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 one

developing active pedagogies

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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.

Introduction to Module 1 Developing Active Pedagogies

Unit 1. Creating a variety of active teaching and learning strategies

The first unit in Module 1 begins by examining how the role of the teacher and the way they work has developed over the years and what impact this is having on children's learning and achievements. The notion of learning being an 'active' process is at the heart of this unit and module. It asks teachers to examine what they currently do in their classroom through reflective exercises and then provides, through Case Studies and activities, a range of interactive strategies such as brainstorming, working in pairs and group, to make their teaching more active and engaging for children.

Unit 2. Exploiting the local environment as a learning resource

This unit looks beyond the classroom to the local physical environment and to the community a srich resources to enhance the active nature of teaching and learning in school. The Unit's Case Studies and activities focus on different ways to use local resources such as using the school grounds to develop children's mapping skills, having experts from the community share their expertise with the children and stimulate their thinking and broaden their outlook.

Unit 3. The learner-centred, educationally stimulating, classroom environment

This unit looks at how teachers can manage and organise their classrooms so that it is more interesting, stimulating and supports children's learning and builds their self-esteem. It examines different ways to organise classroom furniture, to use the walls for displays to stimulate interest and promote thinking. The unit discusses how to include the children in brightening the classroom environment.

Unit 4. Developing professional knowledge and skills

This unit explores the ideas and beliefs behind Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers. It examines how important it is for teachers to be open to new ideas and ways of working, and to always strive to improve their understanding of teaching and learning towards ensuring that more children are actively engaged in learning and gain in self-confidence. Through the case studies and activities teachers are introduced to ways to reflect on their practice such as, sharing ideas and planning with colleagues to try out new ideas and thus build up communities of practice where each teacher supports and helps the other teachers.

Creating a variety of active teaching and learning strategies

Introduction

Welcome to this School Based Teacher Development (SBTD) course, which can help you develop and improve as a teacher. Like other professional occupations (architects, lawyers and doctors, for example) teachers need to keep abreast of new ideas and developments. These may relate to subject knowledge or to your pedagogic practice (the way you teach). For example, you may need to explore how Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) offer a range of new approaches to teaching and ways of organising your classroom.

In all areas of the curriculum there have also been significant pedagogic changes. For example, in the teaching of languages, there is now a much greater focus on developing 'communicative' skills that involve far more interaction between you and the children, and between the children themselves. The contemporary teaching of mathematics and science gives increased emphasis to investigations and problem solving in order to develop children's scientific understanding and ways of thinking and acting scientifically. Similarly, across the curriculum, new and important topics, such as human rights and globalisation, have gained more importance and require the development of new pedagogic strategies. Using different ways of working in your classroom will support these new approaches and will help children gain a deeper understanding of the subjects and issues relating to these topics

To reflect this, we have seen a change of emphasis towards children being more actively engaged, both physically and mentally in their learning. This has been driven by developments in our understanding of the way the brain functions in the learning process. The old idea about each of us having a fixed intelligence has been discarded. It is now thought that we are not born with one predetermined intelligence, but given the right conditions and school is an important condition we are all capable of learning a great deal more than was previously thought possible. Your role as a teacher is, and has always been, to do your best for the children learning in your class(es) and to help them achieve their full potential.

The importance of this 'active' learning, which includes children carrying out investigations, problem solving, and asking and answering their own questions, has come increasingly to the fore in recent years. Talking about ideas and engaging cooperatively with others in carrying out tasks makes children more effective learners. However, if you have a large number of children in a small classroom, perhaps you will think that the more passive approaches, such as children sitting quietly in rows listening to the teacher, appear to have advantages. And, indeed, some children will progress under this approach. But many others will not. The evidence suggests that it is possible, even with large classes, to develop more active approaches to learning. As a result, children's achievements improve, but these approaches also provide a good foundation for learning later in life. Most jobs in the future will require you to be flexible, capable of learning 'on the job' and able to apply new knowledge quickly and effectively. Just think about the changes in communication technologies over the last two decades and how you have had to respond. This sort of adaptability will be needed in most jobs, and schools have an important responsibility to ensure all children will have the necessary capabilities. Although these are not necessarily new ideas, they have not always been fully recognised in many schools and educational systems. Therefore, this unit looks at what you understand by active learning and how to develop it in your classroom.

Teacher Development Outcomes

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

- awareness of the links between active pedagogic strategies and improved children's learning;

- understanding and ability to use more active pedagogic strategies, such as pair work, to promote meaningful interaction between children.

The teachers participating in this programme have a variety of backgrounds and experience. Some of you have taught for many years, others have more recently become teachers. Some of you may already be confident with some of the approaches and activities that this course considers, and it will be important for you to share this experience with other teachers. Remember the age-old saying 'the best way to learn is to teach'. But even the most experienced teacher can refine and improve his/her practice. It is hoped that the ideas presented here, even if you are familiar with them, will stimulate you to do this.

The first activity asks you to spend a short time reflecting on your own classroom practice.

Activity 1

Think about your usual classroom practice, that is, what you usually do when you are teaching. In the chart below are 15 statements about actions and approaches. We want you to tick one of the five boxes for each statement. The boxes range from 'Very often' on the left-hand side to 'Very rarely' on the right. So, for example, if you decide, having read statement 9, that you very frequently ask children to bring in information to help your teaching of subject areas and topics then tick the box on the left ('Very often').

As you work through the statements, think about why and when you use the approaches listed. Also, think if there are any approaches that you don't use often. If so, why do you think this is?

After you have done this, read the case study that follows. This will build upon your own reflection of what you currently do in your classroom.

Look at your answers and notice whether they are mostly at either the 'Very often' or the 'Very rarely' side of the table, and think about the kind of classroom you have. Would you say the results indicate that you have a moderately active classroom or a more passive classroom?

Teacher self-assessment for active learning: Checklist

Please put (✓) under the suitable heading alongside each approach.

Action/approach	Very often 1	Often 2	Some times 3	Rarely 4	Very rarely 5
1. Children are highly involved in class activities and tests.					
2. Children share their ideas with each other and me.					
3. Children can relate new concepts to their own lives.					
4. Children work in small or larger groups when solving problems.					
5. Children use a range of resources to help them try out their ideas e.g. making models.					
6. Children prepare with a partner or team before sharing ideas with the class.					
7. Children debate issues and viewpoints.					
8. Children develop ideas, using a variety of library and other resources.					
9. Children collect information that extends across subject areas or links topics.					
10. Children suggest possible problems that can be addressed.					
11. I help children to explore, extend and connect their ideas.					
12. I give support for solving problems, but do not give away the answers.					
13. I relate new information or problems to what children have already learned.					
14. I ask questions that encourage children to think.					
15. I provide diagrams or pictures to make information clearer.					

Table 1: Teacher self-assessment checklist

Comment

The checklist in **Activity 1** *was designed to open up your thinking and discussion about your classroom practice. There is no precise response that is right or wrong. If you*

replied 'Very often' to all 15 statements you might be seen as a 'super teacher'! You would not expect any teacher to be doing all those things very frequently. However, if all your responses were 'Very rarely', then perhaps your teaching style is too passive and you are not providing enough opportunities for children to actively engage in learning.

Now read **Case Study 1**, which describes one teacher's class practice when doing some science. Sami was keen to use more interactive teaching and planned this lesson to involve all the children at a level that they could understand.

Case Study 1

Sami teaches the third grade in Karmel School.

He planned that the children, as part of the science curriculum, would learn about concepts of domestic and wild animals. The day before the lesson, he asked them to bring some pictures of animals that live in their area for the science class. He also found some pictures, as he knew that not all the children would be able to bring in a picture.

In the lesson, he asked some of the class to tell him what they knew about these animals and then he asked others what they wanted to know about the animals. Many of them wanted to know about their life cycle, their habits, how to look after them and what they eat.

Sami divided the class into groups of four students each and asked them to classify each of the animals into one of two groups:

- Animals we keep and use in different ways e.g. for meat, milk and travel.
- Animals we don't keep or use.

He worked two examples with the students, putting the answers on the blackboard. After that, he gave each group a large piece of paper, on which he had drawn the outline of a table (see below). Sami asked them to classify the animals into two groups by placing each picture on one side of the table and writing the animal's name next to it.

He gave them 15 minutes to do the activity and asked them to choose one person to act as the group spokesperson to explain to the rest of the class what they had done. They recorded their answers in the following way:

Animals we keep and use	Animals we don't keep or use
Goat	**Lion**

Table 2: Help children to categorise.

As the children worked, Sami moved around the groups listening to their discussions, supporting and encouraging them, answering questions, observing their progress, and giving feedback.

After 15 minutes, Sami asked each group spokesperson to stick the group's answers on the wall and then explain their ideas to the whole class. As they did this, Sami helped to facilitate any questions from other children. He highlighted any differences in ideas between groups and helped them agree on their answers where necessary.

He then asked students to suggest a name for each group of animals and listed their answers on the board. Some of the children had used the word 'wild' for those that are not kept or used. But no one had used the word 'domesticated' and so Sami gave them this word to use for those animals that are kept and used.

Comment

*Sami, the teacher in **Case Study 1**, was doing something good teachers do instinctively. He could have just stood at the front of the class and told the children about animal classification. But he knew it would be much more meaningful to adopt an active approach to the learning. He used a fairly simple idea and way of working to allow children to share their own ideas and develop their understanding of wild and domesticated animals together. He knew that they would learn more from each other than from him, as many children in his class had more experience of working with some of these animals than he had.*

Look again at the checklist from **Activity 1**. Which approaches do you think Sami used?

Understanding the value of active approaches to teaching and learning

Why is there so much emphasis on 'active' learning today? The answer to this question has a number of facets. First, there is increasing evidence from psychologists and brain scientists that we learn more effectively when we have to actively participate in the learning process. Think about these two possible scenarios in your own professional learning.

Scenario 1: You go to a lecture theatre and someone lectures you on the use of investigations in the classroom.

Scenario 2: You have a short lecture on investigations. Then, working with another teacher, you devise an investigation to use with your class. Each pair of teachers then shares their plans with everyone else. The whole group discusses the different merits of the approaches adopted.

You can see that Scenario 2 is a much richer, more active teaching approach than Scenario 1. Recent research suggests that different parts of our brain work together to try to make sense of the world. All the time we are trying to put together the 'connections' that make for understanding. All of us have had the experience of puzzling over something for a while and then suddenly the pieces fall into place and you can see clearly what is meant, you understand, you have learnt something. In the language of 'learning theory' you have 'constructed' knowledge. That is why language is so important in learning. You often need to be able to have a dialogue with someone to help you make the connections and construct knowledge. In one sense, this is something teachers do all the time. The process of asking questions creates a form of dialogue that structures learning. One of the most gratifying experiences for a teacher, after he/she has asked a child a number of related questions, is when the child suddenly says, 'Oh, now I see!' or 'Now I understand!' Your interaction or activity has helped him/her to learn.

Active learning means giving each child as many opportunities as possible to participate fully in the learning process. Of course, this makes demands on you as the teacher. You have a whole class to deal with, not just an individual child, and so you need to develop and use a range of teaching or pedagogic strategies to achieve this. One strategy is to organise children to work in pairs or groups so that they can share ideas and help each other to understand what they are trying to learn. As the children work, you can move around the class listening to what they are saying to each other, and questioning them if they are struggling to understand or are stuck. They may want to ask you questions to help their thinking. You may

also often stop the whole class to explain something or to ask an individual child to share something he/she has done. It is clear that whole-class teaching can be an important part of the active learning approach. However, if you are *only* using whole-class teaching where you front all lessons, if some children never have the chance to talk about their learning, then the evidence shows their learning achievements will be limited. There are research studies that show the classes of teachers who use a variety of pedagogic approaches outperform those of teachers who only use whole-class teaching.

A second reason why active learning is so widely accepted and advocated now is rooted in a human rights dimension. Children need to be given the very best opportunities to achieve in school. Their life chances depend on this. As an UNRWA teacher, you are familiar with the concept of children's rights and you will be committed to providing quality teaching that enables children to achieve their full potential. You want them to be confident, innovative, questioning, thoughtful, tolerant, open-minded people, upholding human values and religious tolerance, proud of their Palestinian identity and contributing positively to the development of their society and the global community. These are big ambitions, but the seeds of personal development are planted in the home and in the school.

Look now at **Case Study 2**.

Case Study 2

Kifah teaches Arabic to sixth grade students at UNRWA Akka Elementary School.

She decided that the class would do a project on water. She knew that her class was studying water in their science class and she agreed with Reem, the science teacher, that she would use that theme for teaching Arabic.

Kifah decided to begin the topic with a brainstorming session. She wrote the word 'WATER' in the middle of the board and then asked the children to put up their hands with ideas and words that they think about when they hear the word water. She wrote down all their answers without making any comment until there were no more answers. Before she asked the children to talk about the ideas, Kifah checked that all the children knew what the words meant and encouraged them to share their ideas about meanings of words to help each other.

