

## Role of Teacher in the Classroom Management and Grouping Learners

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**Annotation:** This article describes the role of teacher in language teaching and effective classroom management, organizing the classroom and the learners. It discusses the ways of grouping learners or interaction patterns to use. The article also highlights tips about avoiding some classroom problems and possible reasons.

**Keywords:** relationship between learners, group work activities, to access resources, monitor and observe, anticipate problems, adapt materials, pair-work, behavior and interaction, language resources.

Teachers need to behave in different ways at different stages of a lesson to manage the classroom and to successfully guide learners through the lesson. These different ways of behaving in and managing the class are called teacher roles. Teachers use a number of different roles in every lesson. Teacher roles vary depending on the teaching approach (way of teaching) used and on the teachers and learners' preferred learning styles and learning needs. Here are some roles teachers often adopt.

Role	The teacher:
1. Planner	prepares and reflects on the lesson before teaching, anticipates problems and selects, designs and adapts materials.
2. Manager	organizes the learning space, makes sure everything in the classroom is running smoothly and sets up rules and routines (things which are done regularly) for behavior and interaction.
3. Monitor and observer	goes around the class during individual, pair and group work activities, checking learning and providing support as necessary.
4. Facilitator	provides opportunities for learning, helps learners to access resources and develop learner autonomy.
5. Diagnostician	works out the causes of learners' difficulties.
6. Language resource	can be used by the learners for help and advice about language.
7. Assessor	evaluates the language level and attitudes of the learners by using different means of informal and formal assessment.
8. Rapport builder	tries to create a good relationship with and between learners.

You'll notice how teacher roles match with different aspects of teaching and with different stages of a lesson. We can be planners before the lesson, rapport builders during the warm-up and lead-in phase, language resources during the language input and practice phase, monitors during role-play, pair work activities or writing and assessors during the lesson, both formally and informally, and after the lesson when we are correcting learners' work. The teacher roles we adopt have to be appropriate for the teaching and learning context, the teaching approach, the lesson aims, the stage of the lesson, the type of activity and the age, level and attitude of the learners. A teacher using a PPP approach will, for example, at different times of the lesson, act as a controller, a model and a guide. However, these teacher roles are not so appropriate for a teacher using a communicative approach. Teacher roles more suitable for a communicative approach include facilitator, resource, provider of language, prompter.

Effective classroom management, organizing the classroom and the learners, is dependent on the teacher adopting appropriate roles. For example, when learners arrive late in class or misbehave, the teacher needs to deal with the situation appropriately to ensure that the learners understand that this is not acceptable behavior. In this situation, the teacher's role is primarily to maintain discipline. If, on the other hand, the teacher adopts inappropriate roles, this can have a negative effect on their classroom management. Imagine a situation where one learner is dominating the interaction in the classroom, resulting in other learners becoming annoyed and being unwilling to participate (take part in something). If the teacher lets the learner continue in a dominating role, he or she could lose the respect of the other students and will be less able to facilitate (make easier) their learning. However, if the teacher sets out clear classroom routines and codes of conduct in which learners take turns to participate and listen to each other's contributions, he or she will build rapport with the class and provide the learners with a more supportive learning environment.

There are several common situations in which a teacher has to adapt his or her role as appropriate to encourage smooth classroom management. These include learners not completing homework, monitoring learners during pair and group activities, learners failing to understand instructions, learners chatting during pair or group work and not focusing on the task.

The roles that teachers adopt also depend on the needs of the learners. With young learners, we might take on the role of a parent or a friend when a young student unwell or unhappy. With teenage or adult learners, two of the key teacher roles are those of motivating students and maintaining discipline (establishing a clear system of rules and codes of behavior). With adult students the teacher's roles are often those of facilitator, language resource and diagnostician.

- What we say, how we say it and what we do make our teacher roles clear to learners. When planning lessons, it is useful to first identify the roles we are going to take on during the lesson and then to think about what we are going to say do to convey that role clearly to the learners.
- It takes practice and experience to know which teacher roles are appropriate with which classes and for which activities. Less experienced teachers may feel comfortable using a limited number of roles at first and then gradually extending their range.
- Some problems with classroom discipline, classroom management and facilitating learning are a result of teachers not adopting appropriate teacher roles.
- Learners take time to get used to the teacher working in different roles. For example, learners who are more familiar with a teacher in the role of manager might be confused by a teacher who takes on the role of facilitator. It is useful to provide some learner training and to introduce the new roles slowly so that learners get used to new ways of working.
- It is important to be flexible in teacher roles. Sometimes roles need to be changed because of circumstances in the lesson. For example, when we are monitoring a task and realize that learners have not understood the key language, we take on the role of language resource to clarify the language point so that learners can continue with the task.
- It is sometimes necessary to take on roles we do not always feel comfortable with. When learners do not complete homework tasks, for example, teachers have to be firmer in managing the learners than they usually are. The ability to take on appropriate roles in class is important for establishing class rapport and maintaining a positive and effective learning environment in the classroom.

There are different ways in which we can organize our learners in the classroom. For example, learners can work on their own, as a whole class, in pairs, in teams, in groups. Organizing learners into different working patterns is what we mean by grouping learners.

