

***SYSTEM OF INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS IN
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES***

Qobulova Dildora

Master Student of Jizzakh State Pedagogical University

E-mail address: gobulova@mail.ru

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Qobulova Dildora

Master Student of Jizzakh State Pedagogical University

E-mail address: qobulova@mail.ru

Abstract: This article is about implementing system of intellectual development of students in foreign language classes.

Key words: classroom management, abilities, attitude, open-minded, adaptable, surroundings, responsibility, display board.

INTRODUCTION

We come to the job with our personalities already formed, but there are abilities and attitudes which can be learnt and worked on. As a teacher of young children it helps a lot if you have a sense of humour, you're open-minded, adaptable, patient, etc., but even if you're the silent, reserved type, you can work on your attitudes and abilities.

Abilities

We may not all be brilliant music teachers like Susan's Mr Jolly, but most of us can learn to sing or even play a musical instrument. All music teachers would agree in any case that everyone can sing, although perhaps not always in tune!

We can all learn to mime, to act and to draw very simple drawings. We can all learn to organise our worksheets so that they are planned and pleasing to look at. And we can certainly all learn to have our chalk handy!

Attitudes

Respect your pupils and be realistic about what they can manage at an individual level, then your expectations will be realistic too.

As a teacher you have to appear to like all your pupils equally. Although at times this will certainly include the ability to act, the children should not be aware of it. Children learning a foreign language or any other subject need to know that the teacher likes them. Young children have a very keen sense of fairness.

It will make all the difference in the world if you yourself feel secure in what you are doing. Knowing where you are going and what you are doing is essential. You can build up your own security by planning, reading, assessing and talking to others.

THE MAIN PART

Helping the children to feel secure

Once children feel secure and content in the classroom, they can be encouraged to become independent and adventurous in the learning of the language. Security is not an attitude or an ability, but it is essential if we want our pupils to get the maximum out of the language lessons.

Here are some of the things which will help to create a secure class atmosphere:

- As we said above, know what you're doing. Pupils need to know what is happening, and they need to feel that you are in charge.
- Respect your pupils.

Whenever a pupil is trying to tell you something, accept whatever he or she says with mistakes as well. Constant, direct correction is not effective and it does not help to create a good class atmosphere. Correction has its place when you are working on guided language exercises, but not when you are using the language for communication. We talk about this again in the chapter on oral work.

Just as Terry's ideal teacher is one who doesn't mind children getting things wrong, sometimes, ideal pupils shouldn't laugh at others' mistakes, and this has to be one of the rules of the class. Children of all ages are sometimes unkind to each

other without meaning to be and are sometimes unkind to each other deliberately. Pupils have to be told that everyone makes mistakes when they are learning a new language, and that it is all right. Establish routines: 'Good morning. It's Wednesday today, so let's hear your news.' Friday is the day you read the book of the month. Have a birthday calendar, so that you know when everybody's birthday is, and have a routine for what to do on that day. Have a weather chart so that the weather can be written up every day. Have a calendar with day, date and month. Routines of this type build up familiarity and security for both age groups.

Give the children the responsibility for doing practical jobs in the classroom - making sure the calendar is right, sharpening the pencils, giving out the library books, watering the plants. These activities are genuine language activities and involve both taking responsibility for learning and helping others to learn.

Margaret Donaldson's book, *Children's Minds* (Collms 1978) has a lot of interesting things to say about the disadvantages of rewards

Although it can be great fun and usually leads to a great deal of involvement, there is almost always a winner and a loser, or a winning team and a losing team. Language learning is a situation where everyone can win. Children compete naturally with each other to see who's finished first etc., but this is something different. Avoid giving physical rewards or prizes. It tells others that they have not 'won' and it does not help learning to take place. It is far better to tell the pupil that you like his or her work, or put it up on the display board, or read the story aloud for the others or do whatever seems appropriate. This gives the pupil a sense of achievement which doesn't exclude the other pupils. Include, don't exclude. Don't give children English names. Language is a personal thing, and you are the same person no matter what language you are using.