She then asked the children to look closely at all these answers and discuss with their neighbour whether they could link all the different ideas together and, if so, how. She gave them ten minutes to talk and then asked some of the pairs to give her one example of the links they could make or themes they could identify. She

showed the links on the board using a different coloured chalk to link the words. All the children actively engaged with this. As the lesson proceeded, Kifah began to identify themes that were emerging to the children. These included:

- Uses of water.

- Dangers from water.

- Cultural beliefs about water.

- What water is like.

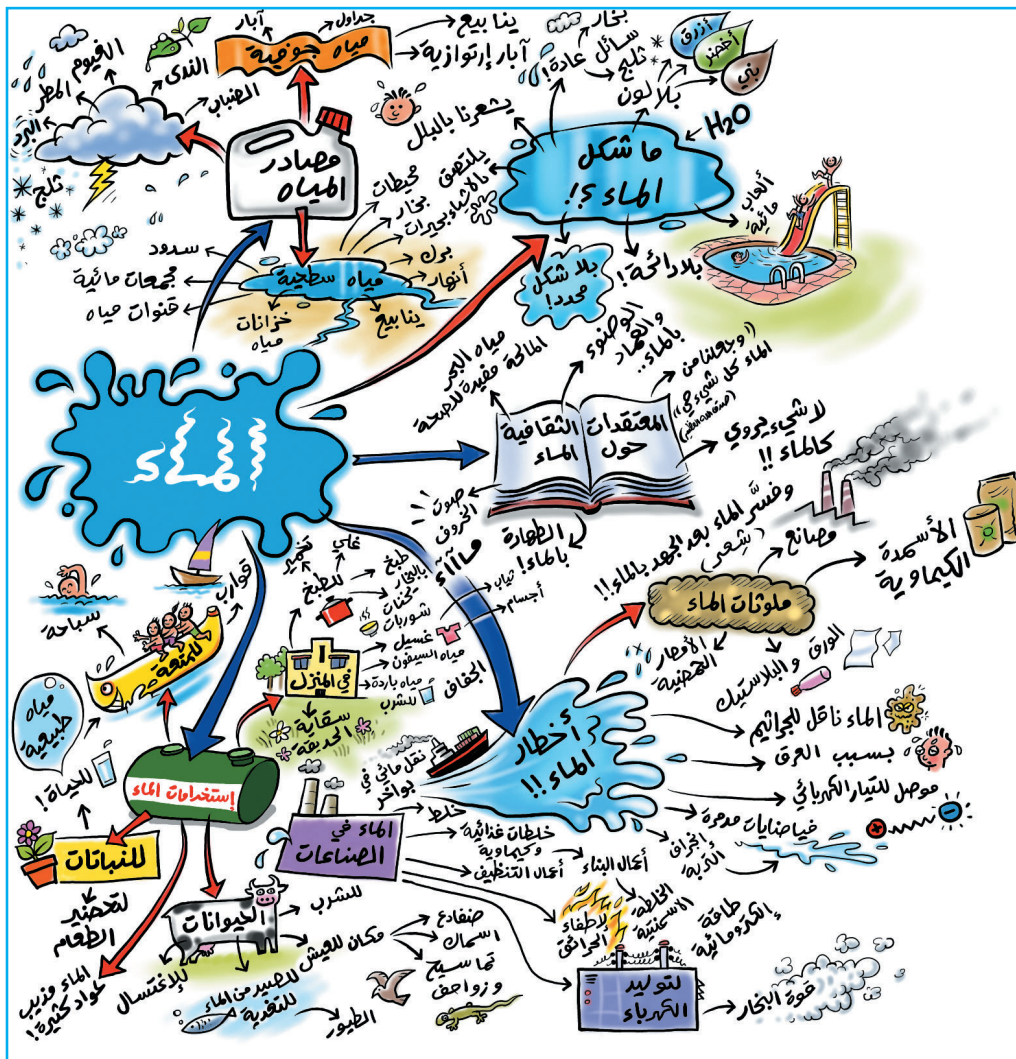- Sources of water.

Figure 1: A class brainstorm can find what students already know.

Next, Kifah asked the children to work in pairs to choose one of the themes and to write a short story based around that theme. Again, she checked the children's understanding of terms and together they shared words and phrases that could be used to describe the different features and characteristics of water.

Comment

You might like to think, and discuss with other teachers, how Kifah might have continued that lesson or series of lessons. She had given them a good start! The brainstorming helped to start the children thinking about a new topic and gave the teacher some insight to the kind of knowledge the children already had about water and the vocabulary that they used. From this, it was possible to draw out themes that could provide an outline for a series of lessons to explore the children's understanding of water and their vocabulary. Brainstorming can be used in many different ways at different stages in a lesson and during a topic. Read the attached resource **Using mind maps and brainstorming to explore ideas** *to give you more information on what they are and how to organise them with a class. There are several approaches listed here for you to try. As you become more experienced and confident in using these approaches, you will adapt them to suit your teaching style and your current class's needs and interests.*
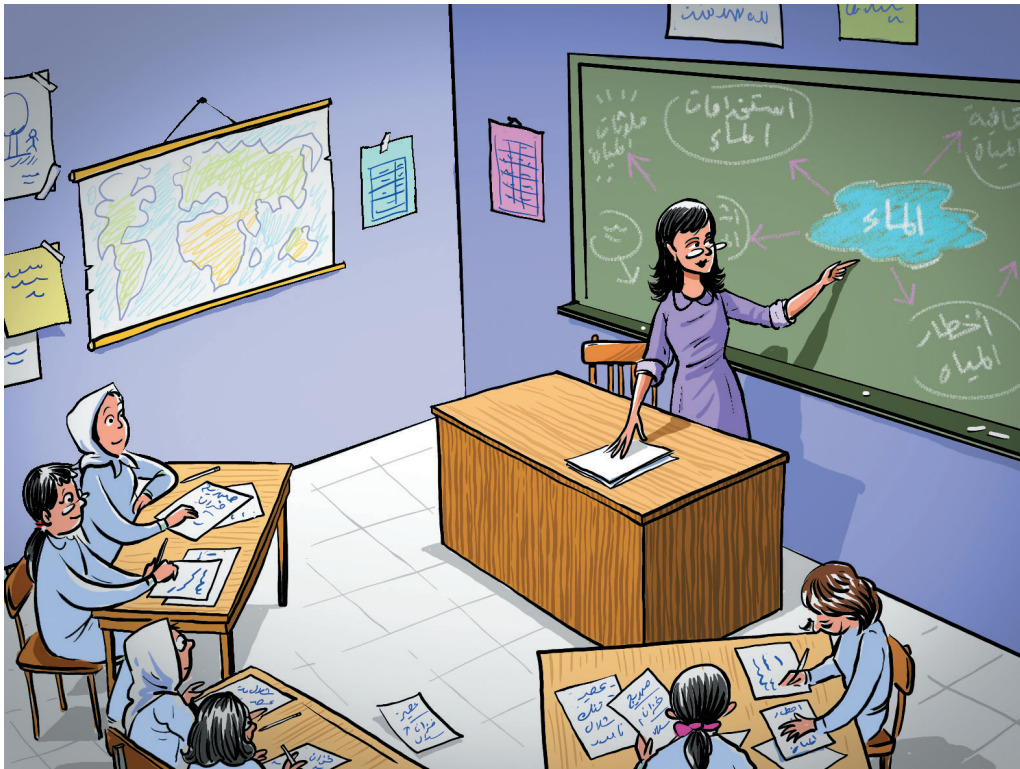
Figure 2: A brainstorming session enables all students to play an active part.

Using pair work

In **Case Study 2**, Kifah used pair work as the follow up to the brainstorming. This can be an especially useful way to work if you are teaching a large class and/or have restricted space in the classroom. It is important to think about the way the pairs are formed. For some activities, like the story task that Kifah set, the pair might be

two friends or the pair that normally sit together in the class (A pairs). For other tasks, such as number work, you might have children who are confident working with numbers pairing with those who are less confident (B pairs). Sometimes it might be the more confident children who make a pair so that they can move forward faster (C pairs); this can allow you more time to work with the pairs needing more structured support to help them grasp the ideas and concepts being taught.

You can see that there are three options for pairing here. One teacher, when she got to know her class, created A pairs, B pairs and C pairs corresponding to the three types of grouping listed above. Depending on the task she has planned for pairs, she tells them, 'It's now B pairs today' and the children, knowing the routine, move into B pairs (you could use numbers or names instead of letters for the pairs).

The same teacher also uses a 2 x 4 technique when pairing. This means that the children work in pairs to do a task and then the front pair turns to the pair behind or next to them and forms a group of four. They then share ideas and together carry out the rest of the tasks set by the teacher.

Combining pair work and group work in the 2 x 4 approach has many advantages for you and the children. Firstly, it is easier to manage. Secondly, and more importantly, it ensures that every child has to participate and engage from the beginning. This helps develop what some people have called 'deep' learning, that is, it's not superficial learning where children are just copying something from the board or memorising facts, unsure of what they mean. The process of constructing understanding the key process in the child's learning is significantly helped by discussion. The more the child talks and listens, the more ideas begin to form in his/her mind.

Putting children into pairs or groups requires you to be organised and clear about how to do it and about the purpose of the groups. The tasks need to be relevant to what you want the children to learn and your instructions to them need to be clear. The Resource **Using group work in your classroom** will help you think through the value of using groups and give guidance on how to plan and organise your lesson to provide a stimulating learning experience for your class.

Activity 2

This activity asks you to plan and teach a lesson that uses brainstorming as an opening to the lesson. The brainstorm will give you insight into what the children already know about the topic. Choose a topic that you are going to teach very soon. Here is what you need to include in your plan:

- The title of the topic being studied.

- How you will explain to the class about what a brainstorm is.

- How you will do the brainstorm. Will the whole class do it together with you writing their ideas on the blackboard or on a large piece of paper? Or will you have different groups each doing a brainstorm and then putting these on the wall for everyone to look at?

- What sort of themes you hope the brainstorming will bring out from the children. (Note: you can use questions and other prompts, such as pictures, diagrams or music, to guide children towards certain themes and ideas.) Make a list of the themes that could emerge.

- How you will end the brainstorm lesson. What will you say to the children about how you will use their ideas for the next lesson?

- How you will follow up on the themes identified. You will need to plan a series of lessons to develop the themes and the ideas within them. Which theme do you think should come first, which should follow next, and so on to the end of the topic? You should use a variety of pedagogic strategies to promote meaningful pupil communication. These strategies might include pair and group work, debates, drama, investigations, writing, problem solving and drawing.

Write down this lesson plan in your course notebook with your follow-up ideas for the themes, and decide when you are going to teach this lesson.

After the lesson, you will need to reflect, perhaps with a colleague, how it went. Did the brainstorming process bring out the key ideas? Were all the children engaged in the brainstorming? How much did the brainstorming achieve in terms of children's involvement, interest, ideas generated and outcomes of the lesson? Are there any strategies that could be used to ensure greater engagement? For example, could each child be asked to write down some brainstorming ideas before you begin the class activity? Could the children work in pairs first to write down three things each? If some children were not engaged, how could you involve them more another time? Note down your ideas, so that you can refer to them the next time you do a brainstorm session.

Summary

In this first unit, we have looked at the rationale for a more active approach to teaching and learning; how it improves learning and prepares children to manage their own learning more and more as they grow older, a life skill essential for the 21st century.

Many of you are already using more active approaches, and it is hoped that this course will help you become even more effective and to share your ideas with others.

This unit has focused on ways of grouping children and using brainstorming as two strategies to make your classroom practice more interactive and engage children more deeply in their learning. It has included information to help you plan how you might begin to use these ways of grouping children. As you try out these approaches, you will find your own ways to modify them to help the children learn better.

There are many other ways to make your classroom more interactive, such as using the local environment as a resource (see **Unit 2**) and making the classroom itself a more stimulating environment for the children (see **Unit 3**).

As you try out some of these ideas and extend your skills, you will see the change in your students as they become more interested in topics and subjects. They will begin to think more deeply about the world around them and how it works, begin to raise their own questions and want to learn more. As they do, they will become easier to manage because they are fully involved and because their confidence in their own abilities will grow.

Finally, as a teacher, you have a responsibility to the children to reflect upon your own professional practice in the classroom continually, to ensure it is really supporting and encouraging the learning of all the children in the class. This notion of continuous professional improvement is an important principle around which this school-based course is structured.

