



**Joint Efforts for Innovation:
Working Together
to Improve
Foreign Language
Teaching in the
21st Century**

**Dolors Masats, Maria Mont
& Nathaly González-Acevedo (Editors)**

A book for the curious and passionate 21st century language teachers and teacher trainers.

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- Pioneering proposals to open up the classroom doors.
- Problem-solving and inquiry-based tasks that promote team work.
- Honest reflections from practitioners on their classroom practices.

This book includes

- accessible examples of teacher-led classroom research small-scale studies.
- calls for teachers to do research in their classrooms.
- personal accounts on the importance of school internships for pre-service teachers.

This book is an invitation for practicing teachers and teacher trainers to be creative and to develop learning skills, literacy skills and life skills.

Are you ready to become an innovative 21st century educator?



**JOINT EFFORTS FOR INNOVATION:
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Dolors Masats, Maria Mont & Nathaly Gonzalez-Acevedo (Editors)

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Classroom management

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Introduction

Teachers spend several years at the university preparing themselves to become teachers. They gain knowledge on learning theories, methods and approaches and are taught about how to put theory into practice, but when they face their own classrooms for the very first time they usually feel overwhelmed. As pre-service teachers, during school placements they have learnt to plan lessons and prepare materials addressed to different groups of students and grades, but they have little or no experience in designing their own teaching spaces, in developing strategies for knowing students' names and needs quickly to give them immediate support, in dealing with disruptive behaviour or in catering for diversity by attending to students' different learning styles. That is, novice teachers still need to develop their classroom management skills.

The term classroom management refers to the procedures expert teachers develop to arrange the physical teaching space and to organise participation in the classroom, with the objective of creating a supportive learning environment (Wright 2005). According to Richards & Bohlke (2011:8) “good classroom management is a prerequisite to an effective lesson [...] and teachers deal with management issues differently, depending on the kind of class they are teaching, their relationships with their students, and their own individual teaching style”. Masats (2016) relates classroom language with four actions teachers need to engage in: (a) arranging the physical and psychological learning spaces, (b) fostering students' participation, (c) promoting group dynamics that favour communication and cooperation and (d) assessing students' learning process and progress. This chapter will provide teachers with practical ideas on how to undertake the first two actions.

Arranging the physical and psychological learning spaces

Students learn better in colourful neatly arranged classrooms that transmit warmth and harmony. A space that allows movement, promotes creativity and gives students easy access to various types of learning tools and resources. Students learn better when they feel comfortable and self-assured when they have responsibilities to meet, when they are familiar with the classroom rules

and routines and when they know what it is expected from them. In this section we will illustrate with examples how to create a physically and psychologically positive learning environment.

Arranging the physical space

Class teachers have their own classrooms, which, a few hours a week are used by specialist teachers. English teachers typically move from class to class to teach and need to adapt to the different styles of organising the space of different teachers. Occasionally, they can have a class of their own, a space they can manage and where they can arrange the furniture and display materials as they please. If that is the case, before setting up their classrooms, teachers need to reflect upon the learning goals for the students who will use that space, the course contents and the methodologies they would use. For example, in figure two below, we can observe one of the classrooms I had. In this case, it was used by kindergarteners. As can be observed, the room is divided into different spaces to allow the organisation of simultaneous learning spaces, each decorated to serve the purpose of reinforcing particular contents. We have the phonological awareness corner, the alphabet section, a classroom library, the computer section, a construction site, a science table, the arts corner, the math wall, the assembly mat, tables for group work and a digital board for lectures.

The contrast between what the same classroom looks like in figures 1 & 2 is obvious. The classroom as it was originally settled was a dull poor learning space. After rearranging the furniture and decorating the walls it turned into a colourful welcoming learning environment.



Figure 1. Poor learning space



Figure 2. Classroom turned into a cosy learning space

Organising the materials

When you teach different groups of students, you need to organise yourself very well. I have a colour tray to keep the copies I give to each grade class. The different groups within the same grade that visit the English classroom have a different tray as well. Each student has a plastic bag to store their worksheets together before putting them on the corresponding tray. This particular way of organising materials also helps teachers subbing in your class to find activities for students easily. It is a fantastic arrangement to have an English classroom organized, especially in my case, as I teach 13 different groups in my class every week.



