Strategies to improve classroom management in a disruptive class

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ABSTRACT

This action-research project was aimed to provide a set of strategies capable to help overcome the several difficulties to perform an effective classroom management at a lower level. Then, my focus question was based on how to manage a 4th grade class with behavior issues inside a context of social vulnerability.

The main points covered in this research focused especially on the influence of social vulnerability on the learning environment; the role of affectivity and collaborative work in the classroom and how these factors provide a better space to nurture positive behavior in disruptive students. Ultimately, the absence of a comfortable and friendly space to develop rapport with members of this school is what triggered the interest for coming up with an intervention plan in order to deal with such factors.

Keywords:

- Classroom management strategies
- Behavior issues
- Social vulnerability
- Cooperative discipline
- Cooperative work
ANTECEDENTS

The educational project

Colegio Babilonia was created in 1983 under the motto “For an education both effective and affective”. In the first place, this school attempts to achieve the objectives established by the Ministry along with a Christian Humanistic approach to their mission. The educational community expects students to put in practice a certain set of values in order to become better citizens in our society and increase their self-esteem.

Babilonia’s educational project is fully addressed to the student by conceiving the latter as the main actor of this mission. Secondly, there is the educator as the professional in charge of facilitating pupils’ learning through appropriate orientation and diagnosis. Lastly, family plays an essential role for they are to boost the Christian values along this process.

Research background

The problem that inspired this research is based on the several difficulties to manage a 4th grade class with behavior issues in a context of social vulnerability. Approximately, twenty-five out of thirty-nine students have problems of this nature. The issues at stake are described as it follows:

- Presence of disruptive behaviors in the classroom: Students who are constantly challenging the teacher and being disrespectful to their peers and authorities.
• Students avoiding participation and demanding tasks: Simply, they refuse to follow the instructions given by the teacher arguing they do not understand what she tries to say in English.

• Pupils feeling reluctant to do pairwork and groupwork since some of them react aggressively when the teacher asks them to do so. Also, the presence of bullying both inside and outside the classroom.

Having mentioned the points above, it is of key importance to also consider the social environment in which the students live and its impact on their relationship with the learning community. Every lesson becomes a challenge since I have to deal with several obstacles such as aggressive behavior and disruptive pupils. Usually, the lesson plan has to be modified at the moment; that is, shortening the pre or post activities as there is only a little time left due to the minutes I spend getting the class ready to listen and pay attention; a recurrent situation that turns teaching into an utterly tiring work.

Problem statement

According to the problems previously stated above, I will deal with the following research question in order to come up with a possible solution:

What strategies can I use in order to improve classroom management in a 4° class with behavior issues in a context of social vulnerability?

Research objectives

• To collect a set of strategies related to effective classroom management capable to be applied on a 4th grade class with behavior issues.
PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

- To find pertinent strategies to promote respect and discipline inside the English class.
- To come up with a behavior intervention plan in order to have a lasting positive effect on a class surrounded by social vulnerability.

Methodological proposal justification

According to Albert (1996), “The goal of classroom discipline is the same everywhere: It is to help students learn to choose responsible behavior” (p. 202) Thus, rather than performing a classroom management based on authoritarianism and setting rules that do not meet students’ concerns and needs, it is of key importance to create an environment capable to make pupils feel they belong to their learning community, and ultimately, encourage them to contribute the best they can through strategies that nurture a positive behavior towards the space that surrounds them.

Having stated the points above, I aimed to work on effective and pertinent classroom management strategies since this is an essential aspect to develop during students’ process of learning. Certainly, if a teacher is able to build a good rapport with his students and work on the creation of a friendly space inside the educational community, learning can take place in much better conditions for both educators and students. Thus, regarding the specific context I was working with, it is worth mentioning that the outcomes can even be more rewarding and meaningful.

Hypothesis

According to the problems previously described, I came up with the following possible solutions to help improve both classroom management and students’ behavior:
The setting of clear and consistent classroom rules makes students aware of the discipline goals they must achieve in order to create a positive learning environment.

The use of pairwork develops a good rapport among students and fosters friendly relationships.

Turning a negative behavior into an opportunity to behave better reduces pupils’ aggressiveness towards their environment.

The more students are surrounded by a positive and affective environment, the better they perform the desired behavior.

Research methodologies

This action-research paper was especially focused on qualitative research methodologies since the topic I was working on required answers that go beyond mere affirmation or negation. Then, in order to accomplish obtaining consistent data, I began by interviewing the school inspector since she is the person in charge of dealing with both children and parents personally (See appendix). Furthermore, the information provided by the inspector may be useful in order to establish a possible relation between the social vulnerability factor and children’s behavior. Due to the several years working for this school, she is already familiar with the students’ socio-economic context and the reasons that trigger their misbehavior. Then, the following aspects were considered to be developed:

- Socioeconomic background regarding the students’ families and the environment that surround them.
• The main reasons for personal parents meetings.

• The most frequent pupils’ negative behaviors according to inspector’s experience.

Secondly, and as a way of getting feedback from colleagues, I also asked COLBAB’s English teacher to evaluate my performance by paying special attention to my skills on classroom management. Then, after a few weeks of observation, I had the teacher fill a survey according to the weaknesses identified during my lesson so that later I was able to come up with pertinent strategies as suggested by the reviewed literature (See appendix).

