

Classroom Interaction in the Teaching Learning Process

Ataur Rahman

Assistant Professor in English, Dhemaji Commerce College, Dhemaji, Assam

ABSTRACT

Every student can think and react to the classroom activities. Without interaction it is not possible to bring out what the learner's opinion on a topic. Different psychologists are also of the opinion that children learn by discovery and meaning making through interaction. Students are more active in the class where there is more interaction and learn better. This paper aims to bring out the need and importance of classroom interaction, how interaction happen in the classroom, the role of the teacher in the interaction process and also the channels of interaction. There are, of course a number of problems teachers encounter during interaction and for interaction. Suggestions have been put forward how the teacher can counter the challenges which stand as an obstacle in the interaction process.

Key words: *Classroom interaction, teachers' role, benefits, countering problems*

MEANING

Interaction is a two-way process. In any communication, event messages move back and forth between two speakers in a series of exchanges. When a person speaks the listener believes that what the speaker is speaking is authentic. The listener's response will depend on what he or she thinks of the speaker as well as what outlook he or she has in life. It will also be influenced by a person's perspective on the world. The listener expects that the speaker would want him or her to react to what is being said. The speaker also expects that the listener will respond to what is spoken. The interaction would thus imply a mutual understanding's thoughts and feelings. This also involves mutual respect, willingness to listen to others and cooperation. Interaction is based on the assumption-

- + every mind is a thinking mind and can react to comments from others
- + a variety of responses could contribute to defining concepts and clarifying issues.

THE CLASSROOM

The classroom is the first component of the teaching-learning process. The others are the teacher and learner. The classroom is our field of operation, it is a place where we spend most of our time as teachers, it is a place where dynamic action whether legitimate or illegitimate, whether planned or unplanned takes place. The classroom is the basic structure of the curriculum system and the 'actors' or 'players' or 'participants' are the students and the teacher without which no teaching-learning can take place. It can be a formal learning situation where courses are recognized and certificates are given. In an informal situation, it is not so structured. It is individual learning 'on the spot through experience. A classroom sometimes is not a room. For example, Rousseau's educational experience with Emile where Nature taught a child, and Paulo Freire's classroom described his Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972) where he helped the farmers to get literate. Tagore's Santiniketan or the traditional Indian guru-shisya system also talks of a classroom without, walls. Even in our modern Distance Education where the teacher is in the self-instructional materials of the learners.

WHY DO WE NEED CLASSROOM INTERACTION?

Interaction is a natural process. We cannot stop it from happening in the classroom. The traditional concept of a silent classroom being indicative of discipline and a well-behaved classroom is changing to give place to the concept of a classroom where students are prepared for the world outside. Psychologists like Vygotsky and Bruner are also of the opinion that children learn by discovery and meaning-making through social interaction. The globalised workplace also demands learning through knowledge-sharing rather than mere transmission of instruction by the teacher. Confidence

that they are not merely receivers of information but can contribute to knowledge-making will encourage learners to take responsibility for their learning and initiate discussion in the classroom. This will lead them to be autonomous individuals later in the workplace with the ability to take initiative, encourage collaborative teamwork and assume leadership roles in the community.

Who Interacts With Whom?

The participants in interaction in the classroom are the teachers and the students. They meet with a common objective of learning. Classroom interactions come up with a basic IRF Structure in the classroom where the Teacher Makes all the initiation (I) to which students respond (R) and to which the teacher gives Feedback (F).

The interaction could happen in any of the following directions:

Teacher-whole class	(T-SSS)
Teacher-group of students	(T-SS)
Teacher-individual student	(T-S)
Whole class-teacher	(SSS-T)
Group of students-teacher	(SS-T)
Individual student-teacher	(S-T)
Individual student-individual student	(S-S)
Individual student-other students	(S-SSS)
Other students-individual students	(SSS-S)

Role Of Teacher In Interaction:

What is the role of the teacher when learning is made through interaction? In an organized form of interaction arranged through pair work and group work the teacher stands outside the learning circle or participates as an equal. The teacher's role is –