Figure 3. Colour trays to organise the copies for each grade and class group

I have two different kinds of storage for the materials I create for my lessons. I use plastic drawer units, labelled for every grade level, to store small teaching materials and realia, such as games, maps, cards, etc. They are all stored in different plastic folders organised by topics. For bigger materials such as posters, I use bigger plastic folders, also classified by topics. This arrangement saves time. Not only because when you are teaching you can find the materials very quickly and use them immediately, but also when cleaning up the walls in June or when setting up the classroom again at the beginning of the school year.

Using the classroom walls effectively

The classroom walls are typically used to display the basic vocabulary, structures and expressions children may need to use to communicate with others. Children tend to use their first language to talk to the other students in the classroom, but teachers should demand them to use certain formulaic expressions to, for example, ask for some water, express the need for extra supplies or ask for permission to go to the toilet. Having flashcards on the wall with the sentences children need to produce in these situations is a useful learning aid.



Figure 4. Classroom displays to illustrate different learning actions

The classroom walls can also be used to label the different learning areas in the classroom, to represent the actions children need to perform or to list the classroom rules. Displaying expected behaviours rules is a strategy that favours the creation of a positive psychological learning space, especially if students themselves agree upon those rules and create posters to list them. This can be a bit more difficult when you teach more than one group in the same class because you cannot have different rules, but it is easy to come to an agreement regarding the most basic rules that should be followed in the English class.

Creating positive psychological spaces for learning: routines, transitions and closings

English teachers don't spend much time with the same group of students, therefore they need to find strategies that, after a short period of time, can create a psychologically safe and nurturing learning environment. Classroom routines have a positive influence on students' performance and behaviour as they inform learners about what they can expect and what is expected of them in class (Burden, 2003). Routines are a set of short learning activities teachers and students carry out on a daily basis to signal the start and the closure of a lesson. When routines are used to create smooth transitions from one activity to the next, they minimise the possibilities for disruptions to occur (Docking, 2002).



Figure 5. A classroom calendar

Lessons typically start with greetings and the teacher checking attendance, and they are also opportunities for checking on the date, especially early in the morning. Writing down the date on the blackboard may turn into a tedious chore, instead, a classroom calendar like the one in figure 5 can serve the same purpose and turns the task of recording the date into a more dynamic activity as students can manipulate the cards they need to set up the date. A similar design can be used to create a weather chart.

Another good way to start a lesson is by providing students with a class menu, a list of the activities they will engage in that day. During the lesson, routines are also necessary to help students expand their vocabulary and develop their communicative competence in a self-assuring way. I weekly plan two different routines connected to numeracy and literacy.

In groups, and for 5 minutes, at the beginning of the lesson students must play games or complete different activities to practice how to say the numbers in English or how to make calculations. The routine is the same, but the tasks set vary on a weekly basis.

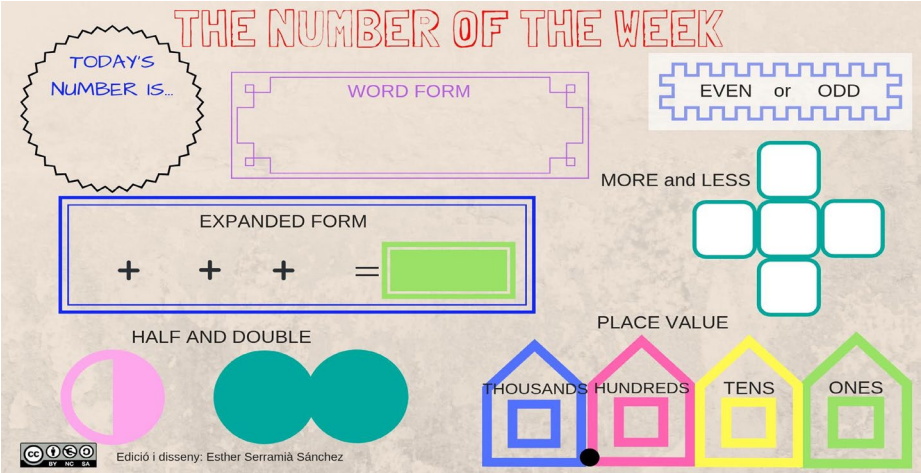


Figure 6. Example of a routine to practise numeracy

After that, they spend some time reading for pleasure. They choose a book from the class library and read parts of it every day. When they finish a book, they do a short activity. They have four choices: giving feedback and commenting on the book, describing the traits of the main characters in the book, drawing a story map or writing a summary of the plot.