The physical surroundings

Young children respond well to surroundings which are pleasant and familiar. If at all possible, put as much on the walls as you can - calendars, posters, postcards, pupils' drawings, writing etc. Have plants, animals, any kind of

interesting object, anything which adds character to the room, but still leaves you space to work.

Encourage the children to bring in objects or pictures or postcards and tell the rest of the class a little bit about them in English. It doesn't have to be more than, 'This postcard is from Portugal. My aunt is in Portugal.' Physical objects are very important to young children, even children of ten.

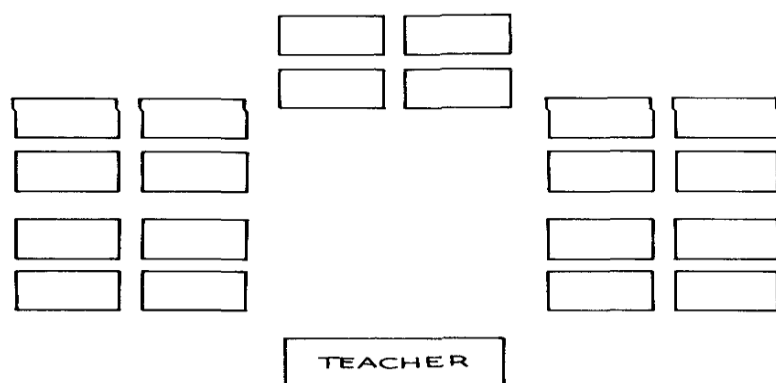
Your classroom is probably used for other subjects or other classes as well, but try to have an English corner - you need shelves, a notice board, and either a pile of cushions or a couple of comfortable chairs (preferably not traditional school chairs). If you really can't manage even a corner of the classroom, a section of wall that you can pin things on is better than nothing.

Make sure you mark all your files and boxes so that you and your pupils know where to find what. Mark the boxes with colours and/or pictures as well as words. Pupils will respond to the organisation - it shows you care.

Arranging the desks

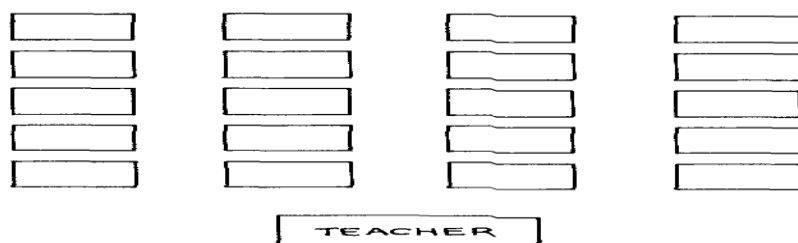
Sometimes you may not be able to change how the desks are arranged in your classroom, and sometimes you may have to make one arrangement which you can't change. You may want to arrange the desks in different ways for different lessons, but it is much simpler if you decide on the most suitable arrangement for a lesson and stick to it. Moving desks during a lesson is a very noisy and time-consuming business.

Let's look at three ways of arranging the desks in an ordinary classroom. With Arrangement A, you can teach the whole class easily, and you can have group work for some of the time, with the class working in groups of four.



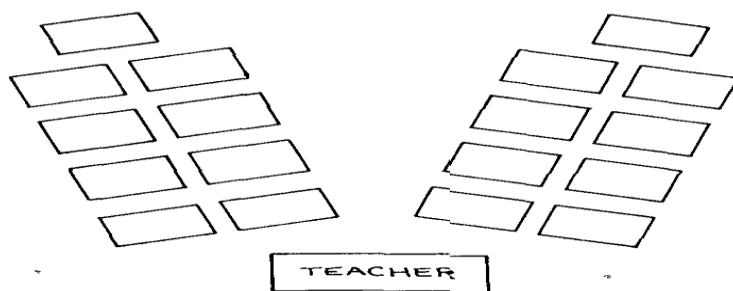
It is good for pupils to sit in groups, even if they are doing individual or class work, since it is then much more natural for them to talk to each other. Arrangement A also lets you do pairwork easily and leaves you a space in the middle of the classroom for more general activities. It gives you room to play games, tell stories, act out dialogues, etc. The front of the classroom is not always the best place for these activities if you want to create a feeling of involvement rather than performance.

