

## V. SILENT WAY: Introduction by Diane Larsen-Freeman

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1. Teaching should be subordinate to learning.
  2. Language is not learned by repeating after a model; students need to develop their own “inner criteria” for correctness.
  3. Errors are important and necessary to learning.
  4. It is the students who should be practicing the language, not the teacher.
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**Video Presentation:** Caleb Gattegno was another methodologist who believed that language learning could occur at a much faster rate than normally transpires. What often happens, however, is that teaching interferes with learning. To prevent this from occurring, the central principle of Gattegno’s **Silent Way** is that “teaching should be subordinated to learning.” This means, in part, that the teacher bases his lesson on what the students are learning at the moment, not what he wants to teach them. Watch how this principle is put into practice in the demonstration of the **Silent Way** which follows, taught by my colleague, Donald Freeman.

**[Video Demonstration Or the Silent Way by Donald Freeman:  
See Silent Way Materials following Commentary.]**

**Video Commentary:** After the teacher greets the students, we skip to where the teacher is reviewing some of the words the students will use that day by pointing to them on a “Fidel” (a color-coded word chart on which each English sound is assigned a distinctive color). He focuses on the differences in pronunciation between *thee* and *the*.

By beginning the lesson with the Fidel Chart, something with which the students are familiar, the teacher can build from the known to the unknown. The teacher next constructs a floor plan with Cuisenaire rods. He elicits from the students the relevant vocabulary. He has the basic structure in mind, but he lets the students take responsibility for guiding the construction of the floor plan. The teacher respects the intelligence of his students and gives only what help is necessary.

Gattegno believed that language is not learned by repeating after a model. Students need to develop their own “inner criteria” for correctness — to trust and to be responsible for their own production in the target language. In fact, he was fond of saying, “The teacher works with the students while the students work on the language.”

You may have noticed that the teacher spent a lot of time working with the students’ errors. Errors are important and necessary to learning. They show the teacher how the students understand what he is teaching and specifically where things are unclear. The teacher used a variety of tools (hand gestures, charts, the blackboard, and other students) to get the students to self-correct.

If students are simply given answers, rather than being allowed to find the corrections themselves, they won't retain them. However, at the beginning, the teacher expects students to progress, not perform perfectly.

The teacher was silent in that he did not model the language, but rather, directed the students in using it. It is the students who should be practicing the language, not the teacher. Because the teacher does not supply a model, the students learn to give their full attention to the teacher's cues. They are also encouraged to learn from one another. Indeed, we saw that the students standing in the back were learning from those seated at the table.

By listening to the sentences the students wrote towards the end of the lesson, the teacher can verify what particular students have learned that day. This same sort of information was obtained when the teacher asked the students directly what they had learned. Both sources of student feedback help to inform the teacher about what to work on next. Students, in turn, learn to accept responsibility for their own learning.

**[End of Commentary]**

## **VIDEO DEMONSTRATION LESSON PLAN**

### **Teaching Points**

1. Prepositions of location
2. Vocabulary for furniture and rooms
3. Describing spatial relationships

### **Objectives**

1. The students will be able to describe the floor plan of a "typical" house in the United States, focusing on the precise, accurate use of appropriate vocabulary for specific rooms and the furniture which is found in them.
2. The students will practice the use of prepositions, appropriate definite/indefinite articles (the/a,an), and one/another/the other.
3. The students will build their awareness in monitoring and correcting of their pronunciation, word choice, and sentence structure.
4. The students will develop their self-confidence in, and awareness of, the precise use of English in this context.

## **Video Lesson Steps in Sequence**

### **[Word-Chart Work]**

This is a warm-up to help students' concentration, and is a means of alerting their attention to details which will be focused on later. The teacher first reviews the word chart (which is not possible to reproduce in these materials). He focuses on distinctions in pronunciation (/th/ vs. /thiy/).

### **[Floor Plan]**

1. Working with half of the class seated around the table, while the other half stands and watches, the teacher presents the floor plan of a typical house in the U.S. He outlines it with small "Cuisenaire" rods made of colored wood.
2. He asks the students to define "floor plan." What is it?
3. Then he establishes "front" and "back" of the house by having the students label the "front/back door" and "front/back hall"; and by using contrast to make the difference clear.

