

Primary Student Motivation and Achievement: Developing Classroom Management and Managing Positive Behaviour

Motivación y rendimiento en el estudiante de Educación Primaria: cómo desarrollar el manejo del aula y gestionar una conducta positiva

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Abstract

Primary teachers all over the world seem to be having a difficult time when trying to motivate their students and engage them in learning. The present paper is divided into three main sections. Section 1 briefly discusses the importance of creating friendly learning atmosphere and highlights some key aspects, which are conducive to increasing students' motivation. Section 2 compiles a wide range of motivational techniques that work on prevention. Section 3 presents a number of activities that activate and strengthen students' Multiple Intelligences. Section 4 provides the reader with effective techniques to sort out problems of disruption.

Key words: Motivation, Primary Students, Emotional Intelligence, Affective Filter, Teacher Training.

Resumen

Parece un rasgo común entre el profesorado de primaria, la dificultad para motivar a los estudiantes y conseguir que se involucren en su aprendizaje. El siguiente trabajo está dividido en tres secciones principales. La sección 1 se centra en aquellos aspectos clave que llevan a la creación de un clima de trabajo apropiado y si señala algunos actos clave que hacen posible motivar a los estudiantes. La sección 2 presenta un número nutrido de técnicas de motivación. La sección 3 presenta un compendio de actividades que activan y refuerzan las Inteligencias Múltiples de los estudiantes. La sección 4 dota al lector de técnicas efectivas para resolver problemas de disrupción en el aula.

Palabras clave: Motivación, estudiantes de primaria, Inteligencia Emocional, Filtro Afectivo, Formación de Profesorado.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Without any doubt, discipline is an important issue in our classes. Literature on the topic suggests that both learners and teachers are responsible for the presence of disruption in the EFL Primary classroom (Prentis, Parrot & Smith, 2013; Gregory, 2016). More precisely, it is claimed that Primary students behavioural problems are generally caused by a skill deficit, a family problem or a specific personality disorder (Walker, 2010; Korb, 2011). On the part of the teacher, it is their lack of knowledge to teach a specific subject or, more importantly, their lack of training to handle behaviour problems that are said to be the main causes of disruption (Feber, 2011; Middleton & Perks, 2012).

On countless occasions discipline measures come down to punishment, losing the focus of the real cause of a problem. In a clumsy attempt to create a classroom environment that will be conducive to learning, many teachers stick to their course books and lose sight of what really enhances the management of classroom learning: motivation. Although educational punishment may be necessary at specific points in time during the teaching-learning process, my own experience tells me we have to be cautious. Preventive measure clearly established from day one are much more effective than the most constructive punishment you can think of. In other words, we must work harder on preventing inappropriate behaviour and creating a positive friendly learning environment rather than trying to handle the consequences.

From all that has been said, it is easy to see I strongly disagree with the common belief that disciplining students is just the business of punishing those who misbehave (Lee & Carter, 1993). Over the years, I have found it more effective to take into account the way learners feel about their accomplishments and the amount of satisfaction they experience after task completion. Teaching Primary students has taught me that the best and most effective recipe to promote appropriate behaviour and attitudes to learning consists of three basic ingredients: a spoonful of motivation, a pound of reward and a pinch of constructive punishment.

In general terms the need to misbehave, clown around or be off-task may be due to different social and family issues, a lack of social skills common at an early age, and/or a difficulty in planning and organising thought and action. Any of these reasons may lead to emotional problems which include impulsiveness, low frustration tolerance, and inappropriate social behaviour.

Unfortunately, there are no magic wands available on the market that work wonders and serve everybody's needs. Still, experience and the use of techniques that backfired have taught me three valuable lessons about how address misbehaviour and never give up on the child.

