

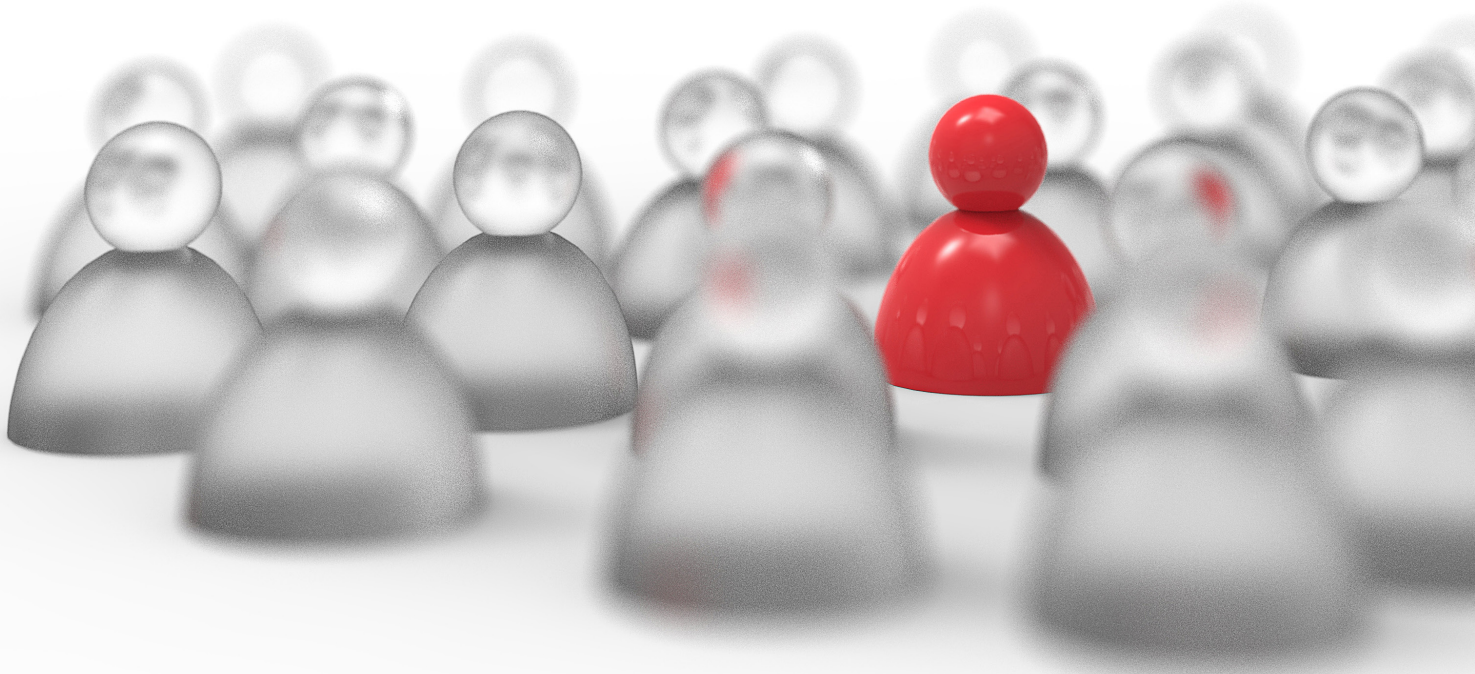


Cater for Learner Diversity Series

Teachers' Toolkit:

A Quick and Easy Way to Cater for Learner Diversity

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It is commonplace to have mixed ability learners in a classroom. Not only is it a headache for teachers, but it can also be quite frustrating for students as well. In many lesson observations, less able students are often left struggling while teachers go through the content quickly. Alternatively, lessons with elite students left idle while the teachers are working to help less able ones are not uncommon.



Yet, catering for learner diversity is nothing fancy. It does not necessarily require lots of (but some, at least) preparation in advance. Here is a success story from a school. By adopting two quick and easy classroom activities, teachers found that there was significant improvement in student engagement. At the same time, they helped with locating diversity in the class.

Primary 2 English teachers of the school has collaborated with the team of Quality School Improvement Project (QSIP) to cater for learner diversity in the classroom, and has devised the following classroom activities when teaching reading comprehension.



1. Classroom Activity – Word Cards

Design and rationale:

To transform a seemingly boring reading lesson into an interactive one, teachers thought of conducting a classroom activity with the grammar item in focus. The text was a phone conversation on a hiking plan, and students were expected to comprehend the text and answer questions in Wh-format. Teachers prepared word cards with potential answers to the corresponding Wh-question words, e.g. ‘Saturday’, ‘library’ and ‘happy’ for the Wh-question words ‘When’, ‘Where’ and ‘How’ respectively.

In the activity, each student was given a word card and was asked to stick it to its corresponding Wh-question word on the blackboard.

To cater for learner diversity, teachers marked a red dot on the back of less challenging word cards. When distributing the word cards to students, teachers intentionally gave less able students the

red-dotted ones. This tiered material enabled students of different abilities to perform the same task with less support from teachers.

The design was also less threatening to students. Students were asked to stick cards in groups, and they did not need to mark their names beside their answers. In this way, students were relieved from the burden of making mistakes. On the other hand, teachers were able to spot problems with a glance at the answers posted on the blackboard, and grasp the teachable moment to elicit.

Bonus:

It was observed that while students were waiting for their chance to stick the cards, they asked around to get assistance from peers in order to get correct answers. Despite being a mini-game, diversity can be used to promote peer learning. For future adaptation, there can be a few minutes for students to chat with neighbours before answering.

2. Classroom Activity – Hand signals

Design and rationale:

Sometimes teachers may doubt if students are following during answer checking. One way to make it more engaging is to use hand signals. For multiple-choice answers, teachers from the school asked students to point fingers. For example, pointing the index finger for option A, and pointing both index and middle fingers for option B, etc. While the whole class could participate, teachers also had an idea if the majority could get the right answers or not. In other words, this handy and effortless activity helps teachers locate diversity and again, grasp teachable moments.



Bonus:

Hand signals appeal to kinesthetically inclined students. It was observed that students who had used to be less attentive in class became more responsive in this class activity. Overall speaking, students reported their answers enthusiastically compared to the conventional way that one student is called upon to answer a particular question.

It is not rocket science to have classroom activities, yet implementation proves they work wonders. By conducting less-threatening activities to make students more engaged in the lessons, teachers may turn teaching a big class to best advantage. The students' reactions to classroom activities are always valuable student data that guide teachers to adapt their teaching strategies to student needs. Taking home this success story, perhaps it is worthwhile to spend more time discussing classroom activities in the coming collaborative lesson planning meetings.



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