

Supportive Error Correction

Mrs. Dina: *“Best Practices in Teaching English”* is a series of teacher training segments dealing with eight topics: **Classroom Management, Writing, Reading, Listening, Presentation Skills, Practice, Error Correction, and Supervision.**

“Best Practices in Teaching English” can be used for teacher and supervisor in-service training or by faculty in pre-service teacher education. Also, tapes can be used separately by student teachers, teachers, and supervisors for individual study and self-development. Accompanying the video series is a set of printed supplementary materials that describes the content and includes information on how to use the videotapes.

Dr. Mohamed Ismail: Is there a difference between a mistake and an error? The mistake is made by the learners due to lack of attention, fatigue or carelessness, whereas the error is made by students when they use in a wrong way a linguistic item such as a grammatical item, a word, or a speech act in a faulty or incomplete way. In this segment of the tape, however, we are using them to mean the same thing. One of the most frequently posed questions by teachers is when and how should we correct speech errors of the students in the classroom. In order to provide a relevant and practical answer to this question, I would like you teachers to take into consideration the following guiding principles. Number one: too much correction shuts off students’ attempts at communication. Don’t increase the times of giving positive feedback in order to avoid fossilization. Use

encouraging words such as "good," "well done," "fantastic," "star of

the day," etc. Don't single students out for their mistakes.

Deal with mistakes without saying who made them.

During a speaking activity, it's more effective to stand back to watch and listen. Don't interrupt the speech... the flow of speech. Give

your feedback later. If the mistake is global, correct it. If it is local, ignore it. Point out and correct the errors that are only significant to the point of teaching or to the target language.

Your correction should be the last resort. Note that mistakes are symptoms of progress and success.

After dealing with speech errors, we are dealing... we are going to induce techniques for dealing with writing errors. In this respect, I suggest four guiding principles. First, when students correct their peers, they should use green markers or green pens. Second, the teacher uses red pens, but not excessively. Third, students should write on every other line. Fourth, we have to consider--or teachers have to consider that

writing is a thinking process as well as a productive activity.

After carrying out the writing activity, the teacher explains her scheme of correction. And by scheme of correction, I

mean she explains to her students some symbols. For example: "SP" to refer to spelling, "LS" to refer to long sentences, etc. Now let us see how far Mrs. Fatima El Zahra'a is applying these guiding principles and techniques with one of her preparatory classes in Ismailia.

Ms. Fatma: Good morning, everybody!

Students: Good morning, Ms. Fatima!

Ms. Fatma: Sit down, please.

Students: Thank you.

Ms. Fatma: Okay? Yes? Can anybody read the title? Mohamed?

Student: Trouble at the Supermarket.

Ms. Fatma: Trouble at the Supermarket. So...Thank you. So we are going to

 speak about a ...?

Student: Act of stealing.

Ms. Fatma: An act of stealing. Thank you. What kind of trouble? What will be stolen from the supermarket? What do you think will be stolen? Yes, Lo'ay?

Student: Some money.

Ms. Fatma: Some money. Thank you. What else? Yes, Ahmed?

Student: Some goods.

Ms. Fatma: Some goods. Thank you very much. So we expect

something to be stolen from the supermarket. Now, I have some new vocab--some new words here. Each group will take one. Whenever a new word is mentioned, what will you do? One of you will come and put it...?

Students: On the board.

Ms. Fatma: On the board. Yes. One. Have a look at it quickly, please, for just seconds. Yes, please. Yes, have a look at it, and then turn it over. You can share together with the other group and you share together with the others. All right. How can thieves enter a supermarket? How can they enter a supermarket? Yes, Ali?

Student: By breaking the window or...

Ms. Fatma: Yes, by breaking the window...or the shop window. Thank you. So we have the word "break in." Today we will speak about "break in." Breaking in. Have you ever heard or read about any break-ins by thieves? Have you Mahmoud? Yes. What happened?

Student: Some thieves break into a bank and stole a lot of money, and they run away, but the police caught them after a time.

Ms. Fatma: The police could...? Yes, Ahmed?