Lastly, and in order to measure the effects of the strategies applied on the classroom, I had my fourth grade students fill a survey in which they shared their experience when working in teams and using a different seating arrangement. These results were essential not only to analyze to what extent the chosen procedures were useful to carry an effective classroom management, but also, to know about students’ perception of these strategies since it helps measure the impact they had on their own behavior. (See appendix)

**Research organization**

This research project is divided into the following sections:

In the first place, I present the background concerning the problem; a description of the target class I worked with and the objectives I aimed to accomplish through the applied strategies according to the literature reviewed.

Secondly, there comes the theoretical framework in charge of providing pertinent approaches concerning classroom management and the several factors that affect its performance, such as misbehavior and the impact of social environment on the pupils.
Thirdly, and after consulting a determined number of authors, I came up with a methodological proposal capable to be applied on the target class by the display of certain strategies supposed to help me improve classroom management skills and facilitate the creation of a comfortable space for both teacher and students in order to foster collaborative work. Then, it was the time for analyzing the gathered data and relating these results to the rest of the paper.

Lastly, I finished this work with the conclusion that summarizes the process along my action-research. Here, I decided whether to prove or refuse the hypothesis made at the beginning of this paper based on the impact these chosen strategies had in order to carry out an effective solution.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

a) What is social vulnerability and how does it affect students?

In the words of Pizarro (2001) the concept of vulnerability can be explained as:

“The sense of insecurity and helplessness that communities, families and subjects experience in their life condition as a consequence of the impact provoked by a certain kind of socioeconomic event of traumatic connotation.” (p. 11)

From the data provided by SIMCE (simce 2010) between twenty-eight and fifty-five percent out of the students from this school is in a condition of social vulnerability, statistics that turn to be a relevant variable since disruptive behavior is a particular problem in classrooms of economically disadvantaged students (Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998).

Now, connecting the facts previously mentioned is it important to highlight that this social vulnerability is mainly identified in districts where a higher level of violence is detected. As Martinez (2005) mentions, in many cases the violent behavior exposed by children and adolescents reflect what is happening around them, and their causes lie on social, environmental, educational, personal and family-related factors.

According to The Classification of Child and Adolescent Mental Diagnoses in Primary Care (1996) American Academy of Pediatrics, there are commonly occurring stressful events in children’s life that lead to common behavioral responses as the following chart shows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges to primary support group</th>
<th>Educational challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Discord</td>
<td>Illiteracy of Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>Inadequate School Facilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


On this basis, a considerable percentage of the pupils is constantly exposed to problematic situations inside their environment, experiencing the effects of being part of large and/or monoparental families and the subsequent lack of support towards their both cognitive and affective development. Moreover, causes such as marital discord, change in parental caregiver and the witnessing of violence can highly influence pupils and their perception of the world. Therefore, this culture of violence ends up being carried up in school where the student attempts to solve conflicts based on what is seen inside the environment.
b) Students’ Stage of Development: What are the characteristics regarding fourth graders?

According to Piaget’s stages of development, these children are currently on the Concrete Operational Stage which goes from 7 to 11 years. Ginsberg and Opper (1969) point out that during this phase, children have basic concepts of objects, numbers, time, space, and cause-effect links develop. In addition, they are able to group different categories and understand that a group can be a subset. They need concrete objects to draw conclusions due to a basic logic develop that is still tied to physical reality, thus making the process of hypothetical problem-solving unable to happen at this stage as cited in Piaget (1950)

Added to this, Piaget’s stages of development are presented in Douglas Brown’s Teaching by Principles (2001) making emphasis on the limitations of children at this phase. More specifically, rules and explanations must be approached with extreme caution since children are centered on the here and now, so their attention span is particularly short. That is also why unclear, ambiguous expressions and gestures must be avoided in order to give clear and concrete instructions. Moreover, the teacher needs to be careful about the use of irritating habits such as grinning or blinking too much. As Gower, R, Phillips, D. Walters, S. (1995) claim, such habits may turn highly off-putting and distracting for children. Then, phrases such as Ok or All right? must be avoided as well since they can potentially annoy the pupils and consequently, make them lose interest in the lesson. Having considered these suggestions, the educator needs to choose language carefully so that students are able to understand clearly. One of the strategies for accomplishing this point is to simplify language by only using the key words to convey the concrete meaning.
c) Managing the class

Having presented the background of the students of COLBAB, I will confine myself to the consideration of the strategies needed to improve my classroom management in this particular context. That is, especially focusing on behavior issues concerning disruptive students.

Why do students misbehave?

Albert (1990) claims that most class misbehavior occurs as students attempt unsuccessfully to meet the psychological need to belong. They want to feel valued, welcome and secure in this environment. Nonetheless, when students direct their behavior towards what the author calls *mistaken goals* - a concept that describes the mistaken idea that through misbehavior they can actually fulfill the need to belong to this community - they present the following behavior issues:

- Attention-seeking;
- power-seeking;
- revenge-seeking; and
- Avoidance-of-failure behavior

In the first place, the *attention-seeking* behavior can be clearly noticed when students are showing off, calling out and making irrelevant questions (Albert 1990) They use this mechanism in order to get attention from the teacher. Secondly, the *power-seeking* behavior is reflected on the use of words and actions that are meant to demonstrate they cannot be controlled by the educator, again as a response to the lack of the sense of belonging to the environment.
As Albert (1990) points out, *Revenge-seeking* comes as a result of a student who is feeling hurt by the people that surround him or simply angry at their parents or any person who is too risky to rebel against. This behavior usually takes the form of verbal attacks on the teacher, in destruction of materials or the room environment and even physical attacks on their peers and the educator himself. Lastly, there is the *avoidance-of-failure* behavior which constitutes a quite common issue in the classroom as the pupil prefers to appear lazy rather than unable to achieve the goals of the lesson.

