* Forum *

The Dark Side of the ESL Classroom

> "Hello Mark! Is that you?" [I was phoning my friend that had not spoken
> to for a long while]
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> . . .
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> "So you had a bad day at school? Hum.."
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> . . .
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> " Terrible conduct, misbehaviour, problems . . . as always? What do you
> mean?"
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> . . .
>
> "So the student pressed charges against the teacher and the school?"

How familiar this sort of conversation is for many of us. Indeed, we may sometimes
have the feeling that our class is worse than anyone's. Well, not always. When
preparing this issue, I was surprised how diverse things are globally. To prepare this
Forum, I contacted around fifteen teachers from the USA to Australia. Many refused
to write, and some were afraid to because of the topic. I also found that problems in
the classroom vary according to countries and cultures. A teacher in the Balkans
mentioned that during the war, students had guns and bombs with them. Another in
Japan mentioned that there isn't disruptive behaviour as understood in Western
countries. He acknowledged that some students had to retake courses, and
mentioned that it is very unusual to experience behaviour or classroom dynamics
problems. So what is behind the images in the movies of troublesome kids or crazy
classrooms?

I received two submissions. The first one is by Maite Ruiz, Spain, who teaches in a
state high school. She offers insights about current classrooms in Spain. The second,
by John Hoover, suggests ways in which to cope with dynamics and behaviour
problems through Curriculum Adaptation/Differentiation for students with second
language needs.

I hope the readers may benefit from these reflections. As always, readers are also
welcome to express their opinions and feelings. I imagine some teachers and
administrators will find this issue familiar. Please, do not hesitate and let your voice
be heard.

Our next issue will be about teaching English to children and the Forum would like
you to share or compare your ideas about your best teaching recipes, your role as a
teacher or educator, parental support, working hours, social recognition, teaching in
kindergarten, beautiful / interesting teaching experiences, bilingual children, skills

and grammar, successful kids with learning problems, and more. We look forward to hearing from you.

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Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Spanish Secondary School

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Despite the fact that the educational system (especially teachers) has made every effort to accomplish the aim that every Spanish student should understand, read, and produce messages in non-specialised English at the end of their secondary studies, this goal gets somewhat blurred when it doesn't match the students' interests or their parents' expectations.

It is true that how (and to what extent) students learn whatever we happen to teach them is affected by a number of variables: social origin, learning capability and strategies, personal motivation, etc. English as a foreign language is no exception. Learners of foreign languages interpose an affective filter on the subject to be learnt: how they rate the language in terms of social or political importance and personal relevance (whether it will improve their prospects of continuing with their studies or finding a good job) does matter. It determines how much effort they will put in, say, learning the irregular verbs, struggling through sentence transformation or trying to pronounce sentences in a feasible and recognizable way.

This phenomenon allows us to place students along a scale (let's call it the "English learning expectations" scale): on one end of it there are students who place a great importance on learning English, and will do their best to speak, read, and write as well as they can, probably investing some extra time and money to achieve near-perfection. On the other end of the scale, there are students who fail to perceive English as a widespread foreign language with approximately 322 million native speakers, but see it as distant reality so separate from their local lower class context you might as well be talking of a fictional language in Disneyworld.

To put things into perspective, we are still teaching under the first educational law that made education compulsory for every student under sixteen. Two new educational laws have been approved since, but both the past Organic Law of Education (LOCE) and the new Law of Education (LOE) (still to be applied) are nothing but footnotes on the first original LOGSE (Organic Law of General Secondary Education) text. When secondary schooling was made universal in Spain in the mid-nineties, it became apparent that public resources were not enough.

Old high schools were intended to teach only those students who had passed their primary studies, but now everyone under 16 had to be granted a place. Since the state school network was unable to hold the increased number of students, there were

agreements to finance private schools with public money. Schools under agreement could no longer ask money from the students and their families (in Spain, compulsory education is free) but kept insisting on certain things: use of school uniform, fees concealed under terms such as "maintenance," and so forth. The schools under this agreement were mostly Roman Catholic schools. When immigration increased, it was difficult for students of different religions to attend, so these immigrants (as well as the majority of others) went to state schools.

