

school based teacher development programme transforming classroom practices

Transforming Classroom Practices Programme

The School Based Teacher Development (SBTD): Transforming Classroom Practices (TCP) is one of the dimensions UNRWA's Reform Strategy. The programme aims at improving the teaching and learning practices of teachers in the classroom by developing active learning pedagogies that will support effective engagement of the students. It will be the basis for an in-service training programme for all UNRWA teachers.

The programme adopts a blended learning approach and consists of 6 modules. Each module focuses on one of the aspects of the teaching-learning process. Collectively, the programme materials are the backbone of providing quality teaching and learning practices in UNRWA schools.

The modules are built interactively where the teacher is requested to reflect on his/her practices and to try the use of a variety of learner-focused strategies.



module two

learning focused classroom practices



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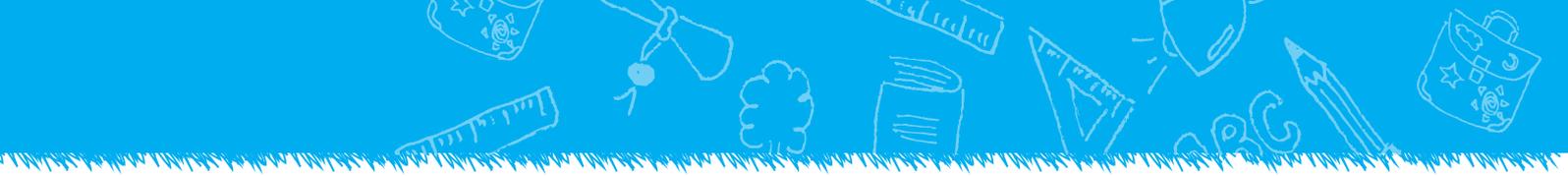
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Introduction to the School Based Teacher Development programme (SBTD)- Transforming Classroom Practices (TCP)

School Based Teacher Development programme (SBTD)- Transforming Classroom Practices (TCP) is a key dimension of UNRWA's Education Reform Strategy. The programme seeks to improve teaching and learning practices in the UNRWA classroom through developing interactive pedagogies or ways of teaching that will engage children more effectively in their learning. The SBTD is paving the way for comprehensive in-service training for all UNRWA teachers. There are six Open and Distance Learning modules and each of these focus on different aspects of teaching and learning that together provide an overview of many different approaches and ways to develop quality teaching and learning in UNRWA Schools. The text modules are interactive and ask the teacher to reflect on their practices, try new approaches and consider the impact they have on the children's learning and motivation.



Intro to Module 2: Learning focused classroom practices

Unit 5 Expectations as the key to effective teaching and learning

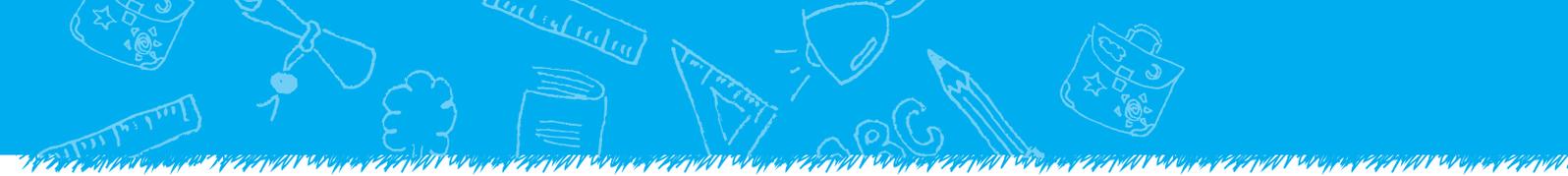
Research has shown that how a teacher perceives a child as a learner can have very significant impact on the child's success as a learner, both negatively and positively. This unit explores how to develop a supportive environment and encourages the use of more positive ways of interaction within the classroom, such as using praise and encouragement which is appropriate to each child's stage of development. It stresses the importance of keeping an open mind rather than closing down the options on a child's and being prejudiced against a child because they come from a certain part of town or are from a certain family or look a certain way.

Unit 6/7 Building successful communities of learning (double TDU)

This unit explores different strategies to help children participate more actively in their learning. The emphasis is on building a supportive environment where children can feel safe in taking risks in their learning and are not ridiculed if they do not understand. Using group work in different ways to engage the pupils intellectually, socially and emotionally is a major focus of this unit.

Unit 8 Celebrating learning success

Celebrating children's success in learning can have a significant impact on the child's perception of themselves as a learner and make the difference between success and failure. The unit, therefore, explores how ways, such as displaying and talking with children about their work, helping them develop their skills of learning, solving problems and participating in discussions will help build the child's confidence and self esteem as a learner.



Module 2 Unit 5

Expectations as the key to effective teaching and learning

Introduction

When the team writing this unit began thinking about the content, one of us, Saif, told the following story.

When Saif was eight or nine years old, his father had changed jobs and he had to move to a new school. He did not know anyone. In the first week he sat next to a boy who was not very well behaved in class. At break he stayed with the boy and some of his friends from another class. The other boys began playing a game of throwing stones to try and hit each other's feet. One of the stones hit a teacher. The whole group was taken to the head teacher and punished, including Saif who had not thrown any stones. To his horror, Saif then discovered that the teacher who had been hit was his mathematics teacher. In his first maths class, the teacher said, 'I'm not having you two troublemakers sitting together,' and Saif had to move to the front of the class. In the weeks that followed, the teacher was very critical of Saif's work and his behaviour, even though Saif had done nothing wrong. This made Saif feel very unsure of himself in mathematics. However, after two months, the teacher began to realise that Saif was quite good at mathematics and always well behaved. And by then Saif had also found new friends!

Have you ever had a similar sort of experience? We tell this story because it illustrates just how powerful expectations can be, even when the expectations are unfounded. Making judgements about someone's potential based on just one experience can have limiting or exaggerated outcomes.

In this unit we want you to think explicitly about your expectations. When you read the case studies, think about children you have taught or are teaching now. Do you think that your expectations of them may influence their capacity to learn and impact on their achievements and access to the curriculum? There are some activities to carry out that require you to think very carefully about your pupils.

Teacher development outcomes

By the end of this unit we hope you will have developed your:

- knowledge and awareness of the different ways in which teacher expectations can impact on pupil learning;
- ability to reflect on, and implement strategies for improving, the school success of children who are not reaching their potential.

What are factors affecting expectations?

Many factors influence our expectations of situations, people and events. Our previous experiences are a key factor, as are our beliefs and values. We make decisions and judgements about what we should do, where we should go and whom we consider as our friends, from what we know already about people, situations and events. This is true of both our personal and our professional lives. Working as a teacher, your day-to-day decisions will be influenced by a range of factors. Think about what these might be.

For example, research tells us that, all over the world, the following factors seem to influence teachers' thinking:

- The child's socio-economic background.
- The child's appearance (for example stereotypes exist about tall or short students).
- The teacher's experience with the child's siblings.
- Gender (for example in some contexts boys are seen as more able in mathematics than girls).

Can you think of other factors that might influence how you respond to the children in your class and the effect these may have had on your teaching?

Do expectations hold true?

The two following accounts explore what research revealed about children in two different communities when they went to school.

A few years ago, educational researchers became interested in the 'street children' of Brazil. These were children who lived in slum areas or had no home at all. The researchers discovered that these children made very poor progress in school and performed particularly badly in mathematics. The children would sit solemnly at the

back of the class and rarely participate. In the opinion of the teachers, the children's poor background was responsible and they did not see how they could help them.

The research team then went to visit these children in their homes or on the streets where they lived. All were involved in buying and selling of some kind. Many of them were able to mentally calculate currency exchanges for a variety of South American currencies. The researchers found these children engaging very successfully in complex mental arithmetic, way beyond the level expected in the school curriculum. When the team talked this through with the children, they discovered that they were using highly effective problem-solving techniques but of a very unusual kind. Such techniques were not part of the school maths syllabus at all! But there is always more than one way to solve a problem and this could have been a starting point for the teacher to involve the children in the class by acknowledging their unique way of solving the problems set. This could help all the children think of different ways to solve the same problem. In this way the children would feel much more part of the school and gradually be encouraged to participate more fully and actually have their potential realised.

In the school context, therefore, expectations of mathematics achievement for these children were low, and that was borne out by subsequent school level attainment. Yet, in another context, these children were superb mathematicians!

Educational researchers have also looked at Korean children who migrated to other parts of the world in the latter part of the last century. Researchers have followed up groups of such children and observed how they have performed in school. The findings are very interesting. Children who migrated to Japan, where attitudes to and expectations of Korean children were very poor, did badly at school. Children who migrated to the west coast of the USA, where expectations of Asian children were very high, did very well in school. So, children from the same sorts of homes performed very unequally in two different settings. The researchers felt that teacher expectations were the key variable here.

The first activity asks you to think about your expectations of the children in your class and the expectations you have of them at school. It is important to consider how well you know your pupils as learners.

Activity 11

Think about the children you teach. Identify one child whom teachers might have low expectations of.

- Think about why this is the case.



- Are there ways in which it would be possible to change expectations of this child?
- Make notes in your course notebook about this child.

You could share your thinking and ideas with other teachers when you have made your notes – maybe at the end of the day.

Next read Case Study 10 below, which describes a similar challenge faced by a teacher in Jordan.

Case study 10



Raji is the head teacher at Al Nuzha School in Jordan.

Omar was a boy in a Grade 5 class. He was not doing very well and would often arrive at school late. Omar was very quiet in school and tried not to be noticed.

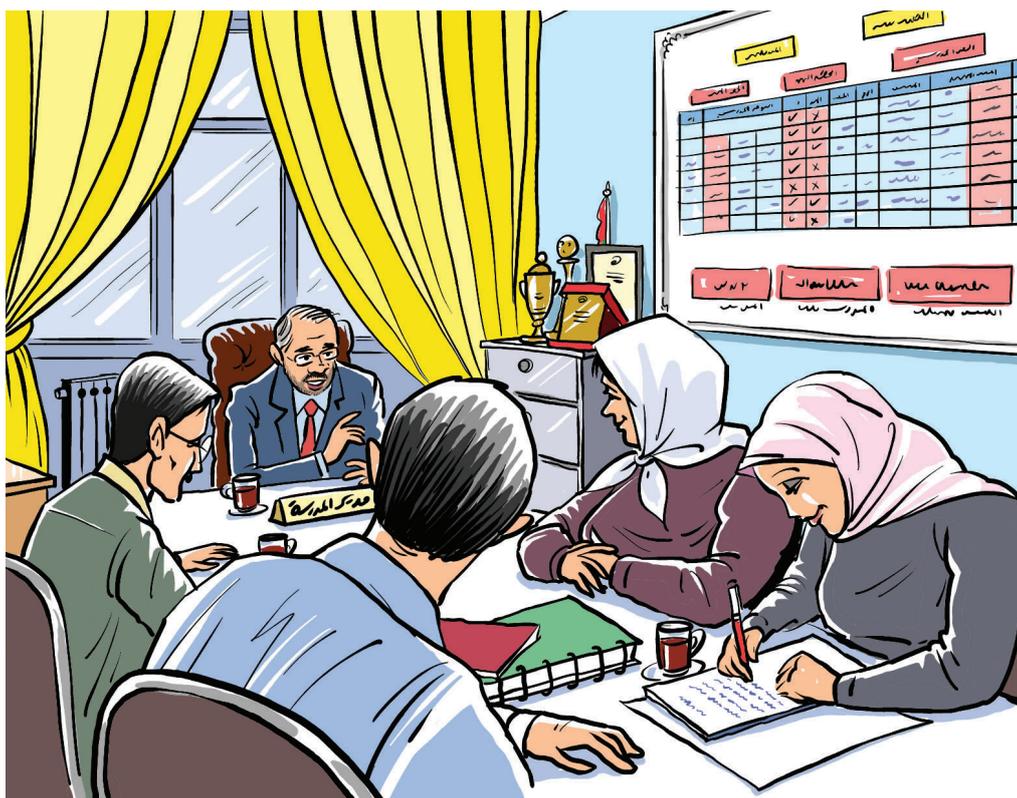


Figure 18: Meetings of School Principals, teachers and parents about students' progress can help in devising plans to assist with their learning.

