

Strategies for Effective Grouping Configuration for Small or Large Classes

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Curricular Thread: All threads are targeted	Sub thread: All threads are targeted

Strategy 1: Building Groups through Vocabulary Cards

Description

Working with different grouping configuration with small children could be challenging for English teachers who should make the most of their time in the classroom. According to the New English Curriculum, students from first to seventh year have three class periods of 40 to 45 minutes each one. Thus, looking for grouping configuration strategies for first and second grades is essential in order to foster students' interaction in class and giving them the opportunity to receive help from their classmates during the class time.



Vocabulary cards strategy will give teachers the chance to form groups and review learned vocabulary at the same time; thus they will take advantage of the grouping time to reinforce and review vocabulary that students have learned before. Teachers will be able to work with different grouping configurations through this strategy such as pairs, trios or groups of four. This strategy consists on creating vocabulary cards according to the different units' contents from their text book. For instance, if you are teaching vocabulary about pets, you can create cards with the pictures of pets and their names.

This strategy will help teachers to form different grouping configurations fast and easily taking advantage of the time at the beginning of each class. Furthermore, they will be able to review and practice learned vocabulary in previous units and to foster cooperative learning within their classes.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

First, teachers should choose a vocabulary category they want to use in their cards. Then, they should draw items related to that category or print them on a cardboard piece (If they draw the vocabulary, they can make their students color them). After that, teachers need to write the names of the drawings or pictures under each one. They can use different sets of vocabulary cards for each unit. Before working with the groups in their class, they have to encourage



students to call out the names of each item and then give each student a card in order to form the groups. They can group them by different items (pencil, pen, eraser and ruler), or they can group them by the same item. (4 pens, 4 pencils, 4 erasers and 4 rulers). Teachers can adapt the groups depending on their own situation.

Differentiation

This strategy could be easily adapted to a variety of contexts and situations within different classrooms. It could be applied in classes with few students or big-size classes. Vocabulary Cards could be also substituted with other materials such as flashcards or maybe playing cards. If teachers like to use technology, they can create and design their own cards, and then print them out. In order to optimize class time, if teachers have access to a projector; they can project the cards on the board and help students recall the vocabulary before starting to use the cards in class. Regarding the reduction of classroom space, working with grouping configuration at the beginning could be difficult and messy, rules and routines could be very helpful. You can bring big pictures of the vocabulary items and place them in the assigned space to each group item, thus students will know exactly where to sit and form their groups. For large classes with limited space for movement, teachers can plan activities that students can do in the playground.

Strategy 2: Building Grouping Schemes through Craft Materials

Description

Sometimes teachers spend a lot of valuable time asking their students to group in different ways. As teachers, we know that setting groups is important and that group's dynamics help us foster an engaging classroom atmosphere. Using different grouping configurations will benefit students since they will scaffold each other and share their knowledge in order to fulfil a project or assignment.

Popsicle sticks are versatile and easy to use; however, it will depend on teachers on how they adapt this material to the reality of their classroom. If you are planning on working with pre-determined groups, this material will be very useful because you group students according to their needs and the kind of activity you have prepared for them in advance.

Teachers can group students according to different criteria such as same proficiency level, same skills, varied skills, or same learning styles.

In Ecuador, it is very common for teachers to work with 4 or 5 classes – each of them with 35 to 40 students; thus, it is hard for teachers to remember their students' names. This is a good method to learn their names that will make them feel appreciated and connected with the teacher. Based on my experience, when students' names are called, they feel more comfortable and motivated in class. I have realized that disrupted behaviour is also easier to control and reduce.

During the implementation of this strategy, teachers will be able to use craft material to create teachers' resources to form different group schemes, and also to facilitate classroom and time management. They will be able to help teachers to get to know better their students.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

First of all, teachers should make sure they have enough popsicles for the number of students they have in each of their classes. They can paint them in different colors or ask their students to decorate them. Then, they have to write their students' names in each popsicle stick, and form the groups based on their expectations and plans. It is important to select one student from each group to be the leader. Before teachers start their class, they should give each leader the set of Popsicle sticks. The leader will be in charge to organize his or her group. The groups could be form according to their English level in order to differentiate tasks. They could also be made based on learning styles. Finally, teachers have to collect the popsicle sticks to use them to call on a student to participate in class.

They would not have to think what student to pick or having just one student participating, but they would be able to have different students in different classes participate with the same opportunities

Differentiation

Popsicle stick is a suggested material. Teachers can use other materials they think would be more appropriate in their class context and needs. Thus, if teachers have learned how to design didactic material using a software, they can create very fancy resources and print them out. This allows teachers to be creative and original. When classroom space is limited, routines are effective in order to avoid disruption and misbehaviour. Using this strategy, teachers can assign a space in the classroom to each team. First, the teacher should assign a number to a specific space in the classroom, and this number should be kept throughout the year. Then, each time the teacher works with groups, they gave a number to each group, and the students will know exactly where to sit.

