

## An Introduction to Teacher Development

### Programme 1: Handling a big class – teacher support worksheet

Large classes are a reality in many parts of the world. So how can we best tackle really big classes and see them as an opportunity?

Working with a really big group means it is hard to give individuals attention. How can we make sure that everyone gets a chance to practise English? Students have such varying levels of ability; you may have a very strict syllabus to follow and very short lessons. So where should we start?

**Le**, who is a teacher trainer in Vietnam, and **Dini**, who teaches in Indonesia, agree that good classroom management is a priority, and that the first step is getting your students to agree some ground rules! **Dini** explains:

***‘I will introduce some “magic” words for me, for example if they are too noisy, so I will say: “One, two, three, eyes on me”. So, they have to understand what that means, so they have clear rules of our class.’***

**Le** suggests that teachers should organise students into different groupings for different phases of the lesson. So some whole class activities, but also pair work and group work – so students can work together.

***‘Another advantage is that when working with peers, they will develop collaboration. They will feel more confident. Students will have more chance to speak English, so that is the way to maximise the learning time for each student.’***

Teachers often arrange the groups so that the stronger students can help the less able. But sometimes the room size and the layout of the furniture makes arranging groups very difficult.

One solution is to move the furniture to make it easier to do group work, or move around – but what if that’s not possible? If you can’t move the furniture, then get your students to turn around and work with those directly behind them, in groups of four. And if the weather is fine, some lively activities can take place outside!

Another important consideration is **planning the lesson carefully**. Everyone agrees that it is really important to plan the stages of a lesson. But what does this mean for a big class? How can teachers with large classes make the most of each stage of the lesson?

**Sukhana**, a teacher in India, explains what needs to go into a lesson plan:

***‘In the lesson plan we write down how much time we are going to devote, and how much of the content we are going to cover. Secondly, we also mention what activities we are going to take – are we going to make it a group activity or an individual activity, are we going to do the lesson as a project? And what teaching aids we are going to use? And how are we going to interact with the class?’***

Getting that constant interaction between the teacher and the students is vital, and one thing that can really help with this – as was mentioned previously – is a variety of classroom activities. So we can start with a warmer – a quick conversation in English that motivates and ‘warms up’ our students – and then move on to different combinations of pair work, group work, and working individually. With a clear plan and good classroom management the students can be constantly active throughout the lesson: speaking, listening, reading and writing ... and laughing too!

What about the benefits of a big class? **Hintsa**, from Ethiopia, feels strongly about the opportunities a large class can provide. Students can help each other to progress and they can help with the lack of resources problem!

***‘(Teachers of big classes) can use their students to correct each other, they can encourage peer correction. They can use their students also to come with materials to the classroom, if they don’t have teaching materials. And that’s a resource!’***

**Zohra**, in Pakistan, puts this into practice:

***‘... if the teacher wants to deliver a lesson about the weather she can divide a class, and ask each group to bring things relevant to any specific season, like clothing, or food, anything related to summer, winter, autumn, and spring. Then she can use those things as teaching material. So she can use this challenge of a big class as an opportunity.’***

Getting ideas from so many students can bring action and creativity to your classroom – have you tried anything like this?

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**Programme summary:** Agree some **ground rules** with your students on how the big class will operate, and how you'll get their attention when needed. Remember, 'One, two, three ... eyes on me'? Good **classroom management** is important. How will you organise the room and the students for pair and group work?

It is very important that we **motivate the students** and make them feel that this is an atmosphere in which they can try out their English. **Plan your lesson** to include different kinds of practice – and **have a clear aim** for every class.

**Look at a large group**, not as a negative, but **as a resource!** Mix weaker and stronger learners, get students to share activities and projects, and get them to bring their ideas and even resources into your classroom.

**Turn that challenge into an opportunity!**

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### Ask a colleague

Talk to other teachers about the ideas in this programme and keep a list of useful ideas.

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### Over to you!

Make a list of some of the problems you have had when teaching large classes. Discuss with another teacher and think of possible solutions.

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