The first lesson I have learned is to see the world through my students' eyes. Misbehaviour is a habit, a bad habit, but a habit at the end of the day. We all know how difficult it is to overcome a habit – only smokers know how many times we have tried to quit smoking and relapsed two weeks later swearing to ourselves: «Just one cigarette will do me no harm!» It took me a while to understand that lasting changes take time. It was then when I started appreciating and celebrating my students' progress, while also being more understanding when misbehaviour appears. Initially, I could just see the student misbehaving that seemed to be operating that way to bug me and ruin my class. However, I was able to see what was going on, I just found a poor soul who was trying to be somebody in the class in the wrong way; that is to say, a poor soul who was a slave to his or her need for attention.

The second thing I have realised is that those who misbehave do not have a busy agenda, or at least not the agenda I would like them to have, pinching their mates, making faces at others when teacher is not looking, or even hitting themselves against the wall to be in the spotlight. This misbehaviour was just highlighting a failure in planning carefully my teaching; students readily take advantage of a perceived lack of structure in a class to misbehave.

The third lesson is that, as an important part of life, humour is a good thing in the classroom, but always at the right time and at the right place. After we all have enjoyed the humour briefly, silence is the most powerful technique to settle down students. I try to respond with silence, to signal to those who misbehave that «enough is enough»; rather than overreacting or ignoring any kind of misbehaviour, silence has proved to be more effective so as to prevent my class from having another misbehaviour problem.

2. EFFECTIVE MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUES

In the light of this, I here present some effective techniques that combine these elements and aim to prevent discipline problems in the Primary EFL classroom.

2.1. Praising Students and Influencing Behaviour

Over these twenty years, I have observed many teachers' classroom practices and I have noticed, to my surprise, that lots of them only address students to calm them down, correct their mistakes or tell them off, but they usually forget to tell students when they have done something right. Verbal reinforcement, therefore, becomes the key to encourage students for their good behaviour and accomplishments. As catchy compliments have the power to enhance the learning situations, by praising students you can easily increase their participation, motivation and positive behaviour. Kind words such as «Super duper!; You're doing fine; You're on the rick track now!; Now you have the hang of it!; Keep up the good work!; Awesome!; You're doing beautifully!; I'm proud of you!; Outstanding work!; so on and so forth».

In addition to verbal reinforcement, my favourite technique to tell students that are doing well is my puppet *Mr. Compliment*. At the beginning of the year, I introduce my youngsters to Mr. Compliment and tell them that he feels good only when he compliments children. Whenever Mr. Compliment sees them getting along with each other, being attentive and respectful and trying their best, he is happy; and, at the end of the lesson, he compliments those who have shone. Not only do youngsters love puppets, but they also feel proud of themselves when they are told how well they have done. *Mr. Compliment* always focuses on specific types of behaviour each week so that students can see what he is looking for. This technique is just perfect to model good and appropriate behaviour.

2.2. Modelling Appropriate Behaviour: Declaration of intentions

Nobody wants to live in chaos. We all need structure, we rely on many things in our lives to be consistent. I always wonder: what if those everyday things I take for granted changed randomly and frequently? How would I begin to act? Our declaration of intentions is a short number of authoritative principles laid down to guide behaviour in the classroom. They constitute the code of conduct that aims at immediately creating a work-oriented atmosphere and are stated positively as expectations of appropriate student and teacher behaviour.

Experience has taught me to understand the importance of creating a friendly organised atmosphere and avoid launching into skills and content instruc-

tion without teaching the 4Rs: Rights, Responsibilities, Rules, and Relationships. The 4Rs are based on the assumption that it is easier to maintain good behaviour than to change inappropriate behaviour that has become established. Unless I explicitly model the essential routines and rules for my classroom, most of them will not know how to behave, or behave as they did in the past.

We start the school year by writing up our declaration of intentions. It is essential to get everyone to have a significant role in its creation. This will avoid a lack of commitment from the learners to abide by the terms of the declaration. Needless to say, some amendments may be needed throughout the school year. Our declaration of intentions consists of three basic articles:

- **Article I. Beginning-of-day routines:**

- **Greeting the class.** Students enter the classroom, get their materials and put away personal belongings. Students greet the teacher and write the date. That week's classroom helper will remind others about the classroom assignment(s) for that day.
- **Getting started.** Students pick up an auction ticket – which are explained further below – and write their names on the back of the ticket. They open their course and wait for instructions.