Strategy 3: Building Grouping Schemes through Craft Materials Variation from 1

Description

Working with predetermined groups is crucial for students' success in projects or assignments; however, teachers may group students without taking into account their characteristics or skills. They can pair or group their students randomly through the popsicle sticks strategy. Forming random pairs or groups will help teachers identify possible future group configurations that could work and be effective at the moment of developing other planned activities.

Social relationships between students could improve and grow at the moment they are grouped with new partners that could be different from them and that could contribute to the group with something extra rather than knowledge and skills. Thus, students could learn from other students about things that could be done in unconventional ways. Setting up new social connections is vital for the correct and optimal

functioning of the class that I consider a “living being”. It’s like the human body; the class needs all its components to work in harmony.

On the other hand, teachers can also realize where social relationships between students are not going very well. This is where teachers should think of the possible strategies they could use in order to help their students minimize discrepancies. In addition, using different grouping configurations during class time could result to having students who are more active and motivated.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Initially, it is vital for teachers to make sure they have plenty of popsicle sticks and then color them using different colors. Next, they have to write a number in each popsicle. (from 1 to 4). Afterwards, they need to show the popsicle sticks to their students and call out the colors. It is convenient to make students listen and repeat. Now they should show the numbers on the sticks to their students and call out the number in each popsicle stick. After this, teachers need to take 4 popsicle sticks and count them with their pupils. Subsequently, they could use their popsicles to form pairs or groups of 4 according to the characteristic they will use (colors or numbers). Therefore; if they form pairs at the beginning, then they could ask them to form groups according to what characteristic they choose.

Differentiation

Teachers can adapt this strategy to their context and use existing material such as cards, or printed cards. One of the benefits when creating their own material is that they can take into account the number of students they have in each class and build enough material. Teachers can create their material using a computer and print it. They can use different designs and colors.

Most classrooms in Ecuadorian schools are overcrowded; thus, teachers should establish routines that students need to follow during activity

time with different grouping configurations. For instance, if a teacher is using pair work, he or she could choose the students that could move around the class looking for their pairs by telling them that only certain colors or numbers are allowed to move around. Consequently, in a class with 40 students we will have 20 students who are moving around through the narrow spaces between columns of desks.

Strategy 4: Building Groups through matching cards

Description

Grouping configuration for independent students could be easier and faster. As they are older, they are able to understand more complex instructions and follow them without much difficulty. Independent users need more dynamic activities which would motivate them to use the language in class and share their ideas with other students. Therefore, teachers need to plan activities that require individual work, pair work and group work in one lesson.



Matching cards could help teachers group their students fast and in an organized way. This kind of cards is ideal when working with different group configurations in one lesson or if you want your students to work in two different groups during a lesson. Since matching cards are made out of cardboard of different colors and they have different numbers and symbols on them, grouping students would not be difficult. This way, teachers can ask students to pair or group according to a number, color or symbol.

Teachers can think of different grouping types using this strategy. It all depends on how they use and adapt them to their lessons and class. Matching cards is just a suggestion of how basic material can be used for educators in class for grouping configuration. Teachers have the last word and they can use other materials that they consider more convenient.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

First of all, teachers need to choose the colors, numbers and symbols that they are going to use for their cards. Then, they have to get 10 different color A4 cardboards pieces. Afterwards, they should cut out 3 cards (7cm x 5cm) from each cardboard piece. Next, they need to write a number on each one of the card (from 1 to 10), and draw a symbol in each card. (e.g. hearts, diamonds, cloves, stars and others). Once their cards are ready, they can give one card to each one of their students. Depending on what group configuration they want to use, they will need to ask students to pair or form groups by numbers, colors or symbols.

Differentiation & Accommodation

Teachers can create their own version of the matching cards or they can use playing cards. In order to save time in class, if teachers have access to technology, they can project the cards on the board and show students how they are going to group. For example, they can ask students to pair up by colors. (eg. reds and blues, yellows and greens, etc.). In the case, they do not have a projector; teachers can stick the cards on the board and show students the group configuration that is needed.

Considering that there is an average of 40 students per classroom, teacher should think about all the possible difficulties in asking their students to work in groups. One of the things that really work is setting a specific space for group work. This means students should know in advance how the seats must be arranged when they are working in pairs or in groups.

Strategy 5: Building Positive Classroom Environment through Rules

Description

Setting clear and simple classroom rules since the first day of class is essential in order to create a positive classroom environment. Children need to know that rules are important in society for living in harmony and order. Teachers can encourage children to think that they follow rules even in their own homes, therefore they will be required to obey rules at school too. Classroom teachers and English teachers can have a consensus about what rules they consider children should be able to follow in the first years of school.

