CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINING DISCIPLINE IN AN ENGLISH-LEARNING CLASS

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Abstract: The lack of respectful behaviour towards teachers and classmates is considered to be the main problem of Bulgarian schools today. A great number of public school teachers have considered leaving the job or have already quit because of students' misbehaviour and their inability to cope with discipline problems. English language teachers are not an exception in this respect despite the popular view that there is a great motivation for learning foreign languages. The focus of the article is the discipline which is necessary to be created, worked upon and maintained in the classroom throughout the whole of the school year. The study was aimed at defining the aspects of the problem with discipline, collect data regarding the existing situation with classroom management and suggest some strategies and techniques for developing and keeping an effective practice. The results confirmed the theoretical concept that the teacher's goal is not to restore the order through respective reactions to misbehaviour but to organize a system of classroom activities and perform a study that would lead to the prevention of the disruptive actions in the first place.

Research methods: content analysis, pedagogical research, scientific enquiry, percent analysis.

Scope and results of the study: The study was performed with pedagogical students in the specialty Primary School Education with a Foreign Language at the Faculty of Education at Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria. The results point at a desperate need for change in the practice of language teaching in the country so as to face adequately the new generations of students with their attitudes and characteristics.

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Keywords: education, pedagogical modelling, motivation for studying.

Introduction

The problem with the management of the students and involving them actively in the classroom activities seems to be of primary importance in the Bulgarian schools of today. It is approached from the standpoint of the principles and techniques of classroom management. Different ways are discussed for improving discipline and behaviour. The actions that need to be undertaken by teachers, parents and school administrators are considered in that respect.

Order in the classroom is an issue to be dealt with from the first day in school. The rules and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour are to be outlined very clearly from the very beginning. On the one hand, because this would have a preventive effect in terms of discipline and on the other hand, this is something that the pupils themselves expect when they come to school. Students are assembled together for long periods of time and the goals which both students and teachers have to accomplish are often various and too many. The teacher in the school of today is confronted with a challenging atmosphere and is often put in unpredictable situations. The reactions from the students also put great demands on them. A very high level of professionalism and management competences are required for coping with disobeying students and keeping the motivation needed for normal work. In order to understand such management, the necessary pedagogical model needs to be followed. Decisions have to be made over issues such as: whether the teacher should simply prepare the lesson plan, thinking of the content to be taught and *only take action in case of any misbehaviour occurrence* or think in advance of a second plan and take preventive measures in that direction. From an organizational perspective, the central unit of classroom order is the activity. This could be a spelling test, a writing lesson or something designated for self-studying. The careful planning of the classroom activities also implies aspects like: the duration in time, the physical reality in which the lesson develops – the number of participants in each activity, the arrangement of the desks, the materials needed and the final result which is expected. Each activity has a distinctive action structure that directs the participants towards the given task. The study objective of the presented research was first, to find out what qualities of the teacher are considered important in terms of successful classroom management and secondly, to raise the awareness of future English-language teachers in the primary school and equip them with the necessary knowledge and tools in order to be able to maintain the discipline in class. 20 students in their third year of study at the Faculty of Education at Trakia University were involved in the pedagogical research and empirical data from their observations and training in the primary school affiliated to the university was collected and analysed.

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Literature Review

Classroom management takes a considerable part of any methodological course for teaching. It covers various aspects of the teaching process and what happens in the classroom, including the role of the teacher, the groupings of the students, detailed descriptions of each activity (with guidelines as to who does what, what are the others doing at that time, where are the participants standing or sitting, etc.) and incidents of disruptive behaviour (what causes them and what actions should be taken against them). The research into the field dates back to the second half of the twentieth century as a response to the changed classroom behaviour of the students. It led to new understandings of individual needs and modes of behaviour in an educational environment, as well as the development of management strategies which teachers need to acquire in order to maintain order and to adequately respond to problems with classroom discipline. These new methodologies also reflect the social developments and ensure the effectiveness and the success of the educational process. Analysis on human behaviour and psychology facilitated the creation of different tools of active involvement, encouraging desirable behaviours and discouraging undesirable ones (Crone et al., 2003).

