Effective Classroom Management
In Young Learners English Teaching

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Abstract:
Young learners (children from the first year of formal schooling, five or six years old to eleven or twelve years of age) English teaching program is very popular in many places of China, especially in urban areas. Although all the young learners English teachers may use different textbooks, they face a same problem-----classroom management. It is one of the most important factors concerning young learners English teaching because children’s self-control ability is very poor and teaching children is quite different from teaching middle school students and adults. In a great sense, we can say the effective classroom management in young learners English teaching means successful teaching and learning. As any children’s teacher will know, it is not so much the children's age that counts in the classroom as how mature they are. There are many factors that influence children’s maturity: for example, their culture, their environment (city or rural), their psychology, their sex, the expectations of their peers and parents. Those are what the teacher should think about in classroom management. Concerning the classroom management in young learners English teaching, this paper presents the following aspects: 1. Definition of classroom management and its importance. 2. Qualities of a qualified classroom manager. 3. Organizing the classroom and planning lessons. (1) Methods to create a warm, friendly, relaxed atmosphere in which young learners feel comfortable, competent and most importantly secure. (2) Rules to organize lessons effectively. 4. Preventive approaches to classroom behavior problems. 5. Solutions to inappropriate behavior in classroom.

In the paper, the author also analyzes the factors outside the classroom which influence the classroom management: (1) Peer relations. (2) Teacher’s attention. (3) Parents’ care and encouragement.

Key words: Young learners English teaching, effective classroom management

1. Definition and importance of classroom management
As more and more children are involved in study English in recent years (primary children are required to study English as a compulsory course in big cities), young learners English teaching program is getting more and more popular in many places in China. This is because: first our government wants to enable our next generation to participate fully in the emerging global community which will require useful knowledge of English, the dominant language for international communication; second parents want to provide their children with a competitive educational
advantage. But teaching children English is quite different from teaching middle school students and adults because of their poor self-control ability. As many young learners English teachers know, classroom management plays a quite important role in their English teaching. In a great sense, it can be said that the effective classroom management in young learners English teaching means successful teaching and learning.

Classroom management can be defined as the teacher’s ability to cooperatively manage time, space, resources and student roles and student behaviors to provide a climate that encourages learning (Albert & Troutman, 1986). So it’s clear that the goal of the classroom management is “to provide a climate that encourages learning”. When children begin learning English, they may show some interest in the language. However, as times goes on, their interest wanes, compounded by difficulties in learning or if they are comparatively slow in their class. As the young learners are a special group, their learning of English mostly takes places in their classroom. It is the teacher’s responsibility to arouse their interest in English. Psychiatrist Georgi Lozanov insists that when learning fails, teachers must scrutinize their own practice rather than blaming the learners. The teacher is always in control of the environment, whether you admit it or not.

2. Qualities of a qualified classroom manager

The years at primary school are extremely important in children’s intellectual, physical, emotional, and social development. They need to develop a series of characteristics to enable them to fit into the society they live in, to become aware of themselves in relation to others, to share and co-operate, and to be assertive without being aggressive. Also, it is increasingly recognized that children need to learn how to learn. This implies that they need to be able to accept criticism and become self-critical, to be aware of how they learn, to experiment with learning styles, to organize their work, and to be open and interested in all that surrounds them. All this means that primary language teacher have a much wider responsibility than the mere teaching of a language system: they need to bear in mind the education of the whole child when planning their teaching program.

To be a qualified classroom manager, the young learner English teacher must

2.1 Be patient and tolerant and try to be the “king” of the them As the young learners have poor self-control ability and poor discipline awareness, which makes them easily do something out of your expectation, you must be ready to accept their naughty behaviors and treat them with great patience and tolerance. You should join them and even play games together with them both in class and outside class. Only in this way, can they like you and regard you as their friend, and thus are willing to learn what you teach them.