Exploiting the local environment as a learning resource

Introduction

Learning, as you discovered in **Unit 1**, is a very active process. It requires the learner to engage with ideas and in activities that stimulate thinking and develop understanding. Your role as a teacher is to provide situations that will encourage deeper learning. One important way of creating a more active learning environment for children is to look beyond the classroom. The physical world around your school is a rich environment that can be used in many ways to support teaching in all areas of the curriculum. It can provide the stimulus for many topics. For example, if you were doing classification exercises in science, you might look at pictures of local animals or plants that would be familiar to the children. The local environment can provide both the context and content for your topic. If you are teaching about 'place and space' to young children, a mapping exercise around the school would help children realise how to represent buildings and roads on the map. If you wanted to look at environmental problems in the local community, such as litter or rubbish, you could use the children's knowledge of the local area to discover where such problems exist. On the human side, families provide a highly interesting source of stories and histories.

Local people can be brought into your school to give talks or explain their jobs; these might be doctors or health workers, plumbers or computer experts. You will have to carefully manage introducing outsiders into the school, but this is a good way of establishing school and community links. Such experiences always fascinate children, particularly if the person is also a parent or relation of someone in the class.

Using the local environment is not something that you will do all the time, but something that you should consider frequently when doing your lesson planning

Teacher Development Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- carry out an audit of the way in which different resources from the local environment can be used in a range of curriculum areas;

- plan and carry out a teaching project exploiting the resources of the local environment.

To start you thinking about how you can use the environment in your teaching, read the case study below.

Case Study 3

Raghda was planning to teach a topic on mapping and using signs and symbols to her Grade 3 class. She told the children that, on their way to school the next day, they must try to observe six distinctive things on their route. She held a whole-class question and answer session on what she meant by distinctive things. For example, she talked about the difference between fixed buildings (such as a school) and moving objects (such as a bus). Raghda told the children she wanted them to notice permanent, not moving, things.

The next day, the children listed the six things they saw, drew a picture of each thing and cut the pictures out. Raghda wrote out four labels that said 'From the north', 'From the east', 'From the west', 'From the south' and then placed each label in a corner of the classroom. She divided the class into groups according to the direction they take to school by asking the children to move to that corner of the classroom. She then asked each group to sort out all the objects they saw into the order they saw them, starting with the object furthest from school. There was much discussion about the drawings and what they were, as well as deciding which pictures the children were going to use if they had more than one picture for the same object

Raghda then pinned a large sheet of paper on the wall with the school marked in the middle and a north point on the sheet too. She explained that the different lines that she had drawn on the map represented the routes and directions the children walk to school. She asked two children from each group to come out and stick the pictures from their group in the correct order of their route to school. Raghda asked the children to look at all the objects listed on their 'Routes to school by grade 3' map and see if they could classify the objects into types e.g. road signs, advertisements, buildings etc.

She made a list of all their suggestions and they discussed how these different types could be shown by symbols. The children agreed that the symbols should be simple and clear and represent the object as much as possible. They agreed a set of symbols to use, and Rahgda drew these on the board to use in the next lesson.
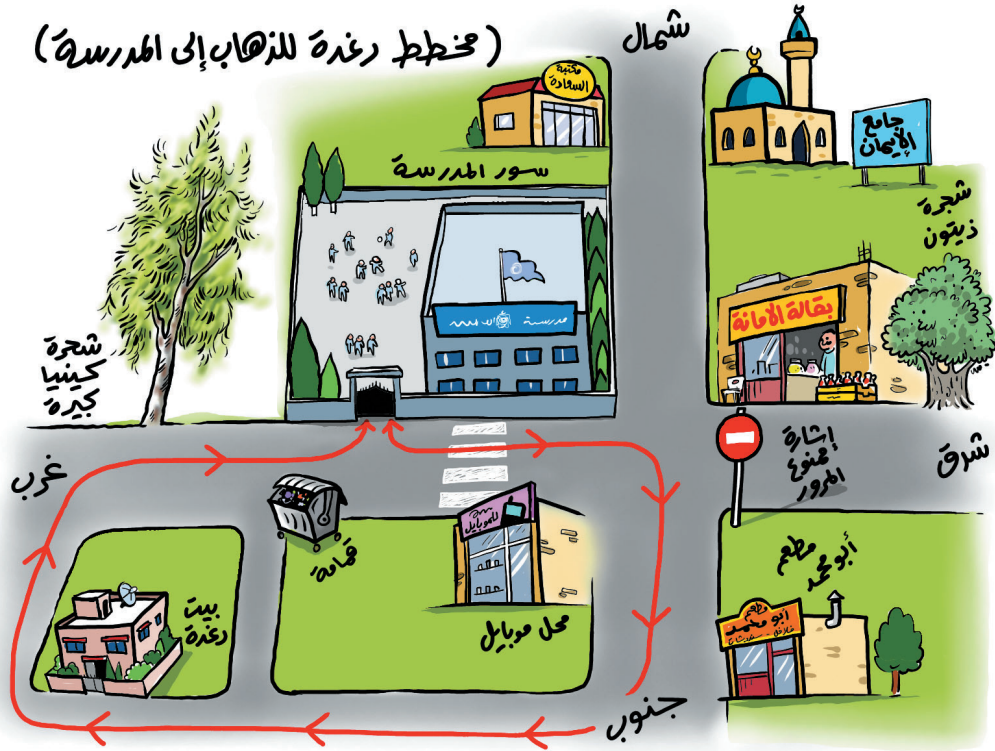
Figure 3: Displaying information visually, can assist student understanding.

Raghda then planned to introduce a published map of the school area to the children in the next lesson. She would explore the similarities and differences between the children's own symbols and the standard symbols used on maps, before getting them to redraw their maps using the standard symbols to help them become more familiar with them.

Comment

By using the local area for this mapping exercise and using the children's own experience of coming to school, Raghda showed the children the relevance of maps and mapping symbols in helping any person find their way. She also stimulated and interested the children because she used something familiar to extend their thinking and move from concrete ideas to more abstract ideas. Recent research suggests young children learn best by actually doing things and, as they play and do activities, they build up understanding that can help them learn more complex things as they grow and mature. As children learn new things, they need and benefit from the support of those who are more expert or competent than themselves, either their peers or a competent adult or teacher. Raghda was supporting and 'scaffolding' building up their understanding by moving them from the familiar to the less familiar and introducing new ideas at planned intervals. By using the local environment, Raghda employed a good strategy to engage the children's attention and interest.

Now read **Activity 3**, which asks you to look at your own school environment and surroundings to think how you might begin to use them in your teaching.

Activity 3

Take a walk around your school at the end of the day and note down how you could use the local physical environment in your teaching in the coming month. For instance, you might want the children to be able to go out and collect objects, or draw or make a plan of the school grounds or local area. In science, you could look at the way plants adapt to their environment. In language, you could look at the way advertisements use language to sell goods.

Select an area of the curriculum in which you think you could use the local environment and make a plan of how you will use it for one or two lessons at the most. Also think about what you want the children to learn and which aspect(s) of the environment would be best to use for this. Think also how you will evaluate the children's learning.

What preparation do you need to do *before* you plan your lessons? You might have to identify what plants are found in the school grounds or maybe measure the buildings yourself so that you can guide the children if doing a scale plan. Next write your lesson plan so that you can see how long it will take and how to prepare the children. Think how you will manage the children going outside. Will you need to do it in small groups or go as a whole class? Will you need someone to help you? Who? What will the children do when they are outside? Do they need to record things and, if so, how will they do this? How will you use what they have done outside to assist their learning?

Next carry out the lesson and make a note in your course notebook of the plan and how well you thought it went.

When you have taught the lesson and evaluated it, find a colleague who has also done this activity as part of their study of the SBTD. Share your experiences. Were all the children fully engaged? Did the lesson go to plan? How would you do it differently next time? What would you do differently? Why? What did the children learn? How do you know this?

Using people in the local environment

The local environment is, of course, also made up of the people within it, and these can provide a rich resource to use in your teaching. For example, as a teacher, one of your main roles is to help your children become fully literate in their mother

tongue and other languages as appropriate, so they can access the full curriculum and achieve personal, social and economic progress in their life. In the early grades this is a major responsibility, but as the curriculum becomes more specialised, a range of teachers take on the task. Alongside the teaching of their particular subject, the teacher has a responsibility for children's language development and here the local community provides an important resource.

For example, in most communities there exists a range of stories, from fiction to historical tales, of the changes that have happened over time. Older people in particular may know stories that they were told as a child but which are beginning to disappear from the local culture. These may be tales of ancestors or fictional folk tales that have survived through the ages. Children can be asked to try to find these stories. Your knowledge of the local community can help you identify people who could be invited in to tell their stories to the class. This might be an activity that extends over two or three weeks with someone invited in each week. Children are likely to be highly motivated by this activity. They can use it to build their own stories in oral and written forms. At the end of the two or three weeks, you could organise a 'presentation' of one or two stories by the class, perhaps to another class or even to the whole school. Children in Grades 1 to 6 love events like this! Such an approach serves many purposes. Not only is it at the core of literacy, but it also helps promote cultural and community pride.
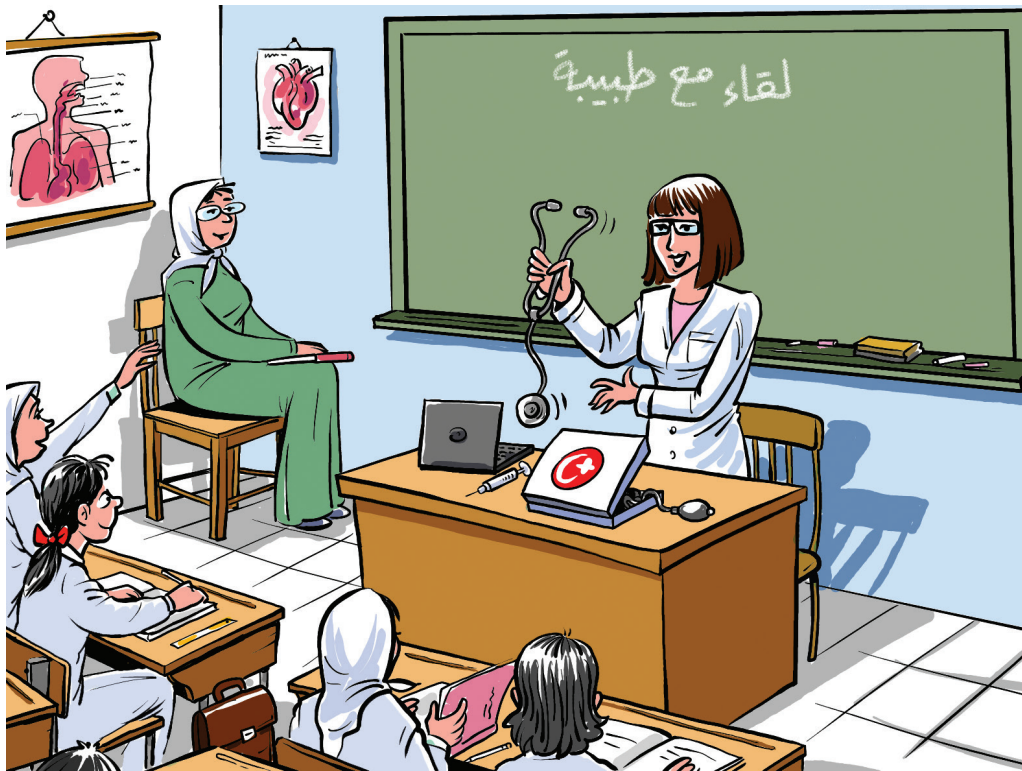

Figure 4: Guest speakers can help to enliven subjects and raise student interest.

Now read Kawther's story of how she asked a local storyteller to come in to help her class to write and dramatise their own stories.

Case study 4

Kawther teaches a Grade 3 class at Al Breish elementary school in Gaza.

She arranged with her head teacher to ask a local storyteller to come and tell some stories to her class. She particularly asked the storyteller to include the *Al-Shater Hassan* story.

The children found the story very interesting and had a lot of questions for the storyteller. After thanking her, Kawther asked her class to tell her the main parts of the story, which she listed, on the board. Next, she divided her class into groups and asked them to think how they could act the whole story or any favourite part of the story. She gave them 20 minutes to sort out their ideas and practise. She sent some of her class out into the playground so there was more room in the class for all to try out their ideas.

Figure 5: Stories can be made more exciting through performance or shared reading with a class.

She called the class together and then asked each group in turn to show what they had done so far. The children watched each group with great interest and applauded at the end. Kawther was delighted with how well they had listened and was amazed with their performance and the interesting ways the groups acted out the same incident. The children asked if they could do this again as they liked both the storytelling and acting and seemed to remember much more.

In the next lesson, Kawther asked her class to draw pictures of some of the events of the story and then to write what happened. She collected these together and made them into a book, which she stapled together and put in the classroom for the children to look at and read. She gave it the title *Al-Shater Hassan Story as retold by Grade 3*.

The class were very proud and excited to see their book!

