

PACE Your Class for Good Classroom Behavior Management

Barry Chametzky, Ph.D.

Adjunct Instructor at Ozarks Technical Community College, Springfield, MO 65802, United States

***Corresponding Author:**

Barry Chametzky, Ph.D

Email: barry@bluevine.net

Abstract: In a K-12 foreign language class, having good classroom behavior management skills is vital to learner success. If an instructor uses the target language during a grammar lesson and if the students do not comprehend the lesson or are bored, mayhem could ensue. What could a teacher do to prevent this? Good lesson organization using the PACE model of whole language learning is one way to avoid management issues. With the PACE model of whole language learning, educators are able to create an engaging, fun lesson while simultaneously grabbing the attention of the learners.

Keywords: Classroom management, foreign languages, communication

INTRODUCTION

I still remember being in elementary school, walking through the halls, and hearing Mrs. G. screaming loudly to her students through a closed door to be quiet and sit down. I was always scared when I had to walk past her classroom in spite of the fact that I had also heard that she was an excellent teacher. In those days, the ideas of teaching and discipline were considered as separate endeavors[1]. Today, however, a fellow educator, administrator, or student teacher would rightfully ask how she could be an excellent teacher if she had to resort to yelling for it is not possible to be one with the other [2].

Things have changed with respect to teaching and discipline in the last 40 years. Nonetheless, if one thing exists that makes new teachers cringe and scream, it has to be classroom management. According to Sandholtz [2], novice educators have determined that classroom management is “a prominent concern” (para. 5) in which they would like additional training. It would stand to reason, since educators would like additional guidance, that during teacher preparation programs, classroom management might be glossed over in favor of perhaps methodology or technology.

The issue of classroom management is important in foreign language classrooms for two reasons. First, limited research exists on the topic of classroom management and foreign language classrooms; though, during the past several years some educational researchers [3-4] have touched on the subject. Second, because of the various foreign language standards set forth by the American Council

on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) [5], teachers should be using the target language (also referred to as L2) in the classroom as much as possible. While using the L2 is a good thing, if the students don't understand what is going on in the target language and if a teacher is not proactive at the onset of the class, students will quickly become bored and disruptive. Thus, foreign language teachers may continually walk a tightrope between adhering to standards and having a smooth-running classroom.

But how does an educator have time for classroom management in a foreign language classroom? The objective of this researcher is to demonstrate how one particular type of foreign language methodology has several approaches to classroom management built into it. By using the whole language method described in this paper, along with a little bit of effort on his or her part, the teacher could successfully create an environment conducive to learning where behavior disruptions are minimized.

Before discussing the specific foreign language methodology vis-à-vis classroom management, a teacher should do one simple thing in the classroom to help him or her with behavior management: change the seating layout. While it is possible to teach students who sit in rows, the idea of a semi-circle[6] maximizes [7] the opportunities learners have to engage in meaningful peer interaction. In addition, with this type of seating in place, students are able to see and hear the teacher as well as each other thereby aiding in keeping the students on their toes. With this proactive approach to classroom management,

teachers ensure that all students are focused on him or her.

Whole Language learning

In the days of Mrs. G., foreign language learning was simply drill and kill—the colloquial way to describe grammar drills and fill-in-the-blank lessons. Students were generally bored and didn't see the need for this kind of mindless repetition. When learners are bored because they do not understand how the lesson or decontextualized rote repetition has value in their lives [8], students act out and disruption ensues. When this behavior occurs, teachers may sometimes go into the reactive management mode and become Mrs. G. They are now in a situation—not at all conducive to learning—in which the classroom is a *you-against-me* battleground. Unfortunately, this situation still is the case in some classrooms. Clearly, though, this method has gone out of favor.

Now that the classroom is ready, it is possible to discuss a foreign language methodology that, when put into practice, incorporates several important components of several different classroom management practices. By implementing a whole language learning approach in the classroom, teachers would be able to present the required material and *at the same time* have an atmosphere where learning becomes fun, engaging, and quick-paced. Many educational theorists [1, 9,10] have demonstrated that when the curriculum is engaging and based on students' interests, the incidence of disruption goes down. Certainly, if the students want to learn something, they will pay attention and be on task [8].

PACE.