**Classroom management**


> “Contrary to popular belief, it is not true that one needs to be an extrovert to be a good classroom teacher. Some good teachers are very low-key in the classroom, while other teachers, both lively and amusing, survive only as entertainers. “(p. 8)

In other words, there is not an ideal model of teacher in the classroom since all of them have their own style. However, if we want a class to follow the rules effectively, first we need to be able to inspire confidence in our students. That is, by knowing when to be directive and when leave them on their own. The key is to avoid going to the extremes, for instance, by dominating the class or leaving it uncertain with no idea about the things they are supposed to do.

According to Albert (1990) teachers reflect three styles of classroom management. Those are *permissive, autocratic* and *democratic*, where the latter plays a fundamental role to promote a good discipline as it sets the scenario for a cooperative work in which each student is allowed to participate actively. Then, rather than struggling for the total control of their manners, the
educator can only be able to influence them by the display of positive behaviors in the classroom.

Since the main topic here is the disruptive behavior of some students, let us first look at its management and significance in our performance. In the words of Kramer (2005):

“Classroom and behavior management go hand-in-hand for a well-run classroom. Procedures and expectations set the stage for managing the classroom and students behavior” (p. 2).

More specifically, the teacher needs to be able to develop rapport with students in order to affect their behavior and increase learning. This positive relationship can be carried out based on five essential teacher behaviors according to educator and author Linda Albert (1990), these are: Acceptance, attention, appreciation, affirmation and affection. By way of illustration, the teacher must provide children with kindness and attention by openly showing he cares about them. Since pupils need to feel they are part of a meaningful process, the educator is to help students feel they belong and that they are valued members.

In order to foster a sense of belonging among students, the author suggests the concept of The Three C’s which stands for capable, connect and contribute and it is explained as it follows:

“When students feel capable, they are willing to apply themselves academically. When they can connect to others in a positive manner and can find ways to contribute to the welfare of the class, the positive relationship promote positive behaviors”

Consequently, through the display of The Three C’s in the classroom, the amount of misbehavior is supposed to fade in a short period of time.
Cooperative discipline as a means to improve classroom management

Teachers should work cooperatively with students so that they can develop a classroom code of conduct (Albert 1990) Therefore, a successful classroom management requires that consequences follow broken rules. As the author remarks, these consequences must be related, reasonable, respectful and reliably enforced. That means, the consequence must be related to the offense in question; reasonable in order to teach values rather than the mere fact of punishing; respectful towards students’ dignity and reliable enforced as a way of being a consistent educator who stands by his word. On this basis, the concept of cooperative discipline helps students achieve their goal of belonging and consequently, becomes a powerful means to reduce misbehavior in the classroom.

The cooperative learning factor

With cooperative learning, students work together in groups of no more than four people. However, cooperative learning is more than just putting students in groups and giving them something to do as claims Jacobs, Hall (2002) Furthermore, it can be used as a tool to encourage mutual helpfulness and active participation of all members.

According to Kramer (2005), “Working with other teaches students how to get along with one another and enhances learning” (p. 14)

As they are given the opportunity to work in this way, pupils hopefully become aware of their capacities and responsibilities in the group and understand their individual role as part of a strong chain. Thus, each student is able to contribute to a common goal in a determined activity according to their personal strengths and skills.
The relevance of creating learning communities can be explained from the approach of Vigotsky’s theory in which culture and human interaction play a central role in developmental processes, Schunk, Dale (2007) Through his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) Vigotsky defines:

“The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 65)

According to this concept, the current developmental phase of these students can be noticeably improved as they work collaboratively with their partners, thus providing a better environment to understand and follow the pace of the lesson. Consequently, as Slavin (1995) points out, cooperative learning is associated with benefits in such key areas as learning, self-esteem and liking for school, facts that suggest a dramatic reduction on the cases of misbehavior in the classroom.

In addition to cooperative learning, classroom arrangement is another essential factor as the position of the teacher and the way students are organized in the class is of great importance to carry out an effective management of the class. According to Gower, R, Phillips, D. Walters, S. (1995) students’ seating arrangements helps us determine:

- In the first place, their attitude to each other and to the teacher himself
- Teachers’ attitude to them
- The way they interact when working in groups
- The type of activities pupils are more likely to accomplish effectively
Ultimately, the teacher’s position and movement inside the classroom make students aware of his role and expectations regarding their performance. Some activities such as controlled practice and giving instructions often demand that the educator is directing what is going on. Thus, the teacher is able to see what everyone is doing and maintain control of the class as he stands in front of them, keeping eye-contact and moving along the classroom in order to help and correct the pupils.

Undoubtedly, body language has a strong impact on teaching performance. Hence, it helps develop the confidence we need to come up with an effective classroom management. As Gower. R, Phillips, D. Walters. S. (1995) state: “A good use of eye contact is crucial in helping to establish rapport”.

