

MAXIMISING POTENTIAL: Points for reflection: Unit 5

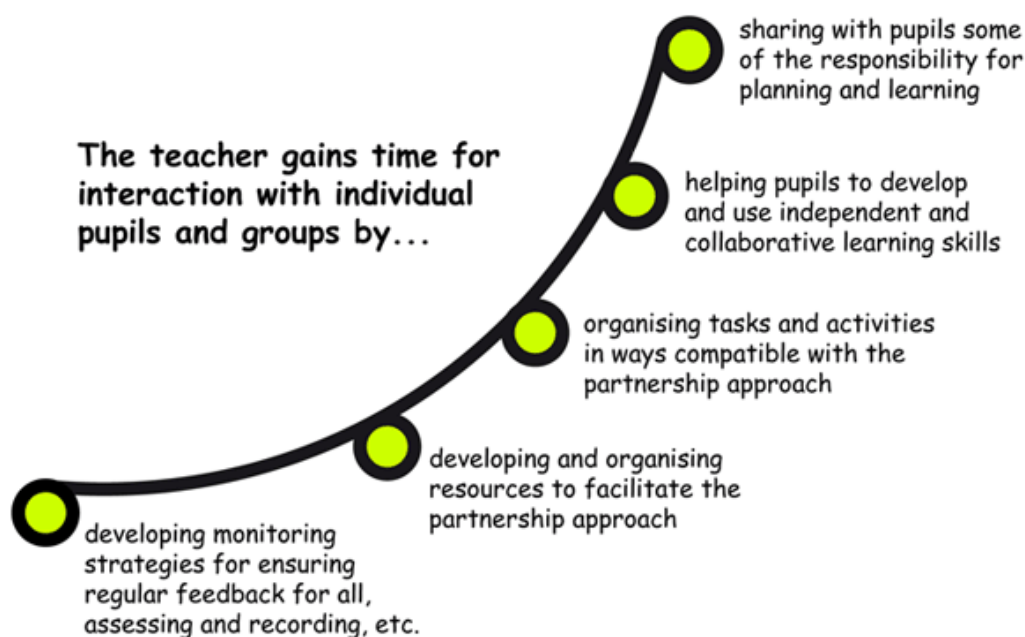
STARTING POINTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Managing change

So far, in this programme, the emphasis has been on observing and identifying learning needs so that we can plan strategies to accommodate them. But not all needs can be predicted in advance, and our best planning sometimes has outcomes that were not foreseen. It is the purposeful interaction between teacher and learner which provides opportunities to respond to more immediate and individual needs as they arise. This has significant implications for the way the teacher uses class time.

In order to be available to meet individual and small group needs, the teacher has to reduce those aspects of teaching which limit freedom to respond to needs as they arise. This means finding ways of managing the classroom (learners, resources, tasks, relationships, responsibilities) which will facilitate the creation of conditions which free the teacher to work closely with groups or with individual pupils. Some of those facilitating strategies are indicated in the diagram below and taken up again in the notes that accompany the tasks in this unit.

This diagram illustrates how the teacher can gain time for interaction with individual pupils and groups.



Fear of change

Teachers are understandably afraid of 'throwing out the baby with the bathwater'. How can you know if any change you make is going to work any better than what you were doing before? Here are some ways of reducing the risk:

Take small steps

Neither you nor the pupils will be comfortable with whole-scale change. Take one step at a time, and prepare the pupils well, so that they are not upset by unexpected changes to usual practice. They need to know if your expectations have changed, and if so, why. Explain that small changes can often make a big difference to how well pupils learn, and involve them in evaluating the effectiveness of the new procedures. If they need to learn new skills (e.g. how to work in groups, engage in self- or peer- assessment, etc.) make sure that these skills are explicitly taught.

Add breadth and enrichment

Maintain the existing regime for the time being, but experiment with additions and/or alterations to one or two activities with a view to widening their sensory scope, to introducing more choice and more independent or collaborative or active learning, etc., thereby accommodating the needs of more learners.

Offer choices

First, try a range of approaches with your pupils so that you, and they, can find out which method works best for different individuals. Then, begin to offer choices, allowing pupils to choose whichever way seems to work best for them. Again, this begins to involve pupils in thinking about learning and encourages them to take on some of the responsibility. Vocabulary learning is often chosen as a vehicle for early experimentation, since it is relatively easy to evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches.

Start with one unit

One tried and tested strategy is to pick out for your experiment a theme or unit of work which seems to be particularly difficult to teach successfully, and to develop just that part of your programme in line with the new ideas that you want to try. Since you selected something which was working unsatisfactorily anyway, you have nothing to lose. Also, if it works, you know that success **is** due to the change in approach, and that will give you the confidence to experiment further.