

MY PROFESSIONAL FAVOURITES (III)

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It is already the third time that I have decided to share with you my professional favourites. This time I do not provide you with a list and description of activities but with ideas that every teacher should go through every time in the beginning of a new school-year. If you have not done these things, it is not hopelessly late, yet. You can do a lot of things right away and some things after the Christmas holidays. A good beginning lays the foundation for a successful year or a successful semester.

Idea 1

INTRODUCING THE SYLLABUS AND YOUR WORKPLAN

It is very important to give the students an overview of the school-year, the term or the semester. This could be done best by introducing the syllabus, the learning outcomes and your workplan. The students could also be involved into discussion, and together with the students we can work out the ways of achieving these outcomes, discuss the risks and opportunities. The students might be invited to propose their own “new school-year resolutions” – what is something the students themselves want to develop, improve or change about their learning. This is crucial because no matter how hard the teacher tries, learning does not happen unless the learners put effort in it.

Idea 2

INTRODUCING TEST / WRITTEN PAPER SCHEDULE AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND TECHNIQUES

Those teachers who have done it already can be pretty relaxed. Those who have not done it yet have to start with it right away to avoid problems later on. The students should be aware of all the deadlines, consultancy hours of teachers, what the consequences are in case the students do not fulfil their assignments on time as well as marking systems and assessment scales. I would also like to encourage you to use self- and peer evaluation more often both with controlled activities (grammar exercises, dictations, etc) where the students are provided with a key at the end of the activity and they themselves or their peers check the answers, and with process writing activities (essays, letters, reports, paraphrases, etc) where the students fill in an assessment grid about their own work or about their classmates' work or both. This is one of the possible grids:

My evaluation	Grammar	Choice of lexis	Content	Overall impression
Teacher's evaluation				

Self- and peer-assessment foster learner autonomy and independence and give the students self-analysis skills.

Idea 3

WORKING OUT CLASSROOM RULES

In order to manage your classrooms better, one might consider working out a list of student rights and responsibilities. It could also be done in co-operation with students. I would like to suggest just a few ideas that you can develop, consult your colleagues and add your own ideas:

<p>Students' rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get professional instruction • Participate in interesting well-prepared lessons • Ask for and get explanations • Be respected • etc 	<p>Students' responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be active and participate in lessons • Do their homework • Take tests and hand in written assignments according to the schedule • etc
<p>Teachers' rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be respected • demand that the homework is done • work in a well-disciplined class • apply disapproval and praise • etc 	<p>Teachers' responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepare and structure lessons well • check and mark student papers according to the schedule • create conditions for learning • etc

It is equally important to work out the procedures for missing the classes or being late. The teacher can decide together with the class upon the system of notifying the teacher about missed classes (by mail, SMS, etc beforehand or afterwards). It is also up to the teacher whether s/he wants to get a formal apology from a student who is late or let him/her slip into the class and apologise at the end of the class. It is also essential to decide upon the classroom language. If the decision will be to use English exclusively, then students should be provided with classroom language lists or posters on the wall that the teacher can refer to when necessary. Well-composed and planned management tools will help the teacher establish fruitful working conditions for both students and teachers.

Idea 4

SPEND TIME ON GROUP BUILDING

Relaxed and friendly classroom atmosphere is one of the keys to successful learning. That is why teachers should spend more time in the beginning and throughout the school year on working on classroom dynamics because language learning and teaching involve much more than just language knowledge and skills. It is also about the development of social skills in general. Lewis and Hill (in *Source Book for Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. Macmillan Heinemann 2003) say that if you are a new teacher for the particular class then it is important:

- Not to over-react – teenage students can be disruptive and annoying, but usually their bad behaviour is not a personal insult against you. They just try to find out how far you let them go.
- Not to aim for popularity first – it is important to be strict at first as this will allow you to relax later.
- To be explicit – say what you want to see, hear and experience during your classes.
- Not to forget their age – refresh your memory in the field of pedagogical, development and educational psychology.
- To be prepared – the better prepared you are, the less likely you will be unpleasantly surprised.
- To admit your ignorance – if you do not know the answer, say so. Better still, lead the students to the answers, e.g. if the students ask for the meaning of an unknown word, ask them to guess first and then check their guess with the dictionary.
- To vary your lessons – busy and motivated students do not have time for disruptive behaviour.
- To keep your sense of humour – the ability to laugh at oneself can definitely help teachers survive in the 21st century. It has definitely helped me a lot.
- To model with your own behaviour what kind of behaviour you expect from students – respect brings along respect, how I manage my anger models for my students what kind of anger management I expect from my students.

If you have new students in the class, think about involving them in group and pair work activities.

I hope that my four ideas and some tips will help you to start the new term or semester successfully.