Certainly, the lack of eye contact in our lesson may reflect a lack of confidence that can become a potential obstacle to our performance. In short, “the more direct eye contact the teacher maintains with all those in the class the more teacher-controlled the lesson.” (p. 9)

Thus, when it comes to work with younger students, this strategy helps maintaining discipline since it shows the teacher is aware of what the pupils are doing. A good eye-contact not only facilitates the control of the class but also allows us to ensure that our students have understood the instructions by paying attention to their expressions.

Besides eye-contact, the use of gestures and mime is of key importance to convey the meaning of language in order to be fully understood by the pupils. Then, according to Gower. R, Phillips, D. Walters. S. (1995), we use gesture and mime to:

- Manage the class by reinforcing instructions;
- to add visual interest;
• to cut down the amount of verbal explanation. This point is particularly important regarding the context of this research as it is a lower level where long verbal explanations in a foreign language can be difficult and consequently, highly confusing for children. Thus, it is advisable to exaggerate our gestures during the first lessons so that pupils begin to convey their meaning.

In addition to the use of expressions and mimes in the lesson, it is important to consider our voice as a means to gain attention. As claim Gower. R, Phillips, D. Walters. S. (1995),

Usually the greater the variation in the voice, the greater the effectiveness is. Having said this, it is preferable to avoid shouting or losing control since pupils often mirrors the teacher’s volume. Therefore, keeping an appropriate pitch will help us control a class when:

• at the beginning of a lesson, pupils are standing around talking;
• the teacher needs to regain control in order to continue with the lesson after an activity.
METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

In order to achieve my goal regarding an improvement on my classroom management in this particular context, I will aim to describe the strategies used based on the theoretical framework chosen for this research.

**Applied strategies to improve classroom management**

**a) Classroom rules**

As Springer (2007) claims, classroom rules are a necessity since students are more likely to follow what has been established rather than what they are told at the moment. Thus, the teacher needs to set a couple of fundamental rules capable to work for all the members of the community. According to the author, three is a good number for essential rules as I am currently working with a lower grade. It is of key importance to remember that as children are in the Concrete Operational Stage, these rules must be as specific as possible and based on an expected positive behavior. That is, by emphasizing what they are expected to do rather than focusing on the avoidance of certain misbehaviors.

**b) Creation of classroom rules**

In order to come up with the creation of consistent rules in the classroom, I applied the theory of authors Albert, Linda (1996) Springer, Steve (2007) to make students participants of the choosing of these rules so that the concept of collaborative discipline can be carried out through the discussion of the rules with the class. Firstly, the idea was to discuss their meaning and possible impact on the pupils by asking for suggestions. These rules were written down on the board so that everyone was able to see them and rate them according to their relevance inside this context.
c) **Stating possible consequences for the proposed rules**

Once these three rules were chosen as relevant and appropriate for the class, the next step was to challenge the proposed rules in order to introduce a possible consequence when they are broken. Yet it was important to remind pupils that these consequences must be always constructive. Then, the consequences were built on *Related, Reasonable, Respectful, and Reliable Enforced* principles as stated by Albert (1990). Thus, in order to protect and increase students’ self-esteem and also nurture a good behavior; the class was presented a hypothetical situation in which having an expected behavior came up with better results for the class rather than having a disruptive and aggressive one since both teacher and students need a friendly space to work in.

**d) Giving meaningfulness to the stated rules**

Following the suggestions provided by Springer (2007), as a way of giving pupils ownership of their classroom, they were encouraged not only to participate in the selection of appealing rules but also to write the rules on a poster and decorate it themselves. Later, we all reviewed the rules together to make sure they were clear and concise enough according to their level. Finally, children were able to display the poster in the front of the room so that all of them were able to see them and hopefully follow them. (See appendix)

**Opening routines, transforming learning environment and classroom arrangement**

**a) Routines as a way of getting the class ready for the lesson**

As mentioned by Springer, Steve (2007), students are more likely to follow what they have established since the beginning of the academic year. In the case of little children, routines such
as songs and quick games before the class start gives the teacher an opportunity to take control of the class as the pupils already know the routines. Thus, every lesson got started as it follows:

- Instead of greeting students by just saying “Good morning”, the lesson began with a Hello, how are you? song.

- After singing both “Hello, how are you?” and the “Weather” song, students were expected to tell what is the weather like today and ultimately, the corresponding date.

- The use of quick games after the routines mentioned above also increased students’ motivation and willingness to participate actively, thus becoming a good strategy to keep them concentrated and get them ready for the lesson.

b) Transforming the classroom into a friendly place

Although this school is surrounded by a context of social vulnerability, this fact is not a reason to underestimate the importance of keeping a friendly space in order to develop good behavior in students. According to Martinez (2005), an aggressive and disruptive behavior in children comes as a result of what they see happening around them. That is to say, if pupils are constantly surrounded by a hostile and careless environment, they are more likely to react as such towards their peers and teacher himself. That is why in an attempt to create a better setting to nurture a good behavior, we agreed to set the following goals:

- Keep the classroom always clean: Students were supposed to keep the space free from litter before and after the lesson.

- Care for their community environment: Pupils not only would care for cleanliness inside the classroom but also all around the school itself. This measure would give children the opportunity to develop themselves both cognitively and affectively
inside a more friendly space, thus hopefully overcoming the obstacles concerning a context of social vulnerability.