When planning our lessons, we decide which way of grouping learners or interaction patterns to use. The interaction patterns we choose depend on the learners and their learning styles, our own teaching style (s) and preferences, the teaching approach, the learning context, the type of activity, the aim or learning purpose of the activity and the stage in the lesson. There are many different interaction patterns to choose from, for example whole class (the teacher leads the class and the learners focus on the teacher), individuals, open pairs (two learners do a pair work activity in front of the class), closed pairs (learners all do an activity at the same time working with a partner), groups, teams, mingles. Very often, the activity itself suggests a particular interaction pattern. Here are some examples:

Activity	Interaction pattern	Reason for using interaction pattern
Brainstorming	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Groups or pairs: students working with other students.</li> <li>2 Students to the teacher (feedback).</li> </ol>	Reviews and shares students' knowledge of vocabulary and/or structure and the topic or context: develops learning strategies;
Bingo game	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Whole class: teacher to the students</li> <li>2 Student to the teacher.</li> </ol>	Reviews students' understanding of vocabulary: gives a change of pace; gives the teacher feedback
Reading and filling in a chart	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Individuals (students complete the charts on their own).</li> <li>2 Pair work: student to student.</li> <li>3 Open pairs (checking answers). Student to student with the teacher facilitating.</li> </ol>	Calms students down, allows students to practise scanning in their own time: enables students to check their work together to give confidence before the class check.
Class survey	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Mingling activity: students move around the classroom asking questions of other students. Reviews students' understanding of.</li> <li>2 Groups or pairs (students compare and discuss their answers).</li> <li>3 Teacher asks different students in the class what they found out (feedback).</li> </ol>	Gives students practice in all four skills and in managing their learning: gives opportunities for large amounts of practice: gives a change of pace; develops learner autonomy, every student in the class is active and involved.

Appropriate learner groupings have a positive effect on class or group dynamics (the relationships between the learners in the class or group) and on the teacher's ability to successfully manage the class and facilitate learning. Whole-class activities, such as mingles, enable all the students to practice the language at the same time. These activities are good for increasing confidence, especially amongst shy or weaker learners. Individual activities give students a chance to work at their own pace and to focus and organize their thoughts. Pair and group activities provide students with opportunities for developing longer turns and fluency through interaction.

On the other hand, poorly chosen groupings can result in problems in the classroom. Here are a few examples of classroom problems with possible reasons for them:

<i>Classroom problems</i>	<i>Some possible reasons</i>
Learners misbehave, e.g. they use their mother tongue, become noisy, don't do the activity.	Some possible reasons Groups are too big: talkative learners are grouped with other talkative learners, friends are grouped with friends.
Learners are bored.	Learners are always in the same learner groupings.
Learners are very teacher-dependent.	Whole class work and individual work are the main learner groupings used, the teacher does not encourage or facilitate learner autonomy.
One or more learners dominate (has/have a strong influence on what happens/other learners get less chance to participate actively)	In whole-class or individual activities, the teacher allows the same learner (s) to answer, in pair and group work, dominating learners are paired with learners who allow themselves to be dominated.
One or more learners don't want to join in or participate.	There are few pair and group activities where learners are paired with other shy learners or with learners with whom they feel comfortable.
Some learners have nothing to do because they have finished the activity more quickly than others	Possible fast finishers are all grouped together rather than being mixed with learners of different working speeds.
Some learners are frustrated because they do not have time to finish the activity.	Slower learners are paired with slower learners.
Teachers are unable to monitor learners and learning successfully.	The above problems mean that the teacher has to manage the class and deal with difficulties rather than monitor and promote learning.

You can see from the table how much learner groupings can affect what happens in the classroom. Overall, it's important to have a balance and variety of learner groupings in any one lesson.

***The most important tips:***

It is useful to include a variety of interaction patterns in a lesson to keep the students interested and motivated and to give them different kinds of practice.

- Young learners do not have such fixed learning styles as adults and it is an important aspect of their development for teachers to introduce them to a range of learner groupings.
- All classes are mixed ability: students are at different points in their language learning, have different learning strengths and different intelligences.
- When grouping students in young learner classes, it is important to consider their cognitive and physical development. Young learners of the same age may not be at the same point in these aspects of development.

- Most of the time learners work well together in different groupings, but sometimes individual learner characteristics mean that some learners find it difficult to work together, e.g. one learner is shy and another is quite dominant.
- With a class of between 20 and 30 learners, we can manage a range of interaction patterns quite easily. With classes of more than 30 learners, interaction patterns such as pairs, groups, mingles, teams are possible, but need more careful planning.
- Gradual introduction of pair and group work is important when learners are used to working as a whole class. It is useful to start by doing short, quite structured pair-work activities and gradually introduce longer and more varied groupings.
- Activities do not always have to be done in the same learner groupings. Discussion activities can be done in teams rather than in groups or as a whole class, and role-plays in groups rather than pairs.
- Learners can be absent from class. It is frustrating when we plan groups for an activity and one or more of the learners are absent. So, it's important to consider how we will manage, for example, if the predicted class of 20 (5 groups of 4) is a class of 18 on the day.
- Sometimes a student arrives late for class after we have organized the groupings for the activity. You can deal with this by putting the student in a group and have the group explain quickly to him or her what they are doing.

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