One day, Raji was returning from a meeting mid-morning when he saw Omar sitting near some shops close to the school entrance. He took Omar into school and asked him why he was not in class. The conversation took quite a long time, but

Raji discovered with gentle questioning that Omar was frightened of his class. He was not reading well and he hated being asked questions he could not answer. Omar told the head teacher that he felt he was not as clever as the other children. He could not always understand the lesson but he found it hard to ask for help. Raji discovered, however, that Omar did have a number of interests. He liked cars and knew a lot about them. He helped in a garage and was very knowledgeable about engines. Omar was also interested in flags. He said his aunty had given him a book about flags and he could say the names of the countries of all the flags Raji showed him.

Raji felt that Omar could do much better. He spoke to Omar's teacher of Arabic and found a way Omar could have extra help with his reading. Then he asked the science teacher whether Omar could do a special project on engines. At the next teacher meeting, Raji asked if all Omar's teachers could think of ways that he could become more involved in class activities to build his self-confidence.

Over the next few weeks, Raji kept a special eye on him. Omar certainly seemed happier, and his attendance and punctuality improved. At the first opportunity, Raji spoke to Omar's mother and praised his work at school. She was very pleased to hear such positive comments about her son's progress.

Comment

To Omar, the school had little to offer and did not give him a feeling of confidence or self-worth, but instead reinforced his lack of confidence and decreased his self-esteem. Raji, however, believed that Omar could do better, and this was the motivation for him, as head teacher, to work on developing a more positive approach to schooling. The teachers developed a range of strategies they could use to support children who were experiencing difficulties in particular areas. For example, they planned lessons in which most of the children could work on group or individual tasks so the teacher was free to give more support and encouragement to specific children or groups of children.

Think about the child you identified in Activity 11 and how you might provide more support to him/her.

How perceptions of ability affect teacher expectations

One issue that impacts on most school systems is how schools and teachers come to define ability. For much of the last century, the idea prevailed that ability was determined fairly early in a child's life. Even when a child was very small, people might say things like 'She's a very bright child' or 'He is not very able'. There are also



times when being part of a social or ethnic group creates negative stereotypes around children.

However, research now shows that intelligence is not formed at birth, but grows, given the right circumstances, throughout life. It is also known that intelligence is multi-faceted. We do not have just one intelligence or ability, but many. But despite this, school systems in the past have often categorised children, formally or informally, in singular, general ways.

Psychologists are not sure just how different types of intelligences (such as mathematical, emotional or scientific) work and how they interrelate. The reason for this is that knowledge of the way the human brain works is still quite limited. What is known is that the brain is extremely powerful and complex. Think about the amazing things you can do, the way you acquired language, the ability of some of you to converse in multiple languages, your capacity to store memories and recollections. The capacity of humans to think and speak has preoccupied philosophers and scientists throughout the ages. In recent years, advances in brain science, stimulated by new technological procedures such as brain scanning, have begun to give greater insight into how the brain operates.

The point being made here is that the complexity and power of the brain indicate the problems of trying to categorise children's abilities, particularly so early in their education. So it is important to keep your expectations of a child high, even if socio-economic or cultural factors appear to suggest something else. That is not to underestimate such factors. A child from a poor home may not have the resources (such as books or games) that a child from a wealthy home may have, and this may impact on their learning. But it is important not to stereotype the child and prejudice him/her throughout his/her schooling. Teachers and schools have a very important task in helping children overcome disadvantages.

Providing equitable forms of schooling can be very challenging. Just think about the expectations and prejudices that are found around people with disabilities. In the lifetime of many of us writing this unit, children with some kind of learning impairment (such as impaired hearing or sight) have sometimes been seen as less able.

Social expectations can also influence the school achievement of boys and girls. In many societies, boys achieve more in subjects such as mathematics and science because it is 'expected' of them. But in a number of school systems that is now changing. Girls are being encouraged to participate more in these subjects and boys are being encouraged more in literacy, traditionally seen as a stronger subject for girls.

All the evidence suggests that, in the 21st century, it is possible to be much more confident about bringing nearly all children to a much higher level of learning than was thought possible in the 20th century. This will create social and economic opportunities for the individual child and for the wider community. This is more than an educational aspiration; it is fundamental to the human rights agenda, which is widely recognised today and particularly in the UNRWA educational programme. The expectations and pedagogic skill of teachers, therefore, become even more important.

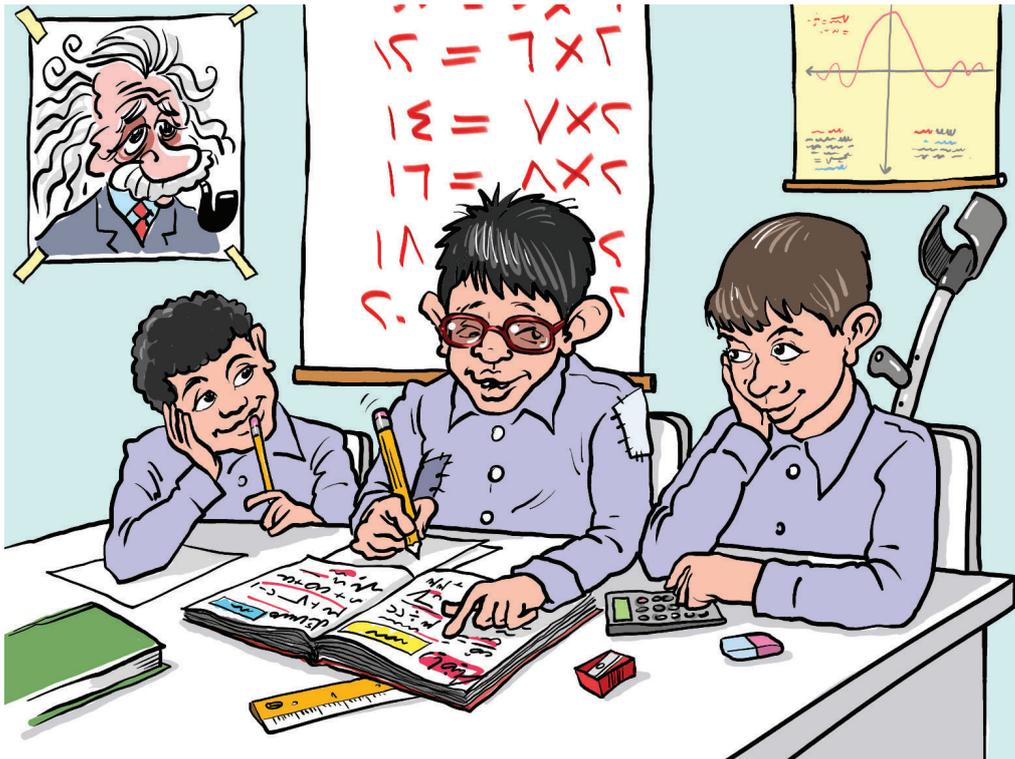


Figure 19: Have high but realistic expectations for all your students.

Activity 12

Think about the classes you teach. Identify those children who might benefit from higher expectations about what they could achieve. How might you be able to transmit different expectations to them and their classmates? Perhaps you could have a regular special word of encouragement with them. Or you could plan some activities in class (for example making a wall display) where you can set them a task that you are confident they will succeed in. Make sure you follow this up with encouraging words, either privately or in front of the class.

Use your course notebook to write a short description of the children you tried to help in this way and how well it went.





Comment

You might also discuss this important issue with other teachers. Are there ways that the school as a whole can raise expectations? Maybe there is a way that the teachers could brainstorm how the staff, as a whole, could work across the school to raise their expectations of the children and thus raise the children's self-esteem. How can such positive expectations be maintained over time? How can the children be involved in some of the ideas you suggest?

Agreeing as a staff how you address children, especially when they are exhibiting unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour for example, can make such a difference. In such cases it is the behaviour that is inappropriate and not the child, so reprimanding using terms such as 'silly' or 'stupid' is not helpful. But if you say that was not a sensible thing to do and not the kind of behaviour you would have expected of somebody so sensible, you show the child that you respect him/her and that they have transgressed. If the behaviour stops, then the child will be restored to his previous position rather than being labelled as stupid or silly.

Other whole-school actions could also have positive effects. For example, modelling ways of speaking to colleagues and other adults with respect and concern should be normal for all teachers. If teachers also show respect to children when talking with them even when they are struggling to understand a concept, then children will feel more confident to admit they do not understand, ask questions and seek help. This will contribute to developing a classroom environment where learning is supported and children feel able to explore new ideas because they can seek help if needed.

In Case Study 11 we again meet Raji, the head teacher, as he strives to improve the ethos and achievements of his school.

Case study 11



As head teacher, Raji was very concerned about how expectations were influencing children's achievement in his school. He heard the teachers talking and did not feel comfortable with the way some of them talked about some of the children.

Together with his staff, Raji worked on developing a strong human rights ethos in the way the school was run. They made a list of the rights they felt most important for the children. Then they made these into posters that could be put up around the school.

- You have the right to learn.

- You have the right to be safe.
- You have the right to be helped.
- You have the right to be treated respectfully.
- You have the right to be heard.
- You have the right to play.

In his meetings with the teachers Raji continuously stressed the importance to the child and community of raising achievement. In relation to expectations, he discussed a number of possibilities with his teachers and they came up with two interesting ideas.

