

■ EDITORS: C N CANDLIN & H G WIDDOWSON ■

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■ A SCHEME FOR TEACHER EDUCATION ■

Roles of Teachers & Learners

TONY WRIGHT

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Language Teaching:
A Scheme for Teacher Education

Editors: C N Candlin and H G Widdowson

Roles of Teachers and Learners

Tony Wright

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For Linda, Timothy, and Elizabeth

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Through work with The British Council, The Council of Europe, and other agencies, both Editors have had extensive and varied experience of language teaching, teacher education, and curriculum development overseas, and both contribute to seminars, conferences, and professional journals.

Introduction

Roles of Teachers and Learners

The purpose of this book is to explore the ways in which role influences the teaching/learning process. Many different and complex factors influence the roles that teachers and learners adopt in the classroom. An appreciation of these factors is essential if we are to understand teaching and learning activities. Although often the social and psychological factors inherent in the roles are hidden, the process of learning a language in the classroom is underpinned by this teacher/learner relationship. It is further enriched by the part played by learning materials and the types of role implicit in the materials that are used.

We begin our investigations in the classroom and see what evidence there is of role behaviour in the extracts that follow. They are both descriptions of classroom language learning activity.

As you read them, consider the following:

Are the activities described similar to the sorts of activity that you use in your classrooms?

What do the teachers contribute to the activities described?

What do the learners contribute to the activities described?

What evidence is there that teachers and learners are working in harmony in the activities described?

Is there any evidence of a mismatch between teacher and learner contributions to the activities?

In what way do any of the activities differ from your own classroom?

Would you describe either of these classrooms as 'ideal'?

Classroom 1

From the classroom across the way comes the sound of voices. The lesson has already begun. As our observers settle down, they hear the class repeating sentences in the new language in chorus, imitating the pronunciation and intonation of the teacher. They are learning the various utterances in a dialogue based on an everyday incident in the life of a student in the country where the language is spoken. Some sketches illustrating the meaning of the sentences the students are repeating have been drawn on the chalkboard. The students are not looking at these clues, but are intent on watching the lip movements and the expressions of the teacher. From time to time,

however, individual students will glance at the sketches as if to reassure themselves that they really understand the meaning of what they are saying. The students' textbooks are closed.

When a pair of sentences is being repeated well in chorus, the teacher asks halves of the class to repeat this section, one in response to the other. When these smaller groups are repeating well, he asks the students to repeat the sentences by rows. Since the sentences seem now to be well memorized, the teacher calls on individuals to repeat the new sentences, sometimes in association with sentences learnt the previous day. If the individuals falter, the teacher returns to interchanges between small groups or reverts to choral repetition until the difficult part has been mastered . . .

(Rivers 1981: 4–5)

Classroom 2

The [. . .] instructor [. . .] was drilling the class in the difference between the 'present simple' and the 'present continuous'. There were twenty very thin, very eager boys aged between fourteen and twenty-two. They had been trained to compete continually against each other, so that the lesson turned into a kind of noisy greyhound race. The moment the instructor was half-way through a question, his voice was drowned by shouts of 'Teacher! Teacher! Teacher!' and I lost sight of him behind a thicket of urgently raised hands. If a student began to stumble over an answer, the others fought to grab the question for themselves, bellowing for Teacher's attention. [. . .]

The drill centred on two oilcloth pictures which had been hung on the blackboard . . .

(Raban 1979: 239)

In both of the classes described above and generally in classrooms, participants, teachers and learners alike, adopt *roles*. Through their *behaviour* in the classroom they express these roles. For example, the types of response that learners give to teachers' directions and the types of task and question that teachers pose for learners are evidence of a distinctive set of relationships. Working patterns and even seating patterns are also relevant to our understanding of these relationships.

It is unlikely that your classroom is exactly like either of those described above, but the questions you have already asked and answered are the first steps in an investigation of teacher/learner role.

The key questions to carry forward are as follows:

What social and psychological factors contribute to the task of teaching?

What social and psychological factors contribute to the task of learning?

How do the two tasks interrelate socially and psychologically?

This book in common with others in the scheme consists of three sections. Section One *defines* social roles and considers factors influencing teacher and learner roles. Section Two *describes* teacher and learner roles in the classroom. In Section Three the reader can then *explore* the ideas and practices considered in the previous sections so that the extent of their relevance and feasibility can be evaluated in the actual process of teaching. The tasks which are proposed here, with their clear specification of aims and procedures and kinds of evaluation required, are designed to enable the reader to investigate teacher and learner roles in their own classrooms. *Note:* In this book, learners and teachers are referred to as 'he', 'him', etc. for stylistic convenience. These are intended as unmarked forms.