Dr. Mohamed Ismail: This type of error correction is called peer

correction. In this technique, the teacher asks another student to give help and provide the correct answer without humiliating his colleague or the student who has made the mistake.

Student: Stolen things.

Ms. Fatma: Very good! Thank you. Who can repeat this please? Who can repeat? Yes, Ahmed? Speak up, please.

Student: He should immediately tell the police about the stolen things.

Ms. Fatma: Very good. He should immediately tell the police about the stolen things. Thank you very much. Now, let's see our trouble at the supermarket today and what had happened.

Okay? Is it clear? Is it clear, everybody?

Students: Yes.

Ms. Fatma: Khaled, how many people are there?

Student: Five.

Ms. Fatma: There are five. Thank you. So here we have five people.

Who do you think this is? Yes, please, Mohamed?

Student: The night watchman.

Ms. Fatma: This is the night watchman. Very good. This is the night watchman.

How many policemen are there? Yes, Mohamed?

Student: There are two policemen.

Ms. Fatma: Two policemen. This is the...? Amr?

Student: The detector.

Ms. Fatma: This is the...? Detect....?

Student: The detective.

Ms. Fatma: The detective. Very good. Thank you very much. This is the
police detective, or this is the police officer. So we have...
now we

have three people from the police. What is that man doing?

What is the police officer doing? Ha, Lo'ay?

Student: He is asking the man quest...man some questions.

Ms. Fatma: Some questions. And at the same time the night watchman
will...?

Students: Answer.

Ms. Fatma: Answer. Another word for answer...? Another word for
answer...? Mahmoud?

Student: Reply.

Ms. Fatma: Reply.

Student: Here? [Student puts the word on the board]

Ms. Fatma: Yes, sure. Thank you, Mohamed. Yes, can we read it all of
us?

Students: Reply.

Ms. Fatma: Again, please.

Students: Reply.

Ms. Fatma: Thank you. We have a break-in. Look at this. What's that?

Student: Some of the glasses of the break-in...or the window of the ...of the supermarket.

Ms. Fatma: The window...the shop window, the shop window of the... is what? What happened to it? It is...?

Student: Break...

Ms. Fatma: Give him a chance, please. Is... ?

Student: Break...

Ms. Fatma: Is broke...?

Student: Broken

Ms. Fatma: Broken. Excellent, Mohamed. The shop window is...Thank You. Sit down. The shop window is broken. The glass is broken. Another word for broken? Yes, Ahmed?

Student: Smash.

Ms. Fatma: Smash. Yes, so the glass is smashed into pieces. Has anybody got the word smashed? Yes, quickly please, Ali. Thank you very much. Repeat all of you. "Smashed."

Students: Smashed.

Ms. Fatma: Smashed.

Students: Smashed.

Ms. Fatma: All right. Who do you think this man is? Yes, Mahmoud? Look

at his face. Is he happy? Is he happy, Mahmoud?

Student: No.

Ms. Fatma: Who do you think this is?

Student: The uh.. he might be the owner of the shop.

Ms. Fatma: Yes. Very good. He might be the owner of the...?

Students: Supermarket.

Ms. Fatma: The owner of the supermarket. Thank you very much. Now what do you

think they are looking for? What are the policemen looking for? Yes, please, Mahmoud?

Student: The policemen is looking for...

Ms. Fatma: The policemen ...?

Student: The policemen looking...looking... are looking.

Ms. Fatma: Very good, Mahmoud! The policemen are looking for the thief.

Dr. Mohamed Ismail: Self-correction with a questioning intonation. In this technique, the teacher gives a clue that something is wrong with the performance of the students.

Ms. Fatma: Look at the police officer. Which one is the police officer?
The one on the...?

Students: Left side.

Ms. Fatma: On the left side. Yes. The one on the left side.

Student: With brown jacket.

Ms. Fatma: Yes. With brown jacket. I think he's giving orders to the... ?

Students: Policemen.

Ms. Fatma: Policemen. What do you think the order is? Yes, Hussein?

Student: The order is to put... or to catch the thief.

Ms. Fatma: Again, Hussein. He ordered them to...?

Student: uuuhhh...catch.?

