

# Positive learning environment encourages students' desire to invest effort in the English learning activity

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**Abstract:** The objective of the present article is to propose a way to activate and encourage students' desire to invest effort in the English learning activity by establishing a positive learning environment. The lack of motivation of teenage students has several causes that can be attributed both to internal factors as external ones. Accordingly, in order to find out pertinent methodologies for improving students' participation during English classes and construct a suitable classroom management strategy, the researcher analyzed different documents such as the official ones pertaining to the involved school, as well as works from several authors that have studied the topic (Dörnyei, 1998; Epperson & Rossman, 2013; Harmer, 2007; Scrivener, 2005; Ur, 2012). A survey was undertaken to an 11<sup>th</sup> grade of a private school located in Santiago, and it is composed of 19 teenagers aged 16 to 17. The results thereof show that the students do not feel sufficiently motivated to learn English, and the topics taught in classes are not of their interest. Consequently, classroom management is understood as developing proactive ways to create a positive learning environment and developing good rapport to contribute to effective teaching. The lessons plan includes topic of students' interest and activities fostering students' participation and rapport. Finally, the results of these new strategies are shown and recommendations are made.

**Key words:** *motivation, classroom management, rapport.*

Teaching teenagers is a task that usually generates several worries to teachers. Tenti (2000) indicates that:

adolescents and young people are bearers of a social culture consisting of knowledge, values, attitudes, and predispositions, which may not necessarily correspond to the school culture and, particularly, to the curriculum or program that the institution intends to develop therein. This structural opposition is a source of conflict and disorder. Harmonization and negotiation between both cultural universes, given certain social and institutional conditions is also a probable outcome of this structural tension. (p. 6).

Additionally, one of the fundamental objectives comprised in the National Curriculum for 11<sup>th</sup> grade is "[students will be able to] assess the contribution of the foreign language to their integral formation, self-confidence, respect to others, positive sense toward life and the development of applicable potential in future academic and/or occupational field." (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 112). Accordingly, in order to help students to improve their learning skills and subsequent integral formation, teacher's knowledge of the subject matter is as important as the fact of establishing a positive learning environment. The creation of said environment is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching, as well as one of the most difficult skills to master. Other related difficulty that impedes the creation of said environment is the lack of motivation of teenage students. Consequently, as one of the main difficulties teachers have to deal with every day is how to motivate young people, the objective of the present analysis is to address the issue of students' lack of motivation by improving the class management and the plurality of factors involved therein, such as class structure, creation of rules, seating arrangement. Particular interest will be focused on stablishing rapport, since one of the difficulties seen in class was the lack of teaching enthusiasm of the teacher, thus damaging class and group relationships. For achieving said purpose, the methodology suggested by Epperson and Rossman (2013) will be used, which provides strategies for motivating the students by establishing successful systems. Also those strategies recommended by Harmer (2007) will be checked and practiced. In the last part of this analysis conclusions and possible solutions to solve the above-mentioned difficulties will be shown.

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## **Theoretical framework**

Some relevant concepts will be analyzed hereunder in order to understand the indicated objective properly.

### **Classroom management**

According to Harmer (2007)

“if we want to manage classrooms effectively, we have to be able to handle a range of variables. These include how the classroom space is organized, whether the students are working on their own or in groups and how we organize classroom time. We also need to consider how we appear to the students, and how we use our most valuable asset - our voice. The way we talk to students - and who talks most in the lesson - is another key factor in classroom management. We also need to think about what role, if any, there may be for the use of the students’ mother tongue in lessons.” (p.34).

With the aim of constructing a classroom management strategy that helps improving student’s learning of English, the above recommendations of Harmer will be considered along with the following techniques of Epperson and Rossman (2013):

Establishing successful systems:

1. Teacher proximity
  2. Arranging the desks
    - choose the best arrangement for your classroom
    - assign students to a group
    - create a seating chart
    - determine when you want the students to form their groups
    - establish the routine
  3. Turning groups into teams
  4. Creating rules
  5. Determining consequences
  6. Taking attendance
- (p.31)

These recommendations and techniques embrace the different features or attitudes an effective teacher should have in a classroom as well as those tasks she/he should complete. Furthermore, Ur (2012) emphasizes that “some important factors that contribute to classroom discipline and are potentially within the control of, or influenced by, the teacher are: classroom management, methodology, interpersonal relationships, lesson planning, student motivation” (p. 262). Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the existence of a disciplined classroom does not ineludibly imply that learning is taking place (Ur, 2012, p. 260).

### **Teachers’ motivation**

Wilson (2012) averred that “tutor’s attitude and approach to their own work is integral in terms of influence.” (p. 6). On the other hand, Scrivener (2005) states that teachers should keep in mind that “an important part of this [teaching] is to do with your attitude, intentions and personality and your relationship with learners.” (p. 79).