Tony Wright

Language Teaching: A Scheme for Teacher Education

The purpose of this scheme of books is to engage language teachers in a process of continual professional development. We have designed it so as to guide teachers towards the critical appraisal of ideas and the informed application of these ideas in their own classrooms. The scheme provides the means for teachers to take the initiative themselves in pedagogic planning. The emphasis is on critical enquiry as a basis for effective action.

We believe that advances in language teaching stem from the independent efforts of teachers in their own classrooms. This independence is not brought about by imposing fixed ideas and promoting fashionable formulas. It can only occur where teachers, individually or collectively, explore principles and experiment with techniques. Our purpose is to offer guidance on how this might be achieved.

The scheme consists of three sub-series of books covering areas of enquiry and practice of immediate relevance to language teaching and learning. Sub-series 1 focuses on areas of *language knowledge*, with books linked to the conventional levels of linguistic description: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. Sub-series 2 focuses on different *modes of behaviour* which realize this knowledge. It is concerned with the pedagogic skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Sub-series 3 (of which this present volume forms a part) focuses on a variety of *modes of action* which are needed if this knowledge and behaviour is to be acquired in the operation of language teaching. The books in this sub-series have to do with such topics as syllabus design, the content of language courses, and aspects of methodology, and evaluation.

This sub-division of the field is not meant to suggest that different topics can be dealt with in isolation. On the contrary, the concept of a scheme implies making coherent links between all these different areas of enquiry and activity. We wish to emphasize how their integration formalizes the complex factors present in any teaching process. Each book, then, highlights a particular topic, but also deals contingently with other issues, themselves treated as focal in other books in the series. Clearly, an enquiry into a mode of behaviour like speaking, for example, must also refer to aspects of language knowledge which it realizes. It must also connect to modes of action which can be directed at developing this behaviour in learners. As elements of the whole scheme, therefore, books cross-refer both within and across the different sub-series.

This principle of cross-reference which links the elements of the scheme is also applied to the internal design of the different inter-related books within it. Thus, each book contains three sections, which, by a combination of text and task, engage the reader in a principled enquiry into ideas and practices. The first section of each book makes explicit those theoretical ideas which bear on the topic in question. It provides a conceptual framework for those sections which follow. Here the text has a mainly *explanatory* function, and the tasks serve to clarify and consolidate the points raised. The second section shifts the focus of attention to how the ideas from Section One relate to activities in the classroom. Here the text is concerned with *demonstration*, and the tasks are designed to get readers to evaluate suggestions for teaching in reference both to the ideas from Section One and also to their own teaching experience. In the third section this experience is projected into future work. Here the set of tasks, modelled on those in Section Two, are designed to be carried out by the reader as a combination of teaching techniques and action research in the actual classroom. It is this section that renews the reader's contact with reality: the ideas expounded in Section One and linked to pedagogic practice in Section Two are now to be systematically *tested out* in the process of classroom teaching.

If language teaching is to be a genuinely professional enterprise, it requires continual experimentation and evaluation on the part of practitioners whereby in seeking to be more effective in their pedagogy they provide at the same time — and as a corollary — for their own continuing education. It is our aim in this scheme to promote this dual purpose.

Christopher N. Candlin
Henry Widdowson

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SECTION ONE

Teaching and learning as social activities

1 What is a role?

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1982) defines 'role' as:

actor's part; one's function, what person or thing is appointed or expected to do.

In our daily lives, we fulfil roles that have features of all these defining characteristics. We are, in a multitude of ways, actors of *social roles*.

We have roles in society – we play parts in society. These differ: some roles are hard to avoid (e.g. father); some roles may be thrust upon us by circumstances (e.g. school pupil); on the other hand, we choose for ourselves many of the roles we fulfil (e.g. teacher).

Whatever the case, once we are placed or place ourselves in a role, others will expect certain types of behaviour of us.

Actors and social actors

Although we 'play parts' in society, the parts differ from an actor's roles in several ways as well as being similar in others. For instance, once an actor is cast in a certain role, he cannot change it. The role is restricted to the range of behaviour and the place in the drama that the writer has chosen for that role. Thus an actor plays 'hero' or 'villain' within the framework already laid down by the writer. Despite this restriction, theatrical roles are open to interpretation in much the same way as we are able to interpret our social roles.

However, our 'life roles' are more flexible and fluid. In a drama, the same lines will always be spoken; in life, we rarely if ever play out our roles in precisely the same way on every occasion. Circumstances change. None the less, we can discern patterns of behaviour in social roles.

