

TEACHER'S ACTION ZONE IN FACILITATING GROUP DYNAMICS

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Abstract: As believed by many researchers (Dörnyei & Murphey 2003, Hadfield 1992), classroom climate is strongly determined by the dynamics of the learning group and its development over time. For this reason, the role of the teacher in facilitating group processes seems to be of primary importance since it is the teacher who has long been regarded as the group leader in both teacher-centred and learner-centred classrooms.

The presentation focuses not only on positive but also on negative forms of classroom dynamics together with management techniques for dealing with conflicts, educational alienation and psychological defensiveness. This, in turn, leads to the concept of facilitator style based on Heron's (2006) model of facilitation, which consists of six dimensions and three modes. In the paper particular emphasis is placed on the presentation and comparison of various theories of leadership, namely Heron's system of facilitation, Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership theory (1982) and Bass and Avolio's transactional versus transformational leadership theory (1984).

Keywords: classroom dynamics, facilitation, group development, teacher as a group leader

1 - Introduction

Since group climate and cohesiveness are both of fundamental importance to the process of learning a foreign language, the theme of facilitating group dynamics in terms of classroom management has become a very significant aspect of language teaching. Through initial observation the teacher becomes more aware of group dynamics and the need for its facilitation. S/he is able to create the positive classroom climate so desirable for successful language learning. The support provided by the teacher helps the students to create a positive classroom atmosphere and become more goal-oriented. Because of that, being an active group leader the teacher becomes much more responsible for classroom dynamics.

2 - Group formation and development (Tuckman 1965)

Since groups develop constantly over time, the processes within groups do not stay still. The role of the teacher-facilitator in the process of group formation

and development is to recognize that group processes evolve according to some general patterns, which are similar for different learning groups. The teacher who has a sense of group development becomes more aware of the processes taking place in a group and interaction among group members. According to Tuckman (1965), there are four stages of group development which have a great impact and relevance for the study of the classroom context:

- Stage 1 Forming: Students are anxious and dependent on a teacher. They try out new methods and look for acceptable behaviour, rules and norms.
- Stage 2 Storming: Students rebel against each other and the leader (the teacher). They can't accept the norms and rules or concentrate on a given task to fulfil it successfully.
- Stage 3 Norming: The group becomes more cohesive, students help each other in order to reach their aim. They begin to accept the norms and their roles. The group does not get out of control, students eagerly exchange their views.
- Stage 4 Performing: Everybody contributes to task completion. All problems are resolved, solutions are easily found. Members of the group concentrate on the interpersonal relations.

As Tuckman (1965) claims, there is a clear division of group development into four phases, each of which is immediately visible and can be recognized by the teacher. The obvious disadvantage is that Tuckman does not take into consideration the fact that different groups develop in different ways. That is why his view of group development is not flexible enough.

3 - The importance of dissolution in group development (Dörnyei & Ehrman 1998)

As mentioned already by Tuckman (1965) and others (e.g. Schmuck & Schmuck 2001) groups go through four developmental stages. However, these models seem to be over simple since they do not include the last stage of classroom performance which finishes the course. It is taken into account by Dörnyei and Ehrman (1998), though. They stress the importance of finishing the course with positive feelings and having certain learning goals for the nearest future. The authors believe that all groups, including learner groups, follow similar phases through their lives.

According to Dörnyei and Ehrman (1998), the teacher-facilitator should prepare the group for the life and time spent outside the learning group. The dissolution stage helps to evaluate what the group has accomplished as well as to define goals for the future. Learners usually need guidelines in order to maintain what they have already learnt and improve their language skills. During this "ending-the-group-life stage" (Hadfield 1992: 163) the members should also be given the opportunity to express their feelings about the group, the teacher and the process of learning. An appropriate closure of the group life allows for some affirmation of what has been achieved and celebrating the moment of rounding up the group experience. It needs to be stressed, that language classes are usually small groups in which active communication among group members take place. As a result, the learners get to

know each other well and group dynamics occurs. For this reason, each and every group cannot be left without a proper closure of the emotional issues.