2.2 Be acquainted with young learner’s psychology and development stages at social, age, intellectual dimensions and know something about children’s education. It is necessary to point out that teaching English to the young learners involves more than merely teaching language skills. “Both social and cognitive development of learners, as well as the linguistic, need to be taken into account when planning for and working with the five to 16 age group” (Williams, 1998). Among many aspects, one point should be paid more attention to: more praise and less criticism. Human beings—children and adults—need to be liked, valued and appreciated. This need appears to be especially crucial for young school children as they are still building their self-image from the significant people that surround them. More praise will enhance children’s self-confidence and promote their performance in the classroom. Criticism makes the classroom more demanding and sometimes even frightening, in which young learners constantly feel anxiety, which contributes to
poor performance; this in turn creates more anxiety and even worse performance.

3. Organizing the classroom and planning lessons

Teachers have many roles in the classroom: two of the most important are planning lessons and organizing the classroom in the way that facilitates learning.

3.1 Try and achieve a warm, friendly, relaxed atmosphere in which young learners feel comfortable, competent and most important secure.

3.1.1 The physical organization of the classroom is quite important. In an ideal world the classroom would have an area of easily moveable desks and chairs, an open space for action songs and games, a quiet corner for reading or self-study. Such ideal conditions are rarely found in the real world, but if at all possible arrange the tables and chairs so that the young learners can work in pairs or groups, and there should be a space for them to come out to the board and to move around the classroom. Often the five or ten minutes spent on reorganizing tables and chairs are well worth it to help an activity work well. It is a good way to display the learners’ work and relevant posters on the wall and try to keep the display up to date.

3.1.2 Create a stress free English learning environment for the young learners. Neither teachers nor parents should push the young learners too hard. According to Resurgent, “the first role of early childhood education should always do no harm”. If programs teaching English to the young learners are damaging their self-esteem, creating pressure and stress on them, there is no doubt that these programs are inefficient and even harmful. As a result of this kind of education, English becomes a headache to a large number of the young learners who suffer repeated frustration in learning it, which is, in turn, detrimental to their self-esteem and confidence. The young learners English teacher should encourage them and their attempts to speak English words or sentences. When they are hesitant, you need to be patient and show great interest. Don’t blame them if they make a mistake. Crucially, if they perform well, give them praise or a certain reward. If the teacher responds with interest, they will try again because “rewarded behavior is usually repeated and becomes a habit”(Machado, 1985)

3.2 Rules to organize and plan lessons effectively

3.2.1 Creating routines that the young learners recognize

Although it takes time to explain and to establish routines, they make the young learners feel secure and save a lot of time and explanation in the long run. Once the learners have become accustomed to certain routines, your class will run more smoothly. For example,

--- Mark the beginning of the lesson with a song or with a brief recall of the previous lesson.
--- Stand with your hand raised until you have total silence and everybody’s attention.
--- Point at your watch to indicate that you are about to end an activity.

3.2.2 Planning a series of activities per lesson

The content of a lesson depends a great deal on their age, abilities and interests. It would not be reasonable to ask a child of six to do a task that demands a sophisticated control of spatial orientation if he or she has not yet developed this skill. On the other hand, beginner of 11 or 12 years of age will not respond well to an activity that they perceive as childish, or well below their intellectual level, even if it is linguistically appropriate. As a general rule, it can be assumed that the younger the learners are, the more holism learners they will be. Younger learners respond to language according to what it does or what they can do with it, rather than treating it as an intellectual game or abstract system. The kinds of activities that work well are games and songs with
actions, total physical response activities, tasks that involve coloring, cutting, and sticking, simple, repetitive stories and speaking activities that have an obvious communicative value. Here some points bear in mind:

---The activities should be simple enough for the learners to understand what is expected of them. Always start by telling them what activities they are going to do and, with older children, what the activities are for.

---The task should be within their abilities: it needs to be achievable but at the same time sufficiently stimulating for them to feel satisfied with their work.

---The activities should be largely orally based, with very young learners listening activities will take up a large proportion of class time.

---The activities should be changeable: some quiet, some active, some involving the whole class, some in pairs or groups. These changes of pace and focus help keep the young learners interested and motivated.

Also, you need to:

---Make sure that the learners know how long they spend on an activity, and set a proper time limit to the activity according to their attention span and make sure they know it. Try and keep the limit as much as possible.

---Use as much English as you can in class. But it is often more economical and less frustrating for all concerned if you give instructions for a complicated activity in Chinese. Make sure the learners know when Chinese is allowed when not.

