

Positive Climate and Motivation, Achilles' Heel in Classes and Schools

GJINALI Aida

Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Tirana, Albania

e-mail: aidagjinali@yahoo.it

Received 12.08.2014; Accepted 18.09. 2014

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to treat and identify two major factors that influence teaching, the creation of a positive climate and motivation, which should be encouraged and created with the purpose of successfully fulfilling not just the school programme and objectives defined by it, but also for a psycho-physiological and emotional wellbeing of the student.

A good psycho-physical and emotional well-being of the student provide for a better motivation, and, of course, for a better performance.

It happens often that teachers concentrate more in the fulfilment of the scholastic programme and neglect or consider it as a loss of time the issue of a positive climate and motivation of students.

It goes without saying that learning implies the student's individual desire, besides the scholastic obligation. This desire which can be instinctive but sometimes driven from family, school and society, is often presented with obstacles during the school year, such as lack of interest, lack of desire to attend classes, lack of desire to learn a subject or all subjects up to total refusal, which endanger the school progress. The causes that influence such a demise are of many forms and different natures, both internal and external, and they increase the student's affective filter and create psychological barriers which lead to letdown and fail to achieve the defined objectives of subject/s, and they also give way to internal thoughts of incapability and lack of integration in class and in relationship with others, a low self esteem and total lack of want.

The concept of the classroom as a sole group where everyone is equal and where everyone receives in the same way motivation, affection and interaction is essential for the creation of a positive climate.

By taking into account the factors that influence such discouraging barriers, there comes forth the need for the teacher to search within oneself and his teaching method for the solutions. This means, he has to look for and use new and diverse techniques and strategies that encourage a positive and motivating climate for the students. The teacher should clarify and increase his teaching performance, he should find other motivating forms and he should not let himself get lost in the daily routine and personal discouragement. Students are very sensitive to the teacher's model and presented teaching method, therefore, in order to achieve the target of a more efficient class, it is needed a thorough internal and external renovation, both theoretical and practical.

Keywords: *positive climate, encouragement, interaction, objectives*

1. Introduction

A school, and especially a classroom, is the place where a student spends the major part of his life. It is the place where he learns and gets information on different subjects and future life, and the place where he forms his personality and identity, he creates relations with other people and the environment, but most importantly, he creates self esteem with regards to school, class, study, results and friends. Of course, school is not the only influence in the personality of a student, because family, society, community, the environment he lives and acts in are the other basic factors that greatly affect his individual personality, but in our research we will deal only with school and classroom.

In order for the school, the teacher and the student to reach their targets and achieve their objectives it is necessary to create a positive interactive climate and inspiration, where the student will feel good psychologically, physiologically and spiritually. And, without any doubt, it should not lack motivation, which, similar to the positive climate, enables efficiency and learning capabilities. All of these are not vain words. Positive climate and motivation are based on real scientific basis. Many researches, which you will find summarized below, show clearly how our brain and organism work when facing positive or negative situations.

2. Bimodality principle – of duality and directional to the brain’s function

As it is already known, the human brain is composed of two hemispheres. Edwards divided and named them as the right and the left hemisphere, in order to define the way of functioning and thinking, related to the functions of the right and the left hemisphere.

Surely, we cannot say that the functions of each hemisphere are clearly divided, because the human body functions as a whole, where both hemispheres play a harmonic two-way game, enabling thus the correct functioning of learning new information and processing it further in their configuration with previous knowledge.

The term brain duality means that the functions of both hemispheres, left and right, should integrate in such a way that the whole brain, of the student in our case, is involved in the learning process.

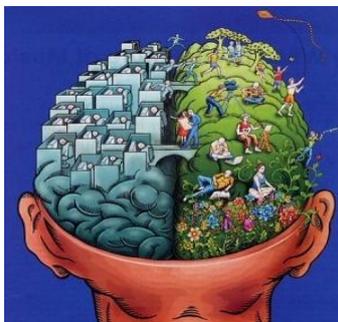


Figure 1 (Atkin J. 2000, p. 6)

The directional principle defines clearly how our brain works. Every information we receive, first passes in the right hemisphere and then in the left one. (Balboni E. P., 1994). By knowing that both hemispheres play different roles, that is: the right one is more global and deals with many functions, mainly emotional ones, which are of interest in our case, and the left one is more analytic

and rational, knowing that the right hemisphere encounters the first impact of new information, it is evident how important is the way such information is motivated and transmitted. If the right hemisphere, which deals with globalization and transmits the information to be processed in the left hemisphere, encounters resistance of the affective filter created from lack of motivation and positive climate, then, the information will not be processed and will not be spontaneously analyzed, and thus, will be faulty in its processing and memorizing.