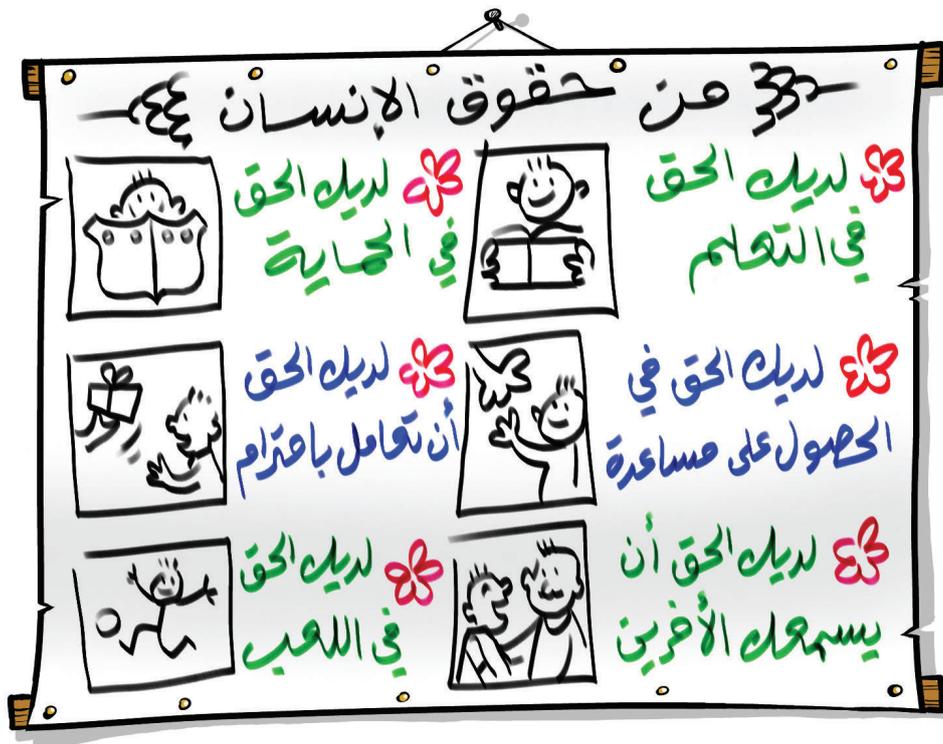


Figure 20: Clearly articulating classroom expectations can help create a positive classroom environment.

First, they agreed, for each grade, to have a grade level meeting twice a year to assess the progress being made by each child. Every teacher who came into contact with the child would attend the meeting. They agreed the purposes of the meeting were to identify:

- all the children who were making good progress;
- strategies for helping those children who could improve their progress.

Raji was very concerned that children who needed more help were not represent-

ed in negative terms. If they were having difficulties, then it required appropriate educational and pedagogic strategies. He held a series of short, in-service, educational sessions after school. In these, the teachers explored ways of giving children relevant feedback on their work so that they could improve it and considered how to group children so they could support each other in their learning.

Second, after the grade level meetings had started, Raji organised meetings for parents to talk about the expectations for the year and the ways they could help at home with their child's education.

The transformation was gradual, but even after a few weeks teachers were able to see subtle changes – such as greater participation in class and increased confidence – in many children.

Comment



The important point in this case study is that Raji addressed the challenge by introducing a range of complementary measures. Individual teachers had to take action, as did the staff as a whole. But this was backed up by parental engagement.

Keeping an open mind about children's potential, having high expectations about what they can achieve and planning activities that enable all children to participate will give them confidence in their abilities and encourage them to aim higher.

Summary



It is important that teachers and educational institutions combat any societal prejudices that are based on outdated ideas. For example, our knowledge of the human brain means that we can now discard the idea that we are born with a fixed intelligence. Our intelligence can grow or, more accurately, our 'intelligences' can, as can our potential. How many times have you heard the suggestion that a child should be able to achieve his or her potential? Our potential is not like a bucket that needs filling! Potential can itself grow through life, just like intelligence, especially if children are motivated and supported constructively.

One of the findings of brain science is that as we grow older our brains adapt and evolve and continue to show extraordinary learning power. One of the myths of the last century was the idea that you lose brain cells as you age. Not so. Our brains evolve in different ways but learning continues (and we can become wiser!). The following are examples of what having high expectations, rather than subscribing to old prejudices, can do:

- Children with hearing or sight impairments are able to do as well in school as anyone else.
- In mathematics, girls can do as well as, or better than, boys.
- Poor children can do well at school.

Issues of disability, gender and poverty have generated significant social movements that have come to influence schools, such as the Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education For All or the notion of inclusive education, which supports the education of all children regardless of their learning and physical disabilities. But schools can also influence opinion by the way they structure the curriculum and plan lessons using new and innovative ways for children to access it.

As a teacher, the way you structure your expectations is the key towards effective teaching and learning and is of great importance in the wider social role you play.



Module 2 Units 6–7

Building successful communities of learning: the development of active class and group teaching strategies

Introduction

Module 1 looked at what makes a successful learning community and discussed issues such as how experienced members of that community can help newcomers. Communities of learning are groups of learners who wish to progress their understanding and, by working together, help each other to make sense of the materials being studied.

The teachers in a school represent such a community. Good schools have teachers with a commitment to ongoing learning – not just for themselves, but also for the teacher community as a whole. In good schools, the teachers work in teams, and rely on each other for support, challenge and a chance to explore ideas in more detail to make sense of them. Such relationships are at the heart of good teamwork.

The classroom and the class can also be seen as a community of learning. In some activities different children can become the experts for a while and help others in the class to understand a new topic. The idea of a community operates at a number of levels – the class as a whole and subgroups within the class of different sizes. In Unit 1 we saw how more active learning is possible when the class is subdivided into groups or pairs. It was suggested that if this notion of communities was to become part of the daily life of the class to motivate and enhance children's learning, then certain routines and procedures needed putting in place. Remember the teacher who had different pairing arrangements and used a letter code to indicate which groups the children should move into? A teacher who is used to working with pairs and groups is always easy to identify because the children recognise the code and quickly move into their places and settle down to work.

This unit takes you on a journey of how to build communities of learning. It will consider, for example, how teachers explain things and the impact this can have on children's motivation and understanding. If the teacher does not explain things carefully then the children are unable to become part of the learning community. And the unit will give particular attention to the benefits of children working in groups and the ways this can be managed. For this reason, this is a 'double unit'

with rather more activities and case studies than most units. Therefore, this unit will take you two weeks to go through instead of one.

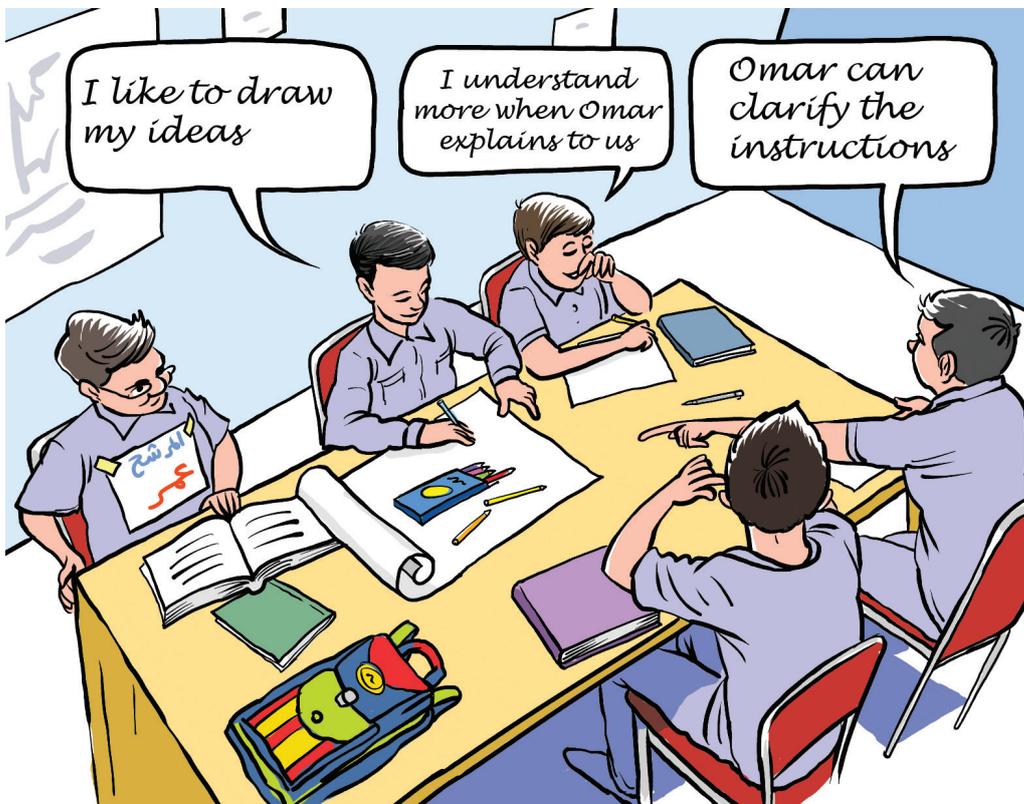


Figure 21: By working in teams and cooperatively students can assist one another to understand new topics and ideas.

Teacher development outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will have developed your:

- knowledge and understanding of the significance of promoting learning communities to achieve active forms of pedagogy;
- skills in using classroom activities, including group work, to establish routines appropriate to supporting a pupil learning community;
- skills of working with other teachers, both within and beyond the school, to develop pedagogic strategies that promote pupil engagement in learning.

Building a positive, cooperative, classroom atmosphere supports children's learning, achievement and social development. Case Study 12 shows how one teacher, at the beginning of the school year, set up a system that aimed to help children feel positive about themselves as learners and become caring members of the class.



Case study 12

Rand is a teacher in Nahr Elbared School in Lebanon. She knows that effective learning involves good classroom management. She also knows that she can help to build a child's character through teaching basic social attitudes.

Rand used to give her class rules to follow, but at the beginning of one school year she decided to do things differently. She chose five virtues: honesty, respect, responsibility, caring and giving. She helped the children understand what these virtues meant in reality. For example 'Raise your hand before speaking' fell under the category of respect. She then turned the virtues into the following goals:

- We are working towards being responsible.
- We are working towards having a caring classroom.
- We are working towards being honest.
- We are working towards having a tolerant classroom.
- We are working towards being respectful of others and ourselves.

In the first week of school, she spent a lot of time defining the word 'goal', discussing each of the goals and giving examples of them, such as examples of honesty or ways of caring.

As well as having the class goals, Rand then helped all the children work on their own personal goals. She asked each child to choose two goals that they would like to work on for the first nine weeks. Because they had not done an exercise like this before, the children were very tempted to write general goals, but Rand explained carefully what she wanted them to do and supported them in making their goals more specific, such as 'I will return my homework assignments on time'. Then each child wrote an action plan to achieve his/her goals, such as 'I will do my homework immediately when I get home and put it in my backpack after I finish'. The students evaluated their progress on their goals once a week. With the head teacher's permission, Rand wrote to the children's parents explaining what they were trying to do and asking them to support their children in achieving their goals.

Comment



It is common practice to post rules throughout a school as a visible reminder to children of expected behaviour. Teachers often also have classroom rules. Some teachers write the rules themselves; others allow children to compose the rules together as a class, which helps the children to have ownership of the rules and makes it more likely they will follow them. Expressing rules in a positive manner (rather than a negative

'you will not ...') creates a much more conducive environment for children to try their best to achieve their goals. Helping children to think through the consequences of the goals they choose and setting realistic and achievable goals will also help the children to meet their targets.

Building up positive relationships between the teacher and children in a class will impact on the children's behaviour in school, their attitudes to their work and their achievements. These relationships should be built on mutual respect for each other, with the teacher acting as a role model for the children in the way he/she interacts with colleagues.