Classroom and behaviour management is becoming a greater concern in the modern school. It is already considered a central component for the teaching profession in Bulgaria and needs to be addressed by school administrators, teacher-training institutions and society as a whole. The training of future pedagogues has a long tradition but is now facing the challenge to equip the teacher properly with the necessary theory, so as to help them organize their work and create a cooperative atmosphere in class and optimize student practice. The emphasis on prevention of disruptive behaviour is widely recognized as the foundation of effective management (Glyn, S. Hughes, 1990; Emmer et al., 2015; Harmer, 1997; Mihalev, 2018). Even the best planned lesson may be ruined if the teacher cannot intervene in time and effectively deal with distractive students. Prevention of undesired behaviours is part of the wider branch of the overall social and emotional development of the student and as such constitutes a major component of the management proficiency of the teacher. The bigger concern of educators today is not so much what should be included in the curricula or the methodological training of the pedagogical staff as prevention of school bullying, peer pressure, the teacher-student interaction, the parental demands and pressure exercised on the teacher who seems to be alone, overworked, stressed, helpless and lost in front of students who, on the other hand, are often labelled as aggressive, unmotivated or victimized in the interpersonal relations in the classroom. Contemporary educators need to borrow from different theoretical fields of research in the social sciences and address the complex social setting of classrooms and schools and most importantly, the *new type of student – the student of the highly digitalized new era*.

Authors who have written on classroom management suggest different types of activities to confront the problem. A study focusing on the behaviour of primary-school pupils found that involvement in classwork was higher when the students were taking part in whole-class recitation, teacher-led small groups or were doing tests rather than when listening to presentations prepared by their classmates or when working on their own sitting at their desks (Weinstein, 1979). It has also been established that the physical characteristics of the learning environment may have a significant positive or negative effect on the behaviour of the students – the arrangement of desks, how close the students are to each other, the design of the building, the availability of enough open spaces or the extent of difficulties which the teacher encounters in preventing or ceasing inappropriate behaviour (the cooperation of the class as a whole when dealing with discipline problems). Interestingly, despite the widely advertised idea that the schools should be friendly spaces, in terms of classroom control it has been proved that the more loosely structured the setting is, the weaker the focus of action and respectively, that deteriorates the structure of activity and the students' behaviour (Simonsen et al., 2008).

Most studies indicate the importance of setting rules of behaviour at the beginning of the course. Once the teacher has given clear instructions meant to maintain an optimal working atmosphere, the students will get familiarized with the consequences of any undesirable actions; they will get used to the routines and sequences of the lesson activities and thus of the order and the necessary discipline will be maintained throughout the year (Doyle, 1986). Early activities, in other words, must have simple organizational structures which are typically quite familiar to students (whole-class presentations and seatwork rather than multiple small groups). They make it easy for the students to accomplish good results in relatively short periods with clear specifications and a brisk pace. Understanding that a

significant part of classroom management is creating routines which students get used to as early as possible is crucial for the future pedagogues. Repetitive sequels of activities guarantee the creation and sustaining of a familiar atmosphere which is unlikely to be disturbed. These could be some sorts of limits, guidelines or awards that have been discussed in advance, etc. Discipline by itself, as it is widely argued, will not work; the focus needs to be on inappropriate behaviour, when it occurs, not the personality; “battlefields” need to be used wisely; “forced choice techniques” should be preferred to punishments whenever possible or delaying a decision when angry, etc. (Bradshaw, 2014).

Classroom management is recognized in all sources as a critical skill area for pedagogy. Teachers need not only be theoretically grounded but also receive adequate training and support in their future professional work. Evidence-based classroom management practices have been widely researched and may serve as a basis for proactive behaviour on behalf of the teacher that will lead to successful organization of the teaching process (Simonsen, B. et al., 2008; Croner et al., 2004). Experience shared by teachers who have proved to be effective in coping with class discipline covers a vast range of topics, including communicative skills, preserving a positive attitude, time management, creating group dynamics, giving short and clear instructions, students’ response management, doing quick calculations, numbering, giving praise (both verbally and non-verbally), performance feedback, active supervision, peer help, error correction, etc. An exhaustive list of recommended practices may be grouped into the following four categories:

- organization of the physical space – the arrangement and the orientation of the desks, furniture, boards, etc. which create the environment of the classroom as a whole
- instructional management – helping to establish positively stated expectations and defining a small number of rules regulating behaviour
- procedures designed to increase appropriate behaviour – such that actively engage students in an observable way
- procedures designed to decrease inappropriate behaviour – error correction or explicit reprimands, performance feedback, planned ignoring (withholding attention from exhibits of undesired behaviour)

From a psychological point of view, there is a popular proposition that we should not reward good conduct since that may teach students that they should not do well unless an external reward is evident. People always pursue the forms of learning which are rewarded in some way. Sometimes the rewards are subtle – smiles, oral encouragements or simply withholding a potential punishment. In time, a student may learn how to enjoy some seemingly arduous activity without apparent external rewards. A system, though, that does not provide learners with valuable rewards will have low capabilities for teaching (Moles, 1990). A great number of school teachers admit to have considered leaving teaching because of student misbehaviour and their inability to overcome it. Among the first stress or anxiety factors identified, as the greatest problems in the teaching profession, is the discipline issue. The situation is the same in Bulgaria and it has been deteriorating for the last three decades. Discipline problems are most often associated with aggressive behaviour, bullying or lack of respect towards teachers and classmates. Student behaviour is affected by surrounding environments and there is a lot to be done towards improving and sustaining discipline climate in schools. It is obvious that new approaches must be tried to make schools better learning environments.