Arrangement B works for individual and whole class work, and you can easily do pairwork if half the class turn their backs to the teacher, or if half the pupils move their chairs over to their neighbour's desk.



Arrangement B does not encourage natural communication since pupils can only see the back of the heads of the pupils in front of them, so it is not as suitable as Arrangement A for language work.

Arrangement C works in the same way as Arrangement B, But is more flexible and leaves; you with space in the middle of the classroom.



Grouping the children

It is important to keep in mind that not all children will take to pair and groupwork at once. Particularly five and six year olds are often happiest working alone, and are not yet willing to cooperate and share. They will want to keep all the cards, read the book alone, play with all the toys in the English corner, etc. Cooperation is something which has to be nurtured and learnt, so if your pupils have been to kindergarten or play school, or if they are already part of a class, then this may not be a problem at all.

If your pupils are sitting in groups of four most of the time, as in Arrangement A on page 13, you will find that although they are working as four individuals, they often develop a group identity. This type of arrangement makes it easier to see when pupils are ready to cooperate with other pupils, and we would recommend some sort of regular grouping, especially for the five to seven age range.

PAIRWORK

Pairwork is a very useful and efficient way of working in language teaching. It is simple to organise and easy to explain, and **groupwork** should not be attempted before the children are used to working in twos first.

- Let pupils who are sitting near each other work together. Don't move desks - and chairs should only be moved if absolutely necessary.
- Establish a routine for pairwork, so that when you say, 'Now work in your pairs', pupils know what is expected of them. The routine depends on how your classroom is arranged. If the pupils are sitting in rows as in Arrangement B, then it

might be that all pupils sitting in rows 1 and 3 turn round to face rows 2 and 4, while those working in row 5 work with the person next to them.

- Pairwork means that everyone in the class is occupied, but even if everyone in the class is working on the same thing, not all pairs will finish at the same time. Do not be tempted to let the pairwork continue until everyone has finished. As soon as you see that several of the pairs have finished, ask the others to finish off and move back to their own seats.
- If you do not have an even number of pupils in the class, then let one group work as a three. If you always partner the odd pupil then you will not be able to help the others.
- Be on the lookout for pupils who simply do not like each other - it is unlikely that they will work well together. This is more of a problem with eight to ten year olds than it is with five to seven year olds.
- Go through what you want pupils to do before you put them into their pairs.

GROUPWORK

Everything which has been said about pairwork applies to groupwork. We cannot put children into groups, give them an exercise and assume that it will work.

INTRODUCING GROUPWORK

If your pupils are not used to working in groups in other classes or if they do not naturally develop a group identity, as they may do if they are sitting permanently in a group (Arrangement A), then you can introduce them gradually to groupwork.

- Start by having teaching groups - groups which you teach separately from the rest of the class. This allows you to give some pupils more individual attention.
- Then you can go on to introducing self-reliant groups - groups which are given something to do on their own, with the teacher only giving help when needed.

- Start with just one group. Tell them clearly what the purpose is - 'I want you to make me a poster', and why they are working together - 'If there are four of you, you can help each other and share the work.'
- Go through this process with all the groups before you let the whole class work in groups at the same time.

NUMBERS

Limit numbers in the group to between three and five.

Who works with whom?

Children should not be allowed to choose their groups, partly because this takes a lot of time, but mainly because it usually means that someone is left out. If your pupils sit in groups all the time, then it is natural for them to work most of the time in those groups. There is no reason why pupils should not be moved about from time to time.