Now look at Case Study 13, in which Radi tries to build up the self-esteem and confidence of his class by being supportive, constructive and positive. He focuses on what the pupils can do, gives them time to answer and encourages them to take risks.

Case study 13

Radi teaches Grade 6 in Baqoura Preparatory Co-Educational School in the Jordan field.



Ola, one of Radi's students, stood at the blackboard demonstrating the process she used to solve a decimal division problem from the previous night's maths homework. 42 children looked on intently. Only the sound of Ola's voice and the scratch of chalk against the board broke the quiet in the classroom. As she completed her demonstration, Ola turned to face her classmates, smiled broadly, extended the hand in which she held the chalk, and said, 'Saed'. Saed was her friend and she wanted to help him become more confident in mathematics.

Head down and shoulders slightly drooping, Saed slid slowly from his seat and made his way toward Ola. The other students watched quietly as he took the chalk from Ola's hand and wrote the problem he was assigned to explain on the board. He stopped to mutter, 'I didn't understand this problem.'

Radi, the teacher, said, 'Let's try it together then.' Saed turned back toward the board and stared silently at the problem. Radi prompted, 'What do we do first?' Saed remained silent, but the students and Radi waited patiently. Radi glanced at their faces; they were watching Saed attentively. Some seemed to be willing him to say something.

Finally, the silence was broken when Saed said in a questioning tone, 'Bring the decimal point up?'

Radi replied, 'That's correct! That's the rule we need to remember.' Saed turned to look at Radi to make sure that the teacher said he was correct. Radi nodded his head and noticed that Ola and several other students also nodded their heads encouragingly at Saed. Saed turned back to the board and hesitantly made the decimal point on the division bar in the correct place. He looked back toward his classmates and Radi for approval. More students nodded in agreement now.

Next Radi asked, 'What do we do now?' Saed examined the problem again and, after several moments of silence, he turned toward the students and Radi and replied timidly, 'Divide 8 by 4.' This time there was no need for Radi to respond. Saed's classmates were all nodding and many broke into smiles. Saed straightened his shoulders and his eyes brightened. He placed the answer '2' in the correct place on the division bar and continued. His classmates offered their support and encouragement through each step in the explanation. When Saed arrived at the solution to the problem, his classmates applauded him and he beamed an appreciative smile at them. It was now his turn to select the student who would demonstrate the next problem. He extended his hand holding the chalk and said, 'Maher'.

With a sense of satisfaction, Radi reflected on how he and his class have arrived at this point. His mind drifted back to the first day when he began the journey to build a community of learners.

Comment



Did you notice how Radi gave Saed time to think about what he had to do with the sum? Although he was obviously nervous about making a mistake, Saed answered and the feedback he got did much for his self-esteem. In a school that has caring and supportive interpersonal relationships, children have more positive academic attitudes and values and are more satisfied with school.

Establishing a supportive environment depends not least on you the teacher giving a lead to the children in your class. The way you speak to the children and the ways you plan and organise the room and your lessons give messages about how you do or do not respect them as children and learners.

The next activity asks you a series of questions about the practices and routines that you already have in your classroom and asks you to consider how they might be developed further.

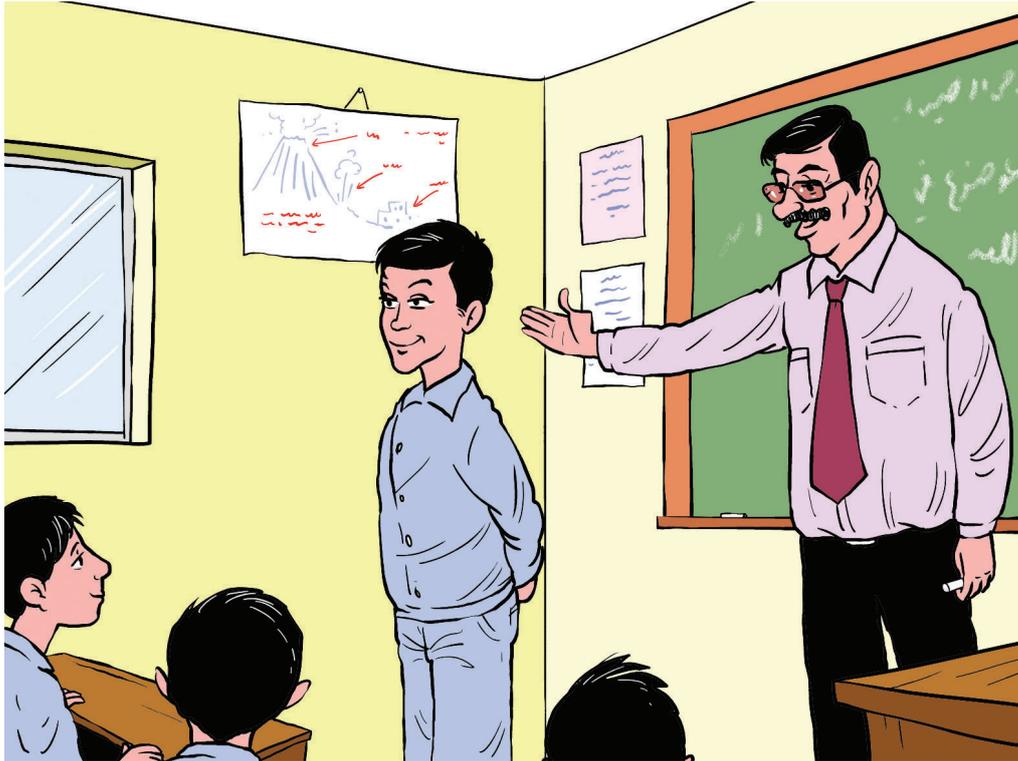


Figure 22: It is important to notice and recognise student achievement.

Activity 13

Think about the routines and procedures you have established in your class. Then look at the questions below and think how they relate to what you do in your classroom. Make a note of your response to each question in your course notebook.



- What are the main routines that you use in your teaching? Why do you use them?
- Do you expect the children to do something while waiting for the lesson to start?
- Do you use working with pairs and groups in your teaching? If so, why? Do the children know how to move quickly into working in pairs or groups?
- Do you have different ways of organising your groups? If so, what are they?
- Do you have routines for clearing up at the end of a lesson?
- Have you talked explicitly to the children about how such routines help them learn? If so, how and why?
- Are there other routines that you would like to introduce into your teaching? If so, what are these? Why do you want to introduce them? How will they help your teaching?



Comment

The purpose of Activity 13 is for you to think very carefully about the routines you have already established and how these contribute to more effective teaching and learning in your classroom. What is important is not to have routines just because you have always done things this way. Routines need to be useful and enhance the learning experience of the children. For example, there is often a period at the beginning of the class when everyone is settling down. You, as the teacher, may need to have a personal word with one or two individuals before starting the full lesson. While waiting, the rest of the class might copy down a 'word for the day' written on the board, or talk to their neighbour about an object you have brought into the class, or you may have put up a question or task for them to do as soon as they enter the class. The same strategy of establishing routines can also be used at the end of a lesson to pull things together and help children reflect on the lesson and their learning. For example, you could ask the class to close their eyes and think about the most important thing they can remember from the last 45 minutes before dismissing them for their next lesson.

Using group work in the classroom is an active way to involve children more deeply in their learning. Understanding how to organise and use groups to maximum benefit is the focus of the next part of this unit. It is important to tell your pupils not only how to move into pairs or groups, but why they are doing it. Sometimes people say that group work is disruptive in the class, but this is likely to be the case only where there are no routines and the teacher is sorting everything out for the first time!

Now read Case Study 14, which shows how Ali used group work with his class and how he helped his pupils understand the expectations he had of them when working in groups.

Case study 14



Ali has a class of 38 children at Jalazone School in West Bank.

Ali had routines to facilitate working in different ways with the whole class – groups (usually of four children) and pairs. At the beginning of each year, with a new class, he introduced the following activity to help his pupils understand what was expected of them when they were working in these different ways.

On the wall he put up three sheets of paper with one of the following headings on each:

- When we work as a class, we ...
- When we work in groups, we ...
- When we work in pairs, we ...



Figure 23: Clear expectations and procedures are important. Involve your students in developing expectations for their behaviour as a class, in groups and in pairs.

He then brainstormed with his class what they should do when working in each of these different ways. For example, they filled the pairs sheet in as follows:

When we work in pairs, we ...

1. listen carefully to the other person;
2. think of ways to help the other person;
3. are prepared to discuss things;
4. take our share of the work;
5. make sure we both understand what we have to do;
6. concentrate;
7. listen to the teacher's instructions;
8. come to joint decisions.

Ali spent a few lessons helping the children become familiar with the ways of working so that when he said to the class to get into their pairs or groups they could do it quickly and quietly, ready to start work.



Comment

Establishing clear procedures, as Ali did, lays the ground for easily organised but active pedagogical classroom methods. Ali was able to use group work, whole class and pair work regularly as it did not take much time to organise his class into their groups or pairs.

The advantages of group work

Good group work can promote active learning as it enhances the opportunities for children to become much more involved in their work. A group is as much a 'community of learners' as a whole class. Research has shown that, in many parts of the world, children in Grades 1–6 spend most of their time either listening to a teacher or writing and reading alone. Given what you now know about active and social learning, you will realise this cannot be the best way to learn! Research has also shown that sometimes children are organised into groups in a token way, that is, they sit in groups but spend most of their time listening to a teacher or working alone. Real group work requires children to work together to make sense of the task set and to discuss and construct their own ideas and solutions to a problem.

Research has shown that good group work can be beneficial in a number of ways. These include improving or promoting:

- critical and analytical skills;
- linguistic development;
- motivation;
- behaviour in class.



Figure 24: Group work allows students to share their learning and ideas in an informal way.

Group work also has social and interpersonal benefits, such as developing empathy, consideration and tolerance of others. It can promote understanding of inclusion (see Module 5), so that children are accepted for who they are and not picked upon or ridiculed for not being part of the mainstream group. If children can work together in a supportive and autonomous way, then teachers are freed from managing behaviour to spend more time in supporting the learning of all the children. If you want to make greater use of effective groups in your class, there are two important issues to consider.

1. Group size

Groups can range from as small as three children per group to as many as you wish, but remember that the larger the group, the less the participation of each child within it. Research suggests that groups of four are the optimum for producing the most interaction within the group but groups slightly bigger can be as effective if you take time to brief children about expectations, as Ali did in Case Study 14. Using pairs and combining these with other pairs to make a larger group was suggested in Unit 1. The advantages of pairs and small groups are that they:

- are simpler for children to work in;
- help build confidence;
- are good for encouraging young or shy children to interact;
- are good for practising decision-making and achieving consensus.

The advantages of larger groups (containing four to six children) are that they:

- are good for genuine problem solving;
- make investigations more authentic;
- facilitate the bringing together of a wide range of views.

As noted above, groups larger than six can be less effective in promoting learning. They might be necessary in a drama or musical activity, but are less effective as an aid to learning across many topics. Big groups are more difficult to organise and some pupils usually fail to engage in the task.