---Monitor individual, pair, or group activities, move around among the learners, praising, encouraging them, listening for major problems and helping them when necessary.

---Check on the task after the pair or groups have completed it, getting selected learners to give examples of what they said, or report on what they did. After the pair or group work, deal with major errors you noted: give spoken examples or write examples on the board for the learners to correct.

3.2.3 Feedback

Feedback is an important, even vital part of language learning process. It is a time in class when the learners and teacher can look back at and reflect on what they are have been doing. There are two kinds of feedback, which focus on: (1) the language you have been working on, and (2) the way the learners have achieved the task, and their behavior, both as individuals and a group. Feedback should be a regular part of your teaching. Feedback activities should depend on the level and age of the learners, the language points you dealing with, and the time--- it can take place after the learners have done an activity, or at the end of a series of activities or on a fixed day each week or fortnight—in fact at any time that the teacher feels it will be useful. The role of the teacher is not to dominate, but to listen and interpret what the learners are saying in a more concise and coherent form. The feedback session is an opportunity for the learners to contribute their thoughts, feels and ideas to the class. It should be done in Chinese, as the aim is not to practice English, but to involve the learners in the learning process. As you get used to doing feedback, you will think of other ways of getting your learners to reflect on themselves and their lessons. You may be surprised at their capacity to be self-critical, and their awareness of the teacher’s aims and of their own learning processes.

3.2.4 Other rules

Remember that ending a lesson well is as important as starting it well. It is often a good idea to
end with a whole class activity such as a chant, a song, or a quick game. You also can do feedback activity—ask them what they have done and what they have learned.

Keep a record of each learner’s progress. This can be a simple table on which you stick such things as the learner’s attitude to English, to the classmates, achievement of tasks, and proficiency in the four skills. It will allow you to identify and hopefully resolve potential problems, and will certainly help when you are called on to evaluate the learner.

4. Preventive approaches to classroom behavior problems

It is wise to begin some courses in a fairly formal or even strict way, and relax little by little as you can gain the co-operation of the group. But still it is difficult for the teacher to teach and control the young learners at the same time. So some preventive approaches to classroom behavior problems are needed.

4.1 Setting rules to keep discipline

Effective management requires teachers to define their expectations for their students at the beginning of the school year. Discipline is the main preoccupation of the teachers of the young learners. Many teachers find it necessary to establish a list of rules to make their expectations clear and to keep discipline. There are some properties of a list of rules (Henson & Elleson, 1999): (1) Establish the list during the first few class meeting. (2) Keep the list short and clear. (3) Focus on learners behaviors needed to achieve lesson goal. (4) State the consequences for breaking the rules and rewards for following them.

Although it is the teacher’s responsibility to set the rules, the learners must be involved, which can motivate them to obey and accept the rules. It is important to realize that the rules do not become real group norms unless they are accepted as right or proper ones by the majority of the learners; ideally the learners should internalize a norm so that it becomes a part of the group’s total value system as a self-evident precondition of group functioning (Forsyth 1990; Levine and Moreland 1990). The advantage of well-internalized norms is that when some violate them, the group is likely to be able to cope with such deviations. This may happen through a range of group behaviors—from showing active support for teacher’s efforts to have the norms observed, to expressing indirectly disagreement with and dislike for deviant members, and even to criticizing them openly. We should not underestimate the power of the group: it may bring significant pressures to bear and it can sanction directly or indirectly those who fail to conform to what is considered acceptable.

4.2 Keeping proper and flexible moving pace of lessons

Kounin (1970) found that the best classroom managers were careful to keep the lesson moving at a brisk pace. Inappropriate learner behaviors increase when the lesson becomes boring, so try to use topics and activities that you think will be interesting and enjoyable.

4.3 Other basic recommendations:
--- Keep an eye on different groups at same time.
--- Be able to be aware of events’ occurring based on observation.
--- Use both verbal and nonverbal skills such as voice control and eye contact.
--- Plan lessons and include varied activities and interactions that keep the learners busy.
--- Motivate the learners by focusing on what they do satisfactorily or well more than on what they do badly.
--- Try to create a sense of community in the group.
---Be fair to all the learners, never favouring some over others.

