

## MANAGEMENT OF CHILDREN'S AGGRESSIVENESS WHEN PLAYING COMPETITIVE GAMES IN THE ENGLISH CLASS

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*H*uman behaviour has been a changing aspect during the history of mankind. Humanity has learned to get along with others; but the behavioural stage has been very difficult to control across the time, because everyone has his/her own interests. In this article, I will describe some factors that affect children's aggressive behaviour when playing competitive games and some strategies that may be considered when guiding those types of games with young learners in the English class. These can lead, as I found in my study, to deeper understandings of children's conducts as well as to improvement in classroom management.

### **The research study**

In countries like Colombia, which are going through violent conflicts, aggressiveness is a factor that people have to face all the time,

mainly because of economical and educational troubles. It affects the children's environment and there is no doubt that children reflect the reality that they live in every day events. Hence, it is necessary to examine alternatives for dealing with children's aggressive behaviour and to instil social-training skills to control it.

The ideas presented in this paper are the result of a case study investigation with primary school children (third graders) whose level in the English language was beginners. I taught this group of learners over a short period of time (4 months, two hours a week) and was puzzled by the fact that they showed aggressive behaviour whenever they took part in competitive games in the English class. The following semester, I was allowed to attend their English class in order to follow this phenomenon in detail while they were working with another



*Children engaged in a competitive game*

English teacher.

Children were observed as they played games in the English class in order to account for their attitudes toward play activities developed in the learning process and to establish connections between kids' behaviours and the factors that promoted them. In order to gather evidence from the participants of the study, the teacher kept a journal I could then have access to. Additionally, aggressive kids were interviewed when lessons were over. It should be explained that the results of my observation period were analysed taking into account the principles of Grounded Theory proposed by Glasser and Strauss (1976) and triangulation procedures (Cohen and Manion: 1994).

### **Factors that promote children's aggressive behaviour**

Antisocial behaviour including aggression appears to be a developmental trait that begins early in life and often continues into adolescence and adulthood. Antisocial behaviour develops as a result of the child's behaviour and interaction with the social environment (Thomas and Melloy: 1993, 346).

During the first stage of aggressive behaviour development, family variables, such as harsh parental discipline and poor adult supervision, result in the child being trained to engage in aggressive behaviour such as hitting. This behaviour becomes functional in the sense that the child may be allowed to escape tasks when he or she acts aggressively. Also aggressive behaviour may be positively reinforced through laughter, attention, and approval, which results in maintenance of the behaviour. Children in these situations do

not learn socially skilful responses from others, but they learn aggressive behaviour that results in meeting their needs (ibid: 351).

The main cause of children's aggressive behaviour is their environment; at home they learn rules to living by imitating adults' behaviour. All those things that they learn at home are demonstrated at school; therefore these children become rejected because they do not demonstrate the social skills that allow them to be socially competent with peers.

Having learned aggressive behaviour in early childhood, other situations at school can also provoke an outburst of aggression. For instance, in the development of a competitive game, there are many factors taking part in children's attitudes. According to Florián (1993, 150) "play is the young child's chief mode of interaction and development, children learn playing and by their own experience, play is a way of auto-expression".

A game is the representation of real life situations, games are governed by rules, which set up clearly defined goals; games involve a contest. Through educational games children not only learn the language, they learn other important aspects like how they should behave in social situations, how to be respectful and to follow rules. For children this idea is sometimes difficult to follow because in a code- control or competitive game whose aim is to score more points than others, there is often a clear winner (Brewster et al: 1992). If everyone wants to be the winner due to the positive feelings triumph produces, it is going to give birth to a competitive atmosphere which is going to result in contrasting situations.

On the other hand, sometimes we as teachers

can make some mistakes that promote aggressive behaviour in children. For instance, our attitude can also encourage children's aggressive behaviour, if we do not realise about cheating or if it is considered by students that we have certain favourites among them, or we give more attention to misbehaving students. Children can react aggressively against those situations. It results in children's complaints and children's verbal or physical aggressive behaviour.

The child's body language for all of these aggressive behaviours is a stance that communicates anger, rage, humiliation or other feelings that motivate aggressive behaviour (Thomas and Melloy: 1993, 352).

### Classroom management

When a child demonstrates a problem with behaviour, adults are required to develop interventions that will both decrease inappropriate behaviour and increase appropriate behaviour. Also, when a child engages in behaviour that is deemed inappropriate, everyone involved (the child, adults, peers) is placed in circumstances that are highly stressful and usually unpleasant.

Parents and we as educators should encourage children and reinforce them to use alternative behaviours to express affection and liking for others in order to control children's aggressive behaviour in the English classroom. In order to achieve these goals, we can apply certain strategies as proposed by Thomas and Melloy (ibid: 2).