- **Article II. Transition routines:**

- **Transition routines.** Effective transitions from one task to another prevent many misbehaviour problems. E.g. Change tasks quickly and quietly; quietly put away materials that are not needed; begin to work or wait quietly until the teacher signals it is time to start working.

- **Article III. End-of-day routines:**

- **Closing routines.** Students note down the next day's classroom assignment(s), put away all the materials, and say goodbye to the teacher by singing a previously learnt rhyme or song.

Never ending celebration! I try not to miss the chance to celebrate all their good intentions or accomplishments, no matter how little they are. We all need to be loved and feel appreciated. A positive environment is particu-

larly motivating for those who need attention. Verbal and non-verbal praise are effective tools to get these students to settle down. Whenever possible, I combine this with a wide range of certificates to reward students for good work and behaviour. As children are peer and teacher conscious, whenever I spot a student demonstrating good behaviour or trying their best at a task, I present him or her with an award to show that I appreciate their efforts.

2.3. Motivating students

The following techniques can work wonders and they have proved to be highly effective with my own students:

- **The King/Queen of the class!** This technique is the opposite of disciplining those who misbehave when sent on a timeout: it provides learners with the stage any actor dreams of. Learning from mistakes, I came up with this idea. If these students can even enjoy the attention when reprimanded, the opportunity to be King/Queen of the class will entice students to complete their best work. Therefore, I place a crown to wear in a classroom corner and reward students who complete satisfactory work with visits to the comfy, royal corner. This motivational technique has served me to manage the movement of students in a humane, yet effective way. At the end of the class, a round of applause will satisfy the students' need for attention.
- **Three, two, one... You're frozen!** I found the «please, stop what you are doing» card very effective to grab the attention of those students who are misbehaving without interrupting the lesson. I usually have a couple of cards in my pocket, always keep them handy, and with any misbehaviour problems starts I simply place the card on his or her desk. If a particular student needs more discipline, they know they will not have the reward for that day and will be responsible for doing other tasks. This simple technique develops self-discipline quite effectively.
- **Tic-tac, tic-tac... Mind your attitude!** As children are peer conscious, peer pressure can work wonders in listening to instruction, changing tasks quietly and quickly. While working in groups, I use a kitchen timer that may ring at some point when they are carrying out most important classroom tasks. If the kitchen timer rings and one

student is off-task, the whole group will not get their daily auction ticket for our monthly auction. This technique helps these students to overcome their hunger for status, develop social skills, and keep up relationships in a positive way.

- **Going once, going twice, sold!** A competitive game, a difficult task within a time limit or any other motivating tasks will give students the chance to earn an auction ticket every day in my class. If deserved, they store them in a personalised envelope we have at the display area. At the end of the month, we hold an auction during which student can spend their tickets on buying rewards – both intangible and tangible rewards, but not edible ones. Once they understand the importance of behaving well, they will do their best to store as many tickets as possible to have an active role they day the auction is held. The idea of being the one who gets the item is too appealing! Students do their best to eventually get the prize.

2.4. The use of symbolic rewards

The use of symbolic rewards is one of the most effective techniques to prevent discipline problems in the Primary EFL classroom. We only have to make sure we change the rewards once in a while; otherwise students will get bored and the technique will not work any longer. Here I suggest some symbolic rewards that can be used throughout the school year and some others that can be used from time to time.

- **Our walk of fame** is my way to show students I appreciate their best efforts. When one of my students makes a significant progress, I take a picture of that student holding his/her good work. Then I mount the picture along with a caption describing the achievement on a bulletin board titled «Our walk of fame». Here are some of the captions I have used these years: «You did a whale of job»; «Award winning behaviour»; «All star student»; «You're the apple of my eye»; «Way to go!»; «Your work is out of this world!», etc. At the end of every period, students can take their photos home to share with their parents.

