A: Getting started

As the saying goes, you only have one chance to make a first impression. That's the same in all walks of life, including teaching primary children. As far as possible, you need to create an impression that will lay foundations for developing a harmonious working relationship as from the first lesson. This includes establishing your credibility as teacher, displaying relaxed confidence in your role, showing care and interest in relating to children personally, planning and delivering interesting and challenging lessons, noticing children's responses and listening to what they have to say. It also involves setting clear **parameters of behaviour** and ensuring that learning **outcomes** are relevant and worthwhile.

That's quite a tall order and, however much experience you have, it's natural to feel slightly nervous before teaching a class of primary children for the first time – at least I know I always do. In my experience, it helps when initial lessons lead to concrete learning outcomes which link learning to children's life outside the classroom. In the case of lower primary, this might be making a simple origami book (see **63**) with personal information that children take home to show and share with their families. With upper primary, it might be creating a personal blog (see **89**), with content of their choice, which they can subsequently add to in a regular way during the course.

My key tips for getting started are:

1 **Learn children's names – fast!**
2 **Keep it personal and encourage aspirations**
3 **Establish classroom routines**
4 **Start as you mean to continue**

1 Learn children's names – fast!

By remembering and using children's names from the outset, you signal your interest in them as individuals. This boosts their self-esteem and makes them more likely to listen and actively engage in lessons.

When you start teaching a class for the first time, there are usually some children whose names you remember more easily than others. In order to avoid any perception of favouritism, it's important to make an effort to learn all the children's names as soon as you can.

For the first few lessons, it helps to make a plan of the classroom with the children's names and photos showing where they sit. You can keep this on your desk or computer screen and refer to it unobtrusively as you teach.

With younger children, you can prepare circular medallions of coloured card with the children's first names in marker pen and a hole at the top threaded with easily breakable wool. As you give out the medallions for children to wear, ask, *What's your name? / My name's …* or *Who's …? / I am!* in order to identify each child's medallion and give yourself an opportunity to learn their names.

Older children can make name cards by folding an A4 sheet in three equal sections, writing their names in the middle section, and drawing a logo to show a favourite possession or interest, e.g. a football or cat. At the start of the first few lessons, children stand their name cards on their desks.

In classes where children are together for the first time, you can also do activities to learn everyone's names. One example is where children stand in a circle in groups and take turns to say and then repeat each other's names cumulatively, following a simple, clapping rhythm. However, in contexts where children already know each other, there's little point in doing an activity like this. Instead, an activity where children work in groups and create a simple crossword with clues using their first names, and then exchange and do each other's crosswords or try them out on you, will be more appropriate.

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Keep it personal and encourage aspirations   **2**

> **Children need to feel that you care about their personal lives and aspirations. This is motivating and helps to build positive relationships.**

The more you know about children, the more you can relate to them individually and understand their needs and preferences (see also **5**). Every lesson offers opportunities for this, e.g. when you personalise a topic or ask children their views, but it is particularly important when you start working with a class for the first time.

One activity to find out personal interests is to get children to create their own coat of arms, divided into four sections. Children draw and/ or write in each section, either choosing from a range of options or following your instructions, e.g. their favourite free time activity, food, sport or school subject, their pet (or pet they would like to have) and a place they would like to visit. Children take turns to show their coat of arms and talk about their choices. These can also be displayed and used as the basis for other activities, e.g. *Who's got a hamster? / How many of you like basketball? / Find the coat of arms most similar to yours.*

An activity that encourages children to think about their aspirations for learning English is to make a dream tree. Create an outline of the trunk and branches of a tree. Give every child a piece of green paper in the shape of a leaf. Children write on the leaf one thing they want to achieve in English and stick it on the tree, e.g. *I want to watch Harry Potter films.* Children then share and compare their aspirations.

Finding out about children in this way allows you to make references to them naturally in subsequent lessons, e.g. *Did you take your dog for a walk at the weekend, Isabel? / Mario loves maths, so perhaps he can tell us.* This shows that you know and care about the children and heightens their **self-esteem**. You can also use their aspirations to inform your lesson planning (see **D**) and this is likely to lead to increased **engagement** too.

3   Establish classroom routines

Classroom routines give a framework and structure to lessons. They make lesson preparation and classroom management easier and save valuable teaching time.

You can establish **classroom routines** in relation to any area of your teaching where you feel that it will be beneficial for children to follow a predictable pattern of behaviour. These are likely to include, among others, starting and ending lessons, getting attention, asking questions, giving out and collecting materials, working in pairs and groups (see **7**), reviewing learning (see **19**). Classroom routines need to be **age-appropriate**. With younger children, an opening classroom routine might include greetings and a hello song using a class puppet, followed by identifying the weather and day of the week. With older children, lessons might start with a high-five greeting and a hello rap, followed by brief 'news of the day' from children who choose to contribute.