Ur (2012) affirms that schoolchildren may learn a foreign language well if the teacher finds a way to activate and encourage their desire to invest effort in the learning activity. Therefore, she suggested the following ways of arousing interest in tasks:

- 1) Clear goals
- 2) Varied topics and tasks
- 3) Visuals
- 4) Tension and challenge: games
- 5) Entertainment
- 6) Play-acting
- 7) Information gap
- 8) Personalization
- 9) Open-ended cues

Accordingly, "our job is to do all we can to encourage the development of ability and enhance motivation, on the understanding that each will contribute to the other." (Ur, 2012, p. 274).

These authors support the concept that the teacher's attitude is essential to encourages students' desire to invest effort in the English learning activity.

### **Students' motivation**

Ur (2012) indicated that the learner motivation makes teaching and learning incalculable easier and more satisfying, as well as more productive; hence the importance of the topic for the teachers. Furthermore, she stated a difference between "intrinsic" motivation (the urge to engage in the learning activity for its own sake) and "extrinsic" (motivation that is derived from external incentives). In Ur's opinion, both of these have an important role to play in classroom motivation, and both are at least partially accessible to teacher influence (p. 276).

According to Ur (2012)

Many sources of extrinsic motivation are inaccessible to the influence of the teacher. However, other sources are certainly affected by teacher action. Here are some of them. Success and its reward: this is perhaps the single most important feature in raising extrinsic motivation. Learners who have succeeded in past tasks will be more willing to engage with the next one, more confident in their chances of succeeding, and more likely to persevere in their efforts. The teacher's most important function here is simply to make sure that learners are aware of their own success: the message can be conveyed by a nod, a tick, even significant lack of response. (p. 278).

On the other hand, Dörnyei (1998) identified the following key motivational factors as having the most significant bearing on a student's motivation in the classroom:

1. Teacher enthusiasm
2. Feeling of encouragement from the teacher
3. A sense that the teacher really believes in the student's progress and success
4. Genuine involvement of the teacher, maintaining good class and group relationships
5. Supportive, safe and secure atmosphere
6. Valuing student ideas and participation, encouraging autonomy, giving students the chance to make the classroom space their own

In addition, Harmer (2007) adds that "one of the teacher's main aims should be to help students to sustain their motivation. We can do this in a number of ways. The activities we ask students to take part in will, if they involve the students or excite their curiosity - and provoke their participation - help them to stay interested in the subject." (p.20).

## **Organization of the classroom**

Given that the purpose of this intervention is to find out pertinent methodologies for improving students' participation during English classes and construct a suitable classroom management strategy, the above-indicated techniques of Epperson and Rossman (2013) will be applied.

## **Rapport**

According to The British Council (2012) "rapport is the relationship built on trust and respect between teachers and students. It is one of the fundamental factors leading to students' feeling capable, competent and creative so that they can reach to their potential in studying English."

Furthermore, Swenson (2010) indicates that research proved that teacher-student rapport helps the teacher effectiveness and student learning. Therefore, it is worth considering the role of rapport if for no other reason than its contributions to effective teaching. Swenson also mentions that

Rapport involves knowing your students and their learning styles and using your relationship with them to teach at a more personal level. Teachers who have good rapport with their students are skilled in ways that encourage involvement, commitment, and interest (...). Rapport has also had a big impact on teaching second languages where interpersonal relationships help break down the barriers to learning. Teaching is as much about the technical merits of the instructor as it is about relationships in the classroom; successful teachers have learned how to build rapport with their students while challenging them to learn new material. (p. 1)

As Scrivener (2005) suggested, "in order to improve the quality of our own relationship in the classroom, we do not need to learn new techniques; we need to look closely at what we really want for our students, how we really feel about them. It is our attitude and intentions rather than our methodology that we may need to work on." (p. 25).

Taking into account all these studies, the question on how to improve the rapport building amount our students arises.

### Tips for Rapport-Building:

1. Learn to call the students by name.
  2. Learn something about your students' interests, hobbies, and aspirations.
  3. Create and use personally relevant class examples.
  4. Arrive to class early and stay late -- and chat with your students.
  5. Explain your course policies -- and why they are what they are.
  6. Get online -- use e-mail to increase accessibility to your students.
  7. Interact more, lecture less -- emphasize active learning.
  8. Reward student comments and questions with verbal praise;
  9. Be enthusiastic about teaching and passionate about your subject matter.
  10. Lighten up -- crack a joke now and then.
  11. Be humble and, when appropriate, self-deprecating.
  12. Make eye contact with each student -- without staring, glaring, or flaring.
  13. Be respectful.
  14. Don't forget to smile!
- (Buskist & Saville, 2001, p. 13).

### **Diagnostic analysis of the Educational Institute and the 11th Grade class**

The school in which the researcher will do her intervention is a private (fee paying), mixed school, located in a middle class district of Santiago called Ñuñoa, which is known as one of the districts with the highest quality of life in the capital.

