

Sample extract from the Teaching English to Young Learners Course

The management of young learners

The management of young learners can be rather different from the management of older learners or adults and the approach of the teacher will depend a lot on the number of pupils in the classroom and how well the teacher knows these pupils. Teachers who have never worked with young learners before will often need guidance and support from a more experienced teacher. This was clearly illustrated in one story that a young teacher told other teachers at a meeting.

"I learnt the importance of play almost as soon as I started working with young learners. I had already had some experience of working with older learners but this was my first experience of teaching young children. I assumed that if I was friendly and encouraging, and told them stories and got them writing their own stories then everything would go well, but of course that was not the case at all. The pupils ran rings round me and I was at a loss to know how to keep them under control and active at the same time. One incident was particularly interesting for me. I had had great difficulty organising the provision of their milk at break time. (Yes, children used to get milk at that time!) It was always on the edge of being chaotic. When the class teacher returned after a week, I asked her if I could sit in and watch her teach. Sweetness and light; calmness and serenity! When it came to giving out the milk, she told all the pupils to put their heads down on their desks; she then went and touched one child who came and collected her milk and then touched another student, who collected his milk and then touched another student, and so on until they had all finished. The whole activity became a game that they all enjoyed, and it was a very peaceful time. I've applied that lesson to a whole range of situations in TESOL and it's a principle that has worked remarkably well."

This teacher learned that instead of calling for quiet and order, the activity could be restructured in a way that automatically made it peaceful and enjoyable. Although they weren't fully aware of it, the pupils worked *with* the teacher instead of doing what *they* wanted to do. The fact that it was a quiet, orderly activity was also something that they appreciated because while children might like a bit of noise and disorganisation from time

to time, underneath what most of them want is a quiet, orderly environment so they can get on with their work.

Establishing a good relationship with a class is most important and will help to ensure that the pupils do not misbehave. If you find that pupils are overactive and noisy, try to involve them more actively in the management of the class by giving them tasks to do. Let them see themselves as assistants to the teacher because this will immediately place them firmly on the side of the teacher rather than in opposition. Always concentrate on positive comments to the pupils and as far as possible avoid criticism.

You will find it very helpful early on to get the pupils used to responding to certain gestures as this will assist you in the management of the class. For example, some teachers establish a rule that if the pupils are working in pairs or groups and the teacher wants to say something, she/he will first raise her/his hand. As the pupils see the teacher's raised hand, they will stop what they are doing and raise a hand as well. When everyone is quiet, and everyone has a hand up, the teacher can quietly and clearly give them a message. This avoids the teacher having to raise her/his voice to make an announcement. (*Stop what you're doing. Listen to me. Group 4, are you listening? No, I said stop talking. etc. etc.*) A simple raised hand can help you to avoid all this without a word being spoken.

Remember to always speak clearly but not loudly. If you raise your voice then the pupils will be inclined to raise their voices. Keep your voice at a moderate level and never raise your voice loudly or shout.

You will need to stand close to pupils on occasions to check their work or to give them guidance but avoid touching them as this can be misinterpreted these days.

If your class is becoming lethargic one afternoon, give them something active to do to wake them up. A quick game of *Simon Says* or something similar will enliven them again. If a class is getting too noisy, bring back a peaceful environment by doing a relaxation activity, perhaps with an activity that involves a physical response to your words. *You are fish swimming slowly through the water. You nibble at seaweed. You rest on the sand. The sunshine is coming through the water. You close your eyes. You feel the warmth of the sun.*