4 - Positive and negative forms of group dynamics

As it has been already mentioned, group dynamics evolves and develops through the history of a group. Because of that, there is no reliable rule about group management universal for all teacher-facilitators. The interaction and energy among the learners change constantly and may take different forms, both positive and negative.

Heron (2006) sees positive forms of group dynamics in the characteristics of a successful group. According to him, the group should be task- and process-oriented. Generally, it means that the students cooperate with each other and with the teacher as well as being involved in the learning process by solving problems and making decisions. Apart from being interactive, the group should also be personal work oriented. In a successful group the students know how to engage in interpersonal work and feedback but they are also able to concentrate on their individual work which is of great importance to classroom dynamics. If the students know how to express their personal feelings and emotions, the group becomes more cohesive due to honesty and trust among the group members. Such positive attitudes of the learners help to confront problems and conflicts which may arise at any time during the group life.

Unfortunately, the positive forms of classroom dynamics have their negative counterparts because of which the learning process may be distorted or held back (Heron 2006). The first form of negative group dynamics is educational alienation which means that the group seems to be limited to only one learning objective. Very often it may take the form of the alienation of intellect when the group pursues only the mental objectives while the emotional life of the group is left aside. The reverse kind of alienation may also take place. The students become so concerned with the emotional side of learning that they forget about the learning process itself. Since a single-stranded learning objective is not recommended, both types of alienated group dynamics are dangerous for the group processes. The second form of negative dynamics is psychological defensiveness which may arise at different stages of a group's history. The main source of negative feelings in a group is usually the anxiety of the learners. This tension may be connected with lack of acceptance or fear of performance. Members' anxiety can also be generated by other threatening issues like group conflict, fear of teacher's authority and control, lack of mastery or competence.

It should be remembered that all forms of group dynamics, both positive and negative, can be controlled and facilitated by the teacher. Effective facilitation can be supported by switching between different strands of learning and creating a holistic course design.

5 - The teacher as group leader

A successful leadership may have a great impact on facilitating group dynamics. Because of that, the teacher should be more aware of what effective leadership entails. This also implies that there is not one universal style of leadership. An

effective 'leader-facilitator' knows what the group needs at a given time and which leadership style would be the most desirable one. Generally, it is believed that one leadership style is not necessarily better than another. The leader's behaviour will depend on the stage of group development and other circumstances during the life of a group, e.g. dealing with conflicts, promoting learner autonomy, etc.

Since leadership is a complex process, there are various leadership theories across different branches of psychology which try to provide clear evidence that leadership really matters. Not all of them may be applied to classroom context, though. On the basis of five different leadership theories, the portrait of the optimal 'teacher-leader' will be presented.

5.1 - Lewin's three leadership styles (1939)

Over seventy years ago Lewin and his colleagues conducted very influential studies in social psychology (Lewin et al. 1939). While working in a summer camp with American children they decided to examine how the children would react to different group leadership styles, namely authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire. The research was aimed at showing the differences in social behaviour and group productivity under three different leadership styles.

Authoritarian leadership is based on complete control over the group. In the democratic and laissez-faire style the role of a teacher as a leader is limited since the students are involved in the decision making process and they share the leadership function. Lewin and his colleagues (1939) found that the autocratic groups were more productive than two other groups; however, the quality of their work was lower than in the democratic ones. The researchers also observed that the laissez-faire groups were the least productive since the absence of the leader caused disruptive behaviour and lack of work organization. From the perspective of group climate, the democratic groups were found to have a friendlier atmosphere and better intermember relations. The students were more willing to cooperate despite limited teacher's leadership.

The research conducted by Lewin et al. (1939) proves that a democratic, participatory leadership is more likely to facilitate the process of group formation and development. Learners are believed (Schmuck & Schmuck 2001) to be more satisfied if allowed to participate in group decisions.