Ms. Fatma: Right?

Student: Uhh...to catch the thief.

Ms. Fatma: Thank you very much. All right. Yes, please?

Student: To arrest the thief.

Ms. Fatma: To arrest the thief. Thank you very much. Now we will see
whether the watchman was the thief or not. Are we sure that
the watchman...

the night watchman was the thief?

Students: Yes.

Ms. Fatma: Are we sure?

Students: Yes. No.

Ms. Fatma: Some people said that they are sure and some people said
"no."

Up till now, I, myself, don't know. So now we have some

questions. We are going to read them. Now you will open

your book. Skim quickly. Look at the passage quickly to
find the answers to these

questions. Please, when you come across a new word, what

should you do?

Students: Underline it

Ms. Fatma: Underline it. Quickly please, and remember the new words which...

Time is over, please. Time is over. Put your pens

down, please. Pens and pencils down, please. Pens and

pencils down. All right. Number one? Yes, Hussein?

Student: Who is the owner of the supermarket? Mr. Ahmed Nawar.

Ms. Fatma: Mr. Ahmed Nawar. Thank you very much. Yes, Mohamed

Ezzat? Two. Why did the police officer go or rush to the

shop?

Student: To see what happened.

Ms. Fatma: To see what happened or to see what...?

Students: Had happened.

Ms. Fatma: Had happened. To see what had happened. Thank you. Sit

down, Mohamed. I think now we can work cooperatively.

We can work together so as to answer these questions quickly.

Okay. Yes, in pairs as Amr said. In pairs, so quickly....

Put

your pens and pencils down, please. Yes. Nice. Number one?

Just give me the answer quickly, just to save time. Yes,

Mohamed?

Student: Who phoned the police? Mr. Ahmed Nawar.

Ms. Fatma: We will come to this again. Thank you very much. Mr.

Ahmed Nawar. Number two, Ali?

Student: He used to work in the shop office.

Ms. Fatma: He used to work in the shop office. All right, he used to

work... Now? Sit down, please, Ali. Now? In the...?

Students and Mrs. Fatma: Past.

Mrs. Fatma: In the past.

Student: He has resigned.

Ms Fatma: He has resigned. All right. Thank you, Amr. Listen. Amr said

he has resigned. Has he? Has he? What happened to him?

Haitham?

Student: Mr. Ahmed Nawar, who was the owner of the shop, sacked

him from his work as he said that he made a lot of mistakes.

Ms. Fatma: Yes. He made a lot of mistakes. What was his mistake. What was the first mistake? What was it Mr. Mohamed?

Student: He was late.

Ms Fatma: He was always late. This is the first mistake. So he was

sacked. Who has the word? Quickly! Now, if somebody is

always late, what should the shop owner do? He should...?

Students: Dismiss him.

Ms. Fatma: Dismiss. Very good. Come... Thank you very much. He should

sack him. He should...? He should...?

Students: Dismiss him.

Ms. Fatma: Ha. Write this word, "dismiss." Dismiss.

Yes, please, Ahmed? Very good. Dismiss. Thank you very much. Another

word for dismiss and sack? Another word? It begins with "F."

Students: Fired.

Ms Fatma: Fired. Yes, to fire somebody. He was fired. Now, what punishment do you think

Osman deserves? What kind of punishment does he deserve?

Yes, Khalid?

Student: He will be put in the jail.

Ms. Fatma: Can you help me write the word "punishment?"

Students: P-U-N-I-S-H-M-E-N-T.

Ms Fatma: Yes. This side, please?

Students: Punishment.

Ms Fatma: The other? "Punishment."

Students: Punishment.

Ms. Fatma: This row, please? "Punishment."

Students: Punishment.

Ms Fatma: "Punishment."

Dr Mohamed Ismail: When the teacher comes across a pronunciation mistake, he or she corrects the mistake through drilling--

drilling the correction of the mistake to the whole class.

Also, without referring to the student who has made the mistake.

Student: Punishment.

Mrs. Fatma: What did the watchman do? What did he do? Yes, please Lo'ay?

Student: He phones the owner of the supermarket.