In order to establish a classroom routine, you need to explain why the routine is important, use the routine regularly, **model** the behaviour you expect, and be persistent in expecting children to conform to this. For example, if you establish a routine whereby you use a tambourine or count down from five as a signal for children to stop whatever they're doing, listen and pay attention, resist the temptation to continue before you have the attention of the whole class.

Some classroom routines can be established collaboratively by negotiating a **class contract** with children. If children themselves agree on the value of classroom routines, such as raising hands to ask questions, then they are much more likely to keep to them.

Classroom routines make children feel secure and develop their **autonomy**. Through the use of regularly repeated, shared scenarios and language patterns, classroom routines also create a sense of class community and promote confidence and ownership of learning.

Start as you mean to continue 4

> During the first few weeks when you meet a class, children are willing to respect you and accept the way you do things. This is a critical period for you to establish positive relationships and an agreed way of working. It is much harder to change things later on.

If you feel nervous meeting a class for the first time and are worried that this may have a negative impact, try the 'as if' technique. This involves acting 'as if' you are the most confident teacher in the world, using relaxed, open body language and a calmly projected voice. If you consciously stage act for the first few lessons, you're likely to find that the children's positive response will boost your confidence and help you become the teacher you wish to be.

In developing a positive working relationship (see **5**), it is a basic requirement to show genuine interest and respect for children and to learn their names (see **1**). You also need to give encouragement, support, **feedback** and praise as appropriate (see **11**). At the same time, you need to be firm in insisting on what you consider are acceptable **parameters of behaviour** so that these become a habit and classroom norm.

In order to establish an agreed way of working, it helps to have a clear vision of how you would ideally like things to be. You then need to plan in detail how to achieve this.

In addition to organising the environment, planning lessons and **classroom routines**, it is useful to prepare a **behaviour plan**. A behaviour plan gives you an opportunity to think through what you consider acceptable parameters of behaviour and the strategies you will use to get children to accept and respect these. A behaviour plan can include things such as (negotiated) classroom rules, a **reward system** (if you plan to use one), strategies for managing behaviour (see **12**), and consequences for inappropriate behaviour. Thinking these through in advance will help you to be consistent in the way you respond to children and to reach a shared understanding of how to work together.

B: Core skills

There are a number of core skills which will underpin your confidence in working with children and are essential to successful teaching and learning. These core skills relate to creating a positive rapport with your learners and thinking carefully about language you use in lessons. They also relate to selecting, setting up and managing activities in a way that maximises learning opportunities and supports your ability to deliver lessons in the most productive way.

For example, with an activity such as dictation, you may choose to do it either as a whole class activity (see **81**), or as pair work, using copies of the same text with different missing words which children dictate to their partner, or as group work, in which children take turns to dictate a text from the wall to their group. In making your choice, you need to weigh up the potential risks and benefits for skills development, **cooperative learning**, enjoyment and orderly classroom management (see **C**).

When you first start teaching children, you may find it useful to write a detailed script of language you are going to use to give instructions and stage-by-stage notes of how you plan to set up a pair or group work activity effectively. As you become more skilled and proficient in these areas, you'll find that you no longer need to do this, and these basic, pedagogical skills will become a natural and automatic part of your 'teaching persona' and performance.

My key tips for core skills are:

   5   **Build positive relationships**
   6   **Watch your language!**
   7   **Set up pair and group work effectively**
   8   **Choose and use activities wisely**

Build positive relationships   5

> **Building positive relationships lies at the heart of effective primary teaching. As well as promoting participation, it also helps you to manage your classes in a positive way.**

The way you relate to children, individually and collectively, and the way children relate to each other, has a fundamental influence on their **self-esteem**, attitudes, behaviour and achievement. Building positive relationships also links closely to **values** education (see **H**) since it is through the development of values such as trust, mutual respect, kindness, inclusion and cooperation, that strong, healthy relationships develop.

In order to build positive relationships, you need to:

- **Model** social skills you wish children to adopt, for example, saying 'please' and 'thank you', using eye contact and active listening.
- Use humour but never at any child's expense.
- Create an **inclusive** classroom by encouraging a team spirit and using inclusive language, such as *Let's … / We're going to …* (see also **69**).
- Find things in common by doing activities such as Cat or dog? Say pairs of related words, e.g. *Pizza or hamburger?* Children identify the item they prefer and share reasons for their choice.
- Make personal connections by doing activities such as Guess the lie! Children write three sentences about themselves, one of which is a lie. They take turns to say their sentences and guess the lie.
- Value children's **multilingual identities** (see **44**).
- Find moments for individual contact. Use these to show you care.
- Look for things to praise (rather than criticise) in relation to children's work, participation and behaviour (see also **11**).
- Include collective activities that create a sense of community, such as storytelling and singing (see **F** and **I**).
- Include **cooperative learning** activities that practise social skills as well as language (see, e.g. **G, J, 60, 66, 75**).