There are other techniques that can be used for shorter periods of time to help create a positive learning atmosphere. We all know about golden stars,

stickers, certificates and coupons to celebrate all types of behaviour. Although these techniques aim to prevent students from turning in careless work and rewarding students for good behaviour, I find the following three techniques much more effective:

- **The leaky cauldron.** Taking advantage of Harry Potter's popularity, I have become a wizard myself. In my magic cauldron I prepare a perfect potion to build up my students' self-esteem, give them positive feedback, and block unfriendly inappropriate behaviour. I place an eye-catching cauldron on my desk. Every time I (or even Mr. Compliment) witness a student succeeding either academically or socially, I write it down on a piece of paper and place it in the cauldron. At the end of the week, I cast a spell on student by reading out loud all the good things they have done. After that, student can take their achievements home and share them with their families. The following day students will start imitating appropriate behaviour as they will be willing to hear their names next time I read what they have done that week. This technique is just perfect to model behaviour without asking students what they must do.
- **My cat rounds out.** As a facilitator of knowledge, I understand the teaching-learning process as a fishing metaphor; that is to say, students do not need me to give them a fish, but they need a rod and my training to use that rod efficiently. This belief helped me to come up with a technique that has proved to motivate my youngsters and keep them under control. Due to children's natural curiosity, at the beginning of the year, I always introduce myself and satisfy students' three main curiosities: my age, whether I have a wife or not and my pet's name. The first week students get to know my cat so that I can implement *My cat rounds out* technique.

I cut out several animal-shaped patterns (i.e. a fish, a mouse or any other animal cats like eating). I then attach a large paper clip to the tail of each animal and place them in a colourful bag. In order to make a fishing pole, I attach a magnet to a picture of my cat and another to one end of a piece of string; then I tie the other end to a ruler. When my students have done the best paper from homework assignment, improved test scores or an error-free grammar exercise, my cat gets

to round out for a reward. It is easy to keep motivation high; I just create a wide number of animals and rewards. E.g. 5 minutes of free time, 1 point to the student's lowest daily grade, etc.

- **Same script, different cast.** As a film director, who gives directions to the cast, every day before the class starts I draw some names (cast) from a pile of scraps containing all the students' names. I keep these names a secret, as the students know that the cast selected will be watched to determine whether they have behaved well and deserve a reward or not. Each and every student hopes that they have been selected and try their best to behave well. At the end of the 'filming' session, I reveal the names of the cast selected and give a prize if deserved. I will give away my secret, I never draw any name; therefore, I always choose those students who tried harder and those did really well in comparison with their typical behaviour. As Primary students need to know what you are looking for, I always make it explicit at the beginning of the session so they know what «behaving well» means that particular day. This is the best way to model appropriate behaviour and prevent misbehaviour.

3. MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITIES THAT AWAKEN PRIMARY STUDENTS' MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE

In addition to these prevention techniques, planning a wide range of activities that cater for diversity and awaken all of the children's multiple intelligences is also a very useful way to avoid misbehaviour problems. Here I explain some of the best activities I have used over the years that can be used almost in any teaching context:

- **My Personal Rocket.** This is a good way to welcome the new school year with a get-to-know-me project. First, I have each student colour and cut-out an enlarged copy of a rocket pattern. Second, I have students personalise the rocket by writing their names on the door. Then I ask students to cut pictures of objects that are significant to them (things they like eating, doing, etc.) from discarded magazines and glue them to the rocket. Finally, we display the completed projects on a bulletin board titled «Look who's going into space this

year!». Every day some students introduce themselves to their classmates by explaining what they like doing in their free time, what they like eating, their favourite animals, sport, etc.