The school was founded in the year 1937 by English and German nuns. In the past this school was managed by a Catholic congregation. However, nowadays the school is managed by a private group. Although the school is no longer in charge of a religious congregation, it may be classified as a Catholic school, since religion is reflected on different aspects, e.g., school's infrastructure order around the chapel, the religious signs and images on the walls, the Catholic values intended to be communicated to the students.

The School's official document PEI (Spanish acronym of Institutional Educational Project) states that "Schools of the Congregation of Jesus in Chile are Catholic educational institutions, whose center is Christ. They provide a comprehensive education from the Gospel and the charisma of Mary Ward (founder). They encourage students to achieve a synthesis among faith, culture and life to contribute to the development of a more humane, just, united, and supportive society, which promotes peace and care of the creation." (PEI, 2011, p. 6). The school motto is: "We have to learn more in order to serve better".

Foundations of the PEI are charisma, search for full life through discernment, education of will and the fundamental values: Justice, Truth, Freedom and Joy. It has to be noted that this last feature is one of the most characteristic –and remarkable among the personnel of this school. Also for the current librarian said feature is very peculiar. She began working in this school this year, and she is not yet familiar with the joy of most of the personnel, since one cannot distinguish between diplomacy and genuine joy.

Another distinguishing feature of this school is the familiar and almost maternal atmosphere created, which may be the result of being a small community, where all involved participants know each other. This particular characteristic has influence on a spoiled behavior among the students, fact that will be explained later.

### **Educational orientation**

According to the PEI "the methodologies used in classroom are articulated and contextualized depending on the students' requirements, abilities and individual differences, which results in learnings that allow the students to apply knowledge and create instances of individual and group participation that bring their knowledge into life". Furthermore, the PEI encourages the use of motivating instances, which should be based on the "knowledge" that the teacher has from her/his own students.

Nevertheless, said methodology is not clearly shown at least in the English classes, where most of the students is often bored, and demonstrates minor interest in learning a foreign language.

### **English classes**

The primary level receives 6 hours of English instruction per week, whereas the secondary level receives 4 hour weekly.

In total there are four English teachers in the school, two for primary level and two for the secondary level.

### **11th Grade "A" class data**

The 11th Grade "A" class consists of 21 officially enrolled students. However, there is a girl, who is pregnant, that never attends classes. Then, this class is made up of 14 girls and 7 boys right now.

There are three different cliques in the class. One group consists of the hard-working students, the other group is formed by boys only, whereas the last one includes all those students “who like to party all the time” in the English teacher’s words.

### **11th Grade “A” class and English classes**

From the actual 20 students, one of them is “exempted” from attending the English class, since she was accepted in this school two years ago, and “does not have the required English level” in teacher’s opinion.

From the above-indicated cliques, it has to be noted that the hard-working students behave quite well and do not have disturbance problem. They attend English classes carefully, participate, and keep the best mark in English.

The “boy group” shows a very childish behavior and likes to play with their cell phones during English classes. Most of them keep a deficient mark in English.

The “party group” is constantly talking to each other and doing activities not related to the class. However, they keep a good mark in English.

There is a general low level of engagement of the students with the English class and several students show an attitude of doing a minimal effort to pass the course.

The English teacher of the 11th Grade “A” class is the coordinator of the English teachers of this school.

English classes for 11th Grade “A” class take place on Monday, from 1:10 until 2:40 pm, and Tuesday, from 9:40 until 11:10 am.

Even though the students do not have an English course textbook, classes are based on the planning indicated in the book “English in Mind”, Workbook No. 4, by Herbert Puchta et al., from Cambridge University Press. As students do not have said book, all the material is provided by the teacher, who copies and photocopies the topics or grammar issues to be discussed or taught.

Most of the activities prepared by the teacher are focused on students’ ability to apply grammar forms and/or structure and vocabulary. She also encourages the personal creation of original material when she requires the writing of essays about specific subjects. However, she fails to ask for said essays and not all the students are used to passing over their writing if the teacher does not collect them personally. In most of the cases, only the hard-working students go the teacher and pass their homeworks over.

On the other hand, it is observed that there is no structure to lessons, since the teacher neither indicates the learning outcome intended to be reached in each class nor closes the class by checking students’ learning. Although there is no structure, lessons are planned according to the unit sequence of the above-mentioned course textbook, as well as the content and students activities. Furthermore, the topics discussed during English classes are exclusively chosen by the teacher, and most of the students are not interested therein.

The teacher’s lessons are directed to those previously named as “hard-working ones”. She keeps the order in the classroom, but is not very interested in teaching to those students belonging to the other groups that usually talk among themselves during English classes. In order to encourage participation in classes the English teacher frequently gives extra point to keep the students working.

In general, 11th Grade “A” class shows a good English level – at least the students understand what the teacher says in English. Although they write properly, they do not feel confident enough to produce their own oral speech.