Once these goals were achieved, I carried out one of the classroom incentives suggested by Springer (2007) as a way of encouraging students to maintain the positive behavior. Thus, I set up a star count chart to reward students for their desired behavior and contribution to the learning community as soon as they would reach a certain number of stars. Ultimately, this incentive helped reduce misbehavior in the classroom as pupils got to know the positive consequences of keeping a good behavior.

c) Seating arrangement

Despite the reduced space of the classroom and the large number of children, I aimed to rearrange the seats in order to determine pupils’ attitude towards their peers and evaluate the possibility to make them interact in a different way in the English class; avoiding the typical seat arrangement established by most schools where students are not able to work in bigger groups. Then, following the model suggested by Gower. R, Phillips, D. Walters. S. (1995), I decided to group the students in a “café style” in an attempt to:

- First, take pupils out of their common seat arrangement;
- Try out a new arrangement capable to provide both control of the class and comfort for the students; and finally,
- To prepare students to work collaboratively through pairwork or groupwork.
Dealing with misbehavior in the classroom

a) **Strategies to encourage good behavior**

In order to promote a desired behavior in the classroom, I specifically based my strategies on Albert’s Three C’s of cooperative discipline (1996) that stands for *capable, connect* and *contribute*. Then, according to these 3 concepts, I developed the following aims regarding the second C which is *helping students connect* to make students establish and maintain positive relationships with peers and teachers. Consequently, as pupils make these connections, they become more cooperative and helpful with each other and more receptive to teachers.

Regarding this particular context, I put in practice the Five A’s developed by the author as a means to bring up the desired behavior in the disruptive students:

1. Acceptance
2. Attention
3. Appreciation
4. Affirmation
5. Affection

The five A’s turned to be an essential tool in order to deal with disruptive pupils as Albert (1996) claims the relevance of the role of affectivity to build a meaningful rapport among teacher and students. Then, my strategies were carried out as it follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies used by the teacher to reinforce good behavior</th>
<th>Consequences / Students’ reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

| • Developing rapport with students | • Improved Teacher – Student relationship. |
| • Showing appreciation for pupils’ work and performance. | • Increase of self-confidence in pupils. |
| • The use of positive statements that reinforce good behavior rather than using “don’ts” to avoid misbehavior. | • Concrete identification of the desired behavior. |

In addition to the strategies mentioned in the chart, I also applied:

- **Turning mistakes into an opportunity to get better**: Since students were afraid of making mistakes, it was essential to demonstrate them that this is the way we all learn so consequently, there was nothing to be ashamed of.

- **Building confidence in students**: Strongly related to the point mentioned above. Making mistakes okay minimize the fear of students to participate actively Albert, (1996) Then, pupils gained willingness to come to the front and say their answers out loud regardless the result.

- **Recognizing pupils’ achievements**: Highlighting the good qualities of the students helps reinforce the desired behavior (Albert, 1996). Students felt valued for their efforts and ultimately demonstrated a higher level of willingness to achieve future lesson goals.

### b) Strategies to deal with disruptive students

Insubordinate students challenge teacher and his self-control (Kramer, 2005) As a way of dealing with defiant students in the classroom, I applied the strategies suggested by Albert
(1996) through the avoidance of confrontations related to power-struggling situations with the pupil. Thus, in the moment misbehavior was perceived, I considered practices such as:

- Focus on the behavior, not on the student (Albert, 1996)

To accomplish this, it was necessary to avoid the use of subjective words such as “bad” or “wrong” since they only focused on the negative aspects that were supposed to be transformed into positive reinforcements. The author suggests being friendly and firm to indicate the misbehavior must stop so that action shows students one cares about them.

- Avoid escalating the situation (Albert, 1996)

The author recommends taking control of the negative emotions by avoiding make reactions worse. Then, as a way of developing patience when a case of misbehavior came up, I applied the following as it mentioned in the book:

- never raise my voice or use sarcasm;
- stand too close to the student or;
- humiliate or mock the student

since any of these actions may turn students even more disruptive and unwilling to contribute to the lesson in a positive way.

Discuss the misbehavior later (Albert, 1996) Conferring this point, rather than confronting the pupils due to his misbehavior, I waited until both parties have cooled down to have a talk about it. However, it was still necessary to show the student in a friendly way the consequences of his behavior so that he would realize he did something inappropriate according to the classroom rules we had established already.
Besides the strategies previously mentioned, I displayed the use of *behavior contracts* as described by Springer (2007) These contracts were meant to help me with students who had problems following rules or staying on task. According to the model suggested for the creation of a behavior contract, firstly I chose three specific desired behaviors and had pupils to circle the face depending on their performance on a particular goal.