If you are using group work for the first time, you need to plan your lesson carefully and think how you will organise the children into groups. Make sure you give clear instructions to the children about what they have to do. Make the task something that most of them will be able to participate in, such as sharing all they know on a topic in a group brainstorm. At the end of the lesson, give the children feedback on the outcomes of their brainstorm and ask them how well they think they worked as

a group, linking back to the 'ways of working' that you discussed with them earlier. You might also give them more guidance on how to improve their effectiveness in a group, so that next time you use groups their work is more focused.

2. Group composition

There are a variety of ways you can set up groups. You could let the children choose who sits together. You could select groups according to ability or task. If you are working in a school with boys and girls in the same class, you might want to have a gender balance in each group.

The best person to organise regular working groups is probably the teacher, especially if you are organising the group work around children's learning needs. In that case, you might put children with similar needs together and give them different tasks depending on their needs. You could put a more expert child within a group to provide support and guidance to those who are not so confident. This does not hold the more expert child back, but helps them explore their own understanding more deeply as they explain ideas to others in the group. Leaving group composition up to free choice is likely to 'exclude' some children. For much of the time you will want groups that show a balance of abilities in the subject or topic area. You will want to make sure that certain children are fairly distributed across the class. A newcomer, for example, might gain particular support from one group. There is also the wider inclusion agenda; the teacher has an important role in ensuring all children are engaged in learning.

Groups need to develop a range of routines and procedures in order to work effectively and keeping the same groups provides a much stronger basis for this.

The way groups function

Giving groups a clear brief or instruction about what they have to do and/or what you want them to find out is important. It is crucial to check that all group members understand their brief, including what resources they have to help them. They also need to know how much time they have to do the work and they may need guidance on how to work as a group, for example appointing a leader and a note-taker.

After working and completing the task, the groups will need to be debriefed about what they achieved and how they worked together as a group.

Below is a diagram that shows the cyclic nature of the briefing and debriefing process.



Figure 25: The cycle of briefing/debriefing

Children should discuss and think explicitly about how they work in groups. Children need to understand, for example, what a 'briefing' is and to remember the focus of the briefing during the group work. You might, for example, put the main instructions – what they are to do and what outcomes you expect – on the board. Later you can use this to lead a debriefing session. Ask the children to think about whether the groups worked as the briefing suggested. If not, why not? What could be done more effectively next time? Their suggestions should be used the next time you do group work. Thinking about the functioning of the group is as important as the setting of the curriculum tasks, which we will come to shortly.

Case study 15

Hasan teaches in Al-Rimal school in Gaza.

Hasan decided some years ago that certain topics in the curriculum of Grade 4 Arabic were best supported by group work. For example, there was a literacy activity where the children were told the beginning and middle of a story and then they worked in groups to create an ending for the story, which they then shared with the class.

Hasan had an established number of topics where he used groups but he liked to keep control about the way the groups were organised. So he:



- established the groups at the beginning of each semester;
- always gave special attention to the way the groups worked at the beginning;
- had made a 'ways of working in groups' poster, which was always on the wall (see below).

Ways of Working in Groups

1. Listen carefully to what others say.
2. Do not talk until the previous person has stopped speaking.
3. Give respect to everyone's ideas and opinions.
4. Help the group to formulate ideas for sharing with the others in the class.
5. Respect the group leader.



Figure 26: Find different ways of expressing classroom expectations.

These five rules, Hasan felt, were very important when the children were working in groups and he kept returning to them when he did the briefing and the debriefing. He felt he was contributing to the development of the children's interpersonal and social education, as well as building their confidence in curriculum areas.

Comment

Developing a code of practice (like Hasan's poster) is a good way to help children be better at and benefit from working in groups. Making it part of a permanent display in the classroom allows children to look at it at any time and think about the expectations. It acts as a point of reference if anyone is not cooperating, and it helps in the early stages of using group work to establish the routines you want to set up.



The next activity asks you to try out a group work session with one of your classes. As you plan, think about group size, group members and how you will introduce this way of working to your class.

Activity 14

Try to do the following activity with a class you are teaching this week. First make a plan. In your plan, you will need to include:



- a discussion topic you think will work well in groups;
- how to divide the class into groups (not less than three, not more than six);
- how to brief the groups on what they have to do and how the groups should work.

At the end of the group-work activity, debrief the class about what they have been learning and how well the groups worked.

On the basis of this experience, design your own code for working in groups and make a copy of it in your course notebook.

Ways of using group work

You can use group work in a variety of ways and for very different time spans (for example from a five-minute 'start the lesson' activity up to a whole week's work). There is no one way of working with groups. It is a creative task for you, the teacher, to match the type of group work chosen to the particular curriculum purpose. Here are some examples.

1. Quick group activities: designed to last no more than 5–10 minutes; these are often used at the beginning of a topic, for example:

- Arabic: brainstorming examples of adjectives at the beginning of the lesson.
- Science: for speculating why the moon changes shape from a disc to a crescent.

2. Collecting information: groups have the job of collecting and collating information, for example:

- **Mathematics:** to examine the concept of probability, groups roll two dice a number of times and note down the sum of the numbers; they then tally these and draw graphs.
- **Social Studies:** groups collect descriptions of the local environment, using key words such as 'landscape', 'vegetation' and 'buildings'.

3. Sharing information: children share with their group some previously prepared information, such as a story or their views on a particular issue.

- **Arabic:** pupils share views on books they have read recently.
- **Mathematics:** pupils share views on how to set about solving a problem.

4. Peer helping: children help each other (best in pairs or fours), for example:

- **Mathematics:** pairs of children work together on alternate maths questions; they then come together and swap the problems they have worked on.
- **Physical Education:** a more experienced ball player shows less experienced peers how to develop their skills.

5. Collaborative creation: children are brought together and asked to create something new, for example:

- **Dance/Drama:** pupils create a performance that expresses thunder and lightening.
- **Arabic:** pupils write a poem that uses alliteration and metaphor.
- **Pupils make a class book about a topic they have studied.**

These examples can be used with all grades. Further examples that might be better used with higher grades are listed below:

1. Group debates: pupils exchange views on a topic.

- **Social Studies:** pupils discuss how the local environment can be improved.
- **Arabic:** setting up a structured debate with pupils adopting different standpoints.

2. Group problem solving: pupils work together to make decisions about a problem.

- **Mathematics:** pupils decide how to measure the area of the playground.
- **Science:** pupils speculate which of a number of objects will float or sink, and why.

3. Group projects: pupils are engaged in a longer-term task with a shared outcome, for example building a working model of how the arm bends.

Activity 15

Now choose a topic that you will be teaching in the next two weeks where you think it would be appropriate to use group work for some of the time. Consider the ideas in this double unit and use your course notebook to plan the topic, including:

- the way you will use group work and why it will be used for this curriculum purpose;
- how you will ensure the groups understand how they should work as a group.

When you have taught the topic, think carefully about how the lesson went and how well the children worked together. What effect did the group work have on what the children learnt? Were they more interested in their work? Did they ask questions? Use your course notebook to write down your thoughts about how the lesson went and how you know that the children learnt more. How would you improve doing group work next time? Think about how you explained what the children should do. Could you improve your organisation of the lesson, for example?

Arousing curiosity, assessing previous knowledge and supporting learning

Having explored group work, this unit now explores how creating an effective active learning environment is often just about making basic teaching skills work more creatively and imaginatively. You will be asked to consider the type of things you normally think about and use when teaching. How could you make the opening of a lesson more interesting? What is the best way to structure explanations? If the children do not understand what they are expected to do in a lesson or activity because you have not given them clear instructions or insight into what they are trying to learn, then they will not be able to participate actively in the learning community. To start this exploration about arousing curiosity, read the next case study, in which Sawsan was starting a topic on insects. As you read, note the different strategies she used.





Case study 16

Sawsan was going to teach a Grade 5 class about insects. When she had taught the topic last year, she had relied primarily on the textbook. She found the children were quite interested in the topic. Insects existed all around them and it had been possible to draw on their knowledge in discussions of the topic. But this year Sawsan thought she could do better and wanted to make the lesson more interactive.

She decided to plan the opening of the topic around three things. She wanted to:

- arouse their curiosity;
- find out in more detail what the children already knew;
- tell the children what they would be covering in the two weeks they would be studying the topic.

To arouse curiosity she remembered a science fiction story that had been made into a film. In the story, the sun had one day turned a shade of mauve. During this day, the sun's rays had shone down on all the insects of the world and made them grow much bigger, bigger than humans. She decided she would tell this story, remind the children how many insects there were in the world and then ask them to imagine what the world would be like if this really happened. The main aim of this would be to help the children think about just how many insects there were and how many different species there were. The children would have to use their imaginations in thinking what a world with enormous insects would look like. The children thoroughly enjoyed sharing their ideas of a world of such large insects!

Next, Sawsan tried to find out what the children already knew about insects. To do this, she asked them to work in pairs. They had to think about and write down everything they knew about insects on a piece of paper. These ideas were then shared with the whole class.

Sawsan was pleased at what the children already knew and used this to plan the next sessions in more detail so that they became familiar with local insects and the general characteristics of insects.

Comment



Sawsan's use of the story to engage children's interest and arouse their curiosity had the desired effect. The telling of the story did not take much time out of the lesson and the rewards it brought in terms of motivating the children were well worth the time. Capturing children's interest in a topic and how best to learn about the topic needs careful thought and planning.

There are many ways that you can start a lesson, from talking about the topic to using pictures, drama, poetry, stories, music or inviting an expert in to talk to the children. It is important to vary the strategies you use so that the children's curiosity is aroused. The next activity asks you to think about a lesson you are going to teach and how you might arouse curiosity in the topic.

Activity 16

Think about a topic you will be doing with a class in the next two weeks. As Sawsan did in Case Study 16, use your notebook to write down:



- how you plan to arouse the children's curiosity about the topic;
- how you are going to explain what and how they will be studying in this topic.

You will need to think about what to use. For example, a picture, a story, music or some other kind of stimulation may gain the children's attention and arouse their curiosity. Think about how you will explain your aims for the lesson and introduce the children to the subject matter again so that they want to learn more.

Teach the lesson and then use your course notebook to reflect on how well the children responded to your introduction to the lesson. How well did your explanation go? How do you know this? Did the children understand better what was expected of them in this lesson? How do you know this?

Good teachers are good at explaining things. This is not a skill you are born with! It has to be thought about and practised. Explanations help us to understand a variety of things including:

- concepts, such as what we understand by 'density' or 'prejudice';
- cause and effect, such as rain being caused by the cooling of the air;
- procedures, such as how to convert a fraction to a decimal;
- purposes and objectives, such as what you are expected to have learnt at the end of a topic;
- relationships, such as why flies and bees are insects, but spiders are not;
- processes, such as how a machine works.

These are the main, but not the only, types of explanation that you might use as a teacher. It is easier to become a better explainer when you know the main features of the explaining process. These are discussed below.

