

33 Organizing and managing a class

A Warm-up

Your classroom management is the way that you manage students' learning by organising and controlling what happens in your classroom . . .

- Or the way that you consciously decide *not* to organise and control.
- Or the way that you delegate or relinquish such control to the learners.

It is also what happens (or doesn't happen) when you avoid or remain ignorant about these choices.

Jim Scrivener, 2012

- 1 Work in pairs. What do teachers of any subject do to organize and control (what is happening in) the classroom? List at least five things. For example, give instructions or put learners into pairs or groups. Don't include 'teaching content related to the subject' in your list.
- 2 Compare your list with another pair. Are any of the ideas on your list only applicable to a face-to-face classroom? Or to an online classroom?

B Organizing learners

- 1 There are many different ways of organizing learners during lessons, each with advantages and disadvantages.

Your trainer will divide you into two groups. If you are in group A, look at page 180. If you are in group B, look at page 182. Complete the table with your own ideas.

Compare your completed table with somebody from the other group. Was there anything you hadn't thought of?

- 2 Which of the interaction patterns you discussed in B1 have you observed in lessons or input sessions so far? How many different interaction patterns were used in the session overall? What effect do you think this had on the pace of the lesson/session and learner/trainee engagement in the activities?

C Group dynamics

Read this quote from Sarah Mercer.

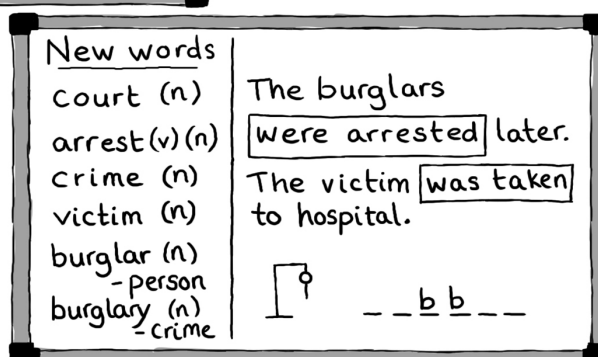
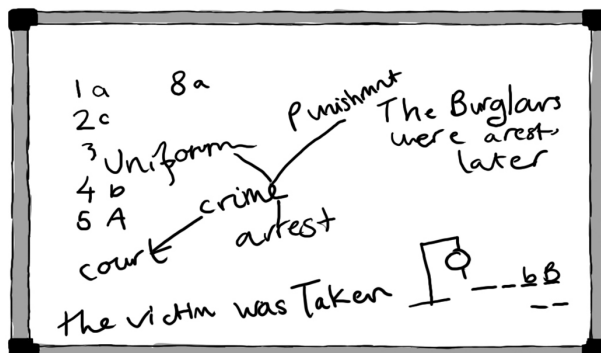
Whether we are in online or face-to-face classrooms, our learners need to feel psychologically safe and it is time well spent ensuring that they do. Especially in the language classroom, which depends so heavily on interaction and student engagement, learners must feel secure. When they do, then they will be comfortable to engage in classroom life. They'll be able to use the language without fear of being embarrassed or ridiculed, and feel a sense of belonging in the group.

Sarah Mercer, 2020

Think of at least two ways in which teachers can help learners to feel secure and psychologically safe in the classroom. Compare your ideas with a partner.

D Using the whiteboard

Work in pairs. Say what the pictures below suggest about the best use of the whiteboard, and how this might be the same or different when making a record of information which comes up during an online lesson for learners.



E Grading language

One of the most important things that teachers have to learn is how to adjust their language to make it appropriate for different groups of learners, particularly lower-level learners.

Read sentences a–g. Tick five sentences that offer good advice. Cross out the other two sentences. Then compare your answers with a partner.

- Pronounce each word slowly and deliberately.
- 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.
- Miss out small words (articles, prepositions, auxiliary verbs and so on), so that learners can focus on the 'content' words and understand the message.
- Speak at a natural speed, but pause slightly longer after each 'chunk', if necessary.
- Try to avoid 'difficult' vocabulary (for example, very idiomatic language).
- Try to avoid complex grammar patterns.

