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Using Correction in Class

Correction is a vital part of teaching English. There are various methods of correcting, each has its pros and cons. Take a look at the different methods below and try to vary the methods you use in your classes.

Self-correcting

In this method, students correct any mistakes they have made on their own. This makes the correction more memorable for the student, as they work out their mistakes for themselves. This also encourages independence from the teacher and gives the student more motivation and confidence. Furthermore, this helps the student take responsibility for their own learning. Students learn to recognise their own problem areas and gain a better awareness of the language. On the downside, students may not understand how to self-correct or be clear on the correct language to use. This could lead to the reinforcement of errors. There is also a chance that students may not recognize the mistakes they are making. The student may also over-correct or become too self-conscious about errors. It's better for students to use self-correcting with another correcting method. In this way, they get the most benefit.

An easy way to get a student to self-correct when speaking is to use phrases like 'Sorry?' 'Could you say that again?' or 'What was that?' The student will then repeat what he/she said and in most cases they correct their mistake. If a student is still having problems, write the sentence down on the board, and ask him/her to find the mistake. You could also leave a blank where the mistake was made and ask the student to fill in the blank.

When you want students to self-correct when writing, write down the number of mistakes they made and indicate the type of mistake. Then have them try to find the mistakes and correct them. Try to focus on one type of mistake, e.g. past tense verb forms, spelling, articles, etc. A page full of red pen marks is no good to anyone.

Student to Student Correction

Another way to correct in the classroom is student to student. In this method, a student works together with one of their peers to correct their mistakes. Students find it easier to accept correction from a classmate than a teacher. This method works best during conversational activities as students can listen, identify, and correct any mistakes their partner makes. You could also use this method with a 'Find the mistake' worksheet by getting the pairs to discuss and correct the mistakes together. When students help each other, it encourages them to listen and become more involved in the ESL/EFL class.

There are some disadvantages to this method. The students offering the correction may not give the right answer or may not identify the mistakes correctly. There may be miscommunication between the two students if they are not concentrating. Furthermore, students may be slow or unclear in their correction.

One way to combat these problems is for the students to do group correction. This can be done in small groups during a group activity, such as a role-play, presentation, etc. Have the students note down any mistakes their group members make for a feedback session afterwards. You could also ask one student to sit out, observe and make notes. In this method, stronger students help weaker students in the group. Students are likely to make similar mistakes and these mistakes are more likely to be noticed. Therefore, all the students get reinforcement of the correct language. Group correction also builds teamwork and a sense of support in the classroom.

Teacher to Student Correction

This is probably the most common and overused method of correction in the ESL/EFL classroom. The teacher helps the student by identifying any mistakes and giving immediate and accurate correction supported by clear explanations and examples. This method should only be used in the early stages of a lesson when students first practice the target language. At this time, students won't be familiar with the new language and will need help and direction from the teacher to know what's right and wrong. The teacher can use modelling or highlighting to catch any errors in the early stages, before they are repeated by the students. The teacher can also focus on common errors made as a class rather than picking on individual students. When working alongside the teacher, students can help in analyzing errors made by other students.

However, teacher to student error correction creates a teacher-centered classroom. If it is used too often or later in the lesson, it stops students taking responsibility for their learning and prevents students from noticing their mistakes. It can also be very demanding on the teacher and threaten the confidence of the students.

If you are correcting in the class, be aware of other students who may feel left out while the correction is taking place. This can lead to loss of interest or distraction. Make sure the other students are doing something to keep them focused while you are correcting a student. One important thing to remember when correcting a student's work is not to highlight every single mistake the student makes, just correct one particular kind of mistake that the student has a problem with. As a result, the student will better understand the mistakes they are making.