Ms Fatma: He phoned the owner of the supermarket. And the owner of the supermarket phoned the police. What did the watchman do? Yes, Ahmed?

Dr Mohamed Ismail: The teacher repeats the answer and expands it in the correct form.

Student: He called the police.

Ms Fatma; He phoned the police. I want one of the intelligent students -
-I know that I have...?

Student: Many.

Ms Fatma: Sure. All of us are intelligent. I want one of the intelligent students to tell me a piece of information which we didn't mention at all in the lesson. Yes, Amr?

Student: We didn't discuss how did the watchman stole the money.

Ms Fatma: We didn't speak about how he stole the money. Very good,

because it is not mentioned. What happened? Thank you, Amr.

What happened to the night watchman? Was anybody hurt in the story? Did anybody tell us that he was hurt? Yes?

Student: When the night watchman said... when he saw the thieves, he went to catch them, but they hit him on his head so he fainted.

Ms Fatma: Excellent. So he fainted. He fainted and then he...?

Student: Recovered to his senses.

Ms Fatma: Then he recovered his senses. Ibrahim, thank you very much. All right.

Student: When he recovered, he knew that the thieves...they had stolen the money, and smashed the glass, and ran away.

Ms Fatma: Thank you. By this answer, what did Lo'ay do? He gave us a...?

Students: Summary

Ms Fatma: A summary of the whole story. Now, let's go back to our words. Let's repeat them. Let's practice them. Yes, please, all of you together.

Students: Reply, grab, smashed, sack, rush, recover.

Ms Fatma: What's the meaning of recover?

Student 1: Return the...the...health again.

Student 2: Return his consciousness.

Student 3: To come back.

Ms Fatma: Yes, to come back to...?

Students: His senses.

Ms. Fatma: Very good. To come back to his senses. All right. Now after discussing the problem-- the causes, the results, and the solutions--we are going to start writing, but there is one point before writing. We should agree upon one thing, When correcting your compositions, I will have this technique in mind. I will have this strategy. This is the strategy of error correction. What do

we have here, Ahmed Maged?

Ahmed: The abbreviations.

Dr Mohamed Ismail: The teacher here explains her scheme of correction. By the scheme of correction, I mean explaining some symbols to be used by the students for correcting the mistakes.

Ms Fatma: ..."Sp?" You will think of spelling. There must be a spelling...?

Students: Mistake

Ms Fatma: Which should be...?

Students: Corrected.

Ms Fatma: By the teacher?

Students: No.

Ms Fatma: By...?

Students: Ourselves.

Ms Fatma: Yes. Very good. So "Sp" stands for spelling. "P" stands for??

Student: Punctuation

Ms Fatma: "St."

Students: Sentence

Ms Fatma: "SVA."

Students: Subject verb agreement

Ms Fatma: What's the meaning of subject verb agreement? Huh? When
I say he...he "speak"?

Students: Speaks.

Ms Fatma: So the verb should agree with the subject. We can't say "he
speak." We must say "he speaks." Next please, Ibrahim?

Student: "T" for tense.

Ms Fatma: T for tense. Thank you.. "WC?"

Students: Word choice.

Ms. Fatma: Somebody is laughing. "WO?"

Students: Word order.

Ms. Fatma: Word order. Yes. You should pay attention to the word
order. "HW?"

Students: Handwriting.

Ms. Fatma: "Wh?"

Students: Question word

Ms. Fatma: Or...?

Students: Wh word.

Ms. Fatma: And finally...?

Students: Long sentence.

Ms. Fatma: Yes. Now we are going to start writing. I want very nice handwriting, good ideas. I want the paragraph to be well arranged. Can we do this?

Students: Yes.

Ms. Fatma: So let's start, please. Start writing, and when we finish writing, we will exchange the pieces of papers so as to be corrected by our friends. Time is over. What are we going to do now? We are going to...?

Students: Exchange.

Ms. Fatma: Exchange. Okay, we are going to exchange. Exchange your composition with your...?

Dr. Mohamed Ismail: The students exchange their papers, and correct their peers'.

Ms. Fatma: What do we need to do if we have a spelling mistake? Just put...?