No formative evaluations have been undertaken during English lessons. Students have five summative evaluations per semester, which are divided into written tests and oral presentations.

### **Classroom norms & student conduct**

During English classes students speak in Spanish most of the time, since there is no consequence if they do so. Although they understand what the teacher says in English, they are used to answering in Spanish.

The English teacher speaks in English most of the class; however, indication and instructions are often indicated in Spanish.

At the beginning of the class, students used to ignoring teachers' greeting, and continue doing what they were doing before the teacher arrived to the classroom. They stand up to greet, only if they are asked to. Usually, the class begins after ten or fifteen minutes after the corresponding start, since some students approach the teacher to make different kind of questions such as the date of the next test or the grade of the past one. Recurrently students leave the classroom for a bathroom break during lesson time and they spend a lot of time there. During lessons it is common to see students playing with cell phones, eating, doing exercises from other subjects or preparing the test that will take place during the next hours. The teacher tries to maintain a reasonable level of silence during her lessons. However, she frequently speaks out when trying to obtain students' attention. She has never asked a student to leave the room, which is a rare situation in this school.

When students miss a test, it is not mandatory to submit a certificate or note of their parents, and they have several options regarding new dates to take the pending test.

### **First survey**

The students were asked to answer a first anonymous survey with the aim of collecting their interests, opinion, and suggestion regarding the English classes and methodology of working (see Appendix I). The results thereof showed that the majority of the students think the most difficult skill is speaking, whereas the easiest one is reading. Furthermore, they think that the most required skill is speaking, and the less required one is reading. In their opinion, the skill more trained during classes is reading, whereas the less trained is speaking. On the other hand, the students prefer conventional classes, i.e., the teacher in front of the class explaining some grammatical topic. They also prefer to work individually rather than in groups, since in their opinion their classmates do not pay attention, are disruptive and distracting.

The reason they argue for not speaking in English is that they do not feel motivated to do so. In their opinion, the teacher should speak in English all the time, and her lessons should be more motivating and dynamic. Finally, the first survey was useful to confirm likes and dislikes of the class, helping the teacher to choose appealing materials for the didactic unit, like music, films and books.

### **Description of the unit**

#### **Didactic decisions**

Even though the class planning was comprised in the course book "English in Mind No. 4", the teaching strategies for generating a positive learning environment that encourages students to invest effort in the English learning activity were chosen in the light of the students' opinion revealed in the first survey, and following Epperson and Rossman's framework. Therefore, the speaking skills will be greatly practiced, since the majority of the students think the most difficult skill is speaking; however, it was the less trained during preceding English classes. In order to practice this skill, topics of students' interest were selected, such as music, movies, and celebrities.

Furthermore, with the aim of establishing a successful learning system several rules of coexistence were agreed between the teacher and the students. In that way, problem behavior could be diminished.

With the purpose of building rapport with the students and knowing their behavior in other subjects, the researcher attended other classes of the same grade, i.e., History and English replacement classes of other English teachers. The researcher realized their rapport was based on years of knowing the students and sharing some personal data, such as hobbies and familiar events. The researcher also noted that neither of them wrote the class objective on the whiteboard, and just one of them verbalized said objective.

### **The lessons**

The unit comprises eight two-hour lessons (ninety minutes each) delivered over a period of four weeks. Said unit is included in the book “English in Mind No. 4”, which is the one used by the English teacher as reference for the classes, although the students do not have it. The topic of the unit is “Peacemaker” and relates to different celebrities that are/were struggling for peace, or peacemaking song or singer.

As previously indicated, the following techniques by Epperson and Rossman’s framework will be applied:

Establishing successful systems:

1. Teacher proximity
2. Arranging the desks
  - choose the best arrangement for your classroom
  - assign students to a group
  - create a seating chart
  - determine when you want the students to form their groups
  - establish the routine
3. Turning groups into teams
4. Creating rules
5. Determining consequences
6. Taking attendance

Classes were aimed to develop reading, listening, and speaking skills principally, since writing does not represent a challenge for the students as indicated in the above-mentioned survey. Accordingly, lesson outcomes were focused on developing listening, and speaking skills mainly, giving to students the opportunity of expressing their own opinion and preferences, as well of listening actual English in use. The class structure was divided into pre, while and post- reading/listening activities. Comprehension checking questions were used throughout the lessons.

