

Three Attitudes Toward Teaching Excellence

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An attitude is a mental position or feeling which develops into a driving force, in this case in one's teaching philosophy to excel in the profession. As I see it there are three main attitudes with which a teacher must be concerned: the humanistic, the scientific and the professional.

The Humanistic Attitude

For the teacher the humanistic attitude means primarily the teacher's love and enthusiasm for the students and the subject matter. The teacher enjoys and even considers it a privilege to be with people of a younger generation who are in a particular period of growth and, thereby, can be interested and inspired or, on the contrary, downright uninterested, obstinate and sometimes obnoxious. Nevertheless, the teacher tries to reach all students through the subject matter which has become a part of his/her inner core due to great interest, previous studies and teaching experience. The teacher feels that all or many aspects of the subject delight him/her and therefore, is pleased to share these with the students. For example, a language has its grammar, phonology, vocabulary, culture, history which many teachers find exciting. Undoubtedly this is a flaw in many teachers—they cannot get excited about their subject as a whole or in part. They are not in love with it.

For the student the humanistic attitude implies the need for phatic communion which is peer respect and recognition, and for a fearless, harmonious atmosphere. The student also needs self-esteem and the opportunity to realize his/her potential through which an important goal is fulfilled via the student's studies. Without the fulfillment of these needs, no cognitive or affective activity can take place.

The unsuccessful student requires the teacher's compassion, understanding and guidance. Many teachers don't take the time to find ways to reach such a student. A classmate who is willing to help could be assigned. A teacher's show of interest and not indifference goes a long way to help the student improve.

There are various activities that elicit humanistic values such as games, songs, picture exercises or simply video cassettes, music, etc. For example, G. Moskowitz (1975) presents 236 exercises with linguistic and

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communicative purposes, levels, size of groups, materials needed and procedures in her book *Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class*, a sourcebook of humanistic techniques.

The Scientific Attitude

First and foremost, the nonnative teacher should become aware of his/ her errors in structure, pronunciation, intonation and culture which may impede communication, set the wrong example for the students or be embarrassing to native speakers. Examples of these errors are:

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| <i>fucks</i> for <i>folks</i> | <i>who is</i> (↑) <i>she</i> for <i>who is</i> (↓) <i>she</i> |
| <i>bitch</i> for <i>beach</i> | <i>tell me where is he</i> for <i>tell me where he is</i> |
| <i>bottom hole</i> for <i>button hole</i> | <i>white house</i> for <i>white house</i> |
| <i>Jung</i> for <i>young</i> | <i>bread</i> for <i>cake or sweet roll</i> |
| <i>isn't</i> (↑) <i>he</i> for <i>isn't</i> (↓) <i>he</i> | |

Such errors can be eliminated if the teacher asks a friend to point them out and/or to observe a class. Then systematic, daily practice of the appropriate forms should follow.

Next of importance are general language facts which are a part of linguistics. The following are some examples:

1. A language has its unique systems of sounds, intonation and word arrangements.
2. Language is the essential element of a culture. All elements of culture are expressed in language.
3. Language is culturally acquired only. The individual learns language as s/he hears other speakers. It is not physical inheritance.
4. All languages change across time and space; geography produces differences in sounds, structure and vocabulary resulting in the formation of dialects.
5. Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society; it includes dialectology, discourse analysis, geolinguistics, and social psychology.
6. Psycholinguistics is the study of the mental processes involved in the perception, production and acquisition of a language; it contrasts the traditional learning of a language with acquisition.

Of what value are these facts for teachers? They help highlight significant aspects of linguistics such as culture and language. They point out relatively new discoveries in teaching which the teacher may investigate: acquisition vs. traditional language learning.

A third part of the scientific attitude is the lesson plan, the creation and evaluation of teaching materials and the textbook.

The value of a lesson plan is not only listing what points to cover but a way to go through a lesson in a brisk and thorough manner. It also gives an indication of the quality of the objectives, activities and procedures covered. For example, performance objectives have four parts (Valette, Disick 1972:17-18):

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| Student behavior | <i>Write and spell correctly the word that corresponds to each of the ten definitions given</i> |
| its purpose | <i>Show knowledge of ten vocabulary items</i> |
| its conditions | <i>On a fifteen minute test</i> |
| its evaluation | <i>Eight of the ten items must be entirely correct to pass the test.</i> |

The details of warm-ups, individual and group participation, pronunciation, structure, vocabulary and culture are necessary on a lesson plan which also allows space for feedback and teacher's comments.