5.2 - Rogers' three attributes of the effective facilitator (1961)

The concept of the group leader as the facilitator originates in psychotherapy. Group facilitation stresses the importance of a learner-centred classroom and a positive classroom climate. Thus, the teacher is no longer the key figure in the learning process – s/he becomes a partner in creating successful classroom dynamics. According to Rogers (1961), functioning as a facilitator of learning, the leader needs to possess three basic characteristics: empathy, acceptance and congruence.

An empathic leader knows how to interpret and respond to learners' emotions. In the classroom context, it requires being sensitive to the group climate and

students' needs. Similar to empathy, acceptance refers to the leader's positive attitude towards the students and processes throughout the group life. Leader's congruence could be defined as a rapport within oneself which is perceived by other people as honesty and certainty. Congruence as a leader's attribute may pose some problems to teachers. First of all, teachers who are not very confident in themselves tend to feel reluctant to admit to their mistakes. Secondly, teachers need to have the right to bring their personal feelings into the life of a group. Being honest and true about one's emotions helps to avoid situations in which leader's authority is undermined by lack of trust on the side of the students.

5.3 - Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership theory (1982)

The situational-leadership theory proposed by Hersey and Blanchard (1982) originates in organisational psychology. It rests on two types of leader behaviour:

- relationship behaviour, which concentrates on meeting the personal needs of the students and creating positive classroom dynamics
- task leadership, which focuses on fulfilling the task and achieving group goals

Hersey and Blanchard (1982) claim that leaders should vary the emphasis on the type of their behaviour in order to cope with changing processes occurring at different levels of group development. Table 1 presents different types of a leader/ leadership styles suitable for all stages of group development.

Table 1 - Hersey and Blanchard's situational-leadership theory (1982) with reference to group dynamics

STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT	TYPE OF LEADER	LEADERSHIP STYLE
forming	high-task/low-relationship	telling
storming	high-task/high-relationship	selling
norming	low-task/high-relationship	participating
performing	low-task/low-relationship	delegating

At the forming stage of group development the teacher should be a high-task/low-relationship leader. With time s/he may display high-relationship behaviour while the students go through the stages of storming and norming their group relations. The performing stage is usually facilitated by a laissez-faire teacher who controls a fully mature group with a low-task/low-relationship leading style. According to Hersey and Blanchard (1982), the teacher as an effective facilitator-leader should demonstrate four leadership styles suitable for a given stage of group development:

- telling means fully supervising students' work and giving the sense of direction; the students know what their roles are and what the aim of a given task is

- selling occurs when the 'teacher-leader' convinces the students of the importance of the task; the students become more aware of the value of their learning process
- participating leadership style allows the students to share their ideas and cooperate with the teacher during the decision-making process; the learners are encouraged to interact with each other and with the teacher
- delegating entails passing the responsibility for the learning process on to the students; it means that the students are in charge of choosing and directing the activities, however, the teacher is facilitating the group processes mainly by monitoring group work

It seems obvious that none of these leadership styles is an optimal and universal one. An effective facilitator needs to be flexible and able to switch from one type of leader's behaviour to another according to a given situation. As believed by Hersey and Blanchard (1982) a 'teacher-leader' should learn how to adjust his/her leadership style as the students and situations in the classroom change over time.

