to help students become more sensitive to the needs of their peers and to give these students the skills and attitudes to be more effective in helping their peers. The course is designed to develop the techniques of building friendships and reaching out to those who are lonely, shy, and in need of friends. It also teaches adolescent

decision-making and problem-solving. Training units include: peer counseling; communication skills, the helping relationship, learning about self, learning about others, and the family. Icebreakers; group process; discussion starters, decision making activities, and peer project description are provided.

B. STAR: Social Thinking and Reasoning (1982)

This curriculum guide provides instruction in assertive skills, personality types, and relaxation techniques for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students. It is especially intended to increase the social skills of shy students. The guide contains fifty lessons which: (1) teach students how to deal with others in a successful and productive manner, (2) provide them with an awareness of personal differences, and (3) give them tools to reduce personal stress. Each lesson includes: title, goal, lesson overview, materials, procedure, transfer activity, behavioral objectives, and follow-up. The guide may be used in the classroom, in advisement groups, and/or in small-group counseling sessions. The lessons offer many experiential activities and role-playing situations.

C. Harris and Brown's Treatment (1982)

This treatment was offered to shy fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-graders. It began with cognitive restructuring. Through group discussions and modeled examples, students were helped to recognize any negative self-statements, images, and self-instructions that they produced before or during interpersonal or public speaking situations. Next, they were taught to replace these statements with task-relevant coping and self-reinforcing statements. Then, they were taught to counteract anxiety through deep muscle relaxation and systematic desensitization. While deeply relaxed, they would first imagine that a feared event was about to occur and would visualize responding to it with coping self-statements and behaviors. Then, they would imagine that the situation was actually happening and that they were handling it successfully. Finally, they would produce self-reinforcing statements.

Conclusion

It could be concluded that whether we accept it or not problem students exist in classes. Moreover, it is never too late to improve and modify a human being's misbehavior. The problems of these students should be considered by their teachers. In addition, it could be said that students' resistance to participate in classroom activities might be related to non-academic and non-cognitive roots. The students might be well-versed but withdraw from participating in activities. Shyness, among other reasons, significantly affects students' frequency and willingness to participate in classroom activities. The present chapter showed that planned, directed efforts could decrease the students' level of shyness, and consequently increase their frequency of participation in classroom activities. Cooperative learning, project curriculum, simulation, learner-centered tasks, and role playing activities, could be said to be effective techniques to be used in the treatment of shy students.

Finally, it should be mentioned that language teachers

have duties, other than purely academic ones, to perform for the sake of building their nations. They are required to deal with their students not only as learners of knowledge, but also as developing young people who are going to be positive citizens in the nation. Their psychological and social problems need to be treated in planned, directed ways.

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