2.1 The affective filter

One of the most important factors closely related to the positive climate and motivation is the affective filter. (Krashen S., 1981: 31). Cardona (Cardona, M., 2001, pg. 84) claims that the affective filter, which prohibits the learning process in cases of stress, anxiety or fear of failure, is not just a cliché, but it responds to a reaction of well-known chemical stimulators. In situations of calmness and positivity, adrenaline becomes noradrenalin, which is a neurotransmitter that facilitates memorization, which in situations of anxiety, fear and stress produces a steroid that creates a conflict between the amygdale (emotional gland), which tries to protect the brain from unpleasant events, and the hypocamp, a gland which plays an active role in the activation of frontal lobes and the start of the memory process.

In a few words, the affective filter is a self-defence human mechanism; therefore, a teacher who looks for efficient and long-term results should not ignore this fact. He should always take it into consideration and when he realizes that the affective filter is being activated, he should change the methodology and techniques, so that this invisible barrier remains at low levels and does not generate negative stress (Krashen S., 1982, pg. 10).

3. Humanist-affective approaches

Taking into account the results of the neurophysiology researches, different methods and approaches used them as a tool for increasing the teaching level. So, the humanist-affective approaches, starting from their name, represent clearly the innovation and necessary changes that were required in the teaching process.

These approaches and methods, in spite of their differences, present similar characteristics, that's why they belong in this group. We will mention them summarized according to Borneti (Borneto S. C., 1998, pg. 41 -44):

1. *The advantage of pedagogy*
2. *The student's nucleus.* The advantage of pedagogy enables the emplacement of the student in the centre of the didactic act. The student is taken into consideration as a whole. He is analyzed, inspected, processed and assisted to gradually overcome barriers and difficulties, he is encouraged and stimulated to learn, improve and demonstrate his personal capabilities.
3. *Multitude of manners.* The more manners and the more channels are activated, the easier it is for the information to be learnt in a stable way.
4. *Teaching to a kid.* The provision of a general psychological environment which is adapt to the class
5. *Atmosphere.* In classes, usually, there are attempts to create a non-competitive, relaxed and frisky environment, where a person feels free of stress, limitations and conditions of preserving his personal image.
6. *The teacher's role.* His main duty is to make the student trust him. During the class, he should have under control the whole classroom, driving and encouraging interaction with the other

present students. In this way, the teacher plays the role of the one who directs, facilitates and leads the teaching way.

4. Motivation theories

Motivation is based on some theories, which we will mention briefly.

They are categorized as (Pettijohn F. T., 1996, pg 314- 328):

- ✚ Biological theories
- ✚ Impulse theories (Hull)
- ✚ Theory of encouragement level
- ✚ Humanist theory of Maslow

We will deal more with the Impulse theory of Hull, not because the others are less important, but because the theory of Hull seems to include an aspect that has to do more with the teaching aspect, which is our main purpose.

Hull (1952) designed a method, which according to him demonstrated that the intensity of behaviour is related to the learning process and motivation, and its basic formula is:

$$E = Z \times I \times SH$$

E – Intensity of a learned reaction depends of the power of

Z - A learnt habit and the power of

I – motivating impulse

But, later, Hull came to the conclusion that motivation as an internal force could not be enough, therefore, he added to the formula the concept of an

SH - external push

Starting from this viewpoint of Hull, we conclude that motivation, although it is an internal feeling and stems from within the human being, needs to be active and efficient in the achievement of an obligation or purpose, and it needs a rewarding external push. In fact, even if we personally were provided with a considerate reward upon the fulfilment of a certain task, our motivation would be higher.

5. School and Classroom

Based on what we said above, according to researches and analysis, it is crystal clear how important it is to create a continuous positive climate and systematic motivation for the growth and education of a human being. As it was mentioned before, forming and creating, moulding and building a new identity and personality of the human being depend on many factors, but we will dwell upon the factors of school and classroom, which are the subject of our research.

Classroom and its premises are very important in the life of a student, no matter his age. In the classroom, the student experiences feelings and emotions of different levels and if these feelings and emotions are translated negatively within his being, they become a difficult barrier and often impassable for the psychological status of the student. These negative energies are later reflected in his behaviour, in the way he interacts in class and school, in his progress at school and his results.

The consequence of not feeling well at school and especially in the class is clearly reflected in a lack of motivation in learning and, consequently, there are signs of aggression, frequent conflicts, intolerant behaviour, total refusal, desire to be invisible, no attendance, low results, until dropping out of school.