Using clear symbols is an excellent way to introduce rules knowing that most of young children have not learned to read in English yet. Teachers should also use simple and basic vocabulary and expressions when they write classroom rules. Another factor that teachers should take into account is that rules need to be reinforced every class. Students could learn a lot from rules such as vocabulary, pronunciation as well as respect and kindness.

Rewards must be also part of classroom behaviour management. Students love rewards and most of the time, it is enough to obtain good behaviour from them. Rewards do not have to be something very big or expensive. For instance, stickers could be an attractive prize for pupils. They are cheap and easy to get. Teachers can also design their own stickers on the computer and print them out. Another good prize for children is sweets. However, if teachers want to make their students feel super good about their accomplishments, they can elaborate good behaviour certificates or medals made of EVA foam. It is easy, cheap and cool.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy



First, teachers must discuss with other teachers and get into an agreement about the rules they are going to follow in class. After they have decided on the rules to be followed, they need to look for symbols or pictures that reflect the rules. Afterwards, they should make flashcards of each one of the symbols using cardboard, posters or a foldable. Then, they present the rules to their students one by one and explain to their student the rule related to the symbol on the cards. Teachers need to review the classroom rules every class just by showing their students the flashcards and making them say the rule.

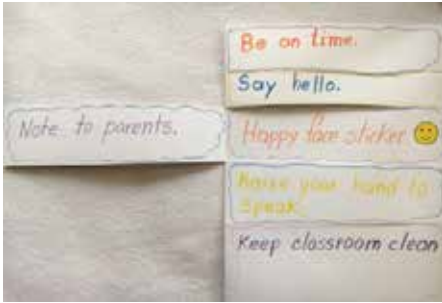
It is important that teachers reward their students when they have been successful at following the rules. They can give them a happy face. When students have collected a certain number of happy faces, they will receive a prize

Differentiation & Accommodation

The strategy was thought for teachers who have many classes; however if they have few classes such as four or five, they can make posters of the classroom rules. Teachers can draw their symbols in flashcards, posters, or they can look for pictures that can project each one of the rules. It is a good idea to review the rules every class and for that they can use PowerPoint slides to show the rules if teachers have a projector in reach. English teachers always move from one classroom to another. Therefore, if they want to display a poster or the flashcards on the wall, they should ask the classroom teacher for space for their students will recall them not only during English classes.

Strategy 6: Building Positive Classroom Environment through Rules Foldable

Description



Building a safe and comfortable classroom environment is definitely indispensable to provide our students with gratifying learning experiences. Classroom rules are helpful in order to construct the appropriate atmosphere. School students are full of energy and enthusiasm that teachers must control and direct them toward

the students' benefit. Thus, rules have to become part of the instruction and kind of a daily routine in the classroom.

Students and teachers must agree on the rules to be followed in the classroom, and students must commit to follow them. When pupils feel they have contributed with their ideas and opinions, there is a good chance for teachers to be successful. Rules have to be fair and realistic. It means that they are possible for students to follow. Sometimes teachers set very strict rules that students will not fulfil at the end.

Another important detail that students should be aware of is that there will be consequences every time they do not respect the rules. On the other hand, they also need to know that they will be rewarded if they behave the way we expect them to behave. Both punishments and prizes should be socialized with the students before the rules start to run. Time-periods should also be established to check the compliance of the rules. As a consequence, students will know exactly what they are going to get for their behaviour and when. Classroom rules foldable strategy is an appropriate way to work with rules in the class.

Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Firstly, teachers must think of the consequences if students do not follow them and about the prizes they are ready to give their students if they follow the classroom rules. They should then set a time period to check with their students how they are doing with the rules. After that, they will share the ones that they want to apply in their class with their students and discuss with them what rules they want to follow and get into an agreement with them about the commands they need to follow in class. It is necessary to let them know the consequences and rewards they will get at the end of a period (every week, every month or every semester).



To make the foldable, teachers should get a big piece of cardboard. First, they have to fold the cardboard in the middle. Then in the front, they need to draw as many sections as rules they have. Next, they have to cut each section just in the front part and then write each rule in each section. On the other face, they should write the consequence, and on the other page the reward. They should write the reward. Finally, they must display it in the classroom; subsequently, students can check them every day.

Differentiation & Accommodation

Cardboard and markers are basic materials that they can get easily in order to build the foldable; however, if teachers have access to other materials, they could use them in order to make the foldable more colorful and eye-catching. Teachers could also design their foldable in the computer and add some illustrations to each one of the rules. Then they could print them in color.

Teachers need to have a space in their classrooms where they can display the Classroom Foldable Rules. As English teachers move from one class to another, they should ask classroom teachers for that space. In the case, they cannot get that space, teachers can make their students create a mini foldable and stick them in the first page of their notebooks.