Students: Sp.

Ms. Fatma: Where? Under the word?

Students: No, above it.

Ms. Fatma: Above the word. All right. Now it's over. Give...give the paper back. Give

the piece of paper back to your friend, please, quickly. Okay, give the paper back to your friends. I'll collect the pieces of paper so as to be corrected and to be given to you tomorrow.

Thank you very much, let me collect them. Yes, please? Yes, please? Ahmed, it's okay.

Dr. Mohamed Ismail: The teacher collects the papers or notebooks and corrects them either at home or in the office.

Ms. Fatma: Good morning, everybody!

Students: Good morning, Mrs. Fatma.

Ms. Fatma: Thank you. Sit down, please. Do you remember the problem which we discussed yesterday?

Students: Yes.

Ms. Fatma: Really, I'm very happy because some of your compositions were wonderful. I'm proud of you. Now you will take back your compositions and please pay attention to the mistakes made and we, all of us, will try to avoid them next time. And as I have just told you, that I'm really proud of you.

Dr. Mohamed Ismail: The students take back their papers in order to discuss the correction of their teacher. The teacher explains

the common repeated mistakes to her students without referring to the students who made them.

As we have seen, Ms. Fatima El Zahra'a has applied all the correction techniques we have mentioned in our narration.

First, she applied peer correction when she asked other students to provide the correct answer. She also used the expansion technique. When one of her students said, "The watchman phones the owner of the shop," she corrected him, saying, "The watchman phoned the owner of the shop," and expanded his answer, saying, "...and the owner of the shop phoned the police."

Mrs. El Zahra'a also drilled the correct pronunciation of the word "punishment." Finally, she used collective, or whole class drilling, not to correct the mistakes of her students, but to make sure that they are pronouncing the new vocabulary correctly.

Adopting the technique for the correction of writing mistakes helped Mrs. Fatma El Zahra'a to involve her students in three stages: first, the writing stage; second, the correction stage; and third, the discussion stage. Also,

avoiding over-correction on the part of the teacher, Mrs. Fatma El Zahra'a motivates students and helps them to like writing. And finally we can say that the application of the correction scheme helps students to discover their mistakes and to think of finding relevant corrections for these mistakes. This makes correction less damaging and an effective learning process.

Ms. Fatma: Well, this might seem an easy lesson, especially because my students are in a private school, but in fact, I like it to be... or to seem as a speaking lesson. I wanted my students to have the chance to express themselves freely and to have the chance to act and interact with each other. Sometimes I have to interrupt my students when the focus on accuracy, when they make mistakes, but when we are after fluency, students shouldn't be interrupted. They should go on and on to act and interact, even when mistakes are made, because we are not after correcting grammar or structure. We are after conveying a message. I like correcting good students or advanced students because they always act as a

model in front of the whole class. This is one aspect. The second aspect is that I should correct them for the others not to be frustrated. They should know that everybody can make a mistake. Even excellent students can make mistakes.

I'm one of the teachers who believe in peer correction, but at the same time, I'm aware at the fact that some of the students got frustrated when they are corrected by peers or by some people who are equal to them. They don't like this. A good teacher should be aware of the fact that his judgement of the treatment of his students...or he should depend on his intelligent judgement. He should know the psychological condition of his students. He should know which of them would like to be corrected by his peers and which would accept teacher correction and which should depend on self-correction.

Writing is considered the most difficult skill in our classes. So I try to facilitate this and to help my student to enjoy writing and to enjoy having their composition corrected. In fact, I try to apply new technique and to let my students know which technique we're going to follow all through the year. I prepared my technique of correction as you have seen in the film and I showed it to my students. This technique is

shown to them once or twice a term, until they got accustomed. When we come to the writing skill, they write the composition, and we apply peer correction. I helped my students to understand the benefit that they get from peer correction because if one of them achieves, all the rest will benefit, and they accept this.

When we come to the last outcome of the writing, students receive the corrected draft and then start writing the last piece

that's the fruitful outcome of their work.. And they become very

happy because of the technique applied, because of peer correction, and because of the remarks of the teacher who appreciates their work.