What is often noticed in classes is the division and grouping of students into different categories. These groupings are of:

- Regional character
- Physical appearance
- School results
- Servility
- Wealth
- Physical force
- Lifestyle
- Race
- Sex
- Behaviour
- No factor, simply because they do not fit in any other group, because they are not accepted or because of personal choices

The presence of such groups within the classroom creates difficult relations among them, which generates feelings of exclusion, separation, lack of evaluation, lack of reciprocal relationships, lack of normal relations in class, exclusion from class decisions or activities, lack of opinion in any issues related to class, school, disrespect, up to total discrimination and total exclusion of different individuals. The most easily vulnerable people are those who seem weak and soft towards the others, who have difficulties in distinguishing the limits of allowing an abusive behaviour, who find it difficult to control negative actions. All of these have a bad influence in the personality of the student and his adaption in the environment. Difficulty to adapt results in discomfort and agitated spiritual and psychological situation, which, without any doubt, will influence his whole scholastic school, and his private one, as well. This psychological pressure, applied systematically to one or more individuals, is done in different forms, such as:

- Mobbing
- Ostracism
- Defamation
- Total contempt or
- Being the centre of mocking, teasing, abusing, etc.

Such cases happen every day, mining thus everyone's possibility to be educated, just like all the rest, and mining the normal flow of one's life.

Therefore, when we talk about a positive climate in class and for student's motivation, we should consider class and students in a wider aspect than that of just teaching and fulfilling the plan and school objectives. It is essential for the teacher to have a wider panorama of the positive climate and motivation, because he can involve the students, and he can understand the needs, issues, wishes, vices and virtues a student possesses as an individual, but also as part of the classroom and the school.

These issues need to be solved if we want a qualitative school and an efficient teaching process, but, in fact, in our schools, where the average number of students per class is 35-40-45, the teacher has often difficulties, such as:

- Difficulties in class management
- Difficulties in the creation of a positive climate
- Difficulties in the general motivation of students
- Difficulties in a real and efficient evaluation
- Difficulties in the usage of cooperative learning techniques
- Difficulties in dealing with the topic of the day
- Difficulties in understanding the general atmosphere of the class
- Difficulties in recognizing the real relations between students and with regards to himself
- Difficulties in really understanding the values of each student
- Difficulties in understanding the individual issues of each student
- Difficulties in understanding the needs of each student
- Difficulties in conflict resolution
- Difficulties in real evaluation of the situation in class
- Difficulties in treating the class as a single group

The teacher is loaded with a heavy burden, because besides being a teacher, he has to be an educator, an advisor, a psychologist, a leader, a facilitator, a coach, roles which are not easily managed, especially when they are new teachers, with few or no experience in education. But even old and experienced teachers; often complain that they cannot fulfil 100% of the roles. There are even teachers who say:

- I have worked enough for 30 years
- I can't deal with it anymore
- Unbearable students
- Why should I deal with them? I'll just finish my class, that's all
- Education does not depend on me. It is the fault of the family, the society and the world we live in
- We are a school, not an educational institution
- I teach a subject no one cares about.
- I am new, with no experience
- I can't deal with nowadays teenagers
- I don't know how to make them passionate about my subject
- There are some classes I don't want to put my feet in. I can't stand them.
- There's nothing more that I can offer
- I have my own issues, I can't deal with theirs
- Who wants to learn will learn anyway, and other things
- Why should I deal with them? I do my job, they do want they want, in the end, I receive my salary.

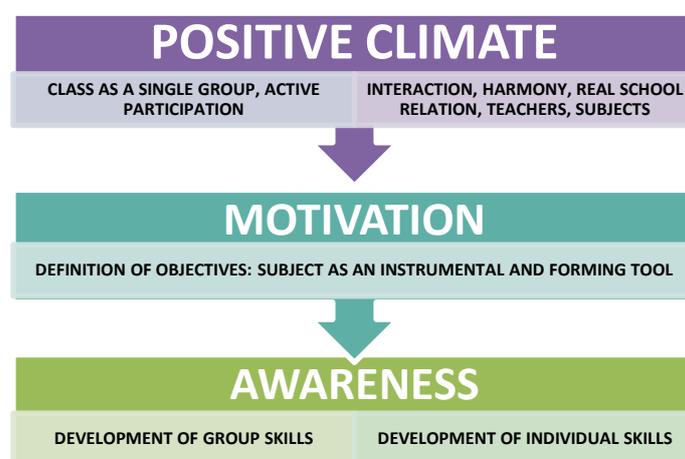
Such responses and behaviours from teachers are unacceptable and intolerable. We do not need this kind of teachers in our schools and classes.