6   Watch your language!

The way you use language in class is crucial in assisting children's learning. It needs to be natural and provide input that children can understand and be closely matched to their cognitive and social development.

In pitching your language appropriately for lower primary children, it's helpful to adopt some features of the way parents typically interact with young children learning their mother tongue. These include repeating words and phrases frequently, asking questions to keep attention, expanding what children say and using simple, grammatical structures and slower, but not unnatural, articulation. They also include using gestures, actions and facial expression to support understanding, and responding to children's meaning by **recasting** and reformulating what they want to say, rather than overtly correcting them (see also **96**). As children get older and become more linguistically and cognitively proficient, you need to continually adapt and grade your language to their level.

Some key areas to think about in the way you use language include:

- Giving instructions: simplify these into stages and avoid complex grammatical constructions.
- **Think aloud** techniques: explicitly verbalise and **model** how to go about solving a problem or doing an activity.
- Eliciting techniques: use prompts, e.g. *And …? / So …?*, and questions, e.g. *Anything else?*, to gather children's suggestions, ideas and get them to display what they know.
- Checking comprehension: plan ways to get evidence of children's understanding. For example, rather than *Do you understand what a reptile is?* ask *Is a snake a reptile? How do you know?*
- Using the children's **shared language**: this may be appropriate at times, for example, for explanations or to check instructions (see also **44**).

Set up pair and group work effectively   7

> Pair and group work provide opportunities to maximise language practice and develop cooperative learning skills – but they also risk escalating noise levels and even losing control of the class. The secret lies in how you set up, manage and monitor activities.

In order to work effectively, you need to provide a clear framework and purpose for pair and group work. You need to indicate partners or groups (for example, children sitting next to, or behind, them) and give clearly staged instructions (see **6**). It's also vital to prepare language you expect children to use, for example, by getting them to practise this in chorus first. You also need to demonstrate or do the activity with the whole class before they begin, and give a signal for starting and stopping.

During pair and group work, you need to **monitor** closely, without interfering unless necessary, and have something ready for fast-finishers to do. It also helps to train children to use 'our quiet voices' (see **73**), to keep activities short at first, and to provide opportunities for reporting back, demonstrating the activity or doing a **learning review** (see **19**), at the end.

Pair work is easier to manage than group work and it is advisable to start with this. Examples of activities that lend themselves to pair work include games (see **G**), drama (see **Q**), and grammar practice (see **95**). As children get older, pair work is also useful for getting them to compare ideas and check answers in **think-pair-share** activities too (see **82**).

The key to successful group work lies in organising children effectively (see **9** and **15**) and ensuring that everyone has a role and is motivated to contribute. In some activities, such as **cumulative** games (see **82**) and wall dictations (see introduction to **B**), the design of the activity means that everyone contributes equally. For others, such as projects (see **J**) and presentations (see **60**), it may be useful to give specific roles, such as timekeeper, notetaker, content checker, reporter.

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8 Choose and use activities wisely

By choosing and using activities wisely, you can positively influence children's attitudes, behaviour and response. This supports your teaching and leads to more productive learning outcomes.

Any activity that you do in class impacts on children's attitudes, behaviour and response (see also **9**). A key skill is to recognise when different kinds of activities may be suitable.

If you wish to promote learner **autonomy** and responsible decision-making in relation to homework (providing you teach in a context where you can decide whether or not to set this), get children to brainstorm the pros and cons of homework in groups. Alternatively, give each group a list of pros and cons in jumbled order on strips of paper, and they sort them into two sets, e.g. pros: *It helps me learn more. / I learn at my own pace. / I learn how to manage my time. / I can ask mum or dad for help.* etc.; cons: *I don't have time. / It's boring. / I want to play. / It doesn't help me learn.* etc. Use the sorted statements as the basis for a discussion culminating in a class vote on whether to have homework or not. In my experience, children invariably decide that it is worth having some homework, even if only once a week or voluntarily. They then go on to decide the kind of homework they would like. By giving children **agency**, they feel empowered and are more likely to commit to the agreed **outcome** in a responsible way.

If you have a large class and are concerned about keeping control, you may feel that, at least at first, it is too risky to set up pair or group work and wiser to do whole class activities that progress in a **lockstep** way. These might include storytelling (see **F**), choral repetition (see **82**), flashcard games (see **55**), TPR activities (see **65**), dictations (see **81**) and whole class discussions (see **31**). In this case, you need to use your professional judgement in order to balance the value of achieving successful learning outcomes through being able to marshal children's attentional resources and maintain a degree of control versus a freer, more learner-centred approach.

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