All these factors resulted in a social selection of the students. Spanish-born middle class students have ended up in former private schools now under the state agreement, whereas lower class students and immigrants, who cannot pay for their textbooks (let alone a school uniform or "maintenance fees") have crowded the classrooms of the state high schools. On the other hand, the teachers working in this scenario are inversely selected (and paid accordingly). While teachers in state schools have undergone a heavily selective process at the end of which they become civil servants, virtually anyone can teach in private schools, which often even fail to check a candidate's C.V. if she is "someone they know" (for example, a former student).

All the above affects how English is taught and learnt in Spain. Even though the last PISA report about the current state of Education in Europe that was signed in Pisa (Italy) (2004) places our country high in *equality* (which means that students from different origins and schools rate very similarly in the skills tested), English as a Second Language is not covered in its scope. However, recent studies on school failure have proved the link between social status and school performance. Research carried out by Álvaro Marchesi (*Valores sociales y fracaso escolar,* 2001) showed that students who ended their secondary studies but did not get the corresponding degree came from the lowest class (very low class) in over a 71% of the cases, while the remaining 28% were distributed evenly among the other social contexts studied (low, middle, and upper class).

These considerations allow us to predict results up to a certain extent. Former private schools under state agreement tend to practice indirect social selection of students, which, if we are to believe statistical data, may improve their learning prospects, even though their teachers are those who didn't follow the state's selective process, and who earn a lot less. State high school students differ considerably depending on location. Schools in the wealthier suburbs have middle class students at the top of the "English learning expectations" scale, whereas schools in devalued neighbourhoods in the outskirts of cities have students at the other end of the scale. In general, families send their children to these schools just for the shake of "staying in school" without expectations of gradution upon their study completion. Furthermore, in many instances teachers are said that kids need to be in school "just because they can be at home by themselves." Therefore, English departments are well aware of this situation. They have a clear idea of their personal, educational, and institutional limitations and, even more, although sometimes parents expect the school to do the parents' job, there is no need to say that parents and school have different functions.

Autonomous Communities run several programs to offer students with high learning prospects bilingual education in their state high schools. For example, the Illes Balears Community has a program called *European Sections*: high-performing students are tracked and given subjects such as History or Natural Science in English.

Low income and low expectation students are more difficult to motivate, since they may place less value on formal education. However, they are also more at risk of social exclusion if they end their studies without a secondary degree. That's why schools with populations of lower income students tend to choose easy, comic-like textbooks, promote the use of new technologies like the Internet and, in sum, make every effort to counteract the notion that English is just a school matter disconnected from the real world.

However, high schools still have to cope with many problems that are inefficiently dealt with. School does well what it is meant to do: it gives students a comprehensive education and it selects them according to *excellence hierarchies* (Perrenaud, 2001)--whether we agree or not with this social function. However, school should not be held responsible for social problems that exceed its scope: poor salaries, long-hour days, low social expectations, non-cooperative families and students who imitate the ineffective models in our society and behave accordingly - in and out of school.

References

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Managing Behavior Problems by Differentiating Curriculum and Instruction

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One reality that continues to challenge even the most experienced teacher is how best to deal with persistent behavior problems in the classroom. As educators are required to meet ever-increasing academic and behavioral standards, one must look beyond isolated instances of behavior problems within the classroom to confront more effectively at-risk behaviors. In my experiences over the past 30 years working with K-12 teachers and students, helping them address mild to severe behavior problems, one constant I find evident is that behavior management must occur within an integrated curriculum implementation and management system to be most effective. To this end, management of behavior must be integral to the overall implementation of classroom instruction.