PUPIL 1: Can I borrow your pencil, please? PUPIL 2: Yes. PUPIL 1: Thanks.

TEACHER: What's this called in English? Anyone know? Guess! Juan, do you know? JUAN: Sorry, I don't know.

TEACHER: Okay. Well, it's called jam.

PUPIL: Can I have a pair of scissors, please? TEACHER: Of course. You know where they are - in the cupboard. PUPIL: Thank you.

PUPIL 1: Whose turn is it to get the books? PUPIL 2: Elvira's. PUPIL 1: Your turn,

Elvira. ELVIRA: Okay.

Particularly with the eight to ten year olds, you might want to put them in mixed ability groups some of the time, but sometimes group them according to ability. Clever pupils can and do help the not so clever ones if the groups are mixed, but sometimes you want to give extra help to either the clever or the not so clever on their own.

CLASSROOM LANGUAGE

If cooperation and communication are to be part of the process of learning a language as well as part of the process of growing up, then the sooner the pupils learn simple, meaningful expressions in English, the easier it will be. A very important way of helping pupils progress from dependence on the book and on the teacher to independence is to give them the necessary tools. One of the tools is classroom language.

For example, few children of five will admit that they don't know the answer to a question. Nor will they ask for more information if they don't understand what they have to do. Very often they will just do what they think you want them to do. So teaching them phrases like, 'I'm sorry, I don't know' or 'I don't understand' helps their development, their language, and their ability to communicate meaningfully in the classroom and elsewhere. Children in the older age group have developed beyond this stage in their own language, but need the expressions in the foreign language.

Here are some phrases which all your pupils should learn as soon as possible. Note that they should be taught as phrases, not as words or structures. Children are only interested in what the phrases are used for. Some are very specific, most can be used in lots of different situations, and most give children a short cut to being

Foreign language classroom.

Good morning/afternoon Goodbye

Can I please?

Sorry, I don't know/don't understand/can't.

What's this called in English?/What's the English for?

Whose turn is it/book is this/chair is this?

Whose turn is it to?

It's my/your/his/her turn. . Pass the please.

CONCLUSION

Do remember 'please' and 'thank you' – they help a lot. So do the words for all the things in the classroom. Have picture dictionaries to help the children with

the more common words. We have included a list at the end of the chapter of some of the picture dictionaries we are familiar with.

Try to speak English as much of the time as you can, using mime, acting, puppets and any other means you can think of to get your meaning across – see the section on presentation on pages 34 to 36. Your pupils are unlikely to have the opportunity to hear English all day so you should let them hear as much as possible while you have them in class. Keep your language simple but natural, and keep it at their level.

You will have to decide for yourself how much mother tongue language you use – it depends very largely on your own individual class. Remember that you can very often convey the meaning of what you are saying by your tone of voice and your body language – you don't always have to switch languages.

Questions and activities

1. Think back to when you went to school and try to think about the teachers you liked best. Why did you like them? Try to make two lists under the headings Abilities and Attitudes. Do the same with the teachers you didn't like. If you are working with others, compare your lists.
2. What abilities do you have that will help you in your teaching? Can you play a musical instrument, sing, tell stories, etc.? Is there anything you would like to be able to do that is not on your list? Can you do anything about it?
3. Read through the section 'Helping the children to feel secure' on pages 10 and 11. Make two lists under the headings:

Do and Don't

Discuss your lists with a colleague if you can. Would you like to make any changes to the lists or add to them?

4. Make a list of tasks which pupils can do in your classroom, like changing the calendar.
5. Look back at the section on arranging the desks on pages 13 and 14. How would you like to arrange the desks in your classroom? Sketch a plan, leaving room for an

English corner if you can. If you are thinking of a particular class, you can add the names of your pupils as well.

6. Let's say that you have a class of ten-year-old beginners. Which classroom phrases would you like them to be able to use at the end of the first two weeks? If you are using a textbook, look at the first lessons there and see what classroom language you think would be useful for these lessons.

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