During the lesson, students may get very excited when conducting certain activities, so teachers need to use some strategies to catch their attention or to make

them be quieter. I use different attention grabbers in my class. I sometimes ring a hotel bell, other times I use clapping rhythms for them to follow.



Figure 7. Wall posters with clapping rhymes used as attention grabbers

Reciting short rhymes or poems or singing a song are useful procedures teachers can employ to set smooth transitions from one activity to another or to change students' groupings. Also, when moving from class to class, my youngest students love to play a pretend game. They imagine they are making bubbles with their mouth or they are eating tasty cotton candies. On doing so, they are able to cross the hallway and walk along the corridors without making noise.

Finally, to signal the end of the lesson, students can sing a song. Alternatively, the teachers can prepare an exit ticket for them. On my door there is a poster where I draw a different picture every day. Pictures are usually connected to something students have to learn during the session. When they enter the class, they see the picture but do not know the word that would allow them to leave the room when the lesson is over. That makes the routine more exciting and forces them to pay attention to what we do in class. Before any holiday seasons, the password I use as an exit ticket is related to the traditions in English speaking countries.

Fostering students' participation

Giving students responsibilities enhances their self-esteem and increases their degree of engagement in the class activities. One procedure I typically use is that of appointing students as class secretaries.

Students in my English class are divided into four groups. All members of the same group sit around a table and one of them adopts the role of a secretary for a week. This role is alternately taken by all students in the group, at least

once every term. Group secretaries are assigned managing roles such as being in charge of setting up the date in the classroom calendar or recording the weather on a daily basis. On each table we place a picture frame that illustrates the class role the group assistant will take on that week.



Figure 8. Tools to assign students classroom management roles



Figure 9. Display and storage of classroom supplies

Class secretaries are also responsible for giving the members of their own groups the supplies needed to carry out the activities planned and for putting them away at the end of the lesson. This procedure serves a two-fold objective. On the one hand it favours learners’ empowerment. On the other hand it supports learning because as the supplies are labelled, students can practice vocabulary in a more natural and effective way.

What it is important for creating positive learning environments is to set activities and routines that trigger students’ spontaneous use of the language. A routine that works well in my classroom to encourage spontaneous writing is what we call “a note to the teacher”. I display a poster on the wall to invite students to send me notes (on how they feel, on ideas they have, etc.). The poster is above a

table decorated with two small attractive mailboxes (one per each English teacher who uses the room), colour papers and pens.

It is a voluntary task and they know their teacher will reply to them and will not use their notes for assessing their writing skills. Grading all texts students produce is counterproductive.