Also, the fact of asking the most disruptive students to assist me in the management of the classroom, turned to be a useful strategy as they felt more valued and important into their own learning process. Thus, in the words of Springer (2007):

> “Assigning class jobs to students teaches responsibility (…) and gives them a sense of ownership over their learning environment.” (p. 17)

c) **Group work**

Teams (four to six students) work well to teach cooperation (Springer, 2007) The strategies carried out to display group work, not only give students the chance to interact among them, but also it develops cross-curricular objectives such as respect and tolerance for one another. To achieve these goals, I applied the following strategies:

d) **Table points**

Table points can also be used as a behavior management chart in order to control students effectively. (See appendix)

- The class is divided up into teams
- Points (stars) are given for desired behaviors and correct answers
The table point is placed in the front so that everyone is able to see it and keep a record of their performance according to the number of starts.

e) **Rewarding and group incentives**

In order to reinforce good behavior, rewards include stickers, stamp cards, candies and most importantly, positive records on the class book.
EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

As established at the beginning of this research, I aimed to gather evidence through a survey of qualitative characteristics. This questionnaire was answered after applying the strategies meant to improve my classroom management in a context of social vulnerability; consisting of four questions related to the experience of students along this process, especially focused on the display of the collaborative work strategy in order to prove its possible influence on making pupils keep a positive behavior. (See appendix)

Since I wanted to analyze in a deeper way their perception about working in teams, I added an extra space below each question so that students were able to justify their answers on the survey rather than just choosing “Yes / No / Sometimes”, for instance. Also, it is important to mention the use of Spanish to carry out this survey as a way of making it clear and straightforward for pupils at this level. Thus, having them answer in their mother tongue would hopefully provide a better understanding and analysis of the gathered data.

Having stated the points above, the following graphics summarize the impressions of these students regarding their experience working in teams last semester.
As presented in fig. 1, 57% of the students sometimes had problems trying to understand the instructions given by the teacher in contrast to the remaining 40% of the students who claimed not having complications to comprehend the instructions and commands given by the teacher. Lastly, only the 3% of the class assumed the presence of problems to understand the instructions.

Description

¿Ha tenido problemas para entender las instrucciones que le da la profesora?
According to the information provided by this graphic, a considerable part of the students had several problems following instructions due to the use of English, even though this was supposed to be an English class.

Fig. N°2:

¿Usted cree que aprende más trabajando en equipo?

A SI; 32; 91%

B NO; 1; 3%

C A VECES; 2; 6%

Description

In fig. 2, the 91% of the class agreed on the fact that working in teams helps them learn better as they support one another along this process. On the other hand, a 6% of the students disagreed on this fact, and lastly, only one student (meaning the 3% of the class) wrote “No” on the space meant to be used for justifying his answer.

From the data, it can be seen that 31 students who answered yes to whether they learned more working in groups, 20 pupils justified their response by arguing that in this way
they would help one another and get supported by his teams. Unlikely this group of children, the remaining 11 students justified their answer by only mentioning how fun working in groups was.

The 3 students who answered sometimes and no also justified their answers as it follows:

Answered sometimes:

- Student 1 & 2: Although one of these pupils claimed the possibility of learning better in this setting sometimes, the latter justified his concerns on this statement by arguing “You may learn individually as well by paying attention”.

Answer no:

- Student 3: Justified his perception by arguing “Because all my classmates have the same answer”.
Fig. N°3:

¿Cómo ha sido su experiencia trabajando en equipos?

Description

In fig 3, the 69% of the students perceived their experience working in groups as very good while the other 20% of them perceived it as good. Finally, an 11% of the pupils considered their experience as regular when working in teams. Nonetheless, the most important point carried by this question was the fact that none of the students had an experience perceived as bad.
Description

Regarding competitions among teams, 97% of the students claimed to feel more motivated to work when this kind of activities takes place. On the other hand, only one student answered *sometimes* to this question, thus making up the 3% of this graphic. Negative answers to this question were not perceived.

Data interpretation

As seen in figure 1, over the 50% of the students had problems trying to understand the instructions. This fact suggests that the use of a foreign language was one of the reasons they could not comprehend what said by the teacher, even though it was the English class. Also, it is
important to consider the possibility of pupils doing something else during the lesson so they were not paying attention to the instructions as expected.

As for the data gathered concerning group work in figure 2, the students expressed the usefulness of this strategy since they were able to help one another and support their teams; factor that demonstrates that most of them needed to feel supported by their group in order to succeed the task. However, it is worth mentioning the three pupils who questioned the effectiveness of learning through teamwork as they argued the possibility to learn without other’s help.

Concerning their experience when working in teams, the students manifested a high acceptance of this strategy by putting in evidence the support they got from their peers to compete besides the fun they had together. Nonetheless, it is relevant to mention that the 11% of them questioned teamwork since it could bring up disputes among students during competitions. Still, figure 4 shows the 97% of pupils actually feeling more motivated to work when competitions would take place. The reason for this fact has mainly to do with the presence of prizes and incentives for the winners of the lesson.

**Final conclusion**

As presented in the theoretical framework, when it comes to teach children, Brown (2007) points out the importance of providing a meaningful and authentic language since according to Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, these students need concrete instructions based on the use of what the author describes as a context-embedded language. Clearly, students had complications trying to understand them, firstly because it was not their mother tongue and secondly due to a possible misbehavior during the lesson. Also, it is pertinent to highlight the
level of self-consciousness these students had on their own performance since they assumed a lack of awareness regarding the instructions they were supposed to follow.

According to the literature reviewed based on teamwork, students were highly motivated by the desire to sense that they belong to a group as they found help and support to reach goals, thus making learning social and collaborative. Then, as Schunk (2007) through Vigotski’s concept of proximal development (ZPD) claims, the current developmental phase of these pupils were improved as they worked collaboratively with their partners. This was very significant information since it showed a general effectiveness on the developing of a collaborative work among pupils with behavior issues.

The use of incentives along the competitions played a fundamental role to increase their motivation. According to the written justification provided by children, pupils’ motivation to succeed the task was mainly based on their eagerness to become the winners of the lesson and thus get incentives such as stickers, positive recording on the class book and candies. Thus, rather than focusing on a friendly competition with the rest of the teams, pupils were more focused on getting a reward.