The PACE method of whole language learning that I present in this paper was developed by Richard Donato and Bonnie Adair-Hauck [11] called PACE. The acronym *PACE* stands for the Presentation of meaningful language, Attention to some detail, Co-construction and explanation of the grammatical concept, and Extension activities. This method embodies several aspects of different classroom management theories and is an *ideal* way for the language teacher to minimize disruption and maximize efficiency in the classroom. The beauty of this method is its simplicity and adaptability to different learning situations. The various components will be broken down in turn.

Presentation of meaningful material.

With respect to classroom management, three aspects to the presentation of meaningful material need to be addressed. These aspects are as follows: 1) relevance, 2) comprehension, and 3) engagement. Conceptually, these aspects form the foundation for the PACE model.

In foreign language classes, educators must have a solid reason as to why a particular aspect of the language is taught in a particular manner. If the students can understand *why* they are going to learn about a topic such as likes and dislikes, they are able to relate more directly to the material. If students can relate to the material [8], then the likelihood is that their acting out or being off-task will be minimized because they are ready to learn [12].

The second aspect involves comprehension. When telling a story (in the L2), teachers need to check for comprehension as frequently as possible. Such a task could be accomplished by having the students *en masse* show thumbs up or thumbs down as a response to a simple yes/no question. In addition, while the teacher is telling the story, he or she should look around the room at the students' faces and determine whether they actually comprehend what is going on or not. In his seminal work, Kounin coined the term *withitness* [13] to mean having a sense of awareness and being proactive to what is going on in the classroom [6]. Glancing around the room and using the forced-choice alternative of thumbs up/down checks are fast and easy to do and do not detract from the story-telling experience. This acute awareness is a modified version of "See, Say, Do Teaching" [14,1] and is quite effective to keep students' attention focused on the subject matter material rather than on extraneous elements.

Finally, the lesson must somehow be engaging thereby involving the students in their own learning process. When a story is told, the teacher shouldn't be afraid to act it out by jumping or running around the classroom. Also, an educator must involve the students in the storytelling. If the story has repetitions, it is advisable to have the students say those words on cue. The more the teacher can engage the students, the more likely classroom management issues will be minimized [15] because students will not have time to be disruptive or redirect the educator from his or her task [6].

Attention to some detail.

On the surface, the idea of focusing on a particular detail of the lessons appears to have little relevance to classroom management. At this time in the lesson the teacher highlights some pattern in the language [11]. The task could be accomplished with various technological tools or a handout showing the text. As the educator asks questions about the patterns in the story, students offer potential reasons for the detail. From a management perspective, this step is important as it helps the students change focus from a teacher-centered lesson to more of a student-centered lesson. It is now up to the *students* to tell the teacher what is going on. The focus shift also helps keep the students alert and on-task because now *they* need to

produce information rather than taking a somewhat passive listening role.

Co-construction and explanation of the grammatical concept.

As students attempt to figure out the grammatical concepts of the lesson, they learn that taking risks and making mistakes are acceptable. While it is possible that some students are not ready or able to direct their own knowledge, it is very reasonable to have educators scaffold the learners in order to construct knowledge [12]. From an educational perspective and a classroom management perspective the idea of collaboratively constructing knowledge is valid. By having the teacher guide the students and the students coming up with their own theories, they are learning that it is acceptable to make mistakes and to take risks [16]. The students are also finding meaning in and are fully engaged in their own learning. When the entire class is busy co-constructing knowledge, the students are too busy to worry about inappropriate behavior.

Extension activities.

During the extension activities part of the PACE model the teacher creates activities that will help reinforce the newly presented material. During this time in the lesson, as with the other times, the teacher needs to be aware of the students and their classroom management needs. If their needs are being met, then the activities will proceed smoothly. I will present several different types of exercises designed to minimize classroom management issues while maximizing the opportunity for meaningful communication. I have used these exercises in my middle school, high school, and college foreign language classes with success. The activities may be easily tailored to non-foreign language classes as well.

In order to meet the students' needs, the teacher must learners busy with lots of relatively short activities. With lots of shorter activities, learners have a reduced opportunity to be bored and disruptive.

One way to avoid the nightmare of boredom would be to have frequent, rapid oral student production. Though the source is over 30 years old, the suggestions made by Rivers [17] are as cogent and pertinent then as they are now.