- **The Apples of Antony's eye!** This is one of my most popular back-to-school activities that are sure to make a great start of the school year. First, I cut an apple shape from red, green, or yellow construction paper for each student. Then, I instruct students to decorate their apple patterns to express themselves. Construction paper of assorted colours, yarn, scissors, crayons, and glue are needed to personalise their apples. When students have their apples ready, I display the completed cut-outs on a bulletin board previously covered with construction-paper branches. During the first days, we go and pick up four apples. These four «apples» will introduce themselves to the rest of the class.
- **Maths Salad.** This is a good way to «digest» basic mathematical operations and learn some vegetable names and shapes in the bilingual classroom. Using vegetable-shaped cut-outs for this purpose such as tomatoes, carrots, lettuce and so on, I form one vegetable pile with the first half of a mathematical operation ($4 + 4$) and write the solution on another vegetable pile ($= 8$). To play the game, two or more students turn all the vegetables facedown on a table, each player takes a turn selecting one vegetable of each pile and turning them face-up. If both vegetables match, for instance ($3 + 3 = 6$), the student must say out loud « $3 + 3 = 6$. I like (name of the first vegetable) and (the name of the second one)», keep them and take another turn. If the pair does not match ($2 + 3 = 9$), the player says «I don't like (name of the first vegetable) and (the name of the second one)» and returns them to their facedown positions. The next player has a go. The play continues in this manner until all vegetables have been matched. Every now and then I shuffle the piles to allow more matches. The player with the most pairs wins and we display our maths salad on the display area to refresh youngsters' forgetful minds. This activity can be adapted to any other content area such as Science (e.g. students should match mammals, reptiles, etc.).
- **Musical Envelopes.** Although children love playing musical chairs, we usually do not have enough room to carry out this activity. My

musical envelopes not only get around common noisy problems and lack of space to move around, but also channels youngsters' enthusiasm into a version for content-area instruction (for instance, Science). To prepare for the game, I create a supply of simple questions of the desired skill level on separate half-sheets of coloured construction paper (e.g. Are spiders insects? Are cows mammals? Are bees reptiles? etc.). I write the question on one side of the paper and the answer on the other side. Next, I give each student an envelope and I instruct them to pass them round clockwise. Then, I play some music and have students pass the envelopes without moving around. When the music stops, each student opens the envelope in their hands, reads the question, and says the answer out loud. To check whether they were right or not, students look on the back of the card. We continue in this manner for a desired amount of time. Since there are as many envelopes as students, no one sits out or misses a turn as in the traditional musical chairs, and everyone gets plenty of practice! Any other content can be presented.

- **Window Shop Celebrities.** When working on clothes, I have each student cut out, personalise and decorate a construction paper T-shirt, skirt, pair of socks, trousers and other garments. Using discarded magazines, they have to find pictures where celebrities they admire are wearing such a piece of clothing of their liking and glue these pictures to their selected piece of clothing. We then display all their items using clothespins and lengths of heavy string as if they were on display on a shop. During this unit of work, I ask a few students to say something about their clothes. Celebrities are just a good excuse to catch students' eye and make sure they will go to the display area and see who is there and review clothing without realising!
- **Fish in the Ocean!** Students enjoy all the movement involved in this fun game. I pick six students to be fishermen. I assign each fisherman a different number from one to six and post that number on their «boat» or desk. Sometimes we play this game in the gym, and then I use hula-hoops instead of desks. I then have each remaining student (or «fish») roll a die to determine his/her number in the game. Write the number on a Post-it and attach it to the fish's shirt. When all fish have been assigned a number, give a signal for them to

«flip the fins» to the ocean of their choice: Atlantic Ocean (corner number 1), Pacific Ocean (corner number 2), Indian Ocean (corner number 3), Southern Ocean (corner number 4), and Arctic Ocean (in the middle of the class). Each fisherman then rolls the die twice. The first roll determines which ocean s/he will visit. The second roll determines which numbered fish can be taken from the ocean (a fisherman who rolls a one and a four will visit ocean one (Atlantic Ocean) and take all fish wearing fours. Fishermen ask fish which ocean they live in and who is wearing the number selected at random. After each fisherman has had a turn, s/he returns to their own boat with the fish taken. The fisherman counts the total number of fish and leaves for another ocean, where they roll the dice again to find out what their catch this time will be. We repeat the procedure until there are no more fish in the oceans. The fisherman with the highest number of fish is the winner.