### Research findings

According to previous investigation reports I examined to develop the research study I have referred to and the results I gathered throughout

a semester, I could conclude that it is necessary to take into consideration tips to control children's aggressive behaviour and create a better atmosphere in the English classroom as well as a better classroom management. Some of these strategies were successful in the classes I observed and it is very likely that they can also be effective in other contexts. The strategies are the following:

- **Focusing:** The focusing technique means that we demand students' attention before they begin; that is to say, we wait and do not start until everyone has settled down.

- **Direct instruction:** An affective way to join this technique to the previous one is to include time at the end of the period for students to do activities of their choosing. This strategy deals with students' interests; it motivates them to partake in the learning process.

- **Monitoring:** This strategy implies that we are checking to be sure everyone is working without having problems. We do not interrupt the class or try to make general announcements unless we notice that several students have difficulty with the same thing.

- **Modelling:** If we want students to use quiet voices in the classroom, while they work, we have to use a quiet voice too as we move through the room helping youngsters. Sometimes students try to imitate the teachers' behaviour; this way, if we want to be respected by students, we also have to respect them. Otherwise if we scream, students are going to do the same, and the classroom is going to be a chaotic place.

- **Non-verbal cueing:** Sometimes gestures can explain our intentions in a more polite way than using words. Non-verbal cues

can also be facial expressions, body postures, and hand signals. Thus, we need to take time to explain what we want students to do when we use our cues.

- **Environmental control:** It has to do with the environment of the classroom. We should let students get to know us better by means of observing how we act. As they get to know us better, we will see fewer problems with discipline. During the learning process the teacher is the guide, s/he has to establish certain rules that have to be respected by everybody in the group. This way, students are going to accept their mistakes and regulate their behaviour.

- **Low profile intervention:** An effective teacher will take care that the student is not rewarded for misbehaviour by becoming the focus of attention. His/her approach to a misbehaving student is inconspicuous. Others in the class are not distracted. If a child realizes that his negative behaviour acts also as a teacher's distraction, it is going to reinforce his negative behaviour, and everybody in the group is going to wish to have the same attention. This proves that we should not dedicate too much time to troubles like that and to congratulate others' positive behaviour.

- **Assertive discipline:** Clear rules are laid out and consistently enforced. Students also have to partake in the regulation process.



*Children guided by the teacher to take turns to play*

In this way they feel that they form an important part in the classroom as well.

- **Assertive I messages:** This strategy entails that we will focus the misbehaving student's attention first and foremost on the behaviour we want, not on the misbehaviour. As I have already said, one of the important factors in the classroom should be students' positive behaviour; it has to be recognized by teachers and students.

- **Humanistic I messages:** We can make students who behave negatively feel blamed and ashamed of their behaviour, by means of psychological traits. For instance, we can say: *"You are an intelligent student; it is a pity that your negative behaviour does not allow you to use your intelligence more"*. In this case, the teacher is using some psychology to create awareness in students. It can also work in positive situations: *"Excellent, you are working well as usual"*. As we can see, we have no reason to begin with negative points if it is not necessary.

- **Positive discipline:** When we see good behaviour, we should acknowledge it. This can encourage students to take responsibility for their own actions. Good classroom management allows students to get a clear picture of what is going on and what is expected of them, and allows them to see more clearly the consistent consequences of their own behaviour, both desirable and undesirable (Aparicio et al: 1995, 56).

The findings I have presented so far give us an idea about how important it is to work on students' self-esteem. It encourages them to overcome and improve, and makes them feel that they are able to do whatever they want. Furthermore, we can recognize the

paramount role the teacher plays in situations when children act aggressively. We as teachers have to try to play fair all the time in any situation. It is going to be recognized by the students and they are going to try to behave in the same way.

## Conclusion

Through this research study I have pointed out the importance of using games in the English learning process. Games are motivating and exciting experiences for children. We know that playing games is a way of interaction. However, competition generates factors which promote aggressive behaviour. Therefore, it is very important to have a way to control aggressive behaviour that "competition" may imply for children.

In this article I have highlighted some factors that promote children's aggressive behaviour. As adults need to take part in the children's learning process which is both intellectual and social, I have also underlined our compromise as teachers, parents and adults in overcoming those types of acts.

Besides the strategies that proved effective in the class I worked with, I could state that there are important factors for further research. First of all, we could explore the influence of a negative environment in children's aggressive behaviour. Secondly, it could be useful to delve deeper into the way boys differ from girls concerning leadership while playing games –an aspect that caught my attention since most aggressive situations present in the class I observed involved boys. And finally, we could think of the construction of a social skill-training club as a means of constructing different social solutions without having to use violence.

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