

Creating Security and a Holistic View of each Individual within the Learning Environment.

By: Abdul Kareem Igabria

says in his book A WAY AND WAYS:

Security and a holistic view of each individual is necessary in order to create confidence and trust, for both the learners and the teacher, in the classroom community. As a result, the learning will be internalized, leading to a new “learning self” who ultimately becomes independent.

The teacher whose work is subordinated to the work of her students must be continually learning from them about where they are- must be constantly ‘learning them,’ so to speak, at the same time that the students are learning the subject matter (1980: 45).

Creating security and a holistic view of each individual requires some basic principles in the teaching-learning process, such as equality among all learners and the teacher, and a relaxed, non-judgmental and fun learning environment. Simultaneously, the teacher is committed to developing a healthy and secure relationship with his students, and among the students themselves.

Since all come to the classroom from different backgrounds, we are all different; not one learner/teacher is all-knowing. There is a wide range of knowledge which is presented in every classroom; some learn slower; some learn faster, but everyone has something to offer; this is what makes us equal. This is also what makes all of us feel valued and that we are of great worth.

“Equality does not mean to equalize everything; it does not mean that there are no differences. WE are equal because we are all learners.” That is, the learners and the teacher are all learners. The teacher learns about the learners while the learners learn the language. As Earl Stevick

In addition, to get equality among learners, teachers should consider differences like the ones which Cohen refers to in her book Designing Group Work as peer and academic statuses, societal statuses, and the intellectual quality of group performance (1994: 28-38). When these differences are dealt with properly (that is, students have more

or less the access to the interaction during group work and, most importantly, learn to treat each other as individuals rather than as members of a social group), the teaching and learning process in the classroom environment becomes effective. Therefore, “people create more supportive climates when they indicate a willingness to enter into participative planning with mutual trust and respect”(Beebe and Masterson, 1989). Also, people succeed in the learning environment (e.g. group work) because they treat each other equally, trust each others’ decisions, and follow the norms for cooperative problem-solving behavior, such as:

- a- Say your own ideas.
- b- Listen to others, give everyone a chance to talk.
- c- Ask others for their ideas.
- d- Give reasons for your ideas and discuss many different ideas (Cohen, 1994:53).

Moreover, people succeed in the learning environment (e.g. cooperative learning) because of their mutual understanding, having a “we” feeling with the group which brings unity and harmony in the group, and most importantly the equal exchange where everyone has the opportunity

to share his/her ideas. As a result, instead of becoming defensive or insulting to each other, people support and encourage each others’ ideas.

To conclude my discussion of equality, I should point out that we as teachers should be aware of creating security and liberating our students as whole beings emotionally, spiritually, mentally, physically, and culturally. Moreover, teachers should not talk down to their students as if they were below them. They should treat them in a way that teachers and learners are all human beings living on this earth to learn, to grow, and to build healthy and secure relationships with each other. They should help them realize that both teachers and learners are all one group, that is, teachers are not coming to learners as superiors.

A relaxed, non-judgmental, and fun learning environment is the other required principle for creating security in the learning/teaching environment. Teachers need to create a low stress environment which allows students to participate in the teaching/learning environment (e.g. group work) effectively, and allows them to increase their concentration on the task and the process needs of the group. Also, teachers should not put their students on the spot, which

might cause mental blocks and fear of making mistakes. This relates to Krashen's idea of lowering the "effective filter." For, if the students are forced to produce too soon, they may be put on the defensive, causing this "filter" to go up. This will only cause hesitancy, inhibitions, and a low self-esteem. Caleb Gattegno (in his book -The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages) adds to this by saying:

Our students will be free of anxiety if they can sense a) that they are not required to do more than is being done and, in particular, are not left to think that the whole language must be at their disposal when only a little has been explored and b) that what they have done has been done well, occupies their time, and gives them the impression that they are on top of things, possessing criteria and a sense of thoroughness (1976: 4).

Teachers should emphasize the importance of creating a relaxed state for the learners and try to correct and reflect a genuine understanding for the learners without placing judgment. This can be a helpful and subtle means of awakening the awareness that is necessary for the learners to have. Moreover, this leads the learners to be independent and responsible for their own

"doings," to create new realities, to influence attitudes and behaviors, and to have access to the ideas and "inner worlds" of other group members. As a result of this, students will feel more confident and secure. Also, they will be able to give effective feedback and be ready to receive it as well.

Additionally, employing a variety of activities, such as group work, pair work, case studies, cooperative training exercises, diversity awareness activities, discussions, reflections, projects, and presentations keeps the students alert and active while learning. Furthermore, these activities help create ease and relaxation among the students and create confidence which every student needs in order to learn. Moreover, these activities are useful in that they focus the students and bring them to the "here and now" rather than to all the extraneous motion going on inside of them. This would keep them centered, balanced and secure.

This leads us into the development of the relationship between teachers and students. Creating a balanced and healthy relationship between teachers and learners, through a mutual understanding, is responsible for the birth and nurturing of security.

That is, teachers should have trust in the individual power that each student brings to the learning environment. They should act as counselors who understand and support the learners. This makes the learners feel more confident, and they begin to trust themselves. As a result, the learners' negative feelings and inner fears are reduced, and they move from dependency to independence and become creative and productive when working together, for example, in group work.

In conclusion, creating security in the learning environment is necessary to create the confidence and trust for both the learners and the teacher. When confidence and trust are created within the learners in the learning environment, students will be able to explore, ask questions, explain their ideas, make suggestions, criticize, listen, agree, disagree, and make joint decisions. Also, students will take part in organizing the steps needed to accomplish any task successfully and safely. In addition, students will assist each other in accomplishing any activity and, by doing so, each student will feel partially responsible for the overall success. Moreover, students will

help each other to realize that they are not only dependent on each other to accomplish any task, but they are equally as dependent on themselves. Therefore, they can create a balance between trust and interdependence; that is, they will listen to each others' ideas. Thus, teachers should be aware of the learning differences among students, improving abilities to meet their needs for these differences, and be able to adapt to each new learning environment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Beebe, A. Stephen, and Masterson, T. John. 1989. "Improving Group Climate", In **Community in Small Groups: Principles and Practices**. Scott Foresman and Co.
2. Cohen, G. Elizabeth. 1994. **Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom**. New York: Teachers College Press.
3. Gattegno, Caleb. 1976. **The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages**. New York: Educational Solutions.
4. Stevick, W. Earl. 1980. **Teaching Languages A Way and Ways**. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers, Inc