

A-Z of teaching young learners: Large classes

What and why?

Large classes of 25+ children require careful classroom management strategies to ensure that the children are involved in the tasks and can hear the recording, and can see the board and you! Large classes often create two kinds of problem – the first is discipline and the second is non-involvement which leads to lack of motivation. Discipline problems may arise in large classes because children may recognise that English lessons are perhaps different in style and approach from other lessons and may feel that their behaviour can be less disciplined, without the teacher seeing what they are doing. It is important to establish that although there are 'fun' activities in English lessons, they are important for learning and can be more fun if everyone can hear the teacher and understand what is happening. Motivation problems often come about because some children feel lost and alone in a large class, without any personal contact with the teacher. This is especially true if the children are slightly deaf or have poor eyesight, or have special needs.

Both of these aspects mean that it is important to find ways of 'breaking down' the size of a large class and to make personal contact more possible.

Practical ideas

- In large classes, the more able children often sit at the front of the class, and the weaker ones sit at the back to try to 'hide' from the teacher. This can cause weaker students to get weaker, as they see themselves as 'less able' and this affects their motivation. It is important, then, to move the children around, so that the ones at the back sometimes sit at the front. You could have a rota for this, which moves everyone around each week, for example.
- If you have a very large class with the children sitting in rows, you can give each row across a name, and each row down a different name. When you ask a question, you can say the name of a row, and a child in that row can answer.
- Despite the fact that there are many people in the classroom, learning in a large class can mean learning alone. It is very easy for the quieter child not to be noticed. It is important, then, to divide a large class into groups so that they can identify and interact with a smaller number of people. You can ask each group to give themselves a name, so that you can refer to them as a group. Groups can have the same members over a period of time – perhaps a few weeks. If you change the composition of groups, you

can ask them to give themselves a new name. You could vary the kind of name that the groups have – for example, they could have names of animals or sports or colours, etc.

- You could make a timetable of when you will talk personally to each group, perhaps when the other children are getting on with some other work. One key factor in the success of the children is the fact that someone cares if they are learning. Personal contact and interest in their work are extremely important.
- Groups can each choose a representative. The other children can then tell their representative if they have suggestions, want extra practice, etc.
- Songs, craft activities and drama all generate noise. If you need to talk to a child when the class is working rather noisily, it is best to say the child's name quietly (children can hear their name in a noisy classroom) or approach the child and speak quietly. Shouting will raise the noise and stress levels. Children's noise will always rise above a teacher's shouting.
- If you would like to have the attention of the whole class, it is worth having a word combined with an action which you can say quietly (perhaps say Balloon!) and put your hand up in the air). When children hear this word and see this action, they will know they should stop what they are doing and listen to you.