Comment

Kawther's class were obviously excited and interested when they had a visitor to their class from the local community and they also enjoyed acting out the play. The stimulus from outside engaged more of Kawther's pupils and motivated them to participate in the lessons about writing and telling stories that followed in ways that they had not previously done. Working in this way also gave the children confidence in their own abilities. Acting out the play increased their self-respect, confidence and competence at telling stories.

In order to create space for the acting practice, Kawther used the playground, thus extending her classroom. This is something that you might be able to do sometimes if children need extra space in which to do their work. To give children more practice at reading you could send them outside into the corridors or playground to read in pairs and groups. (Of course, you have to respect that other lessons are going on around you so the children will have to take responsibility for their actions and noise levels.)

Although it had taken time to set up the visit, Kawther thought the effort was worthwhile. Among the benefits she saw within her class were increased interest, motivation and concentration, as well as better working together to achieve greater understanding. The next case study builds on these ideas. It shows how another teacher, Said, used the local environment to not only extend his students' science knowledge, but also to extend their social skills, by working with younger children as part of the task.

The local environment can be used as a resource by providing materials to use in the classroom. It can also be used as the classroom or extension of the classroom

by bringing the children out to study geographical features, to carry out particular exercises such as mapping, or to look at habitats or aspects of human geography. The environment can also provide a setting and ambiance that will stimulate the children's ideas, even if they are working on subjects not necessarily related to the physical context.

Using the outside environment needs careful planning that is clear about what the children will learn and also takes account of the health and safety needs of the children. You may need to inform the head teacher/principal and parents that you are taking the children out. You may need other adults to help and you will have to provide clear guidance to the children about what you expect from them in terms of behaving sensibly and respecting the environment or any people they see or meet. With careful planning, safety considerations and forethought, any environment can be used.

As you read **Case Study 5**, note how Said plans and involves the children in discussions and making decisions.

Case Study 5

Said's classroom was on the side of a hill. Just outside the school grounds was some grassland with a few old olive trees on it. Said, who taught science to Grade 5, decided to make a nature trail along the side of the grassland. He arranged with the head teacher to have someone to help him with his class in setting out the trail. This person would support the children in the class while Said took each group out.

He first discussed with the class the idea of a 'nature trail'. In explaining this, he said that when they had set the trail up he would ask them to take children from a Grade 3 class around it to share their knowledge with the younger children. But first of all he needed to set up the trail and ensure that the children all knew the different parts of it and which plants would be part of it. Said had decided that he wanted the trail to support a discussion about plant classification and plant adaptation to climate. He would do this by gathering, with his class, one sample of each plant and then use the information sheets he had prepared to identify the plants. Next they would, as a class, discuss the conditions the plants grow in and how they have modified their leaves, flowers and life cycle to be able to live there.

He divided the class into six groups. He took them out, a group at a time, while a colleague worked with the remainder of the class. First he walked the group along the length of the nature trail he envisaged. He asked the students to tell him which plants they observed on the route could become a feature of the nature trail. In discussion, he agreed with the group which plant they would be responsible for.

The first group, for example, decided they would choose an old olive tree with a rather unusual shape. The group then went back to the class and told the others what they had chosen. Said had drawn a large plan of the proposed trail on a big sheet of paper. They marked in the position of the olive tree.
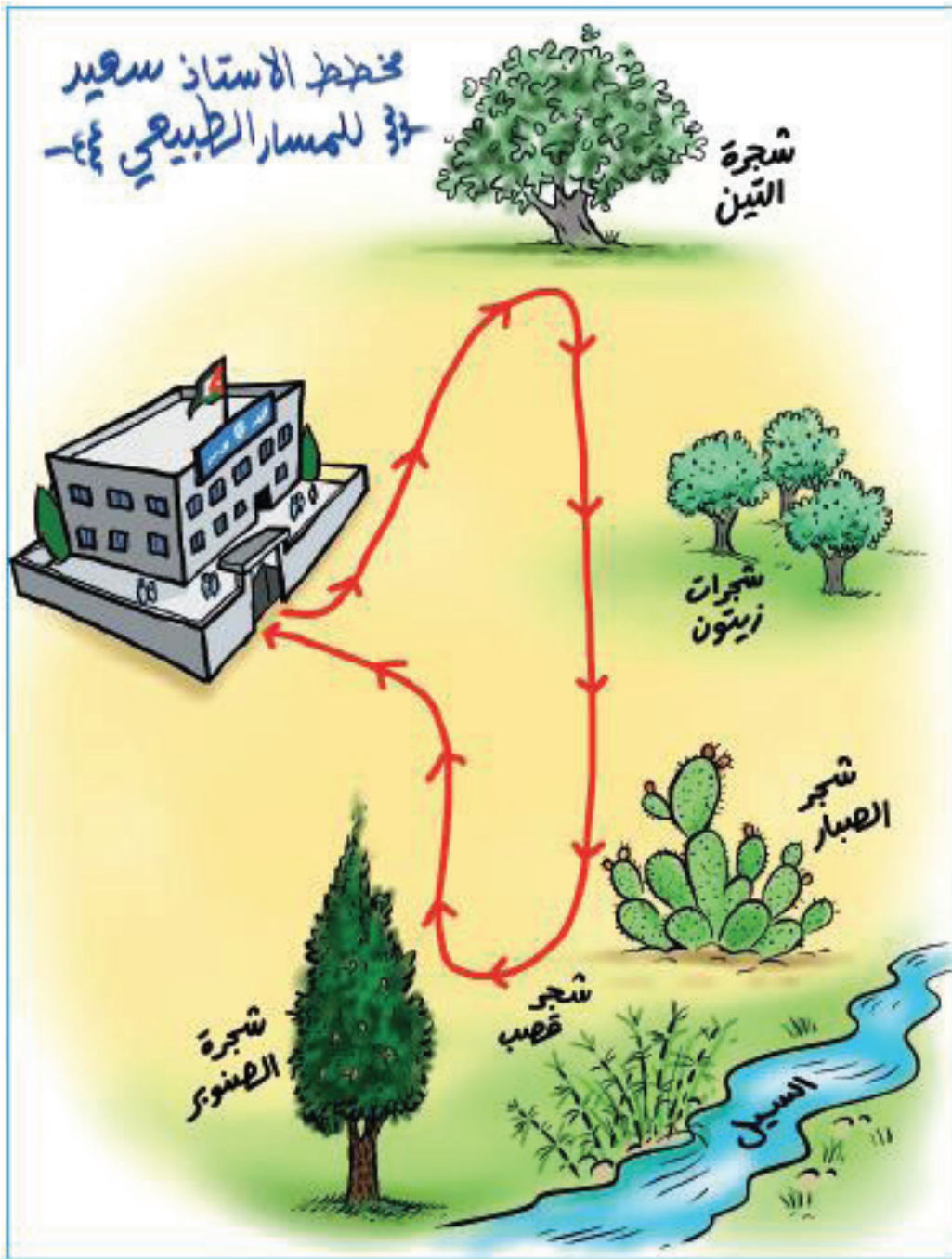

Figure 6: The school environment is rich in resources, here Said's class map identified different plants for classification.

With the five other groups they identified the following features:

- Big fig tree full of fruits.

- Prickly cactus.

- Pine tree.

- Bamboo close to riverbed.

In the next lesson, Said gave each group the sheets he had prepared about all the plants they had found to help them prepare a short presentation to share with the class. He gave them 20 minutes to prepare these. Each group made their presentations by sharing their ideas about what they would say to the Grade 3 children, and the rest of the class offered suggestions on how to improve their work. It took another lesson to hear all the presentations and Said gave them the rest of that lesson to modify their talks. He told them that in the next lesson they would have a younger class visiting them and they would take the children out on the trail. He said he would tell them how this would work next time, but in the meantime they were to remember what they had learnt.

Comment

You can imagine how this simple idea of using the local environment could be developed in a variety of ways. In subsequent science lessons Said would be able to refer to these specific plants they had identified on the trail. In addition to the science component, Said had also contributed to literacy skill development through the way the children prepared the presentations. He had addressed issues of social responsibility through the role his students helped the younger children. The nature trail idea could also be developed for future discussions of other environmental issues, concerns and problems, such as litter or erosion. The trail could also be used by other classes for a variety of purposes; for example it could be the setting for a story.

There are many ways that Said's type of initiative could be replicated by schools in different environments. In preparing these units, we visited a number of urban schools that had used nature trails in nearby reserves. We also visited a school that had used the seashore for this purpose. These trails provide for work in science, mathematics, creative arts, and for literacy and language study. Are you using the local environment in this way? If you are, can you think of ways of making the experience even more educationally challenging for your students? If you are not, how could you develop and use aspects of the environment of your school? The resource **Using the local community/environment as a resource** suggests possibilities that you should read about now before attempting **Activity 4**.

You will see, as you read this short resource, how strongly it emphasises the positive impact of working in this way with children. Developing children's empathy with their local area can have wider reaching positive effects than just their education. They will begin to see the richness around them, which often goes unnoticed in the daily rush of going to school, doing chores and trying to feed families.

Activity 4

This course is about teacher and school development. For this activity we ask you to work with the other teachers in your school and your head teacher to think about how you might design a whole curriculum plan for using the local environment and community as a resource.

First think about the curriculum you will be teaching over the next semester. For each month, select one area of the curriculum in which you can use the local environment and community to make teaching more active and interesting. Draw a grid like the one below, except keep it blank. Work with a colleague to think about how you could use the environment in different ways. You may want to do six different ideas for one area of the curriculum, rather than doing one idea for six different areas of the curriculum.

Curriculum area	Local resource to be used	Nature of use
1. Mathematics	*area of the playground*	*measuring skills*
2. Art	*using plants as dyes*	*making own dyes*
3. Language	*environmental print*	*ways adverts capture interest*
4. Science		
5. Geography		
6. History		

Table 3: Using local resources.

Now pin on the wall all the charts that you and other teachers have prepared. Are there other ideas that you could use? Would you want to change some of your ideas to the ideas of a colleague?

In the future these ideas could be used by you, the head teacher and other teachers to draw up a year-long plan, showing how these valuable resources could be used effectively. This would make sure that everyone does not plan to use the local

storyteller or playground at the same time but that maximum use is made of the facilities. Using the environment should not be 'tokenistic' that is, just used to say you have been in the environment. It is important that the environment is used because it is the best way to help children develop their understanding, and that children build up an understanding of all its dimensions over time and at the same time build up empathy with their local area.

You might also think about how you would tell parents and the local community about this school-wide initiative. They could be invited to contribute further ideas about how to use local resources to help children learn.

Later in the course you will consider other ways of engaging parents in their child's learning. By valuing the knowledge and resources of the community in your teaching, you are giving important messages about how you value family support, both at home and within school, as well as valuing the wider community's role and links with the school. The last activity in this unit asks you to try a lesson or series of lessons where you use the local environment or community in some way in your teaching.

Activity 5

Choose one local resource item from the grid you produced in **Activity 4** or identify an aspect or feature of the local environment that could be used in a topic you will be teaching in the coming week. Plan the first lesson. Prepare and gather all the resources you need. As you plan, think about how to introduce the topic, how you will organise the children and what kind of guidance you will give the children when they go outside so that they stay safe and focused and do not disturb other classes.

Next, teach this lesson. At the end of the lesson, spend a few minutes with the class asking them what they liked about the lesson and this way of working. Ask them what they did not like. How could that be improved? Make a note of their key comments.

When the lesson is over, briefly describe in your course notebook what your plan was and then evaluate how well you thought the lesson(s) went. What was successful? How do you know this? What did the children learn? How do you know this? What did not go as well as you would have liked? Why was this? What could you do differently next time to make it better?
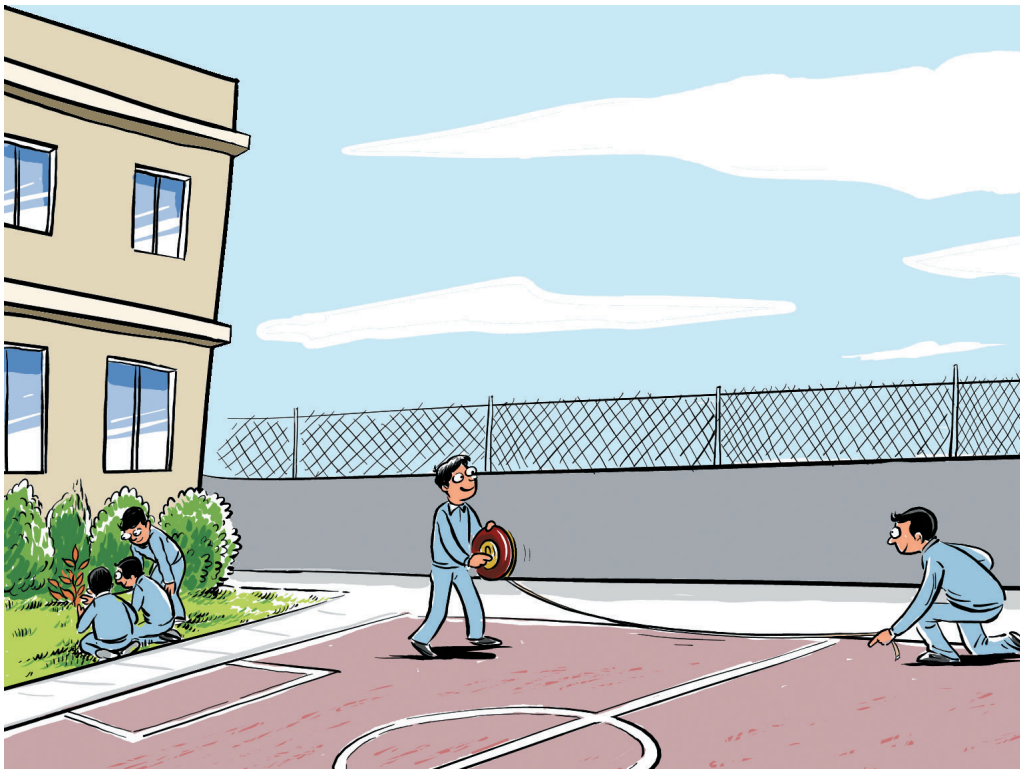
Figure 7: Active learning is always possible, here students are measuring a games court to calculate its area.