Very often a teacher must write his/her own materials because the textbook exercises or explanations are inadequate or they do not satisfy student needs. For example, a communicative textbook refers to the American cultural pattern of using the expression "I'm sorry". However it didn't include all the situations after which the expression is used. Therefore, these were thought of, listed and copies made. The expression is used after an accident, an inappropriate, tactless remark, an oversight, forgetfulness and remorse. Here the important thing is to evaluate how authentic the examples are. Another example is that students need more than a minimal pair drill to better their pronunciation. They need minimal pair sentences, sentences with a repetition of sound contrasts, several words with the same difficult sounds, tongue twisters, chants, songs, anecdotes, and dialogues. A very special book for all this variety of sound practice is *Pronunciation Pairs*.

What would teachers do without a textbook? How dependent some teachers are on the mighty textbook! How can they become so routine, unoriginal and uncreative forgetting that they are the masters and not the textbook. To be of service a textbook must be updated with what is the current methodology. However there are some authors who maintain that the enlightened innovations of today should be used and yet the best of yesterday's traditions should be retained. Other authors claim that their textbook

is multidimensional: it handles structures, vocabulary and functions at the same time. (Carrubba 1990: 486) A checklist of essentials for an adequate textbook is:

1. *attractive format*
2. *communicative methodology*
 - grammar related to functions*
 - vocabulary related to functions*
 - pronunciation related to functions*
 - culture related to functions*
 - practice of four skills*
3. *practices from other methodologies*
4. *creativity space*
5. *point of view: children's, adolescent's, adult's*
6. *reading selections or story line*
7. *consideration of different learning styles and multiple intelligences*
8. *activities for individual, small, large groups*
9. *accompanying cassettes, student's book, teacher's guide*
10. *appendix of songs, games, special structures, vocabulary*
11. *phrasal verbs, idioms, acronyms, false cognates*

The Professional Attitude

In my book *A Sourcebook for English Teachers* the section on the professional attitude includes teacher development, proficiency in English, adequate preparation, continuous study, intellectual life, leadership, and physical fitness. For the sake of brevity, I shall include teacher development, successful teaching and intellectual life in this article.

Growth or more specifically, teacher development is that lapse of time from the beginning trial and error experience to that of successful teaching. Even though some teachers develop less desirable traits which cause considerable personality damage under the stresses and demands of the profession, others find these problems the means of growth, a way to personality enrichment and fulfillment. Each year of teaching makes their personalities more desired and desirable; they are “kindly, stimulating mature, thoughtful, objective, confident, joyful, sincere, and creative”. (Pulias, Young 1969: 254-256)

Successful teaching is the culmination of teacher development. The teacher enables the students to learn with successful, desirable results. S/he praises the students for their achievements and uses appropriate instructional materials and settings; s/he upholds and expresses high expectations of

learning to the students. The teacher sets the stage for self-learning by means of individual, pair, small and large group arrangements in which s/he assumes the role of facilitator and helper and promotes rapport by providing interest, challenge and enjoyment for the class. The teacher knows the craft of teaching which is the specific knowledge of subject matter and its teaching and teaching in general. S/he knows the art of teaching which is the combination of knowledge and experience and of decision making in the interaction with learners.(based on Richards, Nunan 1990: 247-248)

The term intellectual life sounds perhaps rather erudite and unattainable by ordinary mortals. This is not the case at all. We all need to decrease our narrowness of mind if we are interested in development. Highly recommendable steps in this direction are: (1) read outside of our specialty, (2) cultivate associates and friends outside of our specialized field, (3) participate in cultural and recreational activities, (4) travel, (5) have broad interests, (6) be strongly related to the world of nature, (7) have some sort of spiritual life to lift us out of self concern. (Pulias, Young 1968: 18)

The intellectual life also embraces an interest in the liberal arts which include language, history, philosophy, the arts, and natural and social sciences. These humanities, as they are also called, are pursued to develop the general intellectual capacities of reason and judgment as opposed to professional or vocational skills.

Another way to look at development within the intellectual life is to realize that it continuously prolongs and renews life. It consists of growth in knowledge and in being. Growth in knowledge consists of knowing oneself, knowing the nature of man and his achievements and the natural world and finally our own specialized field. Growth in being includes sensitivity to various human experiences and to music and art, love in all its phases, self-determination and humility (reverence and awe). (Pulias, Young 1968:269).

Conclusion

As we have seen, the three attitudes lead to many intriguing facets of teaching and above all to teacher development. The attitudes can be said to overlap in different ways. They lead to excellence in the effort the teacher must make in his/her preparation and daily work and in the accomplishments s/he gains. When this effort is mingled with love and enthusiasm, the teacher can reach great heights.

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