

Controlling Disruptive Students and Getting Students' Attention

Luis Andrés Peralta

Type of Pedagogical skill: Classroom Management	Topic: Controlling disruptive students and getting students' attention
Curricular Thread: Integrated skills	Sub thread: Communication and Solidarity

Strategy 1: Quiet Sprinkles

Description

Teaching small children poses tough challenges for EFL teachers who frequently need to deal with students that are not accustomed to having English classes. As Copland et. al (2014) state, it can be difficult to motivate children who may struggle to understand the relevance of learning English. This results in lack of enthusiasm and indifference that are subsequently transformed in talking. Thus, the Quiet Sprinkle strategy can bring effective results at controlling students' noise aiming to quiet disruptive students and regain control of the class, encourage students' self-regulation, and foster their imagination through fantasy elements.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Sample activity Pre Basic User Year 2-3

Before the lesson, decorate a small bottle with glitter, sparkles, and shiny paper. You can even put some rice or beans inside the container to add a sound element. The idea is that the bottle catches the attention of the students easily. Then add a label to the bottle and write the words “Quiet Sprinkles”.

In class, explain the meaning of the words “Quiet Sprinkles” to your students. Tell the class that when you shake these imaginary sprinkles on the head of a talking person, that person is expected to get quiet and they freeze.

Try the strategy with one student to show the rest of the class how it works making sure that when implementing this strategy, as Watanabe-Crocket (2017) suggests, you as the instructor must be very active and go all around the classroom modelling the strategy. With this, you will definitely draw your students’ attention and foster their imagination through the process as well. Although this strategy is very fun for children, it is recommended not to use it more than twice a month in order not to lose its effectiveness.



Differentiation & Accommodation

This strategy works with all class sizes. Any materials (such as jars, containers, boxes, etc.) can be used as long as they are decorated and grab the attention of the students. Another variation of this strategy is to get a spray bottle, write ‘Quiet Spray’ on it, and add water with a subtle scent as lavender. Teachers will spray a little water on disruptive students and when they feel and smell the scented water, they will need to freeze. However, this variation of the strategy is not as effective as the “Quiet Sprinkles’ one in terms of both getting your students attention and fostering students’ imagination.

Additionally, for the purpose of explaining the meaning of the words “Quiet Sprinkles”, a projector can be used with some visual representation of the words. If no projector is available, flash cards can be effective as well. Finally, make sure there is enough room to walk around the classroom ‘sparkling’ students.

Strategy 2: Countdown Prism

Description

This is a simple yet effective strategy that does not only help the teacher regain control over the class, but also provides students with the opportunity of learning and/or reviewing previously learned content (numbers). Also, it utilizes a visual element which furthers the chance of getting student’s attention. Moreover, this strategy aligns perfectly with the national curriculum of English for the first years of instruction.

Thus, this strategy has as objectives to quiet disruptive students and regain control of the class, to establish a routine with which students will be encouraged to use time accordingly, and to review previously learned content based on the Ecuadorian national curriculum of English as Foreign Language.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Sample activity Pre Basic User Year 2-3

Before class, prepare the material or teaching aid to be used for this strategy which consists of a pentagonal prism with numbers 1 to 5 written on each of the sides and a stick to hold and turn the prism.

For the prism, it is recommended to use strong construction paper or cardboard to ensure its sturdiness and durability. Also, make sure your material/teaching aid is big enough so that students are able to see it and distinguish the numbers on the sides of the prism. A suggested size for each of the sides might be around 8 cm x 8 cm. Once you have your prism done, attach a stick to the its base which will serve as a handle that you can use to turn the prism showing the numbers to the students.

During the lesson, show the artifact to your students and explain to them that you are going to use it when an activity needs to be finished and everybody has to become silent. You might want to review the numbers with your students first.

Get your students to work in an activity in class and proceed to count down the numbers holding up the artifact and showing the respective numbers to the students when the assigned time for the activity is about to run out. By the time you reached number one, all the students must be back on their seats and quiet. Similar with other strategies used with small children, this strategy must not be used too often to ensure its effectiveness.



Differentiation & Accommodation

This strategy works perfectly with all class sizes. Any material used to represent the numbers in countdown sequence works (such as individual flashcards). However, take into consideration that the material is not complicated to be handled. Besides, if there is a projector and an Internet connection available, you can make use of online digital tools (software, webpages, Google timer, etc.) to display the countdown sequence. A simple PowerPoint presentation can be effective as well.

Strategy 3: Musical Stops

Description

This strategy is highly effective when it comes to maintaining attention of students and to make them stop talking. Further, this strategy is very beneficial for teachers because they do not need to prepare any additional material in advance. As well, the ‘Musical Stops’ strategy promotes the use of positive reinforcement of students by rewarding them through prizes, and it promotes music appreciation to students.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Sample Activity for Basic User

Get a small musical instrument (e.g. a xylophone, a recorder, etc.) and learn an easy, simple, and pleasant sequence of chords on it.

Place the instrument in a spot of the classroom where all students can see and listen to it. Explain to the students that the instrument is going to be played every time students are caught talking when they are not supposed to.

Play the chords you learned so students get familiarized to them. Practice the routine with your students before implementing the strategy. Then determine a limit number of instrument plays for the week with your students, so they are given the goal of not reaching that number of “chances” to make noise.