Specifically, classroom instruction comprises four main components:

1. Content
2. Instructional Strategies

3. Instructional Setting (e.g., small group, independent work)
4. Student Management of Behaviors.

Effective implementation of curriculum includes the interdependence among all four of these components, as they are collectively emphasized to facilitate student learning. The interdependence within each of these four curricular elements cannot be overstated, and as one or more of the elements is changed or adapted, each of the other elements is affected. This is significant to teachers because to address behavior problems effectively in the classroom, each of these elements must be considered, not just the individual or isolated behaviors exhibited.

My experiences have included working as a K-12 Behavioral Specialist in the southwestern United States, as well as developing and implementing an alternative elementary and secondary school for children with severe emotional and behavior disorders in a U.S. Midwestern state. My work has afforded me experiences within a variety of culturally diverse environments and with diverse populations of learners including African American populations in low SES areas, Native American students and their teachers on several different reservations, as well as with Hispanic students and their teachers in the American Southwest. Through these and related experiences, I gained an appreciation for the value of addressing behavior problems within the broader context of curriculum implementation and associated differentiations, relative to cultural diversity. That is, effective behavior management best occurs through carefully selected and implemented curriculum differentiations or adaptations while simultaneously valuing cultural diversity of the learners.

In managing behavior problems, my suggestion to teachers is to use differentiated curriculum strategies in the four elements described above as a foundation for not only addressing academic needs but also behavior needs. Use the power of differentiating teaching strategies, instructional settings and self-management techniques to manage behavior problems; rather than attempting to solve behavior issues in isolation from the implementation of the total curriculum. With this in mind, I have several suggestions for teachers to mange behavior effectively, including teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse learners:

1. Behavior management must be culturally responsive by valuing diverse family expectations, so as to not conflict with cultural values and norms within which the student is raised (e.g., shy or quiet behavior in some cultures may represent a sign of respect and should not be misinterpreted as an emotional or behavior problem).
2. Consider the behavior problem relative to the teaching strategies you are using (e.g., Is the teaching strategy contributing to the student's behavior problem?).
3. Be certain that the instructional setting in which the behavior problem occurs is not contributing to that problem (e.g., Is use of extended periods of sitting contributing the student's acting-out behavior problem?).
4. Adapt your teaching style and/or classroom setting as a strategy for reducing classroom behavior problems (e.g., By changing your teaching style or allowing the student to work in a different type of setting such as cooperative learning, many behavior problems can be minimized while also teaching the necessary content).
5. Remember that as one curriculum element is differentiated (for example, a teaching strategy) student needs associated with the other curricular elements

(such as the instructional setting, self-management, or content skills/abilities) may also be affected.

6. The long-tem goal of effective behavior management is to assist students to manage their own behaviors in positive and productive ways. This requires the teacher to attempt a variety of teaching and behavior management techniques, and record the student's progress or response relative to self-management (for example, recording the student's response to a behavioral intervention and its effects, relative to the overall implementation of curriculum and instruction).

Adherence to these suggestions when managing inappropriate classroom behaviors will facilitate more effective student learning. This is accomplished as culturally responsive differentiated curriculum and instruction serves as a foundation to meet student behavior needs by adapting, in integrated ways, teaching strategies, content, and instructional settings for learning.

About the Authors

Maite Ruiz Flores, BA, is a high school EFL instructor and has given a large number of courses for teachers in Madrid and other locations. She is preparing a book about writing for underprivileged children. She is also the author of many journal articles published in Spanish.

John Hoover is currently a Senior Research Associate and Adjunct Faculty in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum, Administration and Supervision with an emphasis in Special Education from Colorado University, Boulder. He is a former special education teacher and supervisor, working with students with learning disabilities and severe emotional/behavioral disorders. In the field of special education, he has over sixty publications ranging from university texts and textbook chapters to refereed journal articles in multicultural, special and general education. His book, *Curriculum Adaptation for Students with Learning and Behavior Problems* (2005) is in its third edition. He is also co-author of a forthcoming textbook titled: *Methods for Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional Learners* scheduled for publication in late 2007.

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