

Educating Parents, Dissipating Tension

As people involved in a service industry, private language teachers should keep customer satisfaction in mind as one of their goals. For private teachers of children, this is complicated by the fact that, effectively, parents are the customers rather than the students themselves. A communication gap between schools and parents, regardless of how well classes are actually going, can lead to problems that can prove fatal to students' continued enrolment.

Some issues that can cause problems include:

- unreasonably high parental expectations
- lack of parental understanding of the aims of the class
- parental disapproval of certain activities (especially phonics training)
- lack of parental support over homework and attendance
- specific disputes over fees, vacations, and payment.

This being Japan, parents do not always voice their complaints, which makes it harder to address them. Often the first sign of trouble comes in the form of falling student numbers or reduced enrolment (more often than not a result of bad word of mouth: in Japan, *kuchikomi* cuts both ways). Although a lot of teachers might feel that they are too busy to try to deal with parents as well as students, getting (and keeping) parents on board actually saves time in the long run.

The easiest area to address is that of assorted administrative gripes. Try to anticipate problems and decide what the school's policy is on various matters. Inform parents of the rules before they enrol their children and be consistent in applying them. Something that must be made absolutely clear is whether students are liable for fees if they miss a class, whether or not they are eligible for a make-up class, what happens if the class needs to be cancelled or rescheduled by the teacher, and when and how fees are due to be paid. The rules should of course be updated as unanticipated problems

arise, and parents issued with the new rules at the start of the next school year.

This "rules list" is also a good opportunity to explain your policy towards homework and materials. If students are expected to do homework, parents should be encouraged to supervise. Of course, most parents will take an interest in their children's activities, but often having such things in writing helps to jog a busy parent's mind.

Too-high parental expectations and disagreements over what constitutes an effective English class are probably the most difficult areas to address. Again, one of the most effective ways to deal with these issues is to address them before parents have made the decision to enrol. A clear explanation of the aims of the class, materials used, and methodology, along with guidelines as to what the students can realistically be expected to achieve is well worth taking time to put together.

Even if parents have received all this information, it is still necessary to keep the lines of communication open. *Renrakuchou* (communication notebooks) are familiar to most parents as they are used in elementary schools for parents and teachers to write notes to each other. Children carry them back and forth between the classroom

and their homes, allowing even busy parents to keep in touch with teachers. These can be an effective way to keep parents in the loop concerning their children's progress. Open classes or class performances offer students and teachers the chance to show off their achievements, and allow parents a chance to see some results.

Finally, some schools offer special events in the form of classes for parents that allow them to experience some of the activities and techniques that their children are taught. Billed as *setsumeikai* (explanatory workshops), they provide a chance for parents to play games, learn about phonics, and even get to know the teacher and each other better. If they go well enough, they could even turn into a regular thing, providing schools with a new source of students.

Ultimately the most important thing is to keep parents informed of what is going on in class, how their children are doing, and what they can do to help their children's English. Having a clear written policy on administrative matters, along with consistent application of that policy, leaves little room for misunderstandings. Listening to parents and addressing their concerns is the other half of the equation. Make

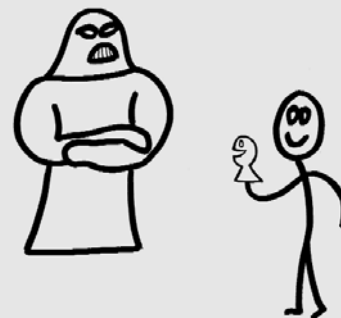
DIAPER WARS Episode One

A few months ago, on a mailing list not so far away...

A fierce battle raged, the outcome of which would decide the shape of EFL in Japan for ever.

The antagonists, locked in mortal combat, fight for their beliefs and the support of their peers.

Babies are not ready for or capable of studying English...



Babies learn from interacting with their environment. In English class they learn not only English but also a positive attitude and open mind...

sure that parents have both informal and official contact with teachers. If all

these points can be addressed, they will go a long way towards eliminating

problems and allowing teachers to get on with actual teaching!

Health Matters Too

As we leave summer behind, our thoughts start drifting towards the long winter months ahead, and the inevitable string of colds and assorted illnesses that lay in store... But are they inevitable? And if not, what are some practical measures we can take to protect ourselves?

As teachers of children, we might find that we get sick more often than most people, or that we just can't seem to shake colds off. This may be due to the fact that we work too hard and get tired or run down, but a large part of it is thanks to our students' generous attitude to sharing. If we can protect ourselves from their little "gifts" then

that's most of the battle won.

Common sense (yet effective) countermeasures include washing your hands between classes, being careful not to touch your mouth and nose during classes, gargling antiseptic throat cleanser regularly, eating plenty of fruits and fresh vegetables, maintaining a regular sleep pattern, and even disinfecting flashcards, toys, and furniture regularly!

Even as basic a thing as having a box of tissues nearby and teaching students "western cold culture", i.e. to use tissues rather than their hands to wipe their noses, and to cover their mouth when they cough or sneeze can

make a huge difference.

One simple and elegant solution that also contains a dash of authentic English use comes from *Aaron Anderson* of *MisterEnglish.com*. He trained his students to line up and wash their hands before class begins. A "leader" is the "soap man" and acts like a sheep dog herding everyone into the bathroom to give them a squirt of liquid soap. English is also part of the ritual, with "here you are", "thank you", and "wash your hands!" being liberally applied throughout. Apparently it only takes about 90 seconds for a small class!

A couple of home remedies with a twist:

Karen Simmonds' Garlic and Ginger Honey Lemon

When you first feel the signs of a sore throat or cold coming on, finely chop a clove of raw garlic and about 1.5cm of fresh ginger root and put it in a big mug. Add the juice of a whole lemon and a big spoon of honey, fill the mug with boiled water and give it a stir, then cover the drink with a saucer and allow to stand for about 10 minutes. Drink the whole lot. It actually tastes delicious!

Dr.Christopher Burroughs' Master Cleanser (courtesy of Chris Hunt)

Juice of 1/2 to whole Lemon
 1/8 tsp Cayenne Pepper
 1 tbsp real Maple Syrup
 8 ounces boiled and cooled water
 Sip immediately once made, and finish drinking in ten minutes. Repeat every hour or two depending on the severity of your condition.

Baby and parent classes teach parents how to help their children with English...



Baby classes are a cynical ploy to take advantage of parents jumping on the English bandwagon...

Babies will become stressed and burned out if they start English too early...



Babies enjoy interacting with parents and teacher in a fun environment...

TO BE CONTINUED?

Up to you. Join the discussion on the ETJ groups or send your comments and opinions to:

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