Summary

In this unit, we have given you some suggestions about the way you can exploit the resources of the environment and local community in your teaching. The case studies of other teachers' practice and the activities you have tried show how you can plan more stimulating lessons. These, of course, are only examples. Not all schools will have grassland close by as Said had; not every school will have a storyteller able to come in to school as Kawther did. But there are other ways to use the environment, some of which will be explored in later units.

The outcomes from activity-based teaching of this sort are often displays and presentations, a theme we will be discussing in the next unit. Children hugely enjoy making presentations about what they have done and learnt. During the planning process and rehearsing, children have to think about the key facts they wish to talk about and how to make these clear to the audience. This discussion will deepen their own understanding and reinforce their learning. Doing presentations or displays can range from the very small scale, such as surveys or giving a talk to a group, to large-scale presentations to parents, which involve the whole school. The strategic skill of the teacher is in ensuring that such experiences are part of every child's school life and in developing the child's self-confidence and understanding of their local area, as well as building their skills and competences as learners.

The learner-centred, educationally stimulating, classroom environment

Introduction

Welcome to Unit 3 of Module 1: Developing Active Pedagogies. This unit looks at how you can manage and organise your classroom to make it more conducive to learning and more stimulating for your pupils. The way the classroom is organised influences how both you and the children behave within it.

Our focus in this unit is 'the classroom environment' as it is seen by you, the children and other people, such as parents. We know that the classroom environment is much more than what you see. The quality of teacher-to-child relationships, the nature of the interaction between children, and all those implicit and explicit assumptions about how learning proceeds, are all important elements in a good classroom environment. We will talk about these issues in other units, but in this unit we want you to focus on the visual, perceived environment.

We want you to begin by thinking about the classroom in which you work.
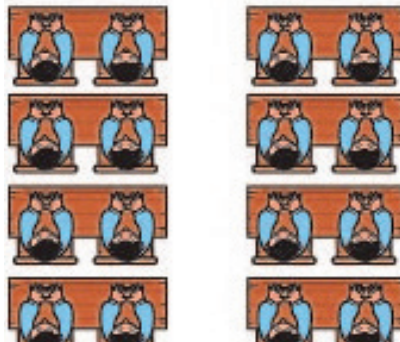

Figure 8: A traditional classroom layout with students in straight rows.

Research tells us that the way the classroom is arranged impacts on the quality and the type of learning, and the children's involvement, attention and overall well-being. When organising a classroom, you need first of all to think about the aim of the lesson you are going to teach or the type of activity you are about to do. The starting point for organising most classrooms is the furniture. The furniture of course varies according to the size of the class you are to teach and the age of your pupils. Younger children tend to have smaller desks. But the way you arrange the tables will send messages to the children about what to expect during lessons.

You may think that this traditional classroom is easily managed, that you can see all the children's faces and that the children can easily see you and the blackboard, and you can control their learning and behaviour more easily. It is said that the traditional classroom is more adapted to a teacher-centred approach than to a learner-centred approach, and that it provides for only minimal interaction between students.

There are other arrangements that you can use to enable more active learning to take place.

See, for example, the U-Shape picture below. In this setup, the children can see you but are also in face-to-face contact with each other, which allows for much more interaction among them.
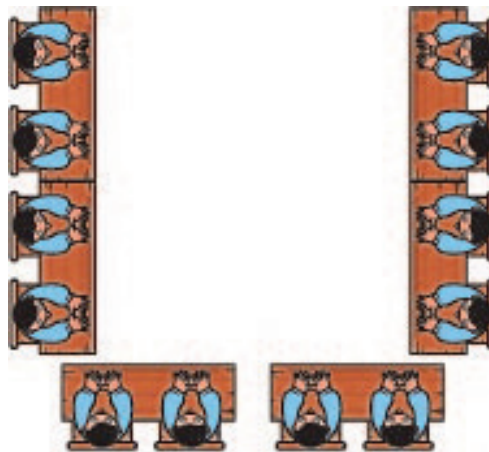

Figure 9: A U-shaped desk arrangement can allow you to get closer to all the students.

Another classroom layout that could be used is table groups, in which tables and/or chairs can be placed where sub-groups can go for team-based learning activities.

Figure 10: Group tables can help in developing collaborative work skills or in grouping students of similar ability or interest levels.

There are some classroom environments where the space is so limited or the desks are fixed or so heavy that it is difficult to do anything other than have rows of desks. In those contexts, however, it is important to think about ways that children can still interact. In Unit 1 we talked about pair work and how pairs can usually be easily turned into fours. Sometimes there is also the opportunity to leave the classroom to work in the playground. This unit will help you to think about different ways the children can be actively engaged with their learning through the way in which the classroom is arranged.

Teacher development outcomes

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

- understanding that the classroom environment influences the behaviour of teachers and children;

- own classroom environment to create a positive learning atmosphere that contributes significantly to the learning of all children.

Activity 6

Think about your own classroom or the classrooms you teach in. Use your course notebook to note down the ways you think you could develop your classroom to be a more stimulating learning environment. When you have completed this unit, look again at the list and reflect on any ways you might like to amend it.

We know that some classrooms are easier to adapt than others. But a great deal can be done in even the most difficult of environments. Some of the course writing team recently visited an urban school that had been created from a large house. Instead of regular-sized classrooms, the rooms were a variety of shapes and sizes, including some that were quite small. The teachers, however, had created a wonderful learning environment. The walls of the rooms were full of displays of children's work and posters prepared by teachers. In the areas outside the classrooms the teachers had set up small corner displays of children's work and made space for one or two children to work on their own. We were told that all the displays were changed at least every five or six weeks.

The case study below shows how one teacher tries to enhance her classroom environment.

Case study 6

Maha joined Hittin School in Ein Helweh Camp as a lower elementary class teacher.

On Maha's first day, the head teacher introduced her to her Grade 3 class, and left. Maha looked around. She felt unhappy with the class environment. The desks were in rows, the walls were bare, and there were no displays or resources around the room.

There was no time to do anything about it immediately, but Maha remembered the classroom of her friend Shami and she decided to make some small changes immediately and to make bigger changes over time.

Her first lesson was about the local rocks and she had brought some samples she had collected into school as learning resources. She asked the class to look at the rocks and suggest ways they could group the rocks. Some sorted by using colour, others by size, shape and texture. At the end of the lesson, the children made a display of their rocks on a small table in the corner of the classroom. Each group displayed their rocks and provided a short description of how they had sorted them. Maha was beginning to make the classroom look like the place of learning she wanted it to be. Maha then asked the children to bring in their own samples the next day to add to their collections. She had decided to use an active group approach to explore classification of the rocks.

The next day, she asked the children to decide if they wanted to change the way they had sorted their rock samples; if not, they needed to add their new samples to their display. Maha discussed with the whole class what criteria they had used for grouping the rocks. She highlighted how valid their ideas were and then explained how geologists classify rocks. The children tried to name all their samples according to the specialised categories and then labelled them. When the whole class had finished, Maha asked them to go and look at each other's displays to see whether they all agreed with each label and to make a note of any they did not agree with. Maha then led a discussion about the rock types. After the discussion, the class finalised their labels.

Later that day, the head teacher passed by to see how Maha was getting on. He praised her display and Maha told him she wanted to improve things even further. At the end of the school day, Maha spent some time drawing a plan of her ideal classroom, using the rocks as the start of a science corner.
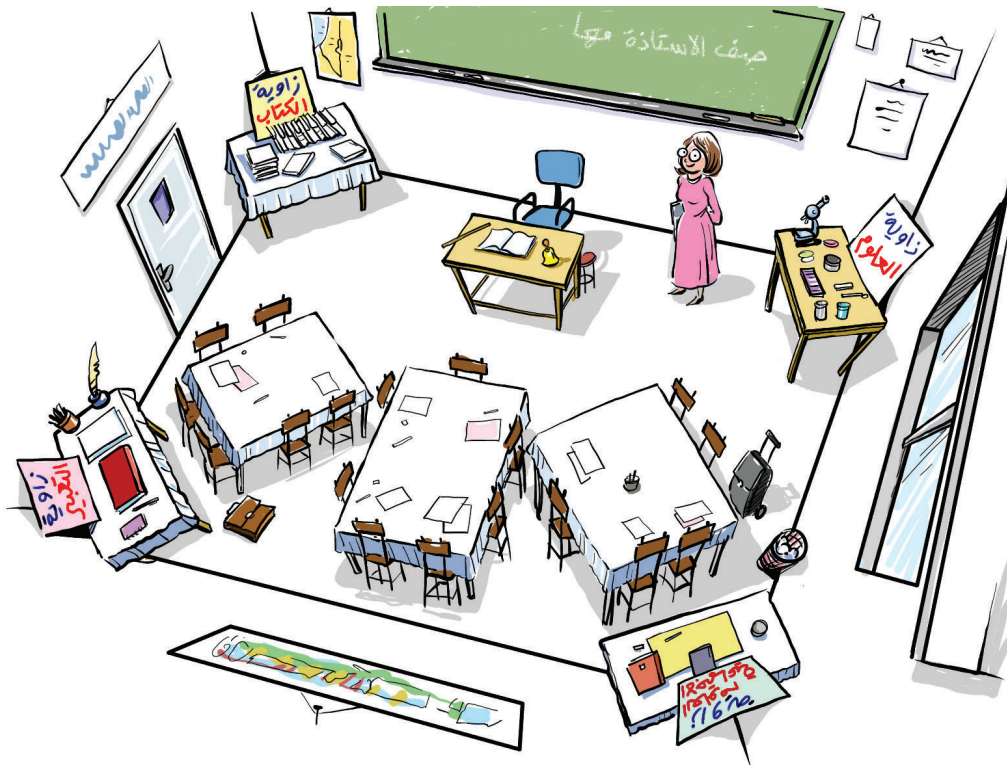
Figure 11: Teachers should think about how their classroom layout can assist students to learn.

Comment

It is important to think of the organisation of the physical environment as crucial. Children have strong and rich personalities and their natural curiosity responds to a variety of surrounding stimuli. Children need to discuss ideas, make interpretations and then present their ideas. Displays, such as the one Maha's class created, provide a stimulus for discussion during lessons and during break periods. This can only help children's learning and keep their interest. Displaying and presenting work is an important way to use the classroom environment in the learning and teaching process.

Displays make a classroom more attractive, but their purpose is more than just aesthetic. We know now that displaying and presenting work helps children learn. It also boosts self-esteem, a very important component of successful learning.

There are more suggestions for displaying and presenting work in Activity 7.

Activity 7

Choose an area of the curriculum you are teaching (for example 'mapping' in geography, 'dyeing' in art, or 'shape' in mathematics). Make sure your choice gives opportunities for children to bring in materials.