1. Keys

What are the 'explanation keys' that help unlock understanding? A key may be a central principle or idea, or a generalisation. For instance, if someone were describing a recipe for making an omelette, then the notion of 'heat' would be important (too little heat and the omelette does not cook; too much and it burns!). It is not too difficult to think of other keys when making an omelette, such as taste, texture and health.

These 'key' ideas will vary according to what you want the children to know and understand. In teaching it is very important to be able to sort out the really important ideas from the facts that describe them. This process has been compared with the idea of a tree. The main trunk is the really central key concept (understanding) that you want children to learn. The big branches are the major keys to developing that overall understanding. The leaves or pine needles are the small facts that help you build the understanding of the key ideas. It is important to make sure that your explanations focus on the trunk and branches and that the leaves do not obscure this.



Figure 27: A thought tree breaks down topics into a central concept (trunk), major key information, (big branches) and small facts (branches or needles).

In preparing an explanation, you need to think about what you will do to gain children's interest, how you will explain and sequence the ideas and what kind of voice you will use to do this. First, we will think about the voice, as this can be greatly underused or misused, which can have a negative impact on the children's interest.

2. Voice

The voice of the explainer is important – is it pleasant and well modulated, or flat and tedious? Does the teacher shout? Does the teacher make eye contact as he/she explains? Good teachers use a change of voice to give messages about the explanation.

See, for example, how one teacher explained what volcanoes are, by telling a story about one of the world's biggest volcanic explosions, Krakatoa, in 1883.



Figure 28: The way a teacher explains ideas and concepts is critical for student understanding

'And do you know,' she says,

'A whole island was blown into pieces.'

[pause] '... people just disappeared.'

'The debris from the explosion went high [gesture with hands towards the sky] into the sky.'

'And what was really interesting,' [pause]

'... was that the dust from Krakatoa went up into the Earth's atmosphere and circled the world giving deep red sunsets for many years to come.'

'Now let me ask a question.' [pause]

'Why do you think the world's sunsets became so red?'

The teacher here uses questions, structure, gesture, her voice and pauses to aid the explanation. She probably also used facial expressions to enhance her explanation. Communicating information goes beyond just saying the words. As you plan your explanations, think about how you can maximise the impact of what you say by the way you use your voice and other communicative strategies.

3. Sequence

It is important to think about the sequence of key points in your explanation. For example, it could be useful to write up key words in advance or perhaps to have a sequence of posters. You might also use the textbook to guide the children and explain ideas so that they understand the difference between key ideas and facts and the sequence in which they need to think about them. But if you are using the textbook, remember that your purpose as a teacher is to explain in an active way what can only be set out passively in a textbook. You need to take the explanation in the textbook and explain it in a more dynamic way. This will make the children more curious and interested than they would be from just reading the textbook. A child's mind, or any of our minds for that matter, does not always follow the sequence that a textbook author has set out, any more than we ever use the manual for a computer or electronic gadget by reading it through from the first to last page. Some of the most passive teaching is when the teacher merely follows or reads the textbook through. Active teaching is much more than that!

A great deal of good teaching is spontaneous. The teacher uses the children's ideas and answers to questions to build an explanation. But good teachers still plan in advance. For example, a teacher preparing a topic will need to think about at least three levels of planning:

- What is the general purpose of the activity?
- What are the keys to the explanation?
- What strategies can be used to help the children understand the keys to the explanation?

Case study 17



Suraya was introducing the topic of volcanoes to her class. She planned the topic, which would last about four teaching sessions over the week, in the following way.

The main idea she identified was that the Earth's surface has been caused by 'cooling' but that weak spots still exist, which cause volcanoes.

Next she decided on some key ideas or concepts to include in her lessons, which included 'crust', 'magma', 'pressure' and 'plugs'. She made cards with one of these words on each and put them around the classroom.

Suraya then planned an opening explanation. She decided to bring in a pan of milk that she had heated just before the lesson. She would put the pan on her desk and get the children to describe what happens when milk cools. This would be a question/answer brainstorming session and she would put key words about cooling on the board; she would ensure that 'crust' or 'skin' was one of them.

She decided then not to do further explanation but to arouse the children's interest more by telling them the story of Krakatoa. She had a map of the world to show where Krakatoa had been. She also had a book with 'eyewitness accounts' of what had happened at the time.

Suraya's lesson went well. The children were fascinated by the milk and the story really caught their imagination.

Comment



You can see from this case study how it's possible to put ideas and facts in place without necessarily immediately showing the connections. An explanation can be more powerful if the connections are made slowly, rather as a detective puts the clues together to solve a crime.

As you move into the topic, the children may make connections themselves – always the most effective way of learning. By not providing connections, too, soon you allow the process to happen. The children can do this together, in pairs or groups, as a 'community' of learners. But you can only allow a limited amount of time for this. If you have to go further into the explanation, then remember that there are four essential features when explaining concepts:

- **Labels or names:** the actual words used to name a concept (for example 'crop', 'reptile', 'electricity').

- **Attributes:** these are either 'must have' attributes, which are essential to the concept (for example wings are a 'must have' attribute of birds) or 'may have' attributes (for example the colour brown may only apply to some birds).
- **Examples:** these are either actual examples that meet the criteria (for example pigeons are examples of birds) or non-examples that help define the actual criteria (for example dragonflies are not birds).
- **Rules:** the full definition, listing the 'must have' attributes and their relationship to each other.

For example, if you imagine you were teaching something about insects, the four essential features might be as follows:

Name or label:	Insect
Attributes:	Must have six legs, head, thorax, abdomen, two antennae, and wings. May live in a desert habitat; may have a black or brown body and stripes.
Examples:	<p>Beetle:  Wasp: </p> <p>Not examples: scorpion (arachnid), snail (gastropod)</p>
Rules:	<p>Insects have six legs, a head, thorax and abdomen, two antennae and two or four wings.</p> 

Table 5: Help children identify ways to present information.

Activity 17



Choose a topic you will be teaching in the coming two weeks. In your course notebook:

- Name the topic, for example 'Insects'.
- List the keys to explaining this topic to the children.
- Describe how you are going to introduce this topic in an interesting and imaginative way.
- Write down three questions you could ask to find out children's previous knowledge and to arouse their interest.

- Describe how you will teach the topic after the introduction.
- Describe how you intend to finish the topic.

Then teach the topic in the way you have planned.

When you have given this lesson, evaluate how it went by answering the following questions:

- How successful was your introduction? Would you change it when you next teach the topic? If so, how?
- How successful was your teaching of the topic? Give an example of one active learning approach that worked well.
- Would you change the 'keys' to explaining the topic next time you teach it?
- Was there any particular aspect of the topic that a considerable number of children found difficult? If so, how could you change your teaching strategy next time to address this difficulty?

Make a note of your responses in your course notebook.

A final word: there has been quite a bit of research on children's attitudes towards teachers. For example, children like teachers who do not shout! Children also like teachers who explain things clearly and who are patient in giving follow-up explanations, particularly if the child does not follow the first or second time around. So explaining is a really important part of teaching, it needs thinking about explicitly and it needs careful preparation and planning. It is important to think about the ways, through questions and other activities, that you can make explanations promote active learning. Are the children just listening passively to you all of the time or are they expecting to become involved? If it is the latter, then you are creating the sort of active learning environment that will support children's learning and development.

Summary

This double unit is called Building successful communities of learning. Such a community can be a small group or pair as well as a whole class. We have seen how good-quality 'explaining' creates a bond of confidence and understanding in such communities. And we also looked in some detail at how having small communities of learners can help make teaching and learning much more active and engaging.

If you have already been working in this way, we hope that this double unit has helped you reflect on your practice. If you are just beginning to introduce methods



other than whole-class teaching, then we hope that the unit has demonstrated ways in which this could be done. Group work is not effective if it is rarely used. Children must learn and talk about how groups function. The teacher must take a lead. A greater variety of class grouping allows children to become more involved in the way they learn. This can only be a good thing for their future educational careers, and life generally.



Module 2 Unit 8

Celebrating learning success

Introduction

Well done! You have nearly reached the end of Module 2. Doesn't that make you feel good about your progress?

Everyone feels a sense of well-being when they are praised. This can be a small moment, such as a teacher telling a child how good a drawing is or the praise at the beginning of this unit. There are also bigger moments, such as going up on stage to receive a prize or your degree certificate. The cumulative effects of all these small and big moments go a long way to building our self-esteem. We know now that self-esteem is very important to successful learning. Schools and teachers that are successful at building their own and their children's self-esteem are usually the best schools and teachers.

What is self-esteem? It is about having a clear understanding of who you are, what your place in the world is and what your strengths are. Educational researchers have tried to identify the ways good self-esteem can be created. The following are some of the component parts:

- Personal safety; freedom from physical harm.
- Emotional security; the absence of fear.
- Identity; knowing who you are.
- Affiliation; a sense of belonging.
- Competence; a sense of feeling able and capable.
- Personal direction; the sense of where your life is going.

Education has not always been good at building self-esteem. There are many stories that could be told to show this. For example, in the past, some students would avoid walking in the same street as their teacher. Some teachers, if they saw one of their pupils playing in the street, might assume that child spent too much time playing rather than working and would criticise his/her work in class. Children who are physically or mentally frightened of teachers are not good learners. Some children often lack a sense of belonging in a school because of the way the teachers do not respect them or speak to or about them. And many children

can sit through the day hoping to evade the teacher asking them a question that reveals their incompetence or incomprehension.

The environment for building self-esteem in a school can often be very different to that of the home. Think for a moment of your own children or children in your wider family that you know. They often, especially when they are in the younger age group, have things they show their families when they arrive back from school. This might be a drawing they have done, or some work they have brought home. The responses from parents and family members are nearly always positive, such as 'Well done!' They might follow up with some questions or comments, but the initial reaction builds success and represents a small moment of celebration and affirmation of the child that they are respected and making good progress as a learner.

Schools are not always like that. Studies of classrooms show that some children can work for a long time (even weeks) without having a meaningful conversation with a teacher and without receiving any feedback – let alone positive feedback – on their work. These studies also suggest that very successful children and struggling children receive a lot of feedback of very different kinds. Those children in between are often less fortunate. They often fall into a category of being 'satisfactory', neither good nor bad! But satisfactory is not normally part of the vocabulary that we use with our own children. The language is often more celebratory, at least for most children.