Keep track of these “chances” in a visual manner. For instance, you can use a large chart paper placed on a strategic place in the classroom where students can be able to see it. If by the end of the week, there are still ‘chances’ on the chart paper, reward the class with some sort of prize.

Differentiation & Accommodation

This strategy works with all class sizes as long as all students can listen to the instrument. You can use any small instrument as long as chords can be played on it instead of simply noise as with a drum. Also, make sure to assign a determined place for placing the musical instrument as long as it is visible for all the students. This strategy does not require additional technology elements.

Strategy 4: Traffic Light

Description

Using the traffic light concept to control the levels of noise and speaking levels in a classroom has been very common in schools around the world. Actually, some companies manufacture really fancy traffic lights for classroom purposes which have the respective red, yellow, and green lights and even a noise meter included. Obviously, this type of objects can be really expensive for teachers. Thus, a cheaper and equally effective option of the traffic light idea is presented. The use of this strategy is very favorable because it is cheap. It also promotes efficacy because it ensures that students maintain an adequate voice level in the classroom.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Sample activity Basic User

Use a large piece of black cardboard paper as the background of the traffic light. Glue three circles of construction or cardboard paper (one red, one yellow, and one green) on the black cardboard paper which will represent the levels of noise the students will be allowed to use during class.

Write the words “Quiet” on the red circle, “Whisper” on the yellow circle, and “Normal voice” on the green circle. Make sure the words are big enough for students to read them at distance. Cover the three circles by taping a side of smaller squares of black cardboard paper.

Place your traffic light on a wall where all students can see it. Explain to your students that the traffic light will be used to control the noise levels in class. Make sure that all students understand the concept of the traffic light.

Uncover one of the lights depending on the type of activity that it is being carried out. For example, when the teacher is explaining a certain grammatical structure, the red light will be visible since students need to remain silent and pay attention. On the other hand, if an activity requires students to talk to each other, as in a role play, the green circle will be revealed allowing students to use their normal voice during the activity.



Differentiation & Accommodation

This strategy works with all class sizes. Depending on the creativity of each teacher, a variety of materials and shapes can be used to represent the traffic light concept, such as, cardboard boxes, cardboard tubes, paint, shiny paper, etc. The only thing you need to take into account is that despite the materials you use to make your traffic light, they must be big enough for your students to see the traffic light from any point of the classroom.

Also, the Internet offers a wide variety of online options that can be used instead of the cardboard paper version of the traffic light. Make sure that there is a projector and Internet connection available.

Strategy 5: Quiet Signals

Description

Although using quiet signals are originally aimed for younger students, teachers can also make use of them with high school students because most of these activities require an advanced language level. Besides the fact that these signals help teachers get students' attention and make them quiet, these strategies also contribute to building rapport between the teacher and the students because they are also fun and increase students' levels of motivation. However, teachers will need to choose or design quiet signals appropriate for their students' language level and cultural context.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Sample activity Independent User

Before the lesson, look for ideas on quiet signals from the Internet. Teaching websites like Teaching Resources (lauracandler.com) or Edutopia (edutopia.org) offer a vast number of these ideas. Also, you can search for videos on YouTube to see how the strategies are implemented in a real classroom setting.

Make sure that the strategy that you choose is general and can be replicated in the Ecuadorian context. For instance, echo clapping and call and response strategies are recommended.

In class, tell your students that in order to get them quiet, you are going to use a quiet signal strategy. Model the strategy to the students' so that they get accustomed to the routine.

Practice as many times as necessary until all students understand the purpose of the activity. Try not to stick to one single type of quiet signal. Vary the strategies from time to time so students are permanently engaged and eager to try new strategies.

Come up with your own phrases, or mirror movements for your classroom. Get students involved with the creation of their own routines as well.

Differentiation & Accommodation

These strategies are suited for all class sizes. Most of these strategies do not require the use of additional material, but flashcards or posters can be useful to present vocabulary to the students prior to the implementation of the strategies. Depending on the quiet signal used, projectors and slide presentations may be used in order to explain concepts or vocabulary to the students as well. Finally, make sure that the students have enough room for those strategies that involve movement.

References

- Copland, Fiona & Garton, Sue & Burns, Anne. (2014). Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners: Global Perspectives and Local Realities. *TESOL Quarterly*. 48. 10.1002/tesq.148.
- Fusion Yearbooks (2017). 13 Magic Spells for Quieting a Noisy Class. Retrieved from <http://www.fusionyearbooks.com/blog/noisy-class/>
- Jordan, B. (2011). Shh! Ideas for Keeping a Classroom Quiet. Retrieved from <https://rgt1.really-goodstuff.com/shh-ideas-for-keeping-the-classroom-quiet/>
- Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador (2016). Currículo de los niveles de educación obligatoria. Retrieved from <https://educacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2016/08/Curriculov2.pdf>
- Watanabe-Crocket, L. (2017, July 9). This is why we must be teaching with imagination and how to do it. [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.wabisabilearning.com/blog/teaching-with-imagination>
- Watson, A. (2013). 15 Creative and Respectful Ways to Quiet a Class. Retrieved from <https://thecornerstoneforteachers.com/15-creative-respectful-ways-to-quiet-a-class/>