If a teacher cannot find in himself the passion, will, calmness, compassion, love and respect for himself first, then for his profession and then for the student, how are students supposed to do the opposite of what is shown and heard?

A teacher is the face of the school, the class and the classroom. Those who cannot work passionately, and who consider their profession just a revenue source, transform their job firstly, and then the classroom and the class in an unwanted place, tiring and stressful, as well. But when the source of all the stress and unwillingness is the teacher himself, what else can be said about the situation among students? At what is their motivation related to the subject? Of course, zero. Then, how are we supposed to perform our job, how can we pretend to achieve the targets and objectives, if we cannot look further than our personal egoist point of view?

6. Strategies and techniques

A positive climate is also achieved through the use of tools, strategies and techniques which favour and support it throughout the whole scholastic process.



We are going to provide some of these strategies and techniques, but they are not all. Among them, we highlight:

- Perform anticipatory surveys which aim to know the student, his ideas, his opinion on the subject, the teacher, the class, the school and what are his expectations
- Process the result and define specific strategies and techniques per each student
- Carry on surveys with the purpose of knowing the psychology of the student (with the assistance of the school's psychologist), in order to identify hidden issues, his psychological situation with regards to school, class, teachers, family and lessons
- Clear objectives and targets
- Transform the classroom into a group, where no one is excluded, and where everyone is treated equally.
- Use cooperative learning efficiently
- Continuous motivation in all ways and forms
- Through analysis of each student's needs
- Continuously make psychological checks on the students
- Create specific work groups, which will monitor other groups by guiding and leading them, under the teacher's supervision. Groups should be alternated time after time, the roles within the group, as well, in order not to create jealousy, hostility and envy.

With regards to the teacher:

- It should be made clear that the teacher is the main leader, the facilitator
- The teacher should not sit down all the time, but he should stand up most of the time, in order to dominate and control the class
- He should not avoid questions, he should provide correct answers, no matter the question
- The teacher should not be ironic, he should not mock, tease the students or swear
- He should be generally calm, but also passionately when necessary
- He should use low voice tones, with the required high and lows in order to gain and encourage attention
- He should congratulate and praise every student's effort
- He should not speak on the phone and should not look often to the clock, as it means that he is eagerly waiting for the class to be over
- He should be create and bring innovation to every class
- The teacher should not speak about his personal issues, only discreetly in those cases when he needs to make a comparison
- He should provide confidence and undisputable authority
- He should know to be tolerant and strict
- He should be properly clothed within the ethical norms
- He should smile
- He should know how to make and how to handle jokes
- He should forget and forgive, he should not be negative
- The teacher should know how to use technology and how to communicate with students through it. Frequently, students have difficulties in expressing themselves face to face.
- He should stay in contact, not only with students, but also with their family members, to solve together, when possible, any encountered issue
- He should discuss openly with the whole class unsolved issues, and invite everyone in the discussion
- He should not commit discrimination of gender, region, race, etc.

The list can go on and on, but we would like to highlight that it is important for every teacher, whether experienced or not, to love his profession. This is the secret that can make everything possible. It is needed the proper education and update of new teaching and class management forms.

7. Conclusions

As a conclusion of what we discussed so far, and taking into consideration the fact that humanist-affective approaches hold in their essence one of the most important principles, motivation, it is clear that one of the main teaching objectives is exactly the encouragement and motivation of students to learn, and also, the presence of a relaxing positive climate. Without motivation there is no learning (Balboni E. P. 1994, pg 75). Therefore, the duty of every teacher, especially those dealing with teenagers, is to include it in his working methodology or applying techniques. He should consider motivation and positive climate as the main source for the progress of the general class and the individual development, and the teacher's development, as well.

Moreover, the teachers and higher hierarchic structures, before requiring results and performing tests and quality control, should give the right priority and importance to the motivation and positive climate, considering many viewpoints: social, economic, age & developmental, in order for the teacher to find the proper space and possibility to successfully perform his job. This is related to the fact that the teacher himself should be motivated to perform his job properly. If there is force, psychological violence, and no reward, nothing can be achieved, that's why archaic patterns, when the teacher is God and knows everything, have come to an end. Nowadays progress, innovations and interdisciplinary relations of teaching show clearly that only a motivated teacher who acts in a motivating and relaxed environment and who uses motivating methods, strategies and techniques can achieve his objectives and a more efficient and long-term teaching process for his students.