[A] class which is *kept actively involved* has little time or energy for disruptive behavior or for that common sport of all students: diverting the teacher from the main business of the day into fascinating bypaths. Choral response; rapid change of roles from teacher to group and group to group; constant shifting of response from individual to group and from group to individual; group practice of poorly assimilated items; brisk alternation of oral and

written work; questions asked of everyone, even the weakest, in no recognizable order so that students do not know at any moment when they will be called upon to participate; . . . all these techniques keep students' attention on the progress of the lesson. (p. 489)

Another type of extension activity is Total Physical Response, or TPR. With TPR, students are able to get up and move around thereby giving them the illusion of playing a game rather than doing work. From a management perspective, TPR is one type of "See, Say, Do Teaching" proposed by Jones [1]. With this activity, the teacher and class could play "Simon Says" using the newly taught material. This particular method is ideal to ensure a class where management issues do not happen. If the students are moving around *and having fun* at the same time, they are not thinking of disruptive behaviors.

Next, an educator might decide to create an exercise involving cooperative learning. Kagan [18] favored cooperative learning, as it would make use of the PIES principle of "Positive Interdependence, Individual Accountability, Equal Participation, and Simultaneous Interaction" (Section 1). These four elements are necessary in order to maximize the educational experience and allow collaborative group members to "to ensure they achieve not only as individuals, but also share in the success of group members when attaining goals" [19].

One example of cooperative learning would be an inner-outer circle activity where the class is divided into two groups—those who create an inner circle and those who create an outer circle. After the students have heard the story in an earlier portion of the lesson, with a story web in hand, the students in each circle face each other and tell each other the story with as many details as they can remember even if all that is possible is one word. Then, at a particular moment (perhaps every 30-60 seconds), the inner circle moves clockwise one student and the outer circle moves counter-clockwise one student. By setting a limited amount of time for each student to interact with his or her peers, the teacher is proactively preventing them from becoming disruptive and going off-task. During the 30-60 second periods, each student retells the story and adds details to his or her story web thanks to the help of the other students' with whom he or she has spoken. By the end of the activity, the students should have their webs completed.

From a behavioral perspective, this activity is excellent as it gets students out of their seats moving around. It also gives the students a chance to do some of the work thus enabling the teacher to listen and see how everyone is doing. The focus of this exercise, then, shifts from the teacher to the students. From a

classroom management perspective, if the students are fully engaged in their own learning and if they have a *meaningful purpose* to what they are doing, there is little opportunity for them to disrupt the class.

A final cooperative activity is Jeopardy. With the students in groups, the student at the head of each group must consult with each group member before deciding on an answer thus necessitating meaningful interaction. After the person at the head of the line given an answer, he or she moves to the end of the line so everyone gets an opportunity to offer an answer.

Summary

As Markham [20] mentioned, foreign language classes are not like other classes. In a foreign language class where practical, functional skills like speaking, writing, and reading are important, students who do not have the requisite vocabulary and knowledge may become easily frustrated. Frustration, coupled with the inability to express oneself in the target language could easily result in a classroom management issue—regardless of the educational level—for the educator. Thus, because of this unusual nature of a foreign language classroom, teachers need to employ numerous techniques to ensure that their classes are not plagued with management problems. One advantage educators would have using the PACE model of whole language learning, is the ability to be proactive vis-à-vis some classroom management issues. By being proactive, the teacher would be able to focus on the presentation of a good lesson.

Classroom behavior management problems may be reduced when using the PACE method for several additional reasons: (a) a varied teaching style, (b) the use of cooperative learning exercises, (c) the presentation of meaningful, contextualized language, and most importantly, (d) student engagement while learning. In order to master a foreign language, extended periods of scholarship must occur [21-22]. When students lack this sustained interest and motivation—which go beyond foreign language classes to any subject—discipline problems will ensue. It stands to reason, then, that the more a teacher can engage his or her students and hold their interests, the less likelihood of problems occurring in the classroom. Given the myriad of issues and requirements that educators must address in the 21st century, it seems reasonable to ask this question of educators: If you could reduce classroom management issues—even for a short period of time—why would you choose not to employ a method to help you accomplish what you were trained to do?

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