

*“The man who has confidence in himself gains the confidence of others.”*

*Hasidic saying*

## **Class Management and Atmosphere**

Both teachers and learners want to work in a good atmosphere in the classroom. This atmosphere depends on many aspects. The most important of them are: motivation, maintaining classroom control and discipline and organising learning activities.

**Motivation** is probably one of the key factors that influence the success of English language learning. If the pupils are not happy in the classroom not enjoying the lesson, the teacher’s job is much harder. Firstly we should provide the classroom atmosphere which promotes pupils’ confidence and self-esteem. Then our pupils will learn more effectively and enjoyably.

The teacher may help the children to feel secure. It is the **physical surroundings** helping the pupils to feel relaxed and focused on learning. The teacher can put as much on the walls as he can – posters, postcards, pictures, pupils’ drawings, writing, calendars . . . . Plants, vases with flowers, four dimensional objects, anything which adds character to the room, is helpful. It just has to leave you space to work. Of course, children themselves can bring the objects, pictures or postcards. The teacher then tells the rest of the class a little bit about them in English. Objects may create a home-like atmosphere which helps the children to feel secure.

What are the other “pieces of security”? **Routines**. Regular activities, items bring the feeling of a well governed world. Let’s start the lesson with “Good morning” every day. Let’s have a birthday calendar, read the book of the month (regularly - e.g. on Wednesday). **Error corrections** should be done in a descent way. Mistakes and errors should not be corrected during using the language for communication. Whenever a pupil is trying to tell you something, forget his/her mistakes and accept his/her talk. Explain the children that everyone makes mistakes when he/she is learning. Pupils themselves should not laugh at others’ mistakes. Give **children** the **responsibility** for doing some practical jobs in the classroom - cleaning the board, watering flowers, bringing the teaching aids, chalks, giving out the library books. And also consider the following: Scott and Ytreberg in *Teaching English to Children* (Longman 2005) recommend organizing no competitions, giving no physical rewards or prizes and giving children no English names as they would lose a bit of their personal identity. Do you agree?

Motivation is some kind of internal drive which pushes pupils to do things in order to do something. Without motivation a large part of joy might disappear from our lessons.

Things already mentioned are interrelated with **classroom control and discipline**. Routines can bring flavour of discipline into the classroom. Young children gradually become familiar with the classroom patterns that help to make them feel confident. The teacher talks **English** as much as possible but a certain balance between mother tongue and English should be found. All instructions given in English may confuse children. They may feel uncomfortable if the teacher talks to them in a strange foreign language all the time. Children should be gradually introduced to use English through rhymes, songs and games. When speaking English use miming, acting, puppets, varied tone of voice, body language. Keep your

language simple but natural and keep it at pupils' level. The **teacher's behaviour, his/her teaching style** and his/her attitude towards children and his job are another important aspect influencing lessons. Children work out very quickly what is and is not allowed. They generally like to work within a framework where the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour are reasonable and consistent. Thus they know where they stand. The teacher should find a good balance between friendly and authoritarian approach. Good **discipline** is a good step towards good learning. It is achieved mainly with good organization of the lesson and tiny teacher's tricks. Orders and restrictions do not work well. Address the pupils by their names which means to learn the names as soon as possible. Give clear instructions. Act firmly but friendly. Wait for quiet before beginning a new activity. Be tolerant of an acceptable noise level. Remember that the noisier the teacher is, the noisier the children will become. Give praise with sincerity and enthusiasm in a variety of ways. Praise groups or the whole class as well as individuals. Just find certain balance again and do not over-praise pupils, it may become valueless.

Planning a lesson the teacher anticipates the effects of different kinds of activities as well as their sequence and organization. **Organizing learning activities** takes much of the teacher's time.

Concentration span with young children is not very long. Therefore they need constant change in activities. It is up to the teacher to find the right moment when the activity must be changed. He/she gives a new kind of activity and the way of organization. Children may work in groups or **individually**. Young children prefer working alone. Later they find friends and like to share. Then cooperation is something which has to be nurtured and learnt. **Pair work** should be used before children start working **in groups**. Some children do not like each other. Therefore we should frequently change the pairs and groups. Children should not be always allowed to choose their groups themselves.

Many textbooks assume that all the pupils in the class are at the same language level. This would be an ideal situation which hardly ever happens. The average classroom is normally of very **mixed ability**. There even may be a bilingual pupil who speaks English well. The teacher must use strategies to encourage pupils to cooperate, to help each other, to share, even to help the teacher (bilinguals). The teacher may need extension activities for those who are "quick"; he/she may choose activities that cater for different levels and types (see chapter Different methods for different pupils). The teacher may even organize differentiated learning activities for different groups of pupils.

**Time management** is another skill the teacher should use. Good realistic timing helps the teacher to avoid rush, which may lead to inattention or ineffective learning. Timing is one of the most important parts of lesson planning.