References

- [1] Cardona, M.. (2001). *Il ruolo della memoria nell'apprendimento delle lingue*, UTET, Torino,
Balboni E. P.. (2005). *L'acquisizione di una LS da parte di giovani adulti* , tek (nën kujdesin)
Pavan E., *Il lettore di italiano all'estero*, Progetto Itals Ca' Foscari, Bonacci, p 84.
- [2] Carli R.,Mosca A. (1980). *Gruppo e interazione a scuola*, Bollati, Boringhieri, Torino.
- [3] D' Alonzo L.. (2012). *Come fare per gestire la classe nella pratica didattica*, Giunti Scuola
- [4] Genovese, L., Kanizsa, S. (1989). *Manuale della gestione della classe nella scuola dell'obbligo*. Milano. Franco Angeli Editore.
- [5] Kanizsa, S., (2007). *Il lavoro educativo: l'importanza della relazione nel processo di insegnamento-apprendimento*. Milano. Bruno Mondadori.
- [6] Krashen S.. (1982). p. 10.
- [7] Krashen S.D. (1985). *The input Hypothesis*, Longman, New York.
- [8] La Prova, A. (2004). "La costruzione di un clima di classe positivo". L' apprendimento cooperativo: nozioni principali e attività'. In *Psicologia Scolastica* , Istituto Carlo Amore, V.3, n°2
- [9] Mariani, U., Schiralli, R. (2002). *Costruire il benessere personale in classe: attività di educazione alle competenze affettive e relazionali*. Trento. Erickson.
- [10] Under the care of Borneto S. C.. (1998). pp. 41 -44.
- [11]Pettijohn, F. T., (1996), fq 314- 328.
- [12] Polito, M. (2000), *Attivare le risorse del gruppo classe. Nuove strategie per l'apprendimento reciproco e la crescita personale*, Erickson, Trento.
- [13] Polito, M.. (2000). *Attivare le risorse del gruppo classe: nuove strategie per l'apprendimento*

[14] Polito, M.. (2003). *Comunicazione positiva e apprendimento cooperativo: strategie per intrecciare il benessere in classe e il successo formativo*. Trento. Erickson.

[15] S., Francescato, D., Putton, A. (2008). *Star bene insieme a scuola: strategie per un'educazione socio-affettiva dalla materna alla media inferiore*. Roma. Carocci Editore.

References webpages

[1] Indire, (2011). *L'analisi di contesto: il clima di classe e la motivazione degli studenti* ,
<http://www.indire.it/pqm2012/?p=134>

[2] Bagetto E., *Effetto pigmalione, Il clima educativo*, p. 10.
http://www.edurete.org/pd/sele_per.asp?id=80

[3] Pozzi R., *Motivazione, clima di classe e successo scolastico nella scuola di massa*
http://www.rivistadidattica.com/pedagogia/pedagogia_50.htm

[4] Miato L., *La Teoria Vigotskijana*
http://www.iprase.tn.it/alfresco/guestDownload/direct/workspace/SpacesStore/ffd6752e-0b92-4bd3-a39c-49d22fa9e5a1/Teoria_Vygotskij.pdf

[5] Cavagnero S. M.. (2009). *Clima in classe e apprendimento degli studenti*.
<http://213.254.4.222/cataloghi/pdfires/860.pdf>

[6] Mondialita', *Il clima nella scuola*, <http://www.cem.coop/attform/materiali/materia4>

[7] Renati R. Zanetti M., A. (2009). *Il clima positivo in classe uno strumento per promuovere il cambiamento*,
http://media.giuntiscuola.it/_tdz/@media_manager/722994.ps-3-clima-positivo-cqruvw8b-3LL9KCGK.pdf?filename=ps-3-clima-positivo-cqruvw8b-3LL9KCGK.pdf&cmg_defaultViewer=cmg_MediaServer&

[8] Markja, A.. (2006). *Manuali per mësuesin*, <http://www.fsash-spash.com/Non-form-educ-manual.pdf>

[9] Seghizzi, S.. (2011). *Vygotskij nella classe. Potenziale di sviluppo e mediazione didattica*.
<http://www.scuolemarconi.it/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Castelfranco-16-settembre-2011-1.pdf>

[10] Di Salvo, N.. (2007). *Il clima positivo della classe*
<http://www.bagheriainfo.it/news.asp?id=23>

[11] Atkin, J.. (2000). *An Outline of Integral Learning*,
<http://www.learningtolearn.sa.edu.au/Colleagues/files/links/IntegralLearning.pdf>