The day before your lesson, tell the children that the next day you want them to bring in objects. For example, you might say, 'Please bring in any different shaped objects that you can.' or 'Please bring in two different shaped/coloured leaves or small samples of cloth.'
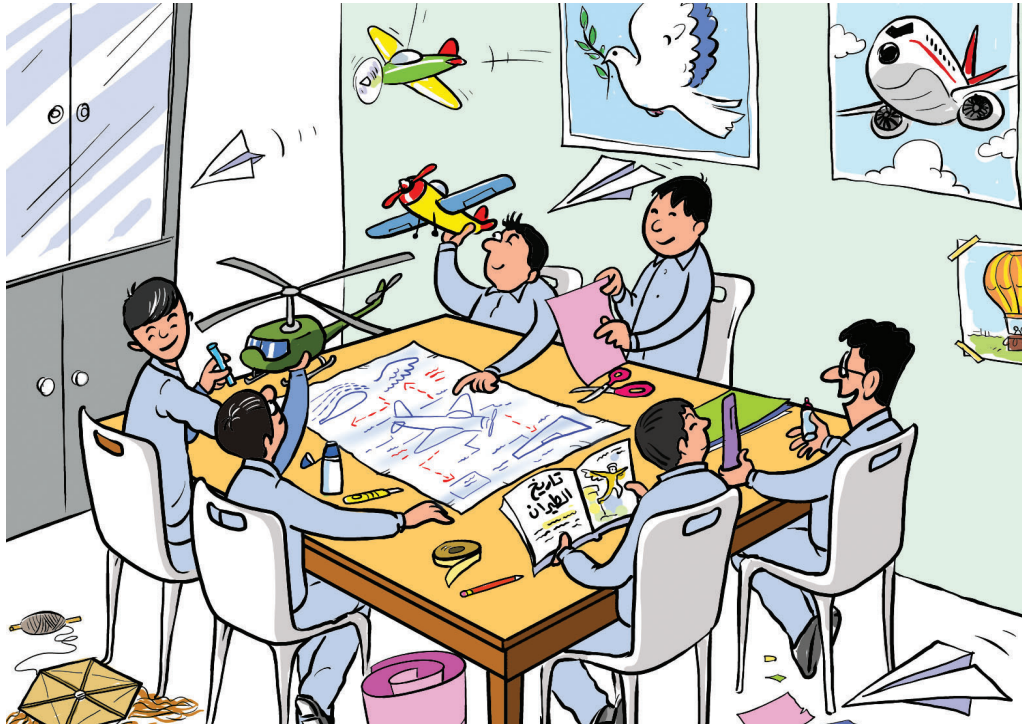

Figure 12: Objects from outside the classroom can also be teaching and learning resources.

When you take the lesson, use the objects that the children have brought in to support the lesson and reinforce their learning. It might be that you are going to use the leaves to see if there is any pattern to the way they are shaped, or look at the fabrics to talk about traditional patterns or the way they are dyed and coloured. Think how you could use the artefacts the children have gathered together in a display to support, reinforce and extend their learning. Remember what we have said about the impact that displaying children's work can have on their self-esteem, motivation and attention span.

After the lesson, reflect on your experience and answer the following questions:

- How well did the lesson go? How do you know this?

- Were the children more motivated?

- Did the display encourage the children to look at the work and talk about their ideas?

- What could you do to make displays a more regular part of your teaching?

- What do you think you achieved by implementing such an activity?

Comment

We hope that you came up with different ways to make your display effective. For example, try to have the display finalised by the end of the lesson (or perhaps the end of the day), so that you can use it in your teaching the following day. In addition, you might know that there are different ways for displaying objects, but you need to make sure that it is done attractively. What kind of labels will you make? What type of print will you use? If you put written text too high up and it is in too small a print then no one will be able to read it. Make sure any text you use can be easily read and that diagrams are clearly labelled and have a title. Putting the name of the person who did it is also important so that he/she gains the credit for his/her good work. You need to think about what is written on displays and whether this is in the form of giving information or asking children to look and make up their own minds about ideas.

Displays as tools for the learner-centred approach

As you work through activities and tasks, add to your displays so that they are constantly changing and children are always interested. Making displays interactive is also another way to make your classroom a stimulating place to be. You could put out samples of natural objects without their names and ask children to guess what they are and write down their answers. Later, check to see how well they did.

Perhaps you could display some of the stories they write on the wall or ask them to write down the stories they tell and make this into a book that you leave in the language corner for them to read when they finish their work. You might have a table to display objects they bring in with some information about each object, or it could be a display that shows how an object is made or works. The display could ask the reader questions about what they have read or seen to reinforce learning, or it could ask the reader to bring in more samples. Any display could ask the reader to add their own contribution to the display or ask them about ways they could use or develop it. This ensures the children are more actively involved in the display rather than just saying how nice it was.

Perhaps you have already produced a visual display in your classroom and have seen that it stimulates children's learning, increases their motivation and self-esteem, and improves the classroom environment. What could you do to improve and extend the displays and/or the corners that you have started to set up? Could you involve the children in the process?

Discussions based on the classroom environment

We have already discussed the importance of children being able to verbalise their learning. This is one of the most fundamental aspects of developing active teaching and learning strategies. By presenting work in a meaningful way, children also have to 'interpret and analyse', the processes beyond discussion that lead to genuine understanding.

Research has shown that using displays to stimulate interest in a new topic or sustain interest as the topic progresses can have very positive effects on the children's motivation, curiosity, confidence and interest, and can stimulate deeper thinking. Creating a successful display reflects the children's ideas and celebrates their achievements, but also demonstrates your care and respect for them as learners.

Displays can be purely decorative, making the classroom brighter and a more conducive environment to learn, and this is a valid use of displays. But, as we have already stated, they can also be used as supplementary teaching aids that will enrich, reinforce and extend learning. For example, if studying a particular country in geography, a display of pictures and information about the country could extend pupils' knowledge.

Some display material may be longer lasting, for example a number line that children can use to calculate simple additions and subtractions, or a list of all the letters in the alphabet, or lists of similar-sounding or similar-spelt words. Other long-lasting charts could show formulae that children need to remember or vocabulary they need to learn. The value of these more permanent displays is that children can refer to them at any time when they are struggling for the required information.

It is important that these long-term displays do not become too old and scruffy because of being left in one place and not being cared for. Making sure that they are moved around and repaired as necessary will mean that children continue to be interested in and use them. You could involve the children in this, which will have a positive impact on their motivation and learning.

The next activity asks you to develop your classroom environment through displays and to use them in your teaching to gain children's attention and interest.

Activity 8

As part of a topic you are introducing, make one small display on a wall or in a corner of your classroom to start your topic. Ask children to contribute objects to the display in advance. Use the display to introduce the new topic and ask open-ended questions so that you can gather information about what the children are interested in and what they already know about the objects in the display.

For example, if your display is about different adverts from magazines ask the children what they think the adverts are trying to do. What kind of techniques have the writers used in the design of the leaflet or advert to attract the reader's attention? Ask them their opinions about which techniques attracted their attention and why. Ask them which techniques didn't work in attracting their attention or interest, and why not. How would they modify and adapt some of the adverts to make them better? This could include looking at the design, drawings and cartoons, words used, and use of catchphrases or gimmicks. You can modify these questions to fit many topics that you are planning to teach. Introduce more focused questions to highlight key ideas you want to pursue in the lesson. For example:

- What do you notice about the …?

- What shapes and colours can you see in this display?

- Is this new or old? How do you know? If you don't know, how could we find out?

In your course notebook make a note of the display you used. Also make a note of your own evaluation of how successful the display was in supporting the question-and-answer session. Did all the children become involved? Were you able to draw out key points from using the display? How could you improve the lesson next time you do an activity like this? Make notes of possible changes you could make.

Comment

It is a good idea to establish classroom routines around the use of displays. Stimulating interest, keeping attention, extending thinking and recording progress are just a few of the many reasons why display is such a powerful medium in the classroom. Having one display can save on the need for resources for each individual child or groups of children (but it should not be the only resource within the classroom).

One routine could include putting a new picture up on the wall or a new object in a corner display at the beginning of each week. When the children come into

class on a Sunday morning they know to look around the room to spot the new resource. This can then become a 'start the week' discussion for a particular lesson or topic. It might well act as a 'signpost' for one of the topics they will be studying in the week. Displays could also provide extra tasks for children to do when they have finished their work or during break times. This could include notice boards about school events, an exchange of ideas between class members about current interests, and lists of routines, responsibilities, tasks and classroom rules.

Displaying children's work

Displaying children's own work is a powerful way of showing your pupils that their work is valued. It creates a sense of achievement and can vastly improve their motivation, but it needs to be approached sensitively. It is important that this does not make some children feel excluded or a failure because their work is not displayed.
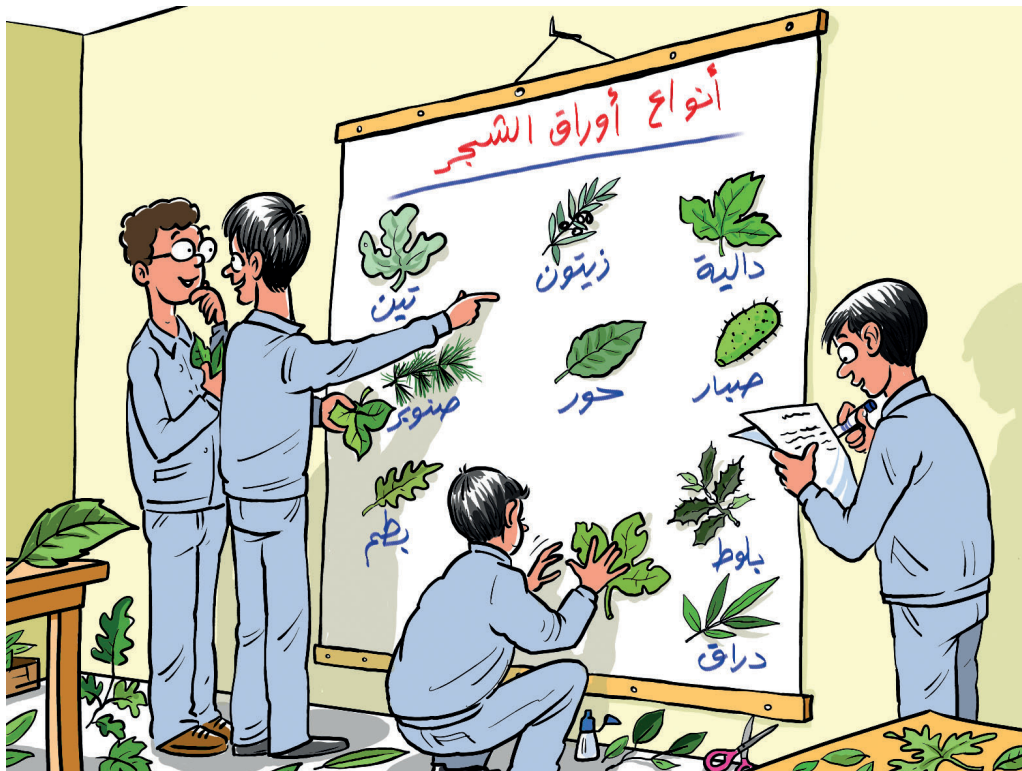

Figure 13: Classroom displays and the exhibition of student work tells students that their learning is valued and helps to create a sense of pride in their work.

There are various ways that you can ensure that all children have some of their work displayed somewhere. One way is to have an 'all the class' display where one piece of work from each child is displayed. The child could be included in the decision as to which piece of work this will be. They could even write why they think this is their best piece of work and what they think they learnt from it. Another way is to

celebrate effort as well as perfect work and this can also help the class to support each other more, especially when a child finds some work more difficult but has tried hard to succeed.

Displaying children's work is also a way of assessing and recording their success. All work should be named on the front, if possible, so that others can acknowledge the child's achievements. If it is not possible to put names on the display, make sure that the name is on the back so that you can return it to the children when you change the display.

It is also important to plan displays and think how you are going to arrange the art or writing so that it is attractive to look at. You may want to have a coloured background that enhances the work and maybe have some questions for the children to consider as they look at the work.

Summary

Nothing motivates children more than 'presenting' their work. Any parent or carer will know how excited a child is to do or make something in school and then be told to take it home to show their family or friends.

Good, active teaching captures that motivation and uses it. In this unit we have set out some visual and physical ideas about how to create a learner-friendly environment, but also the reasons why it is important. We know that it is difficult to use the classroom environment in this way in every aspect of our teaching. But children should feel positive and friendly towards the place they learn. There are several reasons why this is important:

- Presenting work is one of the best ways to learn: allowing children to present their work in a variety of different ways is particularly good for learning and encouraging deeper thinking.

- Such presentations build students' self esteem: allowing their work to be physically and visually present significantly helps learning and motivates learners.

- Organising the classroom in different ways stimulates interest and raises motivation.

As you develop your classroom environment, it is important to be clear about your purpose and to ensure the children understand this too. Do not try to make too many changes at once, as this could confuse both you and your class. Take time to reflect on the changes made, and modify and adapt your changes in the light of the impact they have on your pupils as learners.

Developing professional knowledge, skills and understanding

Introduction

As a teacher, you have a duty to keep up to date about new ideas about teaching and learning so that you can give your pupils the best possible chance to reach their potential. One of the reasons all countries are seeking to improve school systems is because of the link between educational achievement and economic and social progress. Technological progress is changing the nature of work, and in the future more and more people will need to be almost continuously retraining. Teaching is no different, as technology will impact more and more on the classroom. Also, our understanding of teaching and learning is growing significantly – through research into how the brain works and the impact of different teaching strategies on students' learning.