F Trainees' queries

As part of the training process, trainees are asked to write an evaluation of their own lessons.

- 1 Read the trainees' reflective comments, and discuss possible solutions to the problems that they express.

Trainees' comments:

- 1 I wasn't sure what to do when they were writing sentences. I knew they hadn't all finished, but I didn't want the others to wait too long doing nothing.
- 2 I didn't enjoy it much. There were a few students who just spoke their own language the whole way through. I did say 'in English' once but it didn't do much good.
- 3 I wasn't sure what to do in the pair work bit. I thought my instructions were OK, but it was obvious when they started that some of the students hadn't understood, and so I tried to go round to each group and sort it out. I think they did get it in the end, but some of them had finished and others hadn't started.
- 4 The learners were all doing the pair work exercise in breakout rooms and I just waited in the main room. I was worried they might stop talking if I entered the room. I wasn't sure what I should do, really.
- 5 I tried to ask more learners questions today. I know I just kept asking the same people in my last lesson. But it was embarrassing. I asked Kim what she thought and she was so quiet I couldn't hear her. Even when I got really close to her it was still difficult.
- 6 I really wanted to use pair work but I had an odd number, so I did the activity with one of the students. Was this right?

- 2 Now match the trainees' comments (1–6) with the trainer's advice (a–f).

Trainer's advice:

a

Waiting in the main room at the beginning of the activity is OK because it gives the learners some space to make a start. Once they've done this, you should drop into the rooms to hear how things are going and make sure that all learners are on task, but don't interrupt if everything is going well. Just listen to what they say and make some notes. You could also turn off your camera before you enter breakout rooms, to make learners less likely to start speaking to you, rather than continuing to speak to their partners.

b

OK – you did well to sort the problem out, but quite a lot of time was wasted, particularly for the last pair you got to. If there's a fairly general problem, don't be afraid to stop the activity and give the instructions again.

c

Yes, that learner speaks quietly. If you get closer to learners they often get even quieter because they talk to you – not the class. Try getting further away and saying something like 'a bit louder, so everyone can hear'.

d

I thought you made a pretty good decision here. You have to get the right balance. Have something ready for the fast finishers to do, like checking and correcting some of their sentences. You can also set time limits rather than achievement limits, for example 'Write as many sentences as you can in five minutes.', rather than 'Everybody write five sentences.'

5 – Developing teaching skills and professionalism

e

If you do this, it becomes very hard for you to know what the other learners are doing, or to respond if they need help or guidance. You need to think about how you will deal with awkward numbers before the lesson – usually a group of three for pair work is fine and can be managed.

f

I think part of the problem was that they didn't quite understand what you wanted them to do at times. It was good that you said something but you probably needed to be a little more assertive about it, or consider demonstrating the activity. You could also move learners around a bit so that they are not always sitting next to people who speak the same language.

3 Ask your trainer any other questions you have about classroom management.

KEY WORDS FOR TEACHERS

Check you know the meanings of these terms.

- *classroom management*
- *monitoring*
- *mingling*
- *pace*
- *engagement*
- *grading language*
- *group dynamics*
- *interaction pattern*

REFLECTION

Think about the next lesson that you are going to teach in teaching practice.

- Consider the interaction patterns. Will these be the same throughout the lesson?
- How will you keep a record of new information for students to see during your lesson, such as extra vocabulary or corrections? Will you use a whiteboard or another method? When would it be appropriate to remove what you record?
- At what points in the lesson will you monitor the learners? What will you be looking and listening for?
- What is one other point which has come up during this session which you think it will be particularly useful or important for you to consider during your teaching practice?

References

- Mercer, S. (2020). *Nurturing the Relationships in our Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
<https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2020/09/23/nurturing-relationships-in-our-classrooms/>
- Scrivener, J. (2012). *Classroom Management Techniques*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.