Nonetheless, it is essential to highlight one of the justifications provided by a pupil who affirmed to feel motivated sometimes only since when competitions took place, disputes among students did as well. Certainly, this observation made by a child is very relevant as in fact, at the beginning of this action-research project, several students had problems of misbehavior reflected on a disrespectful and intolerant attitude towards them.

Working with other teaches students how to get along with one another and consequently enhances learning through their interaction. Thus, relating these facts to what Slavin (1995)
claims, the strategy of cooperative learning brought several benefits to children’s development as it increased their self-esteem and reduced the cases of misbehavior in the classroom.
CONCLUSION

The research presented in this paper had as a main objective the collection of a set of strategies related to classroom management capable to be applied in a context of social vulnerability. To accomplish this, I not only based this project on what education experts proposed but also, on authors who allowed me to discover the other variables that have an impact on students’ behavior, thus showing me how the concept of vulnerability inside a community turned to be a key factor to comprehend the behavior of these children. Consequently, the literature reviewed was highly relevant and useful to design an intervention plan for this particular context.

Having focused my attention on these students’ needs and concerns, I was able to come up with strategies that were still new to them, such as changing the seating arrangement in order to make the classroom a more comfortable place, and most importantly, giving pupils the opportunity to interact with their peers and encourage them to respect and care for their own surroundings.

Although the objectives of both collecting and putting into practice a determined set of strategies to manage a disruptive class were accomplished, still there was not enough time to come up with a more developed behavior intervention plan with the aim of having a lasting positive effect on the class. In fact, it took several weeks until I finally was able to perceive the positive effects of the applied strategies as lower levels only had a few hours of English per month.

Social vulnerability is certainly a wider topic that must be evaluated more carefully since there are several variables that may have an impact on the behavior of these pupils, for instance
and more generally speaking, the affective and socioeconomic problems they might have been facing inside their own families and surroundings; variables that showed me that in the role of the teacher, many facts about young learners cannot be generalized or given by granted. Still, the variable of social vulnerability was relevant to comprehend the perception of these students since many of them actually had very little support not only from their families but also from COLBAB’s teachers. Thus, most of the hypothesis I had set at the beginning of this research turned to be favorable for this action-research paper:

- “The setting of clear and consistent classroom rules makes students aware of the discipline goals they must achieve in order to create a positive learning environment.”

The setting of rules is indisputably the first step to come up with a positive classroom management. This hypothesis was proven especially due to the fact that, instead of me creating the rules on my own, we discussed the possible ones together followed by their consequences, so that detail certainly helped me make these rules more consistent and meaningful for them, so they agreed to respect them.

- “The use of pairwork develops a good rapport among students and foster friendly relationships.”

This turned to be a refused hypothesis since most students preferred to work in bigger groups rather than working with just one person. Basically, they were more willing to share with a bigger number of peers because then, they were not feeling necessarily forced to do or say something as it happened with pairwork activities. This fact undeniably proves that pairwork was not necessarily as essential as I thought it would be in this context. In fact, the good rapport I
expected to witness among students was negatively influenced by the lack of confidence to interact only with one different partner.

- “Turning a negative behavior into an opportunity to behave better reduces pupils’ aggressiveness towards their environment.”

This hypothesis was supported due to before starting this research; most of children were reacting aggressively as they had never been told about their mistakes in a positive way. Basically, the classroom rules and the teacher’s attitude towards them were mainly based on don’ts rather than on do’s, so the desired behavior never was clear enough to make these children realize the goals they were supposed to aim to; proving that misbehavior had its roots in the mistaken way in which students understood the goals of the lesson. Thus, by showing pupils they were actually able to transform the situation into something better, allowed them to get conscious of their own capacities to contribute positively along the process.

- “The more students are surrounded by a positive and affective environment, the better they perform the desired behavior.”

Undeniably, the affective factor played a fundamental role along this action-research paper. Thus, this hypothesis was proven as during this process, students began to feel more valued and respected by their peers. Consequently, they came up with the desired positive behavior as they were able to learn this from one another, feeling part of a learning community and contributing to the achieving of its goals.

On balance, this was a challenging and yet very meaningful experience since I had never worked with a lower level before. Despite in many occasions it even turned to be tiring and frustrating, little by little I began to apply pertinent strategies for this particular context and
realize the key importance of the affective factors when carrying out a behavior management plan, as in the beginning I was mainly focused on getting the class ready for the lesson and foster discipline as soon as possible.

Regarding the work I performed during the last months, I could perceive an improvement on my classroom management skills although it was not as successful as I had expected since my experience teaching young learners was quite limited. Then, many times I found myself talking to the pupils as if they were already in high school, making the instructions and goals for the class more difficult to understand.

Despite my classroom management skills have still a lot to improve when it comes to teach children, I was glad to see positive changes in the classroom meaning pupils’ attitude and disposition to work collaboratively. Contrary to previous experiences, the students were able to interact and build good rapport with their peers in the particular environment that surrounds them, a detail that highly contributes to their development not only as learners but also as human beings.
References


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Considerando la situación familiar y socio-económica de los alumnos, ¿cómo describe el espacio que rodea a los alumnos del Colegio Babilonia?

