

SURPRISE!

If you keep on doing what you have always done, you will keep on getting the same results.

If you are having problems with a class, then you need to **change** some things, and **that in itself may come as a surprise** to the children and make them sit up and take notice. (*Maybe the root cause of their misbehaviour has been simply boredom.*)

So some of these ideas / suggestions / activities may be familiar to you (maybe you tried them and didn't feel they were worthwhile) or they may be new to you. Perhaps a combination of several would work best. Just keep in mind that you are looking for CHANGE and SURPRISE.

1. Never start to teach a lesson before you have the children's attention. Develop some control strategies, especially ways to call the class to order (without needing to shout) when they are doing an activity or just restless. You could try:

- A call and response, which they soon enjoy, and which actually practises their English. E.g. you say "1, 2, 3" and they respond with "4, 5, 6" – and then they must be quiet. Or you say "bippity" and they say "bop!" (and then sit down quietly) Or you say "hip! hip!" and they respond with "SShhh!" and are quiet.
- Clapping – you give three claps, they respond with four. Or make it a rhythm.
- Some people like to try counting – but there needs to be something at the end. If you tell them they have 10 seconds, then when you get to 10 the people who are not sitting quietly should have to go stand at the back or something.
- Do something with their hands. Tell them to fold their arms, or put their hands on their desks or laps. Again, there should (from the start) be a penalty for those who don't.
- Have a reward system for those who immediately respond when you (quietly) ask them to pay attention. Maybe have some little cards/papers, give out 3 to the first people who are ready every time. At the end of the lesson count who has the most and reward them.
- Use groups or teams to maintain control. If it's hard to reward individuals, work with the groups and let them pull each other into line. Put stars/points on the board for the first group that is ready each time.

You need to 'be yourself', and choose the option that suits your personality, or create one of your own.

2. Make sure there are lots of things for the children to do with their hands.

They need activity, they need something to do with their hands or else they will find something naughty to do.

- If nothing else, make sure they are told what they should be doing with their hands For example: 'fold your arms' (demonstrate),
- 'put your hands on your desk' (demonstrate),
- 'put your hands together like this',
- 'put your hands on your knees',
- 'hold your book in your hands' (like this)

Always demonstrate, wait until they are all doing it, keep an eye on them to make sure no one changes until you want them to, and then make sure you change the instruction frequently to keep them paying attention (so that it's a bit like a game).

[I see a lot of teachers get the children to 'stand up!', 'sit down' ... well, add some variety!!]

3. Children have **short attention spans**.

So the talking time with the class should be short, and then let them participate (and I don't mean just 'drilling').

In a Phonics lesson, for example, rather than continuing with whole class question-and-answer style activities you could:

- Do the same, or a similar, activity in their groups, or with a partner. If, for instance, each group worked on two sounds (from the text book) today, then when you call a word one child in each group could have a turn at placing a missing letter on the board.
- You could make sets of small, paper, flashcards and each child (or, in a large class, each pair) could have a set. When you call out a sound they could choose the right one to hold up.
- One child from each group could come to the front to point/circle/choose/say a sound, and the group could receive points if they get it right so everyone would be more interested. *(Shouting out should be punished by loss of points, or being excluded and made to stand at the back.)*

4. Don't always use the blackboard.

When you are 'presenting' your lesson material, try to make use of other media. *(It doesn't have to mean a lot of extra work, mostly some good planning.)*

- pictures – small and large
- tell a story / show them a storybook,
- realia (dress up a bit, or get a child dressed up, or bring in something to show them)
- go outside together to discover something
- Use technology – show picture with an LCD, or play a song or movie
- take them to sit on the mat close to you and tell them something quietly

and in every case make sure that the children know what to do with their hands, and when possible give them something (picture, realia) in their hands or to share with a partner.