There is increasing interest in the different ways such professional development can be organised. The following general trends can be identified in many countries. First, there is an agreement that training should be continuous throughout a teacher's career. Initial teacher training (prior to taking up a job) is important, but it must be complemented by good in-service professional development opportunities. Second, there is much evidence to suggest that in-service training is most effective when it happens close to or in the classroom. Third, training works best when teachers have the opportunity to share their ideas with other teachers over a period of time. And teachers particularly value the ideas of their immediate colleagues, the people they work with on a daily basis.

This course focuses on the development of interactive approaches to teaching and learning in primary school – that is, teaching in ways that actively engage the learners in thinking and doing. And here we want to make an important point. The same arguments and rationale used for promoting a more active pedagogy with children are also relevant for professional learning. Teachers appear to learn best if the training is 'practical' and 'hands on' and links are made with research and theories of teaching and learning. That is the reason why this course is based around activities that must be carried out in the classroom, at school and often with other teachers.

In **Unit 1** and **Unit 2** we talked about learning as 'constructing' knowledge and understanding. This also applies to the knowledge you can develop around your teaching. In fact, a phrase that is often used today is the *knowledge-creating school*.

Two ideas behind this concept that are important to understand are:

- *communities of practice*;

- *distributed learning*.

Many recent studies of how people learn have focused on the need to develop good communities of learners, where people feel confident with each other and where newcomers can gain the help of more experienced members. There are all sorts of examples of these communities of practice, from an apprentice carpet-maker working with more experienced colleagues, to a design team building a new aircraft. There is now a wealth of research that has examined how such communities work. We can see how effective teams become mutually interested and engaged around certain patterns and ways of working. They develop a shared repertoire of strategies and resources that are available for everyone to use. The learning is very much centred or 'situated' in the culture, ideas and context of the group. They learn from each other in a mixture of formal and informal ways. The effectiveness of the group does not depend on everyone acquiring exactly the same knowledge. It depends more crucially on the way knowledge and learning is 'distributed'. In other words, different ideas and knowledge are 'distributed' among the group. No one picks up exactly the same knowledge and understanding as those they are working with.

The success of humans in this world has depended on their ability to cooperate with each other from the earliest days of hunting animals and planting crops through to the more technological forms of cooperation that we can see today.

The knowledge-creating school, therefore, is about more than any one teacher. It is teachers, and others, working as a community to improve aspects of the school and raise the achievements of all the children. To achieve this, teachers need to have positive attitudes and opportunities towards ongoing professional development. UNRWA's new policy for teachers has this as a central concern and professional development is one of the criteria for progression in the teaching career. The SBTD programme involves the whole school so there is potential for discussion at all levels about the strategies and activities you undertake that will help you to think more deeply about your roles and responsibilities as a teacher.

Teacher development outcomes

by the end of this unit you will developed your:

- awareness of the importance of professional development as an ongoing, career-long process;

- understanding of and ability to use the many ways of developing your professional practice.

Case study 7

Sarah is a teacher in AlZeitun School in Gaza.

Sara had been teaching Grade 2 classes for three years. From her training to be a teacher, she knew that her own mathematics ability was not strong. For this reason she had to follow the textbook very closely in her teaching. She heard other teachers talking about activities in mathematics that she had not yet attempted with her class.

Another Grade 2 teacher, Zaina, had been teaching for seven years and was Sarah's friend. At the beginning of a holiday, Sarah shared with Zaina her concerns about her mathematics teaching. She told Zaina that she was working through the textbook with her classes, but that she knew some children were falling behind and others were bored. She was not sure what she could do beyond the textbook that would help these children to understand the concepts being covered. She also admitted that many of the children did not seem to enjoy mathematics as much as other subjects.

The two friends talked things through. Zaina, who had tried many different ways of engaging children in mathematics, gave three suggestions about how Sarah could develop her practice in this area:

- First, she suggested that Sarah came to observe some of her lessons to look at different aspects of her mathematics teaching and then share her thoughts. This way they could both learn from the experience and improve the effectiveness of their teaching. For each session they decided to identify a focus for the observation, such as questioning techniques, pupil interaction or group-work activities. They agreed that when school started again they would discuss their ideas with the head teacher.

- Second, Zaina said that she had developed some mathematics extension work cards. She used these with children who had grasped the ideas quickly. While those children worked on the extension tasks, she was able to spend

more time with the children who were falling behind. Zaina said she would lend the cards to Sarah to look through during the holidays.

- Third, Zaina said that she had a good book about teaching mathematics to young children, which she said helped her with ideas and ways to organise practical sessions. She thought Sarah might like to look at this book while planning her lessons.

Comment

Learning from one another is an essential part of your ongoing professional development. In the case study, Sarah and Zaina learned together and supported each other as they tried out new ideas and ways of working. As they reflected on how things went, they were able to refine their teaching skills.

Figure 14: Discussing future and past lessons with colleagues can benefit your teaching practice.

We recently visited a school that organised 'demonstration lessons'. Here a teacher would agree to teach a lesson with other teachers watching (not too many, as this could distract the children). The teacher would share his/her lesson plan with the observers before the lesson and then teach the lesson. On the day we visited, we saw this happening. The observers had decided on one particular focus for their observations: 'Are all children fully involved in the lesson? If not, why not?' After the lesson, the teachers met to discuss how much the children were involved in the

session. The good parts of the lesson and the points where the approach might be changed next time were discussed as a group.

Zaina and Sarah's way of working shows the beginnings of building up a 'community of practice'. By extending and supporting such ways of working, the head/ principal can assist the growth of *reflective practice* in school. Such an open and supportive climate can only benefit both teachers and children.

Learning communities also extend beyond the school. We often talk of how important the wider networks of support can be. In fact, Zaina's extension cards had been developed in a workshop on teaching number to young children that was run three years earlier by a school supervisor. Both Sarah and Zaina were displaying their professionalism by identifying a need and finding ways to meet it. So, professional development can be quite formal, such as participating in this course, to quite informal, such as one teacher helping another. Both are important.

Next we want you to think about yourself and your own needs in terms of your professional development as a teacher.

Activity 9

Think about your own teaching over the coming five or six months and identify one thing you would like to do better in your classroom This does not necessarily have to be an area of weakness (such as Sarah felt about her teaching of mathematics). It may be an area that you have been teaching quite well, but where you feel you could do even better. In your course notebook describe what you would like to improve. Then write down the ways in which you feel you could professionally develop this area. The following questions might help you think through your ideas.

- What does the task entail?

- Do you need to obtain more information first? How would you do this? Read some books or go online to find information?

- Do you need to talk to colleagues and share ideas? Perhaps you could work with a colleague and try new ideas together so you can share experiences and reflect on the improvements (or not).

- What exactly are you going to try? How long for?

Think about what Sarah and Zaina tried and consider how you might do a similar activity. Perhaps you could plan a lesson with a colleague, teach it to your respective classes and afterwards discuss how it went. The following questions will help you reflect on what you did and what happened:

- How will you know it has improved your teaching practice?

- How did the children react to the lesson?

- What did they learn? How do you know this?

Reflecting on your practice; thinking about improvement

This unit has considered ways in which teachers can try new activities and tasks within the classroom. It is important to introduce two related concepts that will help you think more deeply about improving your practice:

- the development of *reflective practice*;

- the building of *pedagogic knowledge*.

The concept of reflective practice has been used extensively in the education and training of teachers and also in other professions. There is significant literature on the way reflective practice has been used with nurses and doctors, for example. The idea is that you select for yourself ways to improve your practice and judge the best way to reflect on those changes. The approach respects the way in which you make decisions about which strategies to use in your classroom to make your teaching more effective.

Reflective practice recognises that teaching cannot be effectively carried out by merely following the syllabus or textbook. Children require a variety of experiences to build up their knowledge if they are really to understand topics.

Three concepts are associated with reflective practice. These are:

- knowing-in-action;

- reflection-in-action;

- reflection-on-action.

These are processes that good teachers use on a regular basis to think about their effectiveness.

Knowing-in-action refers to that intuitive, spontaneous knowledge that allows teachers to handle a lesson in ways they do not need to think about explicitly be-forehand or during the session. They just do it when a response, action or change is needed. For example, an experienced teacher knows how to pace a lesson or activity so that it finishes at a meaningful place but on time. Experienced teachers do not necessarily plan for this. They do it, if you like, by instinct. They are able to

judge how long an activity will last from experience and because they know their class well.

Reflection-in-action is where teachers do need to think consciously about the best way to proceed. An example might be when a child gives an unexpected but interesting answer to a question. Do you follow it up? Do you say how interesting that idea is and that you will follow it up later? Do you explore that child's ideas a little further to see if there is a link to the original question? Here you are reflecting on ways forward while actively teaching. Good teachers become confident at making these sorts of decisions, especially if they have clear learning objectives for the lesson.

Reflection-on-action is something you do after the event. Good teachers think back and ask themselves: Did the lesson go well? Why? If not, why not? How could I have done that more effectively? They might be thinking about the lesson as a whole, or particular moments in the lesson. Reflection-on-action is the most important part of professional learning. By reflecting on your practice, you improve your intuitive knowledge (knowing-in-action) and your classroom decision-making (reflection-in-action).

These three ways of reflecting are often called the *cycle of reflection*, which we have represented in the diagram below.
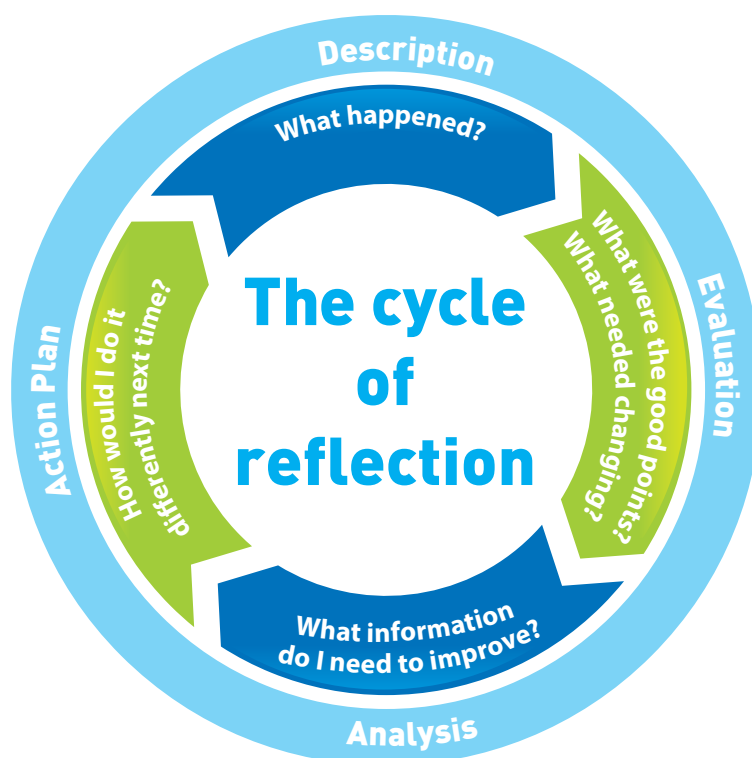

Figure 15: The 'cycle of reflection' diagram.

Professional development is about making this cycle of thinking and reflecting part of your daily work. The essence of the reflective cycle is asking yourself pertinent questions about what you do in your classroom and thinking about aspects you would like to change and improve. Having tried out a new approach or strategy, you need to consider what worked well and why. Then consider what did not go as well as anticipated and think of ways to change your approach in these cases. As you try new ideas, you will begin to identify those strategies that work for you and also start to raise questions about how you would like to develop your professional knowledge and skills further. From this, you can form your own plan for continuing professional development (CPD). Identifying your own CPD needs will become easier as you progress through the course.

Another approach to help develop your skills of reflection and identification of professional needs arises from the work of a number of researchers who have looked at teacher's pedagogic knowledge. By this they mean teacher's knowledge about the practice of teaching. They represent this in overlapping circles. Look at the diagram below.

Figure 16: A Venn diagram of a teacher's professional knowledge.

A teacher's knowledge is perceived as having three elements:

- subject knowledge;
- school knowledge;
- pedagogical knowledge.

Each of these elements is closely interrelated. Subject knowledge refers to the knowledge we have about subjects and topics being taught in the curriculum. If you did higher level studies in mathematics (at, for example, a university) you will have acquired knowledge way beyond that taught in Grades 1–6. That subject knowledge then has to be transposed into school knowledge, so that it would be possible for a Grade 2 or Grade 4 child to understand. In doing that transposition, you as the teacher have to be careful that the subject knowledge is not distorted in ways that make it 'wrong'.

School knowledge is about how to explain things clearly to children, and to do this you need to use ideas and strategies that go beyond just knowing the subject well. A first point of reflection might be: Do I have sufficient subject knowledge of the topic or topics I am about to teach? If not, how can I acquire that knowledge? This is particularly true of teachers teaching a variety of subjects and subject specialists who might have higher-level qualifications but have not covered some of the topics in the school curriculum.