Data and Methodology

The problems of the practical day-to-day management of the class do not usually find solutions in a particular method or theoretical research. As in all other subjects, foreign language teachers require some specialized classroom competence and training aimed at dealing with the classroom situations. For the purposes of the study, two surveys were conducted. One of them aimed to identify which qualities of the teachers are considered to be important for their professional work. Three groups of respondents were covered, consisting of a total number of 200 persons, of whom one represents 4th

graders, one – 7th graders, one – students from pedagogical specialties and another – practicing teachers.

The other study involved 20 pedagogical students from the specialty Primary School Education with a Foreign Language in their third year at university when they cover one semester of training which involves observation of language classes and intern training and practice aimed to prepare them for their future work as language teachers in the primary school. The age of pupils ranges from 7 to 9 years-old.

The participants in this study had to outline the problem areas and produce “a list of instructions” based on their observation and teacher training which would help them in dealing with classroom management and discipline problems in their future fork as language teachers.

Results and Discussion

The test "Diagnosing the qualities of the good teacher" was conducted with 200 respondents divided equally into four target groups. The test included 50 students from the 4th grade of the primary educational system, 50 students from the 7th grade of the secondary educational system, 50 students from Trakia University, mastering the professions of pre-school and primary-school teachers and 50 practising teachers in the high school. The survey was conducted in 2017. The test was provided for anonymous replenishment by the respondents in order to achieve greater credibility of the responses. The task set in the test is to differentiate the professional qualities of the teacher of a new type by scaling. The students included in the study were given the opportunity to rank 22 (twenty-two) of the qualities in terms of significance, marking with 1 the most significant, in their opinion, quality which the modern teacher must possess, and with 22 – those which they consider to have the lowest significance for practising the teaching profession. A rank scale was obtained in which each of the proposed qualities takes up a particular position (from 1. to 22.). We bring out from the ensemble those qualities that are placed in leading positions (1st to 5th place). Following the frequency principle, we determine which of the proposed qualities are referred to as professionally significant by the highest number of the tested persons and which particular position they occupy in the rank scale. The results of the differentiated and ranged (by the respondents) professionally significant qualities of the new-type teacher are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Professionally significant qualities of the new-type teacher				
Rank	Students from class 4.	Students from class 7.	Students from the pedagogical specialties	Practising teachers
1.	love of children	love of children	love of children	love of children
2.	love for the profession	love for the profession	love for the profession	love for the profession
3.	friendly attitude to students	good knowledge of the subject taught	patience	skilful teaching
4.	goodness and attention to people	patience	friendly attitude to students	patience
5.	understanding of the children and acknowledging their personality	friendly attitude to students	undiscriminating attitude to all students	ability to attract the students to the work
Source: Authors				

From the data listed in Table 1, four ranging scales of the professional qualities of the teacher of the new type are differentiated – of the students from the 4th grade, of the students from the 7th grade, of the students from the pedagogical specialties and of the teachers. Each of them presents the opinion of the relevant target group. Between the four scales we can register several cross sections. There are three zones of intersections between the ranks of the students from grade 4, the 7th-grade students and the students of pedagogical specialties. Areas of cross-sections are with the differentiated qualities – love for children, love for the profession and friendly attitude towards students. In the ranks of the professional qualities of the new-type teacher of the 7th-grade students, the students of the pedagogical specialties and of the practising teachers there are also three such sections. They are united in the differentiated qualities – love for children, love for the profession and patience. We observe an absolute coincidence in differentiating the first two qualities of the modern teacher in the four zones of intersections. The four target groups which were surveyed place in the first position among the professional qualities of the teacher of the new type the love for children. Such ranking was performed by 92% of the 4th-grade students, 86% of the 7th-grade students, 80% of the students in the pedagogical specialties and 66% of the practising teachers. They all share the view that it is of utmost importance for the modern teacher to love the children and to devote their full professional activity to interacting with them. If a teacher masters his or her profession with a clear understanding of the fact that it requires a permanent interaction with children, this would imply that he or she loves children, has the need to