5.4 - 'Transactional' vs 'transformational' leadership (Bass & Avolio 1994)

Transactional and transformational leadership are the terms rooted in organizational psychology and because of that they can be easily adapted for classroom use. Workplaces and organizations are quite similar to schools where the leader's aim is to achieve success and improve the dynamics of a group. With reference to different leadership styles Bass and Avolio (1994) established two concepts:

- transactional leadership which means that the teacher sets goals and clarifies the sense of duty in a group
- transformational leadership which is followed by teachers who provide vision and inspiration to the students by changing learners' expectations and their perception of the learning process

Transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio 1994) reflects four characteristic features of a 'teacher-facilitator', namely idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. By idealised influence the teacher stresses the importance of purpose and commitment throughout the course of group life. Consequently, such charismatic leaders are respected by the students who identify with them. Inspirational teachers are optimistic about the future of the group and students' achievements. By strongly motivating the learners, the facilitator shows them a sense of purpose and fully engages them in the process of learning a foreign language. As a result, the students become emotionally committed and involved in all group processes as well as willing to invest their time and effort in the group life. Transformational leaders stimulate their students intellectually by asking questions and encouraging them to think deeply about the learning process.

Moreover, mistakes are treated as them a possibility to learn and as a sign of taking risks. Finally, a transformational leader should possess the element of individualized consideration which allows for the individual contribution that each learner can make to the group. Transformational teachers know that being sensitive to students' individual problems and needs should be of primary importance in facilitating group dynamics. An emphatic and supportive 'teacher-facilitator' gains students respect and trust since s/he is concerned not only with the learning process but also the personal life of the learners.

In the educational context transformational teachers lead the group towards the mutual goal of all the students. Such a whole-group orientation may help with creating a positive classroom climate and promoting group cohesiveness. Nevertheless, the fully effective group can be achieved under leadership which combines both transactional and transformational elements. Trust in the group, enthusiasm, commitment to student learning and rapport with the students are all important prerequisites for becoming a transformational leader. However, what the group also needs is the set of clear instructions explained by a transactional teacher.

5.5 - Heron's system of facilitation

In order to understand the system of facilitation created by Heron (2006), two notions should be explained, the notion of a facilitator and that of an experiential group. Facilitator is defined as "a person who has the role of empowering participants to learn in an experiential group" (Heron 2006: 1). While an experiential group is the "one in which learning takes place through an active and aware involvement of the whole person" (ibid: 1).

Personal development and interactive skills is what this system of facilitation is based on. Since there has been a revolution in learning, Heron emphasizes the need of self-directed learning in the process of facilitation. Nowadays the emphasis is more on students being able to take responsibility for their learning process. It generally indicates "autonomous exercise of intelligence, choice and interest" (Heron 2006: 2). That is why, researchers try to facilitate the learning process by asking how people learn, not how to teach them. Thus, Heron stresses the role of the learner as the key figure in the learning process and the teacher as the facilitator.

5.5.1 - The six dimensions of facilitation

By dimensions of facilitation Heron understands different issues that the facilitator can make use of and in that way influence the process of learning. After defining each dimension, a facilitative question is asked which aims at empowering facilitator's work. All six dimensions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 - The six dimensions of facilitation (adapted from Heron 2006:6).

Dimension	Description
The planning dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concerned with learning goals – what a person wants to achieve and how the facilitator can help him/her • planning and creating a programme which enables the groups to realise their goals the facilitative question: what is the way to realise the group goals and what are the means?
The meaning dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learners need to be conscious of what is going on refers to cognitive aspect of learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the facilitative question is: how shall group members find and realise the meaning of their learning process?
The confronting dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make learners conscious about aspects they avoid or resist the facilitative question: how shall a facilitator raise group's consciousness?
The feeling dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a sensitive aspect of the facilitation • each group has an emotional life which encompasses feelings and emotions within the group the facilitative question: how shall feelings and emotions be dealt with?
The structuring dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formal structuring of the learning process • learning is not only dependent on the facilitator since it is viewed as a self-directed process the facilitative question: how to shape the learning process?
The valuing dimension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • integrity and creation of a supportive climate of a group • all members' needs and interests are fulfilled and they feel comfortable and genuine in the supportive classroom reality

All six dimensions complement each other and create a holistic system of facilitation. Nevertheless, they should be distinguished from each other and worked on separately since this is necessary to organise them into “a well-balanced whole” (Heron 2006: 7).

