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Patterns of Communication

There are various patterns of communication an ESL/EFL teacher can use to change the dynamics of his or her class. Varying these different patterns help change and improve the atmosphere of the class. Some of these patterns are teacher-centred and some are student-centred. When patterns are teacher-centred, they are easily controlled by the teacher. The teacher plays the dominant role, e.g. they decide on a topic of discussion, what is relevant to that topic, who participates, and when. When the patterns are student-centred, it gives the students freer practice with the language, e.g. when students work in small groups, they have more opportunity to control what they talk about and who they talk to. Student-centred patterns are generally better for students as they can practice using language in a more personalized way.

Teachers need to be able to recognize what effects these patterns of communication have on their students and how they participate in class. These patterns shape the way students use language and their second language acquisition. Below are some patterns of communication you will normally find in an ESL/EFL classroom.

Individual work: The teacher gives a reading or writing task that learners work on by themselves.

Group work / Pair work: Students work in pairs or small groups on a set task that require interaction. This is student-centred as the students get to play with the language. Pair work and group work gives the teacher a chance to observe and check the understanding of the students.

Open-ended teacher questioning: The teacher asks a series of questions, which have a variety of answers, depending on the students' thoughts.

Closed-ended teacher questioning: The teacher asks different yes/no questions to the students. This is teacher-centred as the teacher controls the language that the students can use. Furthermore, the answer given is only of one type.

Full-class interaction: The students debate, discuss, or complete a task where they interact as a whole class.

Choral response: This is another teacher-centred activity where the teacher conducts a drill. The students simply repeat what the teacher says.

Lecture: The teacher gives a monologue presentation to the students. The students don't need to interact, just listen.

Homework / E-learning: Students work alone outside of the ESL/EFL classroom or over the Internet to complete a task set by the teacher.