5. Solutions to inappropriate behaviors in classroom

An effective teacher spends much time on preventing problems rather than solving problems. But in spite of every precaution and effort on your part, there is occasionally a learner or a group of learners in a class who seem determined to make trouble if you have most of the learners on your side, it is much easier to handle such situation.

5.1 Using silence

Most teachers talk too much because of the responsibility for maintaining and guiding class interaction. But silence can be effective to discipline the learners. Think of a lesson: you are always talking, learners’ attention decrease and they begin to talk with each other; when you suddenly stop speaking or start to speak softly with a low voice, the learners’ attention will be raised to you and the lesson because they want to know what is happening.

5.2 Proximity control

During the lesson, if the teacher moves closer to a certain learner, it will have different meaning. According to Henson & Elleson (1999) first it means “I am standing close to you” second “I don’t like your company” and the last “we have something in common”. With this approach you can control the learners with inappropriate behaviors because the distance between you and the learners is very short.

5.3 Teacher—learner conferences

The learner who doesn’t change his or her inappropriate behaviors in the class may have reasons. In order to solve the problem, a teacher—learner conference after class is a good way. The success of the conference depends on the manner in which it is conducted. The teacher should be positive and calm instead of showing authority so that good communication with the learner can be made, which helps the learner make behavioral progress.

5.4 Proper punishment

Sometimes you may need to use some kind of punishment for a trouble make in the classroom. But never give a punishment that is humiliating or unreasonable and always reintegrate learners into the group after they have received a reprimand or punishment. This is important not just for the learner involved, but also for your standing with the group. The following two kinds of punishment may be effective.

5.4.1 Temporary isolation

It means that the misbehaving learner is removed for a short time from the classroom activities. The place used for the isolation should be dull and simple. But the time shouldn’t be long, often five or ten minutes will be enough. What’s more, it mustn’t be forgotten that the isolation shouldn’t be used to frighten the learners.

5.4.2 Response cost

It means the removal of a quantity of reinforces related to a response. For example, a teacher can take a learner’s water paints away from his desk because he was painting his deskmate’s hands. Within the classroom environment typical response cost may be loss of tokens or privileges as part of a classroom management system. Many young learners’ teachers agree that the response cost is a very effective way to reduce inappropriate behaviors.

It is also useful to develop your sense of humour, which is usually appreciated by others and can help you face small and sometimes large problems.
6. The factors outside the classroom which influence the classroom management.

Coopersmith pointed out the children’s self-esteem largely depend on the experiences, positive or negative, that they have in their environment, on how they are viewed by the ‘significant others’ and how they see themselves. The significant others are the people the child sees as worthy: parents, teachers and peers. Their repeated responses serves as mirrors through which children see and judge their images. If a positive image is reflected, children will feel worthy of love and valued. On the contrary, if the image is negative, children will believe that they are rejected, unloved, and unwanted, and they will act accordingly.

6.1 Peer relations Peers play an important role in a young learner’s schooling. Peers serve as reinforce by giving or drawing attention and approval. They also serve as models and basis for social comparisons. Peer relations contribute to the young learners perception of their success. Positive peer relations can reduce social isolation and improve social academic abilities. Poor peer relations can result in isolation and even psychological problems. The young learners who are accepted by their peers are willing to take part in classroom activities. Those who are rejected by their peers often feel anxious and have less confidence. And peer prejudice is often a catalyst for misbehavior. Teachers should help them build positive relationships by enhancing classroom interaction, cooperation and conversation.

6.2 Teacher’s attention Educationists emphasize the relationship between teachers and students because the relation socializes attitudes, values, and abilities of the students. Teacher’s positive comments on and attention to the young learners can promote their performance in the classroom.

6.3 Parents care and encouragement Parents’ attitude towards young learners’ performance plays a quite important role in their classroom management. So regular teacher-parent conference often takes place in most primary schools to serve the purpose.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, young learners are a special group, as their English teacher, you need to not only improve your language level and teaching skills but also develop your classroom managing art. In fact, the teaching of young learners is immensely rewarding and exhilarating: they communicate a great sense of energy, curiosity and involvement.

References