Surprise them by:

- Use a lottery to choose specific children to have a turn or attempt a task by themselves (even if you know their names well). Give out slips of paper with **pictures** or **numbers** or **words** or **symbols** which are related to something they have learnt or are learning (e.g. phonics sounds).
- There can be several of each symbol, and the teacher keeps a complete set of cards to 'pull out of a hat' and choose.
 - In a phonics lesson the slips could each have a sound that has been recently learnt. If there are two (or more) of each, then two (or more) children will come forward at a time to try the exercise.
 - In a speaking and listening lesson the slips could have pictures that represent vocab items, to avoid forcing children to read during this lesson.
- Use children's names – write their names (or get them to) on pieces of paper, put them into a container and pull them out with a flourish.

5. Surprise them by **changing your drilling style**.

Sing, don't shout! **Why?** Well, briefly:

- When you shout, the essential language stress and intonation is lost. However, it can be hard to make yourself heard in a noisy classroom.
- Singing preserves the language stress, and carries the sound better.
- Recent brain research tells us that when children sing and move to music, their developing brains are entirely engaged and stimulated. Both the left and right sides of the brain are activated when we sing.
- Singing is also naturally rhythmical, and rhythm is a vital aspect of children's development and especially language learning.
- AND it's more fun!

As well as singing, when you are drilling, find other ways to say it – different voice quality, different body position, aimed in different directions. For example:

- whisper it
- say it to your partner
- say it to the ceiling, the floor, the window, your desk (all good vocab practice)
- close your eyes and imagine saying it to parents
- bend over and say it
- put your hands up high and say it
- clap hands with your partner while saying it
- click your fingers, tap your toes ...

Use rhythm and movement

This can make all the difference to drilling, and to any other part of the lesson – make it fun instead of drudgery, and cement it better in their minds. (Science tells us “When children sing and move to music, their developing brains are entirely engaged and stimulated”.)

6. Surprise them by letting them **discover the grammar rules.**

Especially when teaching grammar, teachers commonly feel the need to ‘explain’ everything. It is much more profitable (according to educational theories) and actually fun for the children to discover the rules themselves. They retain the learning better when they find it themselves – after all this is how we all learned the grammar of our first language. The teacher can structure an activity where the children find the pattern and repeat it.

- When teaching singular and plural nouns, children can look at pictures with labels and deduce a pattern, and apply it to other pictures. Practise it orally before introducing the reading/writing/spelling aspect.

7. Surprise them by **moving everything around**

Change the sitting arrangements; get them away from their desks. *(Even if it is not your home room, and even if it is only temporary.)*

For example, get them to sit in a circle on their chairs. *(If there is not enough space, think about outside, or the hall.)* There are a lot of good circle activities and games that can be used to practise vocabulary, grammar, and other aspects of language learning.

With new seating arrangements, you can establish some **NEW routines** for listening and answering. Warn them that there will be some changes.

- They are distracted by their chairs, desks and bags. There is a big space at the back of the room. Maybe they could start the lesson by standing in 1 / 2 straight rows at the back until the teacher tells them they can come to their desks.
- While they are standing away from their desks in the space they could follow some instructions for movements that will use up some of their excess energy – move arms, march on the spot, clap, click ...
- Marching – get them to march (quietly!) around the room before they get to their desk, give them something to say as they march (the alphabet, a poem, spelling words, one of the songs or poems out of their text book ... something in English).
- When they get to their desks get them to sit with straight backs, feet on the floor, and arms folded or hands clasped until they are allowed to pick up their books or pencils. *(If they can't or won't, maybe some or all of them should go back and line-up in the classroom space until they 'can'.)*

NOTE: For a class that is not well-behaved, moving them to an unfamiliar location (without casualties along the way) can be challenging. Be prepared to spend time concentrating on acceptable behaviour along the way.

- Firstly, get them enthusiastic about the change / move so that it in itself is a reward.
- Be very specific about lining up (for example: two lines, in front of the blackboard, no noise and no pushing.)
- If they do not do as you ask, make them sit back down. Try again.
- You may have to 'give up' for now, promise you will try again later when they can behave.
- If there are just one or two children messing it up, you could get them to take paper and pencil with them and they can do some writing while the others engage in a fun activity.