- a. provide task input
- b. arrange the setting for interaction
- c. set the framework for interaction
- d. monitor student interaction
- e. clarify when the pupil seeks it
- f. offer suggestions when a group does not know how to proceed
- g. collect feedback on the learning achieved
- h. consolidate learning at the end of the session

If the teacher makes all the initiating moves of change of topic, asking questions, leading discussions, disciplining, giving feedback on the correctness of the student's responses etc. then most of the talk in the classroom will be that of the teacher. The teacher should provide maximum opportunity to the learners to talk and himself/herself talk less i.e. the Teacher Talking Time (TTT) should be less and Student Talking Time (STT) should be more. Our traditional belief in teaching has to be changed. The teacher should not try to teach the students but rather help them to learn.

Channels Of Interaction:

1. Teachers' Questions -Most of the teaching in the classroom is in the form of an exchange of questions and answers between the teacher and the students. The nature of classroom questions is found to be different from the kind found in natural interaction. The use of questions in natural conversation and inside the classroom is also different. Generally, three kinds of questions have been identified- Comprehension checks, confirmation checks and clarification requests.

Comprehension checks-It seek information from the listener to show that the message has been received correctly. Example: What are the three kinds of questions?

Confirmation check- It allow the speaker to interpret the listener's reaction where positive answers are expected from the listeners. Example: You have understood the difference between a comprehension question and a confirmation check, haven't you?

Clarification requests-It also allow the speaker to interpret the listener's reaction but where the speaker expects more open-ended answers from the listeners. Example: What do you find difficult to understand? Do you find that the example I gave you doesn't help to understand what a confirmation check means?

Studies have shown that comprehension check questions are frequent in classroom settings whereas in a natural setting it is the confirmation check which is more frequent.

Studies have also shown that referential questions, that is, those that relate to real-life communication evoke a better response. Open-ended questions are seen to promote more spontaneous responses. In the classroom setting most questions asked are display questions. Referential questions should be asked more in the classroom setting. In students' group and pair activities, they use several confirmation check questions and clarification requests. So teachers should put on more open-ended questions.

2. Feedback and Error Correction: Another common channel for interaction between the teacher and the students in the classroom is Feedback. Like questions, the role of Feedback in natural conversation seems to be different than in classroom settings. Speakers know from the listeners whether they have comprehended the message of the speaker in three ways-

- When the learners actively solicit comprehension checks
- When the speaker does not receive any signal of non-comprehension
- When the speaker receives explicit signals from the listeners in the form of nods, interjection, comments, seeking clarifications etc.

How the teacher provided feedback

1. The teacher gives positive feedback acclaiming the performance of the students. The positive aspects of the students, if any, should be highlighted first.
2. The teacher gives negative feedback as well. Care should be taken while giving negative feedback so that the learner's self-confidence is not dampened.
3. In pair or group activities the teacher should observe minutely the students and offer feedback taking into account the strong and the weak points in the learner.
4. Generally, teachers' comments in written exercises should not be limited to giving correct or wrong against the questions.
5. Comments should not be like 'Too long', 'Too Short', 'Re write', 'Improve' etc. This will make the students confuse a lot.
6. Comments should clearly indicate what or how he/she should do to better his/her performance.

Benefits Of Classroom Interaction:

There are many benefits of classroom interaction-

1. Learners learn actively with the content of learning.
2. Learners learn to take initiative in learning.
3. Learners can enrich the knowledge base of their peers and even the teachers by bringing in their real-world experience. This will help them in critical thinking. It also gives the learners the confidence to take on leadership roles in later life.
4. Learners shed their inhibitions and shyness in communicating with others.
5. Learners learn to participate in teamwork.
6. Learners learn to use language appropriately.
7. Interaction provides instant feedback to learning. Misconceptions can be clarified instantly either by the teacher or peers.
8. In the case of language classrooms (a) the focus is on making learners use language rather than just know about the language. Making pupils initiate and respond to topics of discussion in the classroom will help them speak naturally and effortlessly in the outside world (b) language learning is skill-learning and not content learning. Providing practice for the development of the skill will help the future use of language. (c) Interaction helps peer learning. This works in two ways: Peers with better language proficiency act as models for those with lesser proficiency, Pupils are quick to notice errors more when their peers talk although they make errors themselves.