A summary of the teaching unit lessons is described in the following chart:

**Unit 6 “Peacemakers”**

**Topic of the class:  
Rules of coexistence**

<b>Class/ week</b>	<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Materials/resources</b>	<b>Activities</b>		<b>Assessment</b>	
<b>1/1</b>	Students will be able to establish the rules of coexistence along with the teacher.	<b>Teacher:</b> PowerPoint presentation with: - seating arrangement; - working groups; - turning groups into team; - possible coexistence rules; - determining consequences. Computer Projector	* Along with the students the teacher establishes the coexistence rules that will be valid during the whole unit.		* Formative evaluation by direct observation	
<b>2/1</b>			<b>Students:</b> Worksheet prepared by the teacher	<b>Pre</b>		* The teacher explains the class routine (date, topic, and learning outcome). * The teacher introduces the topic of the unit “Peacemaker” explaining the meaning of said term. * The teacher forms four (4) working groups of five (5) students each, where one of them represents the president of the group.
				<b>While</b>		Menu: 1) Arranging the desk (seating arrangement) 2) Turning groups into team: - Create a team name - Choose a President and a Vice-President - Determining President/Vice-President’s tasks. 3) Creating rules: - concise (everyone or no one) - simple language - positive language - 5 or less 4) Determining consequences - verbal warning - visual warning
		<b>Post</b>	* Different opinions on the agreed rules are discussed. * The establishment of rules of coexistence is checked.			

Unit 6 “Peacemakers”

Topic of the class: Bob Marley

Class/ week	Learning Outcomes	Materials/resources	Activities		Assessment
1/2	Students will be able to orally express their own opinions after reading the selected text, using sentences such as “I agree with...” or “I disagree with...”	<b>Teacher:</b> PowerPoint presentation with: - seating arrangement; - working groups; - possible coexistence rules; - reading on Bob Marley Computer Projector  <b>Students:</b> Activity worksheet prepared by the teacher	<b>Pre</b>	* The teacher explains the class routine (date, topic, and learning outcome). * The teacher reiterates the topic of the unit “Peacemaker”. * The teacher asks to form the working groups * The teacher encourages a brainstorming related to the celebrity of current class: Bob Marley, and writes the ideas mentioned by the students on the whiteboard. * Then the teacher explains the meaning of “cognates”, “false cognates” and key words, giving examples of each of them. * The teacher indicates the key words of the text about Bob Marley. * The teacher asks the students to underline the cognates and key words in the mentioned text.	* Formative evaluation by direct observation
2/2			<b>While</b>	* In pairs the students read the text about Bob Marley. * The students answer the questions indicated on page 3 of the worksheet. * The answers are checked, and the president of each group is responsible for reading them aloud. * Then the teacher explains and models the use of sentences such as “I agree with...” or “I don’t agree with” in order to prepare the answer of the post-reading exercises. * In groups the students prepare the post-reading discussion mentioned on page 5 of the worksheet.	
			<b>Post</b>	* The answers of the post-reading activity are checked. * Different opinions expressed are discussed. * We check if the proposed objective was accomplished	

**Unit 6 “Peacemakers”**  
**Topic of the class: Peace, love and understanding**

Class/ week	Learning Outcomes	Materials/resources	Activities	Assessment
1/3	Students will be able to understand a song by hearing it, recognizing the corresponding vocabulary of the unit.  Students will be able to create a dialog using “I like” structures and giving their own opinion.	<b>Teacher:</b> PowerPoint presentation with material extracted from the book “English in Mind” No. 4 Computer Projector  <b>Students:</b> Activity worksheet prepared by the teacher	* The teacher reiterates the coexistence rules that are valid from the beginning of the unit, i.e., attitudinal norms, seating arrangement, working groups, and consequences of not following these rules  <b>Pre</b> * The teacher explains the class routine (date, topic, and learning outcome). * The teacher introduces the topic of the class “Peace, love and understanding” and asks the students if they know another peace song. * The teacher encourages a brainstorming related to the topic of current class and writes the ideas mentioned by the students on the whiteboard. * The teacher forms the groups (I to V), distribute the material prepared by her, indicates that the best group will win the 1st prize, and gives the corresponding instructions, i.e. we will listen to the song three times, one time the video, then just the song, and then the video again, and students will work in group and ask the questions. * Then the teacher asks the students to look at the picture on the worksheet and tell what they think the singer feels about Peace, Love and Understanding?	* Formative evaluation by direct observation
2/3		<b>While</b> We watch the video “Peace, love and understanding” by Elvis Costello (3x). The teacher explains the key words. In groups, the students do the exercises of the worksheet: a) Six words are missing. b) Meaning of the song’s title c) Opposite words in the lyric		
		<b>Post</b> Exercises are checked. <b>What Singer/band do you like?</b> The following structure is checked: <i>I like...</i> <i>Why?</i> <i>Because I like...</i> This will be useful to prepare the coming Oral Presentation. (summative evaluation) At last, the teacher models an example of a “peacemaking song” which will be also useful for tomorrow’s presentation. The teacher summarizes the content checked today.		

### **Teaching resources**

As previously mentioned, the main topics and materials of this didactic unit were selected according to the results of the first undertaken survey, and also the careful observation and analysis of the involved students. However, as the specific planning of the course book must be followed, only minor modifications were allowed. For instance, to start with the “Peacemaker” unit, the researcher chose Bob Marley as a celebrity, who fought against racisms and human rights for oppressed Black people. However, he is mainly known by his marihuana consumption. Although it was a controversial topic to be discussed, the students were receptive to this new theme.