As a teacher thinks about school knowledge, they are also thinking about the best pedagogic strategies to teach a topic and here they are calling on the depth of their pedagogical knowledge. It is important to use appropriate teaching strategies to ensure that the children can make sense of the subject matter you are teaching. The use of language and the ways you help them construct their understanding will make a significant difference as to whether they successfully learn what you want them to.

You can use the reflective cycle to improve your subject knowledge and your understanding of school knowledge while also expanding your repertoire of pedagogic skills. Sometimes the pedagogic skills and knowledge are referred to as a *professional tool kit*. These are cultural and professional tools such as:

- Stories you can tell to illustrate a point, such as a local folk tale.

- Analogies, such as using fruits of different size to illustrate the position and relative size of the planets.

- Ways of using pair work, such as playing word games in pairs to develop vocabulary.

- Different types of explanation, such as using charts to explain the stages in dyeing fabrics.

- Different kinds of questioning techniques, such as using open-ended questions (for example 'What do you think?') to find out what children already know about a topic.

- Different ways of organising activities to enhance learning, such as using board games for children to learn to count on and to subtract.

In this course we want you to be thinking about how you can expand your own 'toolkit' of ideas and strategies. This is achieved much more effectively when teachers share ideas, and the next activity will involve you working with a colleague. First read **Case Studies 8** and **9**.

Case study 8

Ahmad has been teaching science to Grade 4 for two years at Zarqa School.

Last year, Ahmad developed a file to record his practices in implementing the curriculum. He organised the units for each semester, planned his lessons and wrote his own reflections on what had happened. He included ideas about how to modify lessons to make them better after implementing the planned lessons. At the beginning of this year, he went through his file and found the following notes for the Grade 4 curriculum:

For the first unit, which was on 'Organisms and Environment', he had written to himself:

1. Prepare samples for bread mould before the lesson.
2. Organise extra readings on food chain.
3. Find and collect photographs of different prey and predators.
4. Need to give more time for moulds to develop
5. Need to organise the groups to collect resources one at a time.

Then he moved to the second unit on 'Light' and found a list of successful activities that could be done this year too:

1. Pictures for Sun, moon and stars.
2. Students to ask their grandparents and other elders in the community about sources of light when they were younger.
3. Need to do this a week before the lesson so they have time to gather information.
4. Activity for students to read about Ibn Alhaitham, Arab scientist born in 965, in order to explore his ideas about light.
5. Need to give time to read this to their groups before discussing so they all know what they are talking about

Having looked at these notes, Ahmad made three lists drawn from his file that included these suggestions he made last year. One was a list of topics that he needed to read more about to enrich and broaden his knowledge. The second was a list of topics and experiments in the textbook that he wanted to improve. He planned to discuss his ideas for this with other teachers, using the time between lessons and at the end of school. The third list was of things he needed to think about when planning his lessons, such as how to organise the children, the furniture and the resources, and ways of managing the children at different stages in the lessons.

Comment

By keeping a file over the year, Ahmad had a record of what he had tried. The comments he had made on the success or not of different strategies would help him plan better lessons this year.

The SBDT programme asks you to keep a course notebook to record, like Ahmad, your experiences of working through this programme. Alongside this you will have a portfolio, which will be a formal record of your having participated in the programme. It will include samples of some activities that you have completed and your reflections on the experience. You need to read the portfolio handbook to find out exactly what is required of you. The portfolio will be explained to you at the first meeting before you start the programme.

The course notebook is for you to note down your thoughts on the activities you do and your suggestions for how to extend and develop your teaching and ways of working. The keeping of a course notebook or other reflective diary will help you to develop your ability to reflect, if you use it regularly and are open about the comments you make about your practice. The notebook is for your personal use to record your experiences when teaching. You do not have to show it to anyone, but you could share selected aspects of your writings with trusted colleagues to help you think through ways of dealing with particular issues in the classroom, such as how to organise groups or how to do displays. As you study this course, you have been and will continue to be asked to make notes in your course notebook, but even when you are not asked it can be used to write down any concerns you have about your pupils, or about how to organise them and your classroom. It is not easy to retain everything in your head when teaching all day, and so jotting down pertinent questions or issues you want to explore will help to start you thinking about how to modify and adapt what you do in the classroom to improve and develop your teaching skills. As you become more experienced in knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, you will find that your pupils are much more involved in their lessons and that they are making better progress in their understanding.

How you organise your reflecting is very much a personal matter. In the next case study, you will see how one teacher organised a file to hold his lesson plans and the resources and strategies that he used in his teaching. It would be useful for you to have a similar file/notebook of your lesson planning to refer to when you participate in your school and field meetings or local meeting about the programme.

Case study 9

Ali is an English teacher who has just finished at university and started his work at Sarafand School in Damascus.

Ali was assigned to teach English language for Grades 4 and 5. His friend Fares had taught this grade the previous year and they exchanged ideas about the strategies to be used. Fares showed him a file he had created during the year. Ali looked at a page of the file.

Class	Topics	Resources	Strategy
Grade 4	School	Labels for classroom furniture	Labelling the objects in the classroom. Muddling them up some days and see if the children can change them. Rearranging furniture and drawing plans of the classroom and labelling the furniture in its new place. Writing short poems about different pieces of furniture. What are they used for?
Grade 5	Writing letters	Collect some articles from newspapers	Children to write their own letters to the newspaper commenting on an article they read. Provide a template for children to use. Have sample letter on the wall with all the headings to remind them what to do.

Table 4: A page from Fares' file of ideas for lessons.

Fares had listed 'Topics, Resources, Strategy' as three headings across the top of the page. As he worked through the year, he made a note of the resources and strategies used. One example Fares pointed out was how he tried using group work for the first time during a discussion about travel. He had not thought how

to organise the groups clearly enough and so there were a lot of children walking around the classroom because they were not clear which group they were in. His notes said that next time he would make lists of each group and make the first name the group leader. He would call out the names of each group one by one and then tell the leader where to sit and to check they had the right members.

As he also kept copies of his resources in the file (or a note as to where they could be found) Fares said it was much easier and quicker to locate them when he needed them. Fares said Ali could borrow his file and Ali thanked him, saying that he would add to it so that they would both have an even richer resource for teaching Grades 4 and 5 in future years.

Comment

The case studies above illustrate two important elements that will help you during this programme. The first is that working with another colleague can be very supportive and stimulating. Being able to share ideas, discuss new ways of working and adapt them to your classroom will help you think about how you currently work and how you can build up a wider range of strategies to use in your teaching. As you talk about the issues, more ideas will come to mind. Sharing ideas with a colleague about how to resolve a problem will make you feel more confident in trying new approaches and give you someone to share the ups and downs of trying those new approaches out with.

The second important element is that keeping notes about your experiences will help you develop your ideas and not repeat any mishaps or ineffective lessons that you had before. Because you can refer to your notes for suggestions and see your comments on how well a particular approach worked, you can plan your lessons more effectively. If this information is linked with your knowledge of your current class, you can plan and modify your approach accordingly. This process of reflecting, planning, teaching and assessing the impact of your lesson becomes easier the more you do it, and helps you to always think of the learners' needs.

The next activity asks you to work with a colleague to explore what preparation you may need to do to teach a topic. This may include developing or expanding subject knowledge, school knowledge or pedagogical knowledge.

Activity 10

If possible, do this activity with another teacher or teachers who teach the same grade as you (and if possible the same subject). Like the teachers in the case studies, think about one part of your teaching extending over one term or semester.

On a large piece of paper (or electronically) copy first the part of the syllabus that has to be taught in the term or semester. You might like to do this in a column or using circles to separate each part of the syllabus.

Now think about your own subject knowledge. Write down any areas where you think you will need to develop this further. Are there ways you could work with other teachers to develop subject knowledge? Would you need to go to secondary school or university textbooks to do this? Are there other means you could explore? List your ideas of how to do this on your diagram.

Finally make a list of the different pedagogic strategies and approaches that you would like to use in your teaching such as using pairs in a lesson or using a poster to start a discussion about a particular topic. This does not require the detail of a lesson plan but you should be clear, as in the case studies, about the different methods you will use. Remember, these need to be active and varied, as we discussed in **Unit 1**, but they should also be targeted at enhancing and deepening the children's learning.

When you have completed your chart, share the information with the other teachers in the school. Agree together how you will support each other, for example by planning lessons together or agreeing to observe each other teach, and how to measure your impact and success.

Comment

Teachers have a rich repertoire of teaching ideas and pedagogic strategies. There are so many that it is difficult to carry them all in your head! Some of you may already be keeping a file of teaching ideas and resources. If you do not, we ask you to use your course notebook for this, as otherwise you risk many good ideas being lost and unused. And that is another reason why working cooperatively can be such a good idea. 'Two minds are better than one' an old saying suggests, and that is very true of planning creative and active ways of teaching. Talking together stimulates your own creative thinking and that of others.

Another way to help each other is to observe each other trying out these new ideas with your class. You can sensitively provide constructive feedback to develop each other's classroom practice.

The result of this will be a community of practice where individuals feel free and supported by others to explore and question different ways of working in the classroom. Communities of practice are dynamic and involve learning by everyone. This might mean different learning for different members, but learning based on

their knowledge and previous experience interfaced with new actions and ways of working. One definition for 'communities of practice' is 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'.
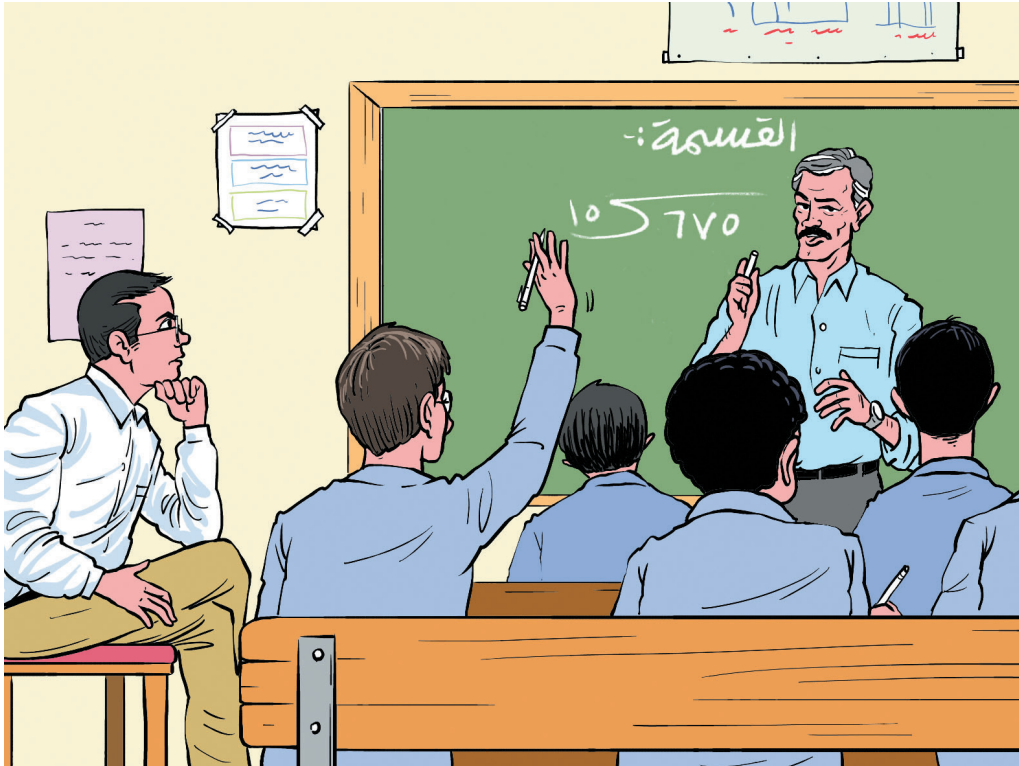

Figure 17: Observation and feedback are powerful tools for improving teacher practice.

Summary

In this unit we have thought about professional development and your own professional development as a teacher in particular. Occupations such as law, medicine and teaching have always had updating, renewal and improvement as core professional processes. Some do this better than others, but the UNRWA policies are designed to give all teachers the opportunity and entitlement to career-long education and training.

We have suggested to you that working with other teachers is a feature of building creatively the knowledge base for the school. Sometimes the whole staff needs to discuss issues about teaching and learning as well as the organisation and management of the school. As well as whole-school discussions, working in a pair or small group with other teachers is also very valuable.

Some of the best experiences in teaching come from working in teams. Good schools are expert at identifying issues and getting groups or teams of teachers to work together to develop new approaches and programmes. 'How can we make our teaching more active?' might be one such issue; 'In what ways can we introduce practices and strategies that support inclusion policies?' might be another (see **Module 5** later in the course).

Good professional development requires action at all levels of the system – at the policy level, at the field level, as a whole school process and in terms of the commitment of individual teachers.