give them his or her love and reciprocally to receive theirs. Children are very sensitive to the specifics of the teacher's attitude and commitment to them. They quickly discover who truly loves them, and also discover the hypocrisy and the indifference of the teacher towards them, which distances them from him or her. Good professionals in the teaching profession are characterized by the high quality of their theoretical and practical training, coupled with openness and warmth in their relationship with which they gain the love and confidence of their students and turn them into their own adherents. This provokes us at the stage of shaping the pedagogical competence of future teachers at the university to make a determined effort to involve students in collaborative initiatives and interactions with students. These would help students enjoy the interaction with children, reveal the attractiveness and usefulness of the profession they occupy; make them more open and dedicated to the attitude towards the students. The second position among the professional qualities of the new-type teacher, in the four target groups, is occupied by the love of the profession. Such a response is differentiated by 84% of the 4th-grade students, 74% of the 7th-grade students, 64% of the students in the pedagogical specialties, and 58% of the teachers. The love for the profession is formed as a consequence of a meaningful and well-realized professional choice, correlating with the triadic bond between the needs, abilities and interests of the person. If the teacher has achieved this balance of professional choices, his or her professional realization would help him or her feel happy and satisfied with the results they achieve. This satisfaction would contribute to staying for a longer period in the profession. Teachers who love their profession, through their practice, satisfy the needs of the highest hierarchical level of all their needs. They are aimed at professional self-realization and self-improvement. Satisfaction of these needs requires hard work and dedication to the cause – the education of the younger generation. Teachers who perform their professional duties with confidence in the importance of their noble mission are guided in their activities to the same extent by love for children as by the love for the profession. This provokes us to create a supportive educational environment for university students which would help to reveal the best aspects of the teaching profession and to involve young people in it.

The second part of the study resulted in quite an extensive and exhaustive empirical bulk of data which proved our hypothesis that the problem with school discipline and classroom management is huge and essential for the teaching profession. The presented results are based on a questionnaire which the trainees had to complete after their practice in the primary school. An important element of the overall experience of the trainees/future teachers with their observations is the feedback they shared during the after-class discussions. The conclusions they came up with are informative of their in-depth understanding that teaching success is based on *careful planning* but also on *the ability to be flexible* in the course of the lesson – deviate or react on the spot to unexpected events. It can be argued here that the unexperienced teacher is not prepared for such deviations and improvisations. Logically, this skill comes in time and the educational system needs to take special care of beginning teachers to provide them the necessary tutoring, observation and monitored teaching.

One task the pedagogical students had was to put down the functional language items used in the observed English lessons for controlling the behaviour of the students. The phrases related to classroom management were grouped in terms of what the language function is. Some such lists are:

- for the language function “giving instructions” the examples given were: “open your books at p...”; “Point at text with your pencils while listening”; “Write down the new words in your notebooks, please!” or “Read the text in a chain!”
- for the language function “supervision”: “Look here!”, “Stop talking!”, “Listen to what Kate is saying!”
- for the function “interaction – affective attitudes”: “That’s interesting!”, “Thank you for your participation”, “Knock-knock-knock!”, “God Bless!”, “Thank goodness!”

One of the aspects of the pedagogical experiment was to register any change of attitude and motivation level of the students from the specialty Primary School Education with a Foreign Language at the Faculty of Education involved in the survey. Almost all of them (80 %) stated that they have developed a more positive attitude to the teaching profession and an increased motivation to work as English teachers after their graduation. The entry in the questionnaire in which the students were asked to give “tips” to teachers was open to free answers. These were systemized in terms of their meaning and presented under the following headings: feedback, instructions, dynamics and pupils’ response. The four most highly ranged “tips” which the students provided, according to their frequency, are as follows: 1.

‘to give students frequent and effective feedback, to keep instructions frequent and brisk’; 2. ‘to incorporate movement into the lessons’ and 3. ‘to allow students reasonable time to process the content and to respond’.

Conclusion

Classroom management has been treated by various scientific branches and from different perspectives. It is recognized as a key problem for education today which is confronted to address a growing array of topics and problems. The educational situation of today is quite different from the traditional instructional role it was in the past. It is vital for the contemporary teacher to understand that teaching is, at its core, a kind of communication and that respect and good behaviour cannot be expected from the students as *status quo*. Knowing how people succeed or fail in their efforts to communicate can help to intervene in disruptive students’ behaviour but a more important strategy for sustaining order is keeping them busy. Faced with recommendations for changes to classroom practice, teachers usually respond by pointing out differences between their own circumstances and those of the person making the suggestion, or between theory and practice. This explains the resistance to change with arguments of the sort that there is lack of materials, or that the teachers are not equipped with the necessary techniques, or that the class size is too big, or that the whole teaching situation is inadequate to the children of the new times. No matter how carefully researchers try to reproduce the conditions for normal classroom teaching in their experiments, the conclusions they draw are, by necessity, less complex than the reality that teachers confront every day. Teaching is a collaborative enterprise and makes demands on both parts – teachers and students. Negotiation and repair play a crucial part in all interaction and are unique forms of behaviour navigation and correction. The traditional patterns of classroom interaction assign specific roles that the learners adopt. By including interaction tasks in which learners can take the communicative initiative or take active part in the classroom management, teachers give them a glimpse of what to expect in their later years of studying and of real life. The study provides evidence that this negotiating process needs to start early and be maintained throughout all educational levels.

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