

## STUDENTS ATTITUDE AND LEARNING

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The speaker began by giving brief, practical examples of how an audience's attitudes towards teachers, lectures and other focus-figures can change according to the messages they receive from that person. In so doing they determine the success, or lack it, of the interaction.

The point was then, made that «homo sapiens» is a naturally curious and enterprising animal; he/she shares with many other species, to such an extent that we might even rebaptize the species as «homo curiosus». Reference was made to an article by John Holt in which he chronicles the gradual degeneration of the ordinary child's level of interest and curiosity as she/he progresses through school. Mention was also made of Carl Rogers's view of Man as a basically self-motivating being orientated towards his own and fellow-creatures' good. It then follows that if our students often have negative attitudes, it is because somebody or something (many things over the years) has made them that way; and teachers must shoulder a large portion of the blame for this state of affairs.

Attitude was defined as the individual's reaction to and attempt to face up reality, both outside or inside him/herself. This reaction is shaded and moulded by the individual's perception (human beings are highly erratic perceivers, often better at picking up bad vibrations than good ones), group pressures (which make students different people in or out of class), self interest and values. Therefore, if we aim to change—that is, from our point of view, improve—attitudes, we shall have to deal with all these aspects of the problem. This is no easy task; in fact, compared to it, teaching is dead easy! However if we truly aspire to become good, professional teachers, then we must address ourselves to the problem of attitudes and become, in the speaker's words, «attitude engineers».

In principle, our students will often see us as the bearers of society's values and attitudes, and reject us out of hand for this fact. On top of this, we may often «turn people off» quite unwittingly in class by our body language or attitudes. There seems to often be a kind of balance between the teacher's and the student's attitudes; for example, an insecure teacher will have aggressive, «vindictive» students, a cold one, indifferent students; an authoritarian

teacher produces an insecure, uncreative class; a falsely enthusiastic teacher only breeds cynicism, and so on.

If, then, we really want to create positive attitudes in our students, and not just use their patent apathy as an excuse for our own faults, we must first examine our own attitudes to our students, teaching, our subject, English «culture», our work situation, life in general and ourselves. Secondly, we have to try to discover how we «come over» in class, how our students probably perceive us. Once we have done these two things, we can start to try to project ourselves more positively in class.

Apart from this, there are still a lot of things which deserve our full attention. We should, for instance, create in our classrooms a task-orientated atmosphere, in which the main reason for working is the intrinsic motivation of the task itself, irrespective of external rewards and punishments: teachers should learn to see better (to see at all) what is going on around them, and to sort out their priorities accordingly; they should endeavour to think as positively as possible; they ought to dominate as little as possible, and give their students as much freedom of choice as they can, or dare; any technique which encourages creativity in our students —for instance, discovery methods— helps tremendously; careful lesson planning will allow us to be in control all the time, and to really see our students; we must be genuine, and we should definitely try to get as deeply involved as possible in teaching, through our own observation, reading, attending seminars like this «Encuentro» and so on, since the more you put in, the more you (and your students) get out.

One excellent way of getting involved is through Action Research that is, research by the ordinary classroom teacher into what is going on in his/her own class environment. This is not the first time this approach to teaching, for which the late Lawrence Stenhouse is largely responsible, has been mentioned in an Encuentro — in fact, the Guadalajara teacher training college will be launching an Action Research course later this month. As an example of this technique, the speaker then went on to describe some research he had done at his own school in Córdoba, into the relationship between (you guessed it!) students' attitudes and their seating patterns in class. In this research, each of the 139 students attending the centre was rated according to his/her Active or Passive attitude at oral classwork.

The scale was:

<u>Label</u>	<u>Numerical score</u>
Active (A)	4
Active-Active-Passive (AAP)	3
Active-Passive(AP)	2
Active-Passive-Passive (APP)	1
Passive (P)	0

Seating plans were taken over a period of about a month, till a total of 48 plans had been built up. The scores per seat, per class were then noted down, and the total per seat divided by the number of times that the seat was used. The resulting score was the attitude

rating of that seat. Occupancy rates were also worked out in percentage terms, so it was possible to see not only where the more active students tended to sit, but also where occupancy rates were higher.

From all the data, a picture of my classroom emerged in which there were very clearly identifiable areas of high and low activity. Even bearing in mind that this is not absolute, in so far as an active student may occasionally sit in a passive area, and vice versa, it still gives highly useful information about what is happening «out there». Some of it confirmed my long-held suspicions, while other bits were quite surprising.

Comparison with data obtained from other teachers confirmed that they, too, had high and low activity areas, albeit in different patterns from mine.

In the next two stages of the project, the speaker intervened in his class seating patterns by sitting in a different position himself, and also by variously forcing students to change their positions. At the end of this process, patterns were taken again, and it was found that the high activity zones had got larger, while the top ratings had fallen from over 3 (on a maximum score of 4) to 2.74: at the same time, the passive areas had shrunk, while their ratings had risen from 1.33 to 1.77. Seen in the form of a graph, this new picture had noticeably flatter profiles. That is, the result of the intervention process was to move active and passive students around until the whole class pattern became much more homogeneous, avoiding over-dominance by the more active students and «hiding» by the more passive ones in areas that they considered safe.

In the last stage of the project, students were asked to identify the seats they liked best and least. This revealed other interesting trends — and also the fact that people often do not sit where they say they like best, but do sometimes congregate where they say they don't.

Quite aside from the knowledge gained about his own seating patterns in class (which are inevitably to some extent a reflection of his own teaching style) and ways of improving them. The speaker said the whole process had been fascinating and had taught him a lot more things, incidentally, about other aspects of teaching/learning. It had not only improved his students' attitudes towards classwork, but it had also boosted his own motivation. He was therefore in a position to recommend Action Research as a powerful tool for teachers development to his audience. He would be pleased to supply more information on his project, and on Action Research in general, to anyone who wished to write to him on the subject. He would also be delighted to be able, one day, to compare his data on seating patterns with that obtained by anyone else interested in carrying out similar research.

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