4. Then the teacher establishes the four rooms in the house: *living room, dining room, kitchen, and bedroom*.
5. He asks the students to label the four rooms.
6. He asks the students to label the walls of each room. This reinforces the previous vocabulary and introduces the need for "inside/outside wall" (e.g., "the front wall of the living room," "the inside wall of the dining room," etc.).
7. He asks one student to repeat the labeling of the walls so the terms are established for the class.

### [Corrections]

#### The teacher corrects:

1. **Vocabulary** — by seeking alternative expressions from the students until they arrive at one which is accurate and appropriate to the situation.
2. **Pronunciation** — by using the word chart and/or familiar words on the blackboard.
3. **Sentence structure and word order** — by using finger signals.
4. **Intonation** — by rapping the rhythm on the table.

### [Furnishing the Rooms]

1. The teacher invites the other half of the class to sit around the table, while the first group stands and watches. He adds furniture to the floor plan, starting with the living room.
2. The teacher chooses a rod of the appropriate scale/length and asks the students to identify it [as representing the arm chair].
3. He asks the students to tell him where to put it:
  - In which room? ("Put it in the living room.")
  - Near/next to which wall? ("Put it at one end of the sofa.")
  - Near/next to which wall? ("Near the outside wall.") etc.
4. Then the teacher continues the same process with the other rooms, beginning with the dining room. He controls the pace of the lesson by indicating how precise he asks each student to be with the spatial directions and prepositions. This process is cumulative; it builds on and constantly recycles vocabulary from previous steps.

### [Corrections]

The teacher waits until the student has completed what she or he wants to say. He then corrects:

1. **Vocabulary** — by seeking alternative terms from the students until they arrive at one which is accurate and appropriate to the situation.
2. **Pronunciation and article use** — by using the word chart and/or familiar words on the blackboard.
3. **Sentence structure and word order** — by using finger signals. He accepts more than one version of a particular sentence, as long as it is accurate and appropriate.

Then the teacher continues the same process with the dining room, and the other rooms. He controls the pace of the lesson by how precise he asks each student to be with the spatial directions and prepositions which she or he uses.

### [Writing]

The teacher asks the students to write about the house, using terms which have been new for them in what they learned.

1. The teacher gives the students enough time to complete at least one sentence; many write more than one.
2. The teacher asks for volunteers to read their sentences.

### [Corrections]

After each sentence is read, the teacher corrects any errors he hears, by using either the word chart or the blackboard:

"The dining room is *\*in the face of the living room\**" to  
"The dining room is *facing the living room.*"

while referring to the floor plan to clarify what the student means to say.

He allows students to add additional vocabulary if they choose, and introduces alternative ways of expressing the same idea:

"The [tape] recorder is on the *side/end* table by the sofa."

### [Feedback]

The teacher asks the class what they have learned in the lesson. He listens without responding, except to clarify what they are saying.

## TEACHER-TRAINING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BASED ON THE VIDEO

Using the following questions as a guide, think about the way in which the lesson was put together.

1. How does the teacher present the new material?
2. How does the teacher have students practice the material?
3. How does the teacher correct student errors?
4. When and how does the teacher direct the lesson and when and how does he respond to students' contributions?
5. Concerning the balance of teacher control and student initiative, Earl Stevick says this balance exists (to differing degrees) in every lesson. The ideal, according to Stevick, is for the teacher to be in control and yet for students to be able to initiate as much language use as possible. [Earl Stevick, 1980. *Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways*. Newbury House] In this lesson, what aspects does the teacher control and how does he control them?
6. How do the students take initiative in the lesson?
7. How would you characterize the balance of these two forces in the lesson?
8. One of the key principles of the **Silent Way** involves "moving from the known to the new or unknown." How did you see this principle put into practice in the lesson?

## TEACHER-TRAINING ACTIVITIES BASED ON THE VIDEO

I suggest prefacing any of the following teacher-training activities with the following:

### [Observation and Analysis]

1. Watch the video lesson through once; do not include the Commentary or distribute the Lesson Steps in Sequence above.
2. Watch the video demonstration lesson a second time; make notes as you watch what the teacher does in the lesson.
3. Compare your notes with your partners then watch the video lesson a third time.
4. Repeat 2 and 3. This is a deceptively easy procedure; the more times you watch and make notes about what the teacher does, the more of the complexity of the lesson you will see.