1.1 Defining social roles

If we pick up a newspaper and read, at random, reports on various events, we commonly find people identified by both their name *and* occupation. In the extracts below, the occupational 'roles' are in bold.

Dr Prem Misra, **Consultant Psychiatrist** at Duke Street Hospital in Glasgow, revealed that he has treated four teenage boys after they became computer addicts . . .

and

The Daily Mirror will resume production tonight after Mr Robert

Maxwell, publisher of Mirror Group Newspapers, struck a settlement with the National Graphical Association print union.

When a person's name is very well-known, only the 'role' is mentioned. For example:

The Prime Minister has decided not to bring Mr Cecil Parkinson back into her government . . .

(*The Guardian* 2.9.85)

Superficially, occupations seem to define social roles and, in most societies, the chief defining characteristic of a role is the occupational aspect. However, there are other features which define roles. In order to discuss these, let us take an example – an airline pilot.

Doing

Picture the uniformed pilot sitting at the controls of his aircraft. In this position, he operates the controls, reads the instruments and performs various manoeuvres such as taking off and landing, climbing, cruising, and turning. The pilot flies the aircraft.

Talking

He is not alone though. In the cockpit he talks to the co-pilot, navigator, and engineer about various technical aspects of flying the plane. He also communicates with ground stations in order to give details of the flight and to ask for information and assistance, among other things. Flying a plane also involves talking to people; although the pilot makes decisions, he relies on others to help him reach these decisions, simply because he is unable to be in possession of all the information he needs at any one time.

More than one role

The pilot does not only fly the plane; he is also captain. He is at the head of a chain of command which is responsible for the smooth operation of the aircraft's functions as restaurant, cinema, and dormitory – the aircraft, too, has many roles. As captain, he is ultimately responsible for the safety of the passengers. The two roles overlap here – the plane has to be flown safely and the pilot has to react to unforeseen emergencies such as mechanical failure or bad weather conditions. The captain has to react to emergencies – in the extreme, a hijacking – which may endanger the passengers. Both roles involve human contact, but of differing types.

Expectations

In order to test out some of your ideas about an airline pilot's roles, now imagine you are a passenger on a plane. It so happens that the pilot is a young man in his twenties, with uncombed hair, dirty clothes, and wearing sandals. When he comes out of the cockpit during the flight, an unlit handrolled cigarette hangs from his mouth and he has a can of beer in his hand. He proceeds to make passes at all the young women on the flight, including the stewardesses. He then returns to the cockpit and, over the intercom, denounces the political rulers of his country and the management of the company which employs him.

Would you panic? Would you be outraged? Would you lose confidence in the pilot's ability to fly the plane smoothly? Would your *expectations* of the pilot be disappointed? It is likely that they would.

In short, *there is more to a role than just doing a job!* Furthermore, the role in question is governed both by our expectations and the *actual behaviour* of the pilot. The two are very closely related. The fact that our pilot has certain social habits and political views *should* be irrelevant to his function as a pilot. But we probably expect him to be politically neutral on duty, to wear the standard uniform and behave in a 'professional' manner towards the passengers and crew. Any behaviour that is not detached, impersonal and cool might prevent him from flying the plane safely. We expect a pilot to be a pilot.

► TASK 1

We have seen the sort of behaviour that a pilot might indulge in which is contrary to our expectations. Can you now draw up a scenario in which a teacher is behaving contrary to expectations? By doing so, you will clarify your own expectations of a teacher's 'in-role' behaviour.

When you have done this, do the same for the learner.

Remember to think of the 'work' teachers and learners traditionally have to do and how they communicate.

We have identified the main role-defining characteristics of an airline pilot. You have, by constructing the 'anti-teacher' and 'anti-learner', done the same for teacher and learner. The main characteristics of a social role are:

- 1 The *work done* and *job-related* activities.
- 2 The *relationships* and *communications* they have with others. These help to define the role more clearly.
- 3 *Beliefs* and *attitudes*.

You may also consider that the *use of a uniform*, *sex*, *age*, and any *special abilities* further define the role. These do not necessarily affect behaviour, however.

► TASK 2

Now examine the list of occupations and social positions below. For each one, note down your expectations as to their role behaviour according to the characteristics of role discussed.

| | | | |
|----------|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| father | grandparent | librarian | mechanic |
| mother | judge | teacher | civil servant |
| uncle | bus driver | priest | journalist |
| son | accountant | doctor | |
| daughter | salesman | detective | |