When it comes to the educational context, all six dimensions should be taken into consideration when planning a course and managing a group. The key advantage of the system is that it embraces a wide spectrum of the teacher's actions and decisions. Because of that the teacher becomes fully aware of the teaching process. In other words, s/he can easily control the group structure and emphasize the meaning of each activity so that the learners know what is going on in the classroom. Making

sense of different aspects of facilitation, the teacher can create a positive classroom climate and supportive atmosphere more easily.

5.5.2 - The three modes of facilitation in teaching and learning

As mentioned above, each dimension of facilitation deals with different aspects of the teaching and learning processes. In order to adhere properly to all principles of each dimension, the facilitator should ask her / himself a facilitative question. The answer to each question is complex which means that firstly, it refers to the person that decides about the issues meaning, whether it is the facilitator, the facilitator together with the group or only the group. Secondly, the answer indicates actions that should be taken so as to tackle the issue. The politics of teaching is called by Heron "the three modes of facilitation" (Heron 2006: 7) and they are:

- The hierarchical mode. The facilitator acts on behalf of the group and s/he is in charge of planning and arranging the learning process. S/he is responsible for managing the group feeling and all learning dimensions.
- The co-operative mode. The facilitator plays the role of a guide. S/he shares knowledge and experience with the group members and they work together on planning and structuring the learning process. All decisions are worked out through negotiation since the facilitator shares his/her influential but not final view.
- The autonomous mode. The facilitator gives space for self-determination and self-directed practice. Learners are free to find their own way of dealing with things, resistance to group problems and structure of learning. Nonetheless, it doesn't mean that the facilitator puts his/her responsibility aside since s/he is still responsible for creating conditions for learning.

Generally, an effective facilitator should make use of all three modes simultaneously according to a given situation. Since facilitation focuses mainly on the processes taking place in every group, the teacher's primary aim is to guide the members of the group to achieve their goals. Being unpredictable, every group demonstrates the need for teacher flexibility. That is why, there is no one mode of facilitation which would be suitable for all groups. The classroom environment is changeable and each situation requires moving from one mode to another and from one dimension to another. Table 3 presents the holistic system of facilitation.

Table 3 - Dimensions and modes (source: Heron 2006:9)

	Planning	Meaning	Confronting	Feeling	Structuring	Valuing
Hierarchy						
Co-operation						
Autonomy						

Dimensions and modes demonstrate that teaching is a very complex process. However, Heron's system of facilitation makes it more organized since teachers can move smoothly around 18 different modes of actions suitable for a given situation. Being an effective facilitator, the teacher can make use of all three modes in each of the six dimensions. As the modes complement each other, the teacher can combine them in the light of the changing situation in the group. In other words, teaching style can be hierarchical with elements of co-operation and learners' autonomy. Alternatively, the group can be autonomous itself and the teacher is responsible for the hierarchical work. The key advantage of this system is that the role of the teacher is not reduced to only three well-known leadership styles (democratic, authoritarian, laissez-faire). Every teacher can adjust his/her action zone according to a particular dimension and a given situation in classroom environment. However, knowledge of the six dimensions and three modes of facilitation is not enough for the effective group facilitation. What is also needed is creating the facilitator's own individual style.

5.5.3 - The concept of facilitator style

All facilitating styles are based on rules and principles governing a given method of facilitating the learning process of a given group (Heron 2006). It is also true to say that one's own inimitable style reflects:

- facilitator's norms and values
- his/her psyche
- skills, experience, development
- objectives of a given group

It seems that a facilitating style is underlain by many factors (mentioned above) but it is believed by Heron that it is the facilitator him/herself that determines the style. As Heron puts it, it is "the unique way that a person leads a certain group" (ibid.: 13). Facilitator style is by far the product of what is already possessed by him/her, i.e. knowledge of methodology, leadership skills, professional experience, etc. and the gap that can be filled by the process of the creative imagination. One right and proper method of creating a facilitator style does not exist since all types of facilitator styles transcend different rules and principles dependent on a particular person. Groups can be facilitated in an appropriate or wrong way but there are so many varied approaches to the issue of group facilitation that developing one which would be universal is impossible.