5. With the other people in your group, make a collective list of your observations of what the teacher did. Record the list either on poster paper or the blackboard so everyone can see and contribute to it. You should all discuss and agree on the procedure of the lesson. When there is doubt or greater disagreement, watch that part of the tape again; it is important to let the video lesson guide your observations.

#### **[Peer Teaching: Same Lesson]**

1. In groups of five or so, try to reteach the video lesson in English to your peers. Those of you who are in the role of "students" should act as naturally as possible; do not pretend to be or act like students in your own classes. (This will needlessly complicate the activity.) There is sufficient complexity in the lesson that just walking through it will be challenging.

#### **[Analysis/Discussion/ Feedback]**

1. Regroup and discuss what went well and what was difficult.
2. At the end of the discussion, each person should write down one question or issue which, as a result of the reteaching experience, she or he would like to check out in the video lesson. Then watch the video lesson again.

#### **[Peer Teaching: New Lessons]**

1. In groups, teach a similar lesson, using a different focus. Instead of the house, it could be the park, a supermarket, a family photo. You must decide how to use the rods to set up the focus of the lesson, as the teacher in the video lesson used them to make the initial floor plan.
2. Mix up your groups and try out the beginning of your lessons. In these new groups, there might be one person doing the park, another the supermarket, etc. When you are not teaching, you should act as a "student" for your peers.
3. Try the same process, only this time focus on how the students are allowed and encouraged to practice in the lesson.

#### **[Analysis/Discussion/Feedback]**

1. Regroup yourselves by topic: all those who did the park are together, all those who did the supermarket, and so on. Analyze what worked and didn't work with your presentations, and why.
2. Share and discuss common strengths and weaknesses in the lessons in the whole group.
3. Make a list of things to keep in mind in presenting a lesson with the rods.

### [Corrections]

1. Watch the video lesson again and focus on how the teacher corrects student errors.
2. Practice each of the three types of correction:
  - Finger correction for word order
  - Familiar words on the board for mispronounced sounds
  - Tapping the table for rhythm
3. Working in small groups, one of you is the teacher and the others are the students. The students talk, making mistakes, while you, the teacher, corrects. (Or, if you can, teach a few sentences to the students in another language.)

## **EXTENSIONS OF THE DEMONSTRATION LESSON: INTERACTIVE/COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES**

### [Group Work with the Video Floor Plan]

1. The teacher asks the class to break into groups of five to eight.
2. The teacher gives some rods to one person in each group and tells that person to lay out the same floor plan as in the video lesson, without any furniture.
3. The teacher then asks the rest of the group to furnish an American house. The group has to tell the student with the rods how to furnish each room, what furniture to use, and where to put it. The only guideline is that the group may not touch the rods themselves; they must tell the person with the rods what to do. The person with the rods may not initiate anything, but must follow the directions she or he is given by the group. The group can use the vocabulary from the group lesson and/or add their own.
4. The teacher circulates among the groups, providing help when asked, and correcting when needed.
5. Finally, each group draws up a complete floor plan of their "house" and posts it at the front of the class.
6. One member of each group reports to the class. The teacher corrects mistakes and solicits alternative ways of describing the same situation.

### [Group Work with the Students' Floor Plan]

The teacher conducts the same lesson, only this time s/he asks the students to describe/build a typical house in their own country. If the two floor plans are built side-by-side, the teacher can introduce comparative statements.

1. The teacher asks each student to draw a furnished floor plan of her or his own house and label it.



2. Students practice in pairs by telling a partner how to draw a furnished floor plan of their own house.
3. To simplify this step, the “author” can make a tracing of the unfurnished floor plan and then tell her/his partner how to furnish it.

### **[Dynamic Directions within the Floor Plan]**

After building the floor plan together as a class (as in the video), in a later class the teacher can introduce the language of “dynamic directions” in the following ways:

1. Using imperatives: “Go into the living room and sit on the sofa,” etc.
2. Using present progressive: “Ms. Black is going into the living room.” etc.
3. Creating “rod people:” Ms. Black, Mr. Brown/Green/White, Little Red, (meaning a red-headed child), etc.

The teacher asks the class to tell him/her what they are doing in the house. The teacher can direct the process by moving the rod people while the students supply the language, or vice versa.

### **[End of Lesson Materials]**