4. FROM PREVENTION TO REMEDIATION

While an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, this is often not possible. What can we do if we are faced with a difficult situation in the Primary classroom? What corrective actions help us to address problems when they occur? The above mentioned techniques were aimed at providing Primary teachers with a 'bag of tricks' to motivate their learners. Although motivation may be the mainstay of the teaching-learning process, they are not the only tools in teachers' arsenal. In other words, disruption usually finds its way into the Primary classroom, which sometimes makes it hard to remember that teaching is, above all, a loving caring profession. Optimally, teachers need to be able to orchestrate experiences that lead to student learning in an environment that fosters the development of the whole person. Thus, there is a need for teacher to cater for their students' different learning styles while creating a friendly, non-threatening, and work-oriented atmosphere. Such a difficult task calls for a skilled teacher who understands his/her commitment to the high ideals of the teaching profession. In what follows, I will focus my attention on how to handle the consequences of inappropriate behaviour constructively.

In my opinion, there are three basic steps to follow to manage challenging behaviour effectively. The first step is always to reflect on the antecedent. As

the teacher, I try to analyse who is involved and what the situation is. The second step is an analysis of the actual challenging behaviour; that is to say, what the pupil is doing or has done. The third and last step is an evaluation of the consequences of such behaviour for the pupil, for the other learners, and also for me.

It is essential that teachers express positive expectations towards all students. Unfortunately, I have met and observed many trainee and experienced teachers who have forgotten that they are in a personal developing profession that should help children enhance the quality of their lives. The key idea is ‘do not forget that whatever the learner does, we always have to address behaviour, not the student himself or herself’. It is worth saying that the solutions or techniques proposed here are not intended for everyone’s needs; they must be considered in the context of your teaching environment. In my teaching experience, students mainly show three stressing ways of behaving: a) those who need to be forever in the spotlight; b) those students who cannot hold their tongue and speak out of turn and all at once; and c) those students who swear and find amusement in fighting. Let us examine them in turn.

4.1. Attention-seeking students

These learners are constantly doing things to get your attention. It does not seem to matter that you provide lots of it, they prefer being punished, admonished or criticised to being ignored: their desire for attention is almost insatiable. Unfortunately, sitting down with these learners and explaining to them that you have a number of children to work each day is not very effective. Initially, I recommend promoting intrinsic motivation and providing these children with responsibilities and a leadership role from time to time. However, if motivation and responsibilities do not work, try and use plan B: getting students to feel the frustration their mates feel every time they do not follow the rules, speak out of turn, etc. Here you are two simple, but very effective techniques:

- **The singing wall.** The procedure is relatively simple. I divide the class into two teams, putting the attention-seekers on different sides, and I call out one of them from each team. As in an ordinary information gap activity, these two students are given certain information – always related to the topic we are working on, the grammar structure

we want to consolidate, so and so forth – that must be shared with their own teams. After having exchanged the piece of information they need, I swap them and put each other on the opposite team. At the same time, students in both teams are given precise instructions: they have to be as noisy as possible to prevent the leader of the other team from getting the message through. A word of caution to this tale: ALWAYS ask your students to sing in chorus a previously learnt song. On the one hand, they will be reviewing something English aspect and, on the other hand, you will not end up the class with a splitting headache. This activity is extremely effective to make these attention-seeking students feel the frustration and anxiety their mates may feel every time they break in when the rest of the class is doing something else.

- **Life swap.** There is not doubt that the effectiveness of this technique stems from the fact that Primary school children's reliance on what they experience, or perform directly. When children misbehave and you ask them whether they would like the others to do what he or she has just done, we always have the same answers: «Yes,!», «Of course!», «Why not?» or simply, 'I don't mind!' In order to try and put an end to this, I design different role-playing scenarios where students disrupt the class in different ways and make them all play all the roles at a time. In doing so, they learn by being in somebody else's shoes. My 'life swap' technique can help students learn right from wrong; that is to say, these role-plays are aimed at helping attention-seeking students reflect upon their behaviour and understand how their classmates feel. The procedure of the task may vary in terms of what we are doing at that time of the school year. Basically, I record students while they role-play a specific disruption. I then work with all the class to think about this type of behaviour. I make sure that the attention-seeking students are always the ones that are 'left outside alone'. This technique, hard as it may seem, is based on the behaviourist claim that behaviour is learnt and is the product of our experiences. If changes in students' behaviour are governed by the consequences of their actions, these role-plays can make students understand that what they are doing is wrong. Over the years, this technique has proved to enhance the management of classroom learning, develop students' aware of their own behaviour and create a friendly learning atmosphere.