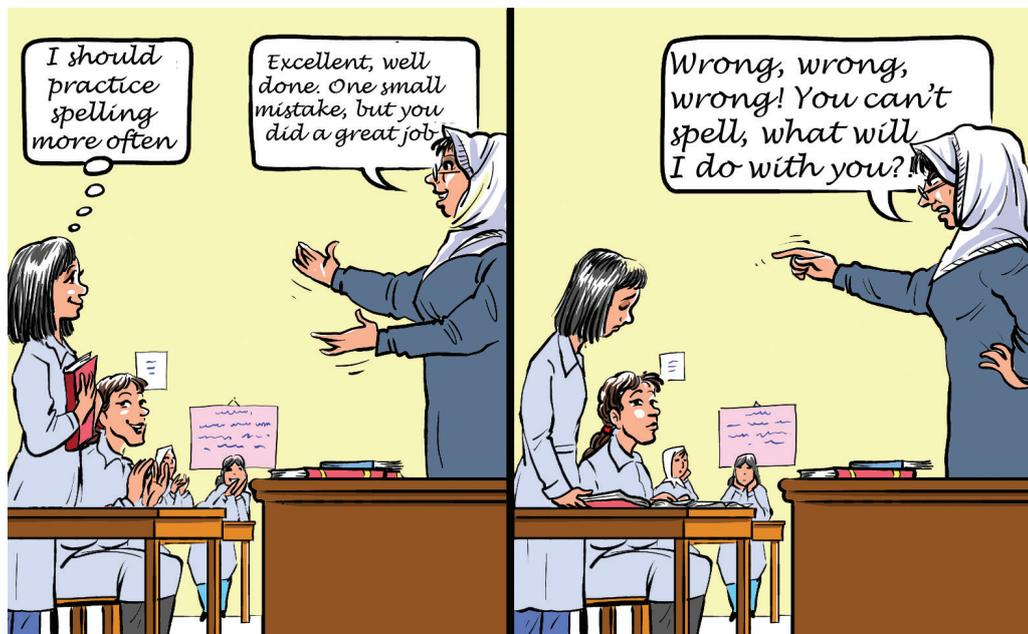


Figure 29: The way a teacher gives feedback is important, and has a strong effect on student motivation. Positive yet constructive feedback is best.

This leads to a question. Why is the language of achievement in schools so different from that used in the most supportive homes?

As stated above, there are, of course, homes in which there are few moments of positive celebratory feedback. But for many children in that unfortunate situation, the feedback in school might be equally negative or absent. The focus of this unit is to explore the reasons for such behaviour and to suggest alternative ways of speaking to colleagues and children in order to raise expectations both for children and teachers.

Teacher development outcomes

In this unit we will talk about raising self-esteem and creating opportunities for all children to succeed. By the end of this unit you will have increased your knowledge, understanding and skills in:

- developing, at a school and class level, an inventory of ways of celebrating pupil success (individually and collectively);
- carrying out, at class and/or school levels, activities to implement diverse ways of celebrating pupil success.

Building self-esteem

Having talked in Unit 5 about how teacher's perceptions of ability impact on the child, it is important to explore how to develop children's self-confidence and belief in themselves as competent learners. As was discussed earlier, our ability and intelligences are much more diffuse and varied than 20th-century ideas suggested. Human beings are born to learn! Their intelligences can be developed and extended by careful nurturing and good teaching. Research has shown that children have an inbuilt orientation to learning, which includes the factors listed in the box below.

Learning orientation

- A belief that effort leads to success.
- A belief in one's ability to improve and learn.
- A preference for challenging tasks.
- Satisfaction from personal success at difficult tasks.
- Enjoyment in solving problems.

So, as a teacher, you need to work with your colleagues to develop an environment that sees children as willing learners, capable and interested in the world around them. The environment should acknowledge what children can do and build on this, rather than focus on what they cannot do



Case study 18

Wahid is in his third year of teaching.

Wahid had recently read a book that included a chapter on making the classroom environment more positive about children's achievement. At the end of the chapter, the reader was asked to make a list of the ways in which the classroom could build self-esteem. Wahid made the following list:

1. *Children need to learn how to listen carefully to each other.*
2. *Children need to learn to be supportive of other children's ideas.*
3. *Children need to play games and participate in role play to foster caring for each other and cooperation.*
4. *Children need to learn to be proud of their classroom environment.*
5. *Children need to look forward to being welcomed at the beginning of the lesson.*

He then thought about how he could help his class to achieve these outcomes and to develop a more supportive classroom environment. He always stood at the entrance to his class at the beginning of the day, but did not speak much to the children as they arrived, so he decided he would try to speak to them more. The next day, as he stood at the entrance to the classroom, he said 'Good morning' to each child and made some other comment such as 'Did you have a good sleep?' 'How are you today?' 'I hope you are well.' The children looked surprised and many smiled with delight, even some of the children who were reluctant about coming to school.

Wahid decided that as a next step he would make a place on the wall in the classroom to display the children's work to celebrate their achievements.

Comment

Wahid shows how a simple action can change the reaction of a child to a normal event in a positive way. Obviously there are many other things that Wahid could do to develop the self-esteem of his pupils, but he had taken the first step. You could make a list of things you would like to do and then prioritise these in an order for implementation. The important thing is to make a start and not to try to do too much at once. Work on one or two strategies at a time so that you and the children become comfortable with them.



What small steps and changes could you make in your classroom? The next activity asks you to think about this.

Activity 18

Wahid wrote his list of how to build his pupils' self-esteem from the point of view of the child. This was a good idea for the children, but it is also important to consider what you can do to help build your pupils' self-esteem. Make a list of ten strategies that you could use in your classroom to help your pupils feel more confident about themselves. It might look something like the following:



- *I need to develop strategies to encourage children to listen carefully to each other. This will include playing games that involve listening but are also fun and encourage children to have a go.*
- *I need to use praise more often in class. This will include saying 'Well done' or 'Good try' to children who give an answer for the first time.*
- *I need to ...*

Write your list of ten into your course notebook, identify one that you would like to start with and describe how you will do this. Put it into practice this week. At the end of the week, write down how well you thought it went.

Positive self-esteem is the core of successful learning

Jerome Bruner, a famous social psychologist and educator, was very clear that self-esteem was crucial to learning. In his book *The Culture of Education* he said:

Only two things can be said for certain and in general; the management of self-esteem is never simple and never settled, and its state is affected powerfully by the

availability of supports provided from outside. These supports are hardly mysterious or exotic. They include such homely resorts as a second chance, honour for a good if unsuccessful try, but above all the chance for discourse that permits one to find out how or why things don't work out as planned. It is no secret that school is often rough on children's self-esteem, and we are beginning to know something about their vulnerability in this area.

Any system of education, and theory of pedagogy, any 'grand national policy' that diminishes the school's role in nurturing its pupils' self-esteem fails at one of its primary functions. The deeper problem - from a cultural-psychological point of view, but in a workaday common sense as well - is how to cope with the erosion of this function under modern urban conditions.

(Bruner, J. 1996. The Culture of Education. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.)

Bruner's last point about the difficulties of nurturing self-esteem is an important one. In small schools, perhaps in rural areas, teachers may have more time for nurturing individual self-esteem. In larger schools with larger classes and many different classes in a day this becomes more difficult, so if a teacher wants to make changes then it must be planned for. For example, in a large class, teachers sometimes keep a record of when they spoke individually to each child and what they said. This shows them which children they have missed. It is particularly easy to overlook a quiet child getting on with his/her work, especially when there are so many who may need your attention because they are struggling, misbehaving or do not understand what to do.

Children who do consistently well do deserve praise, and they tend to get this more easily than those who are not doing so well. However, every child deserves recognition. In the unit on expectations (Unit 5) we talked about the danger of classrooms becoming hierarchies of praise, with the highest achievers receiving a lot and the low achievers receiving little or none. Now read Case Study 19 to see how Najwa, a Grade 1 teacher, developed a very interactive teaching style with her class.

Case study 19



Najwa teaches a Grade 1 class in Gaza.

Najwa was working on a number topic with her class. She gave each child a number from one to nine and asked them to make a drawing of it. Then she asked the

children to think of a story about numbers and they brainstormed some ideas. One child had a very good idea. 'Why not imagine the numbers as people?' he said.

Najwa thought this was a wonderful idea. She asked the children to work in pairs. Each pair was given a number and she asked them to make up a character for the number. Together they worked on this, giving Najwa plenty of time to talk to most of the pairs, make suggestions and give praise for the ideas they were having.

Eventually they agreed a character for each number. For instance, number 9 was always angry and never smiled. Number 4 was always happy.

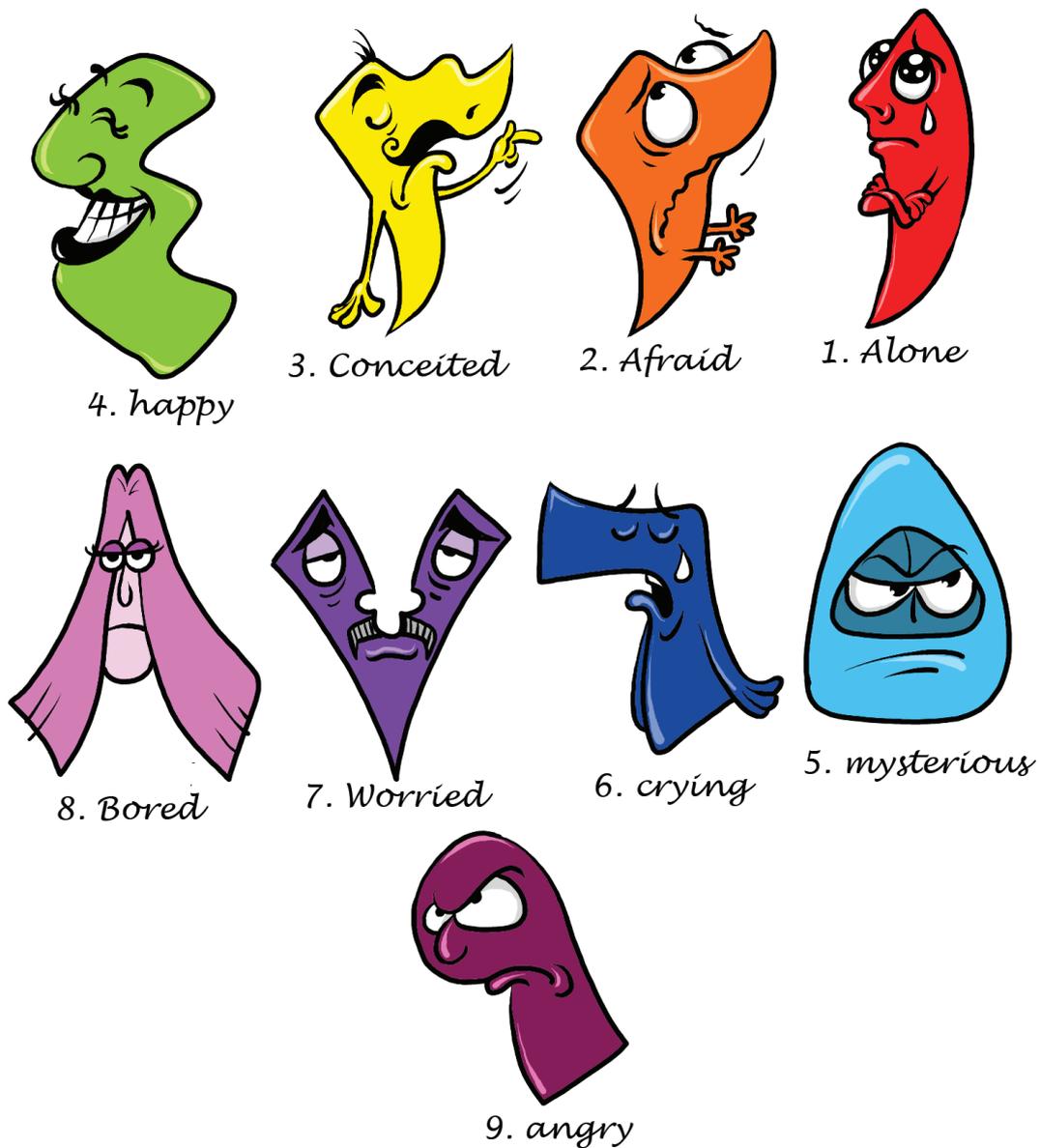


Figure 30: Think of imaginative and innovative ways to present material to students.