Teachers' Problems With Classroom Interaction:

When these benefits of classroom interaction are pointed out we put forward many problems and try to establish that interaction in our setting is not possible. What problems do we generally point out-

1. The class is too large for interaction
2. The time allotted for a class is not sufficient for interaction
3. Students don't even bring books to the class, they are very irregular, how is interaction possible
4. The textbooks are full of difficult texts, we have to explain texts words by word and sentence by sentence
5. We have to complete the syllabus

6. We have to produce results in examination. Our authority counts everything in results and a student's future also depends on the mark sheet
7. If we insist our student speak (in English) they won't attend class or stop coming to college. Our students come from a rural background with no English or little English, they make simple spellings mistake. So, interaction in our situation is not feasible

Besides these, even if we go to the classroom that may create many problems

1. The classroom will get noisy
2. Learners may not take learning seriously
3. Accuracy will never be achieved
4. The lessons may not go according to Plans. Time may be frittered away on irrelevant matters.
5. It is difficult to consolidate learning

COUNTERING TEACHERS' PROBLEMS

1. The teacher needs good classroom management skills
2. Grouping according to levels initially and mixed groups after a level of ability is achieved. Explaining to students that interaction is important and will affect evaluation, and that minor grammatical or pronunciation inaccuracy will not be penalized will help low-ability learners to shed their inhibitions.
3. Once the ground rules for learning procedures are explained along with the rationale, student cooperation will be voluntary.
4. The teacher needs to create a focus and see that the activity is geared to the teaching, -point. Deviation might sometimes throw more light on it. The challenge level of the tasks should be set so that learners engage themselves in problem-solving.
5. The teacher will need good organizing skills. In fixed furniture classrooms students can be asked to turn around and face the row behind them. Pair work should be possible. The teacher can appoint team leaders to help the teacher in monitoring.
6. In the case of language classes, close observation by the teacher of students' language. and highlighting common errors at the end of the session will help. Alternatively, activities can be built around common errors. Learners can identify, comment on and correct them in pairs and groups.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

1. List out all problems in the path of interaction.
2. Categorize the problems as solvable and unsolvable.
3. The teacher should not conclude that nothing will work before the actual work has begun.
4. The teacher should see what will work in laboratory conditions before trying out something in real teaching conditions. That is, a small class of learners will help in discovering the dynamics of a method or technique, and how in interaction things work in optimal conditions before trying to implement these techniques within the constraints of real teaching conditions.
5. Deal with the mutable aspects first before tackling the large and more difficult seemingly unsolvable constraints in the classroom.
6. The teacher should not take all problems at one time, but try to give priority. Identify" which problem seems most crucial to me?"
7. If some tried-out problems don't work, they should be left alone, let things be. Try something new or address another problem. Then come back to the unsolvable one again.
8. There should be a good understanding of the problem itself. This understanding could be in terms of- (a) how the problem has been tackled by others in the past and other places and (b) the reasons why solutions offered have not been successful.
9. We can't expect miracles. What is required is our attitude to the problems which should not be that of despair but sensible practicality. Problems in the classroom will keep on appearing, this is the stuff of teaching.
10. The problem in teaching means that we are teaching. If we have no problems in teaching means that there goes something wrong. If we concentrate more we will discover problems. Problems are important for quality improvement in teaching. To state, a problem is half the battle won in finding solutions.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Byrne, Donn. (1987). Techniques for Classroom Interaction. Harlow: Longman Group, UK Ltd.
- [2]. Malamah Thomas A. (1987). Classroom Interaction. Oxford. OUP.
- [3]. Mathew, Rama (1998).The Learned Centered Classroom. Hyderabad: CIEFL Dissemination Project (A CIEFL-DFID-BC Joint Project)
- [4]. Ur, Penny (2005). A Course in Language Teaching. CUP, Cambridge, UK.