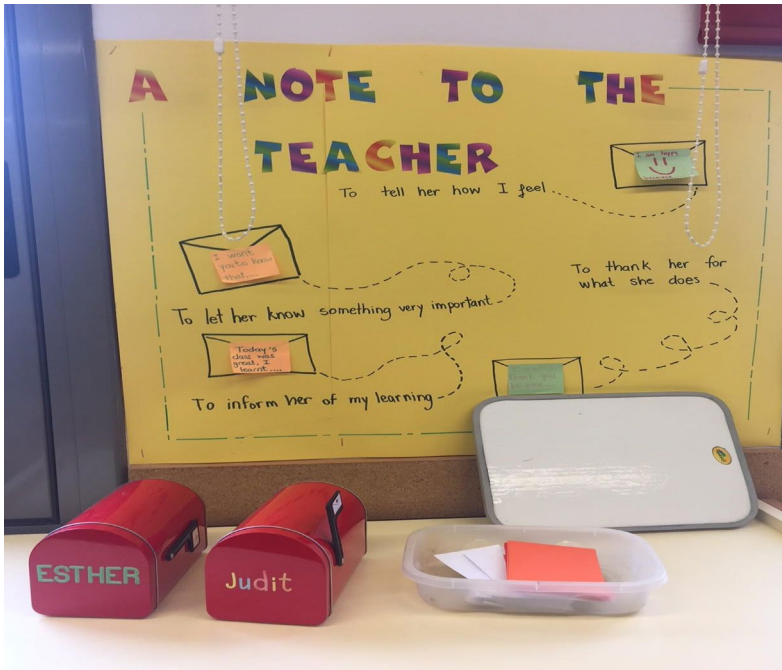


Figure 10. Realia used to encourage students to communicate with their teacher

Writing spontaneously and with no pressure allows students to feel more confident about writing. The activity also promotes cooperation because as students are engaged in an authentic writing task with a real target addressee, they want to make themselves understood and ask their peers for help if needed.

Classroom routines need to be part of teachers lesson plans and teachers need to plan well in advanced which language they want their students to practice through classroom routines and how often they will modify those routines. Establishing a visual year calendar can be a useful managing tool (see figure 11).

Notes on planning

ENGLISH					
TERM	MONTH	WEEKS (1 Week)	DIDACTIC UNIT	ENGLISH CONTENT	
First term	September	1st Week	TOPIC 1		
		2nd Week			
		3rd Week			
		4th Week			
		5th Week			
	October	6th Week			
		7th Week			
		8th Week			
	November	9th Week	TOPIC 2		HALLOWEEN
		10th Week			
		11th Week			
		12th Week			
		13th Week			
	December	14th Week	TOPIC 3		CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS
		15th Week			
15th Week					
Second term	January	16th Week	TOPIC 3	Christmas holidays	
		17th Week			
		18th Week			
		19th Week			
		20th Week			
	February	21st Week	TOPIC 4		
		22nd Week			
		23rd Week			
		24th Week			
		25th Week			
Third term	March	26th Week	TOPIC 5		
		27th Week			
		28th Week			
	April	29th Week			
		29th Week			
Third term	April	30th Week		Easter Holidays	
		31st Week			
		32nd Week			
		33rd Week			
		34th Week			
	May	35th Week	TOPIC 6		
		36th Week			
		37th Week			
		38th Week			
		39th Week			
June	39th Week		SCHOOL CULTURAL WEEK		

Figure 11. A sample of a blank teachers' calendar

The calendar should organise teaching weeks into the corresponding term periods and for each period, teachers should decide on how many topics or projects will be developed in class. When planning there is no such thing as a specific sequence of steps to follow. Each project will be different. The most important thing that counts is to have a clear idea of the contents that will be taught, the skills students would employ and the kind of activities that would allow them to do so. As a routine in my class, all projects include a song, a story and a game. Regularly, singing the song will be used as a procedure to set transitions between activities or as a strategy to capture students' attention.

The calendar is also useful to list the tasks students will be engaged in during the implementation of each class project and the assessment activities linked to those tasks. Before actually planning the lessons, it is important to have this general overview of the whole project. This allows teachers to notice if the tasks allow for a good balance between all sorts of student groupings (individual work, pairs and group work, whole class work), as this is essential to manage students' participation effectively.

Concluding remarks

Learning is more likely to take place in positive and reinforcing milieus. At the beginning of the school year, teachers should invest time arranging the classroom and the learning resources and materials to create a warm atmosphere that

welcome students to learn. Once the physical space is settled, and during the first lessons of every school year, time should be invested on creating a confident and secure environment to support students. Investing a few sessions to negotiate classroom rules, to assign classroom roles to students, and to make sure learners know what they can expect and what is expected from them is worth the time spent.

Good classroom routines are those which contextualise language use, serve the purpose of managing students' participation and contribute to the creation of a favourable learning environment. Not all procedures used as classroom routines work well for all the groups, so teachers need to adjust them to the learning objectives of each lesson and to the learning style of each group of students.

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