To generate a smooth change of teacher the researcher decided to allocate the first class to establish common coexistence rules. As English classes did not comprise any structure, the first lesson was allocated to introduce a class routine and conjointly establish rules of coexistences that allow an ordered work during classes. The researcher also wrote her e-mail address on the whiteboard in case the students have any suggestion or complaint regarding the new English classes.

Several presentations, videos and songs and even search in Internet were used as materials intended to improve students’ participation in classes. Worksheets prepared by the teacher were also used, since students are used to working with this kind of exercises. Also awards such as candies were utilized in order to foster students’ engagement with the class. Surprisingly the most accepted activity was the group preparation of a poster, which summarized the main facts of a reading activity.

### **Evaluation**

Since one of the objectives of the unit was to encourage students’ participation and oral productions, the summative evaluation took the form of an oral presentation, where pairs of students chose a peacemaker or peacemaking topic and explain in front of the class and the teachers their reasons to select said person or theme. The last class before these oral presentations a modelling work was performed in order to show the proper way of preparing it.

The corresponding rubric (see Appendix 2) was prepared by the English teacher and the researcher and it assessed different aspects such as vocabulary reviewed in class, creativity and personal contribution, among others.

Most of the students did a good job, preparing attractive visual material with a suitable content. However, two students did not prepare any material, arguing that the instructions were not clearly explained and they were not able to prepare such oral presentation due to the lack of suitable vocabulary.

On the other hand, a second survey was undertaken in order to evaluate the results of the researcher’s or new teacher’s intervention (see Appendix 3). The result thereof show that most of the students consider that the new methodology encouraged them to invest effort in the English classes (69% of the respondents). In addition, the majority of the students enjoyed working in groups as well as classes oriented to develop speaking skills instead of learning grammar issues. One of the more interesting students’ observation was the fact that they liked the kind attitude of the new teacher and her quietness to explain the topics in English, although they recommended her a stricter attitude toward the disorganized students mainly.

### **Learning results**

At the beginning of the implementation, most of the students felt frustrated by working in English. They also resisted following class rules, though said rules were established conjointly. Nevertheless, during the implementation most of the students have been able to express and defend their ideas more often than in the preceding English classes. However, some students continue using

Spanish for replying to question posed in English. They do not feel yet confident enough to produce their own English speech, even though they understood what the teacher said in English.

Explaining the meaning of cognates and the difference between them and false cognates resulted in an stimulating topic for the students, since they did not know the existence of such words and are using them to assist themselves during reading comprehension and speaking.

Students' comprehension was evidenced through their increasing participation in classes, although there was a couple of students that do not show any change in their behavior, and continue playing with their cell phones or doing exercises from other subjects during English classes. Unfortunately this behavior easily distracted the other classmates.

On the other hand, the work in groups generally resulted in a positive experience for the class. However, it involved some conflicts among the students, since they are used working individually or in groups selected by themselves, but these mixed groups were organized by the new teacher according to the different skills exhibited during the preceding classes. Furthermore, the class was highly competitive; therefore, some students did not want to cooperate with the less skilled ones, since it would affect their final grade.

Although the average grade of the summative evaluation was slightly superior to the one of the preceding summative evaluation (6.0 versus 5.7) the main change was reflected on the students' attitude toward the English lessons. They were not completely devoted to the class, but at least most of them were listening to the teacher and participating in the activities prepared for them.

### **Analysis of the intervention**

The objective of this intervention was to increase students' desire to invest effort in the English learning activity by establishing a positive learning environment. For achieving said goal, the successful system suggested by Epperson and Rossman (2013) was established, and the tips for building rapport recommended by Buskist and Saville (2001) were followed. As a result, each English class had specific learning outcomes as well as particular steps (pre, while, and post). Also coexistences rules were established along with the students as well as consequences of breaking said rules. Furthermore, the new teacher (or researcher) tried to build a good rapport with her students by knowing their names, their interests and preferences, chatting with them, providing the students with her e-mail address, rewarding students' comments and observations and being enthusiastic most of the time.

A crucial tool to evaluate if the corresponding intervention can be considered as a successful one was the second survey undertaken by the students. The result thereof show that most of the students consider that the new methodology encourages them to invest effort in the English classes (69% of the respondents) Different kind of exercises, working in mixed groups, emphasis on the speaking skill were effective to achieve the attention of the students, who were actively participating during the last part of the intervention, where a poster was prepared.

From the survey results it was also observed that teacher's attitude towards the students is crucial to motivate them properly, since they greatly appreciate some features such as being humble, kind, understanding as well as showing a positive attitude and encouraging them to be better and to learn more. Although they were able to value said personal features, it did not imply that the disruptive behavior of some students was totally reduced over the period of the new teacher's intervention or that students' attention was taken for granted. Said characteristics help facing the teaching experience, but every class is a new challenge and at the moment the teacher believes her methodology is the correct one, said methodology does not work as planned.