A ver, si consideramos el espacio físico (…) Es un lugar que no es tan malo porque tiene acceso a locomoción colectiva, hay ferias cerca del colegio. Se podría decir que los apoderados son ferianos (…) y por ende, como este colegio es particular-subvencionado, se esfuerzan por pagar una mensualidad que no es muy alta tampoco, pero como ellos tienen varios hijos, se esfuerzan por pagarla.

¿Cuáles son los principales motivos por los cuales se cita a los apoderados para discutir sobre sus hijos, y cuál es el motivo más frecuente?

A ver, en general depende. Acá por ejemplo en el colegio tenemos normas de conducta que están registradas en la libreta de comunicaciones – como el reglamento interno- entonces se llama mayormente a los alumnos por las anotaciones negativas que hay en el libro que van colocando los profesores. En otras ocasiones, por conductas inadecuadas en el patio, conductas inadecuadas de los niños más grandes hacia los niños más pequeños, el bullying que se llama hoy día (…) atrasos también (…) pero lo más frecuente son las anotaciones o el comportamiento que tienen en la sala, cuando los profesores están dentro de la sala con ellos.
• ¿Ha habido muchos casos de violencia no sólo entre alumnos, si no que también hacia el profesor?

Hacia el profesor ha habido pocas. Yo diría que una en especial que recuerdo yo (…) -no, dos- pero los alumnos ya no están dentro del colegio (…) las medidas que tomó el colegio fueron durante todo el año; y años anteriores también (…) los alumnos vienen con antecedentes, pero este año ya los alumnos se pusieron muy falta de respeto y la verdad es que se les caducó la matrícula. Los apoderados eso sí con conocimiento (…) se están llamando, se está hablando con ellos.

• De acuerdo a su experiencia como inspectora, ¿cuáles son las conductas negativas más frecuentes en los alumnos del establecimiento?

A ver, las conductas más frecuentes son (…) una, que se molestan entre ellos – y el hecho que se molestan, se pican y se pegan (…) yo creo que esa es la conducta más frecuente; y lo otro, que les gusta mucho jugar a la pelota (…) pero en general es el pequeño bullying que se va llamando de pelea entre uno con otro niño. Lo otro que toma el colegio como medida es la suspensión. Niños que se pegan, se golpean, ellos se van suspendidos.
1. De acuerdo al desempeño de la practicante, ¿cuáles son las dificultades más latentes que ha percibido en base al manejo de clase? Por favor, enumere.

   a.- Lo primero y más importante es darse cuenta que ser docente significa ser “líder”, el liderazgo dentro de la sala de clase envuelve no solo el entregar los conocimientos necesarios dentro lo planificado, sino también, entusiasmar a los alumnos y alumnas con tus propuestas de ejercicios y actividades que impliquen una mejor convivencia dentro del aula en tu subsector.

   b.- Darse el tiempo de conocer a tus estudiantes, es la mejor manera de entablar una sana empatía para que te ayude a manejar tus estrategias de enseñanza aprendizaje.

   c.- Situarse dentro del aula con una actitud positiva y alegre, contagia a tus estudiantes a realizar de mejor manera y en un tiempo más reducido el proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje que se quiere como meta.
2. ¿Qué habilidad en cuanto al manejo de clase es más urgente de reforzar actualmente?

   Insisto que un docente debe ser líder de sus estudiantes dentro y fuera del aula, a pesar de ello esto es más bien una característica de la personalidad de alguna gente. Se puede desarrollar habilidades tales como: La empatía, dar el tiempo necesario para cada estudiante, la clase participativa y proactiva, el manejo de disciplina de los alumnos y alumnas, el conocimiento fidedigno de los Reglamentos internos de los colegios, ayudan a desarrollar un mejor clase.
JPG FILES

- Classroom Rules

![Classroom Rules Image]

- Table Points

![Table Points Image]
SURVEY SAMPLES

1. ¿Ha tenido problemas para entender las instrucciones que le da la profesora?
   a) Sí
   b) No
   c) A veces
   ¿Por qué?

2. ¿Usted cree que aprende más trabajando en equipo?
   a) Sí
   b) No
   c) A veces
   ¿Por qué?

3. ¿Cómo ha sido su experiencia trabajando en equipos?
   a) Muy buena
   b) Buena
   c) Regular
   d) Mala
   ¿Por qué?

4. ¿Se siente más motivado a trabajar cuando hay competencia entre equipos?
   a) Sí
   b) No
   c) A veces
   ¿Por qué?
1. ¿Ha tenido problemas para entender las instrucciones que le da la profesora?
   a) Sí
   b) No
   c) A veces
   d) Por qué?

2. ¿Usted cree que aprende más trabajando en equipo?
   a) Sí
   b) No
   c) A veces
   d) Por qué?

3. ¿Cómo ha sido su experiencia trabajando en equipos?
   a) Muy buena
   b) Buena
   c) Regular
   d) Mala
   e) Por qué?

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   d) Sí
   e) No
   f) A veces

¿Por qué?

2. ¿Usted cree que aprende más trabajando en equipo?
   d) Sí
   e) No
   f) A veces

¿Por qué?

3. ¿Cómo ha sido su experiencia trabajando en equipos?
   e) Muy buena
   f) Buena
   g) Regular
   h) Mala

¿Por qué?

4. ¿Se siente más motivado a trabajar cuando hay competencia entre equipos?
   e) Sí
   f) A veces

¿Por qué?