8. Don't Drill.

Really. In Malaysian classrooms drilling seems to be the backbone of learning. But from the students' point of view:

- It is an opportunity for the loud, aggressive children to shout and dominate.
- It is an opportunity for the quiet, bored, disinterested children to sit back and pretend.

So, for a set period of time – maybe a week or two – decide that you are not going to do any drilling! **SURPRISE!**

What can you do instead?

- Play classroom games such as Typhoon. *(Find instructions elsewhere on this site.)* They will be pleasantly **surprised**, and you will be surprised how eagerly they join in and behave.
- Create a 'Little Book', or a pop-up card or book, or a 'Mouth Puppet' *(See instructions elsewhere on this site.)*
- Surprise them by using songs and chants when it is not a 'language arts' lesson! Get the children to stand up to sing/chant *(maybe go to their positions at the back of the room)* and use their hands to clap, click and pat.
 - Children could practise some of those clapping games with a partner. This is very good for them developmentally, and can be used for practising spelling and other drills. *(If they don't have a partner they could do it against the wall or desk.)*
- **Surprise** them by using circle games. Once you have established some routines these have lots of applications. Get them in a circle on their chairs away from their desks. *(See above about moving around.)*
 - Go around the circle giving one clap each – concentrate and get the space between the claps even.
 - Do two claps each, or get faster or slower, or make a pattern – one person one clap, next person two. This is good for concentration and development.
 - Spell words around the circle.
 - Play 'I like people who' or 'what are you doing'.
 - Pass something around – e.g. flash card – and let everyone read it aloud.

- For a vocabulary-based lesson (especially listening and speaking) play BINGO! Go to <http://www.eslactivities.com/bingo.php> to create a set of bingo cards with pictures. (See instructions elsewhere on this site.) **They will be surprised** and delighted and will learn all of the words on their cards.
 - They can be rewarded with applause, or a prize, or just by becoming the next caller.
 - Use something like sunflower seeds as 'markers' rather than drawing on their cards. The children then remove their seeds and the game starts again with a new caller.
 - If two children win they can call together, take it in turns.
 - Mix up the little slips for calling, and let the caller read them out and hold them up one by one.
 - Maybe the first time you could use a smaller card – only 4 x 4, also offered on the website.
- When you are using the 'Communicative Approach' (*as you should be!*) the teacher should be speaking 20% of the time and the children 80% of the time. **Surprise them by actually doing this!** This is actually much less exhausting for the teacher, but requires careful management, especially at first, to develop strategies to give the children support to be able to practise speaking confidently.
 - Use "Person A - Person B" technique to demonstrate a conversation. Teacher stands to one side and says the "Person A" part, then moves over to face the other way to say the "Person B" side of the conversation. The class then practises the conversation chorally – one side of the room to the other.
 - Chain conversations – Teacher practices the question and answer first with a child. (E.g. "My name is Sammy Snail. What's your name?" and the child says "My name is Andy Ant. Good Morning Sammy Snail.") Then choose another child – the first child repeats the conversation with the second child. Then choose a third child ...
 - Children can also practise the conversation in pairs at the same time, while teacher walks around and observes. Some pairs could be asked to come up the front and demonstrate/act out the conversation.
- Having practiced the conversation the children can dramatize with their masks on and/or with their puppets. When they use the puppets they can put one in each hand and try using voices for both sides of the conversation.

9. Speak **only** English!

And stick to your rules. **Don't give in and explain in BM!** Maybe you could start by warning them in BM that this is what you will do, but then use only English and refuse to budge. **SURPRISE** them. If the children know or expect that eventually you will (in frustration) explain in BM, then they will simply wait for that to happen. You know this is true.

It is mostly the teachers of the difficult/low level classes who tell me that they use BM because they need to or else the children won't understand. So

- Simplify your language
- Speak clearly
- Keep repeating slowly and clearly
- Use actions
- Use pictures
- Keep trying
- Don't give up
- Reward children who respond correctly
- Be patient

And don't worry about the 'content' that they are 'not learning' – because they weren't learning it anyway, honestly, were they? This is a hurdle that you need to get over, and once you do the rest will start to fall into place and you can 'catch up' with the content.