One obstacle detected during the implementation of the unit was the fact that the teacher had to follow a specific class planning, which was mainly directed to grammar points. This blocked the creativity of the new teacher, which was restricted to amend or modify the planning already provided. Another crucial obstacle for implementing this unit was the lack of technology resources at school. There is a great bureaucracy that has to be faced in order to show classes using PowerPoint presentations. In the first place, the teacher has to request three different kinds of wires to the lady responsible for the photocopies. Then, the teacher shall ask for a specific sound wire to the computer technician. And once this complicated wire connection is set, it rarely works. For that reason, new teachers should always have additional material available in case the prepared one does not work accurately.

### **Self-evaluation**

After finishing my intervention I analyzed my performance critically and reached the following conclusions:

In the first place I should have discussed the corresponding rules of coexistences and the consequences of not following them or not complying with the assigned tasks with the formal English teacher. In that way I would have known how to handle those conflicts according to the school culture, since this knowledge empowers new teachers to manage their performances by virtue of the school norms. Appropriate rules depend on the school culture, and then rules need to incorporate consequences. However, new teachers cannot be stricter than the norms provided by the school culture. Accordingly, school culture represented an important obstacle to my classroom management objectives, since these students were used to misbehaving without having any consequences. It is difficult to modify students' behavior towards classes when the whole school system encourages said conduct and eases the formation of "spoiled" children and teenagers by not following order norms and consequences. In the same line, I tended to be too indulgent and relaxed with some behavior issues, and that was interpreted as a lack of character. Since I did not observe any hard consequence due to bad behavior, I used to getting over those issues, and that played against me. For that reason, most of the students recommended me to be stricter.

On the other hand, building rapport with teenagers is essential for success in the classroom, and showing the teacher's true colors to the students is a fact that they greatly appreciate. As Scrivener (2005) indicates, teachers should keep in mind that "an important part of this [teaching] is to do with your attitude, intentions and personality and your relationship with learners." (p. 79).

### **Improvement plan**

In order to build a positive learning environment it is crucial to establish clear rules and consequences at the beginning of the year, and to follow them throughout the whole class period. A good exercise would be to draw a poster with consequences and hang it in the classroom in order not to forget them.

Other key factor that can improve new teachers' performance is having a fluid communication with the formal English teacher in order to coordinate the intervention, consequences, etc. Likewise, socializing with other teachers is very useful to get to know your students and their behavior in different scenarios. The colleagues can also help evaluating your work and suggest new topics and forms of developing the same.

Another good advice would be to vary the activities, tasks and materials using different VAK (visual – auditory – kinaesthetic) exercises addressed to foster students' motivation and learning styles, taking into account their preferred type of activities: listening to music, watching whole films, watching short videos, etc., at the moment of planning classes.

## **Conclusion**

The creation of a positive learning environment is a continuous process that takes time. The new teacher should be patient and believe in its methodology, as long as the same was previously discussed with experienced teachers. In that way, the fact of following the proposed norms throughout her intervention becomes a smooth procedure. Accordingly, rules and consequences of breaking said rules shall be clearly communicated to students during the first lesson, and new teachers shall follow them during their intervention, i.e., they shall be consistent with their speech all the time, since students like working within a framework as well as testing teachers' persistence. They will misbehave as long as the teacher tolerates said behavior.

Nevertheless, a positive learning environment does affect students' motivation and they are willing to participate and learn if the teacher shows a kind attitude towards them. As Ur (2012) indicated, "the teacher's most important function here is simply to make sure that learners are aware of their own success: the message can be conveyed by a nod, a tick, even significant lack of response." (p. 278).

On the other hand, new teachers should not be afraid to get involved with the students and show their true colors, since students appreciate said feature. That does not mean that new teacher should be friends with their students, but to have genuine interest in their personalities and activities.

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**Appendix 1**

**ENCUESTA**

**Estimada/o alumna/o:**

Agradecería que pudieras contestar esta encuesta, que me servirá para recopilar información necesaria para realizar mi investigación de titulación. Esta encuesta es anónima y sólo será usada para los fines antes mencionados.

