Supplementary Notes 2

Catering for learner diversity in the senior secondary English classroom

[Supplementary notes to Chapter 4.6 **Catering for Learner Diversity** *in the English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4-6)(CDC & HKEAA, 2007), pp.101-103]*

Learner diversity is a challenge to the majority of teachers teaching English to senior secondary learners. To cater for learner diversity, different strategies can be adopted at the school, subject and classroom levels so that all learners can move forward along the learning continuum.

Some common strategies at the school level include streaming of learners according to their English abilities and arranging small/split class teaching for English lessons while those at the subject level include organising English remedial and enrichment lessons on top of the regular English lessons, adapting the English curriculum and setting different requirements for English tasks/assignments. However, these arrangements and planning will not have any substantial impact on learners unless effective strategies are used by teachers at the classroom level to address learners' varied abilities, interests and learning styles.

1. **Varying the input and output**

When engaging learners in English learning tasks, teachers can vary the input and output in response to learners' progress and learning styles in order to enhance their engagement as well as motivation, and ultimately, their learning effectiveness. It is important that learners in the same class are assigned the same task. Varying the input is providing learners with the same learning content but giving different support to help them complete the task. The support can be provided in the form of exercises but different learners may be given different types or amount of exercises. Varying the output is allowing learners to decide to what extent the task is accomplished. It is by no means lowering the expectations on some learners by assigning them fewer or simpler tasks. For example, teachers can assign all learners a core task followed by different extended activities which are designed with a multiple intelligence orientation. Learners are given autonomy in the choice of the extended activities in order to draw on individual learners' strengths and further stretch their potentials.

2. **Varying questions in terms of language and cognitive demands**

In order to sustain the motivation and interest in the learning process, learners need to be given opportunities to respond to questions which are reasonably challenging but yet within their grasp. To address the learning needs of learners in the senior secondary English classroom, teachers can use questions which vary in terms of language and cognitive demands to cater for learners'

different English proficiency levels and cognitive abilities. These questions refer to those used for daily interactions with learners in tackling learning tasks as well as those set in task sheets at different stages of learning. Teachers may make reference to the revised Bloom's Taxonomy in designing questions of different cognitive demands. For example, for English tasks which require learners to read one or more texts and solve a problem, questions involving lower cognitive abilities such as extracting explicitly stated information as well as higher cognitive abilities such as making connections among various sources may be set. On the contrary, questions that require higher order thinking processes such as justifying a decision and writing a personal reflection may be set as an optional activity to challenge learners to achieve deep learning and develop metacognitive capabilities. These learning activities typically entail fully operational mastery of the language, substantial world knowledge and a good command of language development strategies. However, it is crucial for teachers to provide support through strategic scaffolding such as paraphrasing the questions and giving quality feedback during the learning and teaching process to enable the weaker learners to tackle the more demanding questions.

3. Employing flexible grouping strategies

Types of grouping strategies include whole class, pair/group (e.g. homogeneous and heterogeneous) and individual. When adopting these strategies, teachers are advised to take into consideration learners' preferences and the nature of the tasks. Learners usually have their own preferences in terms of grouping. Some derive more satisfaction from individual work while others fare best with pair or group work. Teachers can also decide on the group configuration based on the nature of the tasks to bring about best results. For example, introducing new information/concepts and wrapping up the lesson to the whole class does not only save time but also establish a sense of community for learners. Individual activities like intensive reading, self-evaluation and note-taking can cater for individual learners' progress. Brainstorming and information gap or jigsaw activities, which are usually done in groups or pairs, can promote peer learning and enhance learners' engagement. Employing flexible grouping arrangements, together with well-designed activities and tasks, can cater for learners of different styles and stages of progress.

4. Providing timely feedback

As learners of different stages of progress and learning styles are expected to acquire knowledge and skills at their own pace, constant feedback, both verbal or written, should be given based on the performance and progress of individual learners to help them set their own learning goals and improve further. Examples of teacher and peer/self assessment forms, sample script with teacher's feedback and suggestions on how to provide feedback or comment on learners' writing are provided on pages 8-24 in Supplementary Notes 3A on Assessment *for* Learning.

References

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