

Correcting students' errors – Process of editing

Teacher's reflection on how children started picking up language without the explicit use of grammar

We as teachers in general, try to teach everything to students assuming that they do not know anything. 'I know things better and I can correct you' this is what teachers believe. If the teacher's aim is just pointing out the errors, then it would break the confidence level of the young learners. Today we have research findings, which show that error correction doesn't help the learners, rather it creates a step back for them; they hesitate to put forth their own ideas.

We should not forget that as teachers our main aim is to engage all the students in the learning process. This does not mean that we should not address the errors at all. Then what is the way out for correcting errors in the language class?

Levels of editing

Making errors indicates the learning process that is happening. The discourses (descriptions, conversations, narratives, etc.) constructed by the learners (whether individually, or in groups) may have certain errors in them. These errors may be related to sentence structure, word forms, punctuation or spelling. These are to be rectified for which there is a meticulous process of editing. It is not for teaching grammar. The learners are sensitized on the errors by invoking their intuitive sense about what 'sounds correct'. This knowledge is acquired non-consciously and not by learning grammar consciously.

The teacher reviews the writing at different levels:

- The dialogue / write up is reviewed on intended purpose of writing, meaning, flow

- At the sentence level, teacher focuses on structural errors like wrong word order, missing words and excess words
- At the word level, the teacher checks for spelling, capitalization etc.

The classroom process

- Let us see how the editing process is carried out in the classroom. The discourses written individually are refined in groups through collaboration leading to a group product.
- One of the group products is taken up for editing through whole class negotiation.
- Prior to this the teacher would be presenting her version of the targeted discourse.
- Interaction is initiated to help the students to compare their products with the teacher's version and identify ideas and some of the discourse features they have not included in their writing. Every time the comparison happens, the students read the teacher's version and their products. The teacher's version serves as an indirect evidence for the learners in their process of language acquisition.



- When the learners edit the other group products and later, their own individual writing, the teacher's

version serves as a referencing material, which gives them feedback on discourse level features as well as syntactic and morphological features.

- Spelling errors are addressed by suggesting reference materials (textbook and other source materials).

Cases of editing in my class

Here are some of the examples that were taken up in my class during the editing process in groups:

- In one of the products 'beautiful' was written as 'butiful' and 'honey' as 'hunny' and 'hungry'. To change the wrongly spelt word, into its correct spelling (beautiful), I gave them binary option, 'butiful/beautiful,' and they chose 'beautiful'.
- For 'honey', they had used 'hungry' and they corrected it by referring to the 'yellow butterfly' lesson. Perhaps they assumed that 'hu' in 'hungry' sounds the same as 'ho' in 'honey' ('hun/hon'). So they picked out the word hungry for honey.
- For some words they themselves referred the text book. For example, 'brown' and 'water'. The reference was made not in English textbook only but in other subject books also.
- In another product there was the sentence, "Big flower give me please." When I told them there was a problem with the word order, they were arguing that their sentence was correct. Then I gave them a situation:

'If you want a pencil or a pen from your friend how will you ask?'

They replied: 'Please give me a pencil. Please give me a pen.'

By this time, they changed the order of the previous sentence as, 'Please give me a big flower.'

- Children used sentences like 'no catching' and 'no flying' to mean 'do not catch,' and 'do not fly'. When they were asked to think of some more ways of expressing the idea, Saransri said. 'Do not.' Her response was a surprise for me.
- To my wonder, a student used the expression 'let us' during editing. Her sentence was "See-saw bore, go to school". When I asked her how many boys were playing the see-saw she immediately responded, 'Let us go to school.' I hadn't expected that and asked her: 'Can you explain this in Tamil?' 'vaa namma schoolku pogalam.' (Come, let's go to school). I understood that she was using the sentence non-consciously.

During the process of editing, I could sense that children were using grammar correctly without knowing it was grammar. They could sense the usage of 'is' and 'are'. Saransri said, 'When we mention one thing we use "is" and for more than one thing we use "are". How did they learn it? I wondered. "There are many leaf" was edited as "There are many leaves," by Tamilselvan.

On the whole, I can sense the progress they have been making in the process of their learning. They confidently express their ideas. Earlier this was possible only for very few students. Now all the students are making attempts to produce their discourses. There were times, I taught two letter words and three letter words. I was fed up with the performance of some students. They did not have active participation in the classroom activities. But now, even those students take the ownership of their ideas and read sentences themselves.



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