**1. Ordena las habilidades en inglés desde la que se te hace más fácil a la más difícil, siendo 1 = la más fácil y 4 = más difícil:**

\_\_\_ leer      \_\_\_ hablar      \_\_\_ escribir      \_\_\_ escuchar

**a) ¿Cuál de las habilidades crees es más necesaria? Ordenar, siendo 1 = la más necesaria y 4 = la menos necesaria**

\_\_\_ leer      \_\_\_ hablar      \_\_\_ escribir      \_\_\_ escuchar

**b) ¿Cuál de las habilidades se trabaja más en clases? Ordenar, siendo 1 = la que más se trabaja y 4 = la que menos se trabaja**

\_\_\_ leer      \_\_\_ hablar      \_\_\_ escribir      \_\_\_ escuchar

**2. Señala con una cruz la(s) alternativa(s) que crees son la(s) mejor(es) para aprender Inglés.**

- El profesor explicando algún punto gramatical dando la instrucción \_\_\_\_\_
- El alumno en forma individual investigando un tema dado en clases \_\_\_\_\_
- El alumno trabajando en conjunto con otros \_\_\_\_\_
- A través de textos del estudiante y libros de ejercicios \_\_\_\_\_

**3.- De acuerdo con tu opinión personal ¿cómo aprendes mejor inglés: individualmente, en parejas o en grupo?**

**¿Por qué?**

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**4. ¿Con cuáles actividades te sientes más motivado en la clase de inglés?**

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**5. ¿Para qué crees que utilizarías más el inglés en tu vida profesional en el futuro?**

**Marca con una cruz la o las alternativas:**

- a. Para hablar \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Leer información \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Para escribir \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Entender lo que escuchas \_\_\_\_\_

**6.- Deja aquí algún otro comentario sobre el inglés en tu vida**

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¡Muchas gracias!

Appendix 2

ORAL PRESENTATION RUBRIC

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_ Mark: \_\_\_\_\_

Criteria	4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point
<b>Content</b>	Content is rich. Ideas developed with elaboration and detail about the selected peacemaker.	Content is appropriate. Ideas adequately developed with some elaboration and detail about the selected peacemaker.	Content is somewhat adequate and mostly appropriate. Basic ideas expressed but very little elaboration or detail about the selected peacemaker.	Content is frequently undeveloped and/ or somewhat repetitive
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Wide range of vocabulary, use generally accurate and appropriate. Proper use of vocabulary reviewed during classes.	Varied range of vocabulary; use sometimes accurate and appropriate. Use of some key words checked during classes.	Limited range of vocabulary; use sometimes inaccurate and / or inappropriate. Occasional use of some key words checked during classes.	Inadequate and /or inaccurate use of vocabulary. No use of key words checked during classes.
<b>Language Control</b>	Control of language structures with use of the expressions already given (at least 4).	Control of language structures with a few minor mistakes. Use of some expressions ( at least 3).	Emerging control of basic language structures with some grammar mistakes. Use of few expressions (at least 2).	Emerging use of basic language structures with many mistakes.
<b>Fluency</b>	Speech sustained throughout with few pauses or stumbling.	Speech sustained most of the time; some hesitation but manages to continue and complete thoughts.	Speech slow with frequent pauses; few or no incomplete thoughts; some sustained speech.	Speech with long pauses or incomplete thoughts; little sustained speech.
<b>Eye Contact</b>	Student maintains eye contact with audience without reading his notes.	Student maintains eye contact most of the time, seldom returning to notes.	Student occasionally uses eye contact, but still reads most of the time.	Student reads all his notes with no eye contact.
<b>Pronunciation</b>	Pronunciation is comprehensible, free of mistakes.	Pronunciation is comprehensible, mostly free of mistakes (1 or 2).	Pronunciation may interfere with communication ( 3 or 4 mistakes)	Pronunciation interferes with communication (more than 4mistakes)
<b>Audiovisual aid</b>	The used audio-visual aid helps to clarify the content of the presentation properly.	The used audio-visual aid helps to clarify the content of the presentation most of the time.	The used audio-visual aid does not help to clarify the content of the presentation.	The used audio-visual aid interferes with the presentation.
<b>Creativity</b>	The presentation involves a creative design.	The presentation involves a creative design most of the time.	The presentation involves a creative design occasionally.	There is no creativity in the presentation.
<b>Personal contribution</b>	The presentation comprises personal opinion regarding the selected peacemaker.	The presentation comprises personal opinion to some extent regarding the selected peacemaker.	The presentation comprises a brief personal opinion regarding the selected peacemaker.	The presentation sometimes does not comprise personal opinion regarding the selected peacemaker.

**Appendix 3**

**ENCUESTA FINAL**

**Estimada/o alumna/o:**

Agradecería que pudieras contestar esta encuesta, que me servirá para recopilar información necesaria para realizar mi investigación de titulación. Esta encuesta es anónima y sólo será usada para los fines antes mencionados.

**1. En estas últimas clases ¿sientes que fue más fácil para ti expresarte oralmente en inglés?**

Sí

No

**Marca con una cruz tu respuesta y fundamentala.**

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**2. Respecto a la metodología de trabajo grupal, da tu opinión y fundamenta (aspectos positivos y aspectos negativos)**

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**3. Evalúa tu motivación para aprender inglés antes de la unidad "Peacemaker" y después.**

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**4. ¿Qué le dirías a la profesora sobre la intervención realizada? ¿Qué es lo que más te gustó? ¿Y lo que menos?**

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¡Muchas gracias!