Then Najwa suggested they make a story from the numbers and characters. You can imagine how this aroused the children's imagination and creativity. It also helped them to become accustomed to number. The story they all thought was the best was one about the numbers quarrelling because Number 9 wanted to come before Number 7 when everyone counted!

Comment



In the case study above, Najwa was not only creating an inspirational teaching strategy, she was also creating a context and a class management style that allowed her to interact positively with most (if not all) of the children on a pair or individual basis. As she talked to the children, Najwa was able to ascertain how well they were able to articulate their ideas and how well motivated they were by the task. By setting up this more open-ended task, Najwa was giving the children responsibility for their own learning, and enabling all of them to participate in ways that matched their abilities. She also noted how much more confident some of her pupils were becoming, especially those who often found learning more challenging, as she felt they were much more interested and involved in the task. Some were contributing ideas in ways she had not seen before.

Thinking about individual children in a class context

Teaching requires you to think about the class as a whole and also the individuals within it. This is not always easy, particularly with larger classes. The skilled teacher balances working with the class as a whole with creating time to give attention to individual children. This is especially important in terms of giving individual children positive feedback. A child is much more likely to go home and tell his/her family the teacher praised him/her than to tell that the whole class was praised.



Figure 31: A good teacher makes time to give individual feedback to students.

To do this, you need to value the importance of giving individual attention in developing a child's self-esteem, and plan how you might do this. There are many ways, such as keeping records of children's achievements, identifying particular help they might need and planning where in the sequence of forthcoming lessons you can do this. Working in the way Najwa did, by encouraging the children to work together and support each other, frees you up to focus on children as individuals. You will concentrate on this in the next activity.

Activity 19

Choose a lesson you are about to teach. Plan it in a way that will allow you to move around the class to have individual conversations with some or most of the children about their work. Give praise or encouragement wherever you can. As you do this, note down the children's names, what you talked about and any suggestions you made to help them with their work.



After the lesson, write up the list of names and your comments in your course notebook. Then think about the following questions, making notes in your course notebook as you do so:

- Were you able to talk to most of the class individually?
- What proportion of the comments you gave were positive/gave praise?
- Are there any children in the class who often miss out on positive feedback? If there are, how do you think you could change this?

You will be following up your responses to this activity later in the course but they will also inform the next stage of this activity.

Now you should take the ideas of Module 2 about learning-focused classrooms and apply them to your usual lesson planning process. Plan a lesson in your normal way. When you have finished, write a short commentary under the following headings:

- How I planned this lesson to ensure all children were actively involved.
- How I planned this lesson to maximise the positive feedback I could give to children in the class.

Write the lesson plan and your commentary in your course notebook. Take particular care with this response, as it will be needed in completing your portfolio assignment for this module and so will be followed up later.

Teaching for success

Good lesson planning creates opportunities for all children to succeed. As tasks become more challenging, some children may struggle, so it is important that in the early stages of doing an activity the feedback for most children is positive. Even when it becomes more difficult for some of them, it is still possible to praise children's efforts. If it does not seem possible, then there is a need to change the teaching strategy. It is important to teach for success, not failure. Praising children for effort and encouraging them about the progress they have made so far will help and encourage them to continue and try harder.

In preparing this unit, we looked at the lesson plans of a number of teachers, many of whom provided the opportunities for children to succeed, as Najwa did in Case Study 19. One lesson plan struck us as being especially creative. The teacher was working with a Grade 2 class. Her topic was the differences between animals and plants. She knew that all the children would have enough experience of animals and appreciate that they have the same basic common features, such as eyes and ears and that they can see, taste and smell. She decided to teach them more about plants, with which they were less familiar. This teacher's subject knowledge was good. Her notes were as follows:

- *Animals lay eggs or have young while plants reproduce by producing seeds or spores or reproduce vegetatively, that is, they produce replicas in some way.*
- *Some plants reproduce by sending out runners to root and grow into new plants (e.g. strawberries); new plants can also be grown from cuttings taken from a mature plant (e.g. olive trees).*
- *Animals and plants feed but most plants make their own food through photosynthesis; animals, directly or indirectly, feed on plants.*
- *Many animals feed directly on plants but some who are higher in the food chain feed on plant-eaters.*
- *Animals are more mobile than plants, but plants do move as they grow; some flowers (e.g. sunflowers) turn to always face the sun.*

These subject knowledge notes were the equivalent to the 'keys' to understanding the topic that we talked about in Units 6–7. This teacher had written these points out explicitly to take into school and use during her question and answer session

to help keep her questioning focused on the learning intentions of the session. The teacher had also made two resources to pin on the classroom wall – a list of vocabulary and a list of questions.

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| • <i>animal</i> | • <i>plant</i> |
| • <i>alive</i> | • <i>living</i> |
| • <i>breathe</i> | • <i>feed</i> |
| • <i>grow</i> | • <i>reproduce</i> |
| • <i>die</i> | • <i>similarities</i> |
| • <i>differences</i> | |

- *Can I see it?*
- *Can it talk (make a noise)?*
- *Can it hear?*
- *Can it feel?*
- *Can it eat?*
- *Does it need water?*
- *Can it move?*
- *Does it have babies or lay eggs?*
- *Does it have roots?*
- *Does it live forever?*



Figure 32: Visual displays of content and relevant questions provide anchor points for students' understanding.

You can imagine the discussion the chart of questions would create around the similarities and differences between animals and plants. These are simple questions, not the open-ended ones that we talked about in Module 3 Units 10–11, but they will elicit answers from the children that give the teacher the opportunity

to respond 'Yes, good!' This teacher highlights the importance of using good and appropriate questioning skills to encourage children to think more.

When this teacher taught the lesson she had planned, she helped to prompt the children's answers by bringing in a plant in a pot and having a picture of a donkey on the wall so that, as she questioned them, the children had resources to look at to promote their thinking. After the question and answer session, she pinned up two simple outlines of a plant and an animal. The children were then invited to come up and write words that described the plant's or animal's features inside the shape.

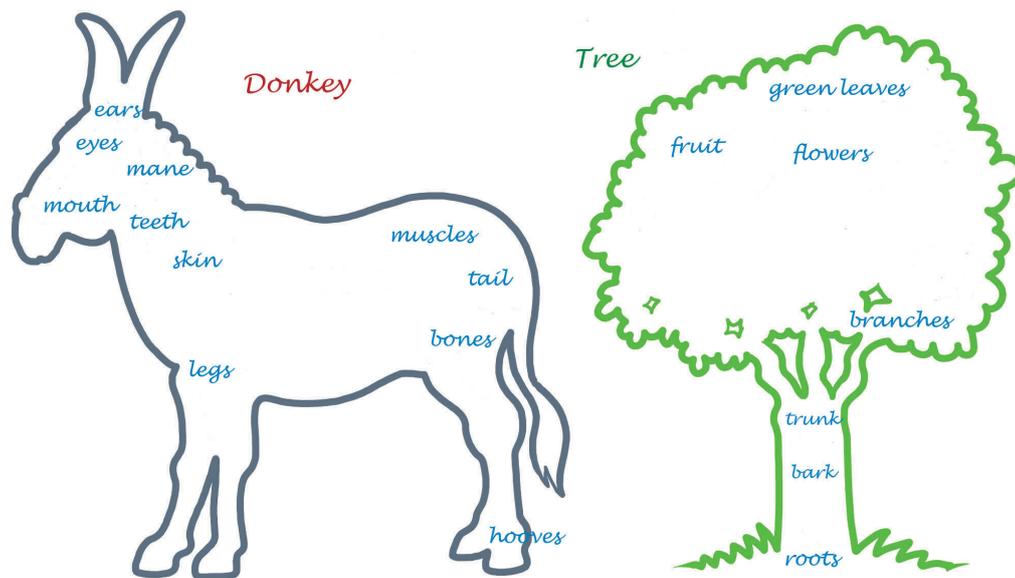


Figure 33: Interesting and appealing presentation of learning content can have a positive impact on student engagement and understanding.

Throughout this lesson, the teacher had tried to involve her pupils in a variety of activities to stimulate their interest and focus their learning on looking at difference. Because she planned and structured the lesson so well, she helped most of the children to participate well and was able to praise them for this.

Summary



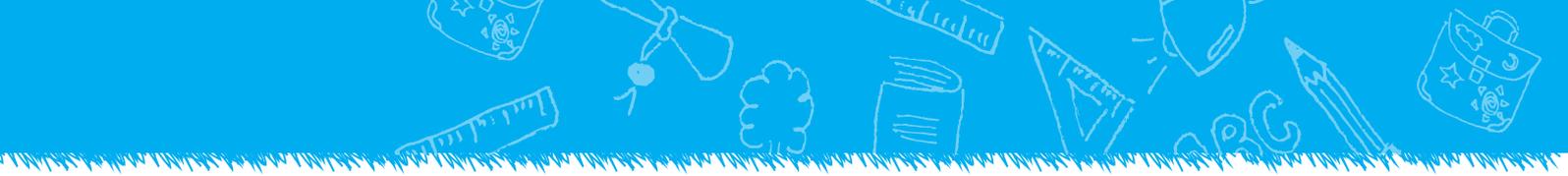
The lesson plans described in the case studies and the text of this unit all promote active learning and use strategies that would allow all, or most, of the children in the class to receive positive feedback about their contribution.

There are many similar activities you could try. In another lesson plan we saw, a teacher had done a lesson on 'spot the insect' to help children understand that animals can be sorted into groups. He had drawn cut-outs of different animals and used these in a similar sort of question and answer session to that described

above. Children then drew a picture of a rural scene with ten insects in it. The children then swapped their drawings with each other and tried to find the insects.

There are hundreds of creative ideas you could apply. The important thing is to plan for all children to be actively engaged and to have opportunities to receive positive feedback. To achieve this, you need to use a variety of teaching and learning strategies. Whole-class teaching is one important approach – provided you hold the class’s interest and attention – but pair work and group work are also important because they allow children to verbalise and construct their understanding and allow you to give constructive feedback to individuals or small groups to encourage them. Celebrating the children’s achievement and success in a lesson should be a regular feature at the end of that lesson.

By celebrating learning success, by making sure that as many children as possible receive positive feedback, we are doing more than effectively managing the classroom. You are helping them to become more confident in themselves as learners and as people who are respected and valued. This will serve them well throughout their education and into their later life.

A decorative border at the top of the page features various school-related icons in a light blue color. From left to right, the icons include a ruler, a pencil, a book, a tree, a pencil sharpener, a pencil, a ruler, a pencil, a pencil, a pencil, and a pencil. The icons are arranged in a slightly overlapping manner.

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