4.2. Starting the class over the chattering of students

From the moment we put a step into the classroom, we must make sure that we have the attention of everyone in the classroom before the lesson starts. It is not advisable to teach over the chatter of students who are not paying attention. Inexperienced teachers sometimes think that by beginning their lesson, the class will settle down. Children, however, will think that the teacher is willing to compete with them, that he or she does not mind talking while they talk, or that he or she is willing to speak louder so that they can finish their conversation even after you have started the lesson. They get the idea that their lack of attention is accepted. I here present a focusing technique to demand their attention and show they are not allowed to talk when the teacher is giving a lesson. Here you are some attention-getting techniques:

- **The count down or the counting rhyme.** At the beginning of the class, I raise my hand in the air to call students' attention. First I show five fingers and lower one at a time until you have none up. By them, they have to be quiet. In addition, you can make up an easy rhyme to get students' attention. For instance, I quiet students down between activities or gain their attention by saying «One, two, three eyes on me». Then I encourage students to answer in chorus «One, two, eyes on you!».
- **Crossing time.** In my class, I have created my own pedestrian «crossing lights» consisting of three coloured words: STOP, INSTRUCTION TIME, and WORK. If students are very young, I use the symbols of a stop sign, an ear, and an upraised hand respectively. I instruct them what to do by pinning an arrow glued to a safety pin onto the relevant sign.

4.3. Swearing and violent behaviour

At present, violent behaviour and swearing in the school is clearly a sore subject. Both cause teacher most stress due to the fact that there is no universal intervention that can be used in any teaching context. In spite of this, I will propose some strategies which you could adapt to fit in the context of your teaching environment. Funnily enough, most students swear because they lack the social skills to know when swearing is inappropriate. Let me give you

an example: Is it not true that many people and encourage toddlers to say a swear word in their baby talk in a family context? When these children are in the classroom they may still think swearing is funny and expect the teacher and everyone else to laugh with them as their relatives do. This time a reminder of the school approach to positive language should be enough. Some other times learners swear because they are used to hearing their relatives doing it. In this case, a one-to-one chat may be necessary. You must be careful not to create another source of conflict, though. This could happen if you react angrily, demonstrate embarrassment or shock, if you make comments about the students' home or draw attention to the situation for all to hear. Rather, it is much better to defuse the situation.

If involved in one violent episode, our first responsibility is to stop the aggressive behaviour as soon as possible. As adults, we must stay calm, try to defuse the situation, and give clear instructions both to the aggressor and to the other pupils. If you have a student who is often violent, you are not a failure if you need to ask for help: the psychologist, some other teachers, and/or parents can help you get round the problem. However, when facing an isolated episode of violent behaviour, I find *The Assembly* very useful:

- **The Assembly.** This technique is really effective to create a special bonding among students. After the event, I gather students around and start a debate – younger students will be prompted to talk by means of simple questions they can understand – so as to reflect on the episode, what led to it and the consequences of the action. Then I ask students questions to make them say how they feel, how the victim feels, and the others as well. This assembly serves to basic purposes: to help students to understand why this behaviour is not acceptable and to teach the student how to handle his/her violent temper.
- **The funny pair.** It is often frustrating when students do not want to cooperate and simply cannot understand why violence is not the way to sort out problems. After a while, I came up with the idea that if cooperation is one building block of the teaching-learning process, cooperation could also be the medicine to cure this aggressive behaviour. This way I usually get those students who have beaten each other to literally stick to each other for a week. Students must be together as long as possible; that is to say, they must carry out tasks together in