5.5.4 - The role of the facilitator in group dynamics

Since group dynamics is grounded in the emotional and interactional aspects of group life, the influence that the facilitator has is significant. It means that s/he should concentrate and act on the emotions and feelings of group members which generally means "managing the dynamic directly at the affective level" (Heron 2006: 65). The teacher can also employ strategies governing the facilitator's action

zone whenever negative group dynamics occurs. It may help to regain cohesiveness and positive classroom climate. The strategies which may be used by the facilitator are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 - Facilitator's action zone (adapted from Heron 2006: 65).

Facilitator's action zone	Description
Strategies for educational alienation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic course design: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - holistic curriculum - different, integrated kinds of learning - diverse objectives • Effective switching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - from one strand of learning to another - the timing needed for each change - the manner so that people can easily adjust to a new mode of teaching
Strategies for psychological defensiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture-setting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - facilitator's authority - gentle, charismatic, warm, supportive - creating basis of the group culture • Permission-giving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - group members are vulnerable - may uncover their feelings • Growth ground-rules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introducing a clear set of group rules and norms - learners know what to expect and how to behave • Honouring choice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - freedom of choice - learners start their personal work the moment they want to
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional switching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - switching energy from the emotional block and directing it towards something else • Laughter: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bursting into laughter regularly in order to get rid of unnecessary fear, tension and embarrassment • Individual work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - working with each individual in front of the group - everyone is concentrated on a given person - necessary support and help is provided • Group autonomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - with time the group should learn how to spot problems on their own and how to deal with them

As can be seen, the role of the facilitator in creating positive group dynamics is crucial as s/he is responsible not only for exposing the learners to language learning but also for developing instant personal rapport in the group. The facilitator is there to ensure any productive process which takes place in a group and enhance group cohesiveness. S/he should avoid any kind of assessment or negative feedback. Instead s/he ought to listen in order to understand the nature of the group. The facilitator should be able to design a learning course but also switch from one strand of learning to another since facilitation is not a linear process – some stages of group facilitation happen simultaneously but some of them appear throughout the process. Both types of strategies mentioned above, when put into practice, may result in students having sense of belonging and mutual acceptance. That is the reason why, incorporating various psychological strategies in order to enhance classroom dynamics and facilitate interactional patterns is worth trying.

6 - A comparison of five theories of leadership

All five theories of leadership emphasize the importance of the teacher in the development of group dynamics. The one presented by Lewin (1939) seems to be the simplest one since it is based on three very general leadership styles. Hersey and Blanchard (1982) present only two types of leadership, however, they are more concentrated on the leader's behavior and his/her reaction to classroom processes. Bass and Avolio's (1994) leadership theory is also based on two types of a leader, namely transactional and transformational, which stresses the teacher's attitude towards the teaching process and the group itself. There is also the theory by Rogers (1961) who does not name it precisely but he seems to be more concerned with the characteristics of an effective facilitator. Finally, there is Heron's (2006) system of facilitation which combines three modes and six dimensions of facilitation. Being the most holistic and organized system of facilitation and leadership, Heron's theory is recommended to be adapted for classroom use.

7 - Conclusions

Classroom management is one of many aspects of teaching practice that the teacher should deal with. Successful teachers are able to focus students' efforts towards common goals and encourage group members to work as a team. However, in order to become an effective facilitator and leader, the teacher needs to be aware of different styles of group leadership. Because of that, leadership training for teachers should encompass not only the various functions but also features of different leadership styles. A group-conscious "teacher-facilitator" relies on the group's own resources and in that way s/he promotes autonomous learning among the learners. In other words, becoming more aware of what effective leadership is, the teacher can lead the group in a more effective way.

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