



Week 2: Active learning in practice

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Introduction

In Week 1 you examined global and national policies on teaching and the shift to a more participatory pedagogy. The focus this week is on how such participatory pedagogy can be enacted in practice in schools and colleges by teachers and teacher educators.

The week starts by looking at key features of a participatory pedagogy. You will then explore some of the TESS-India OER in detail and begin to identify how these encourage teachers to move to more active approaches to learning in their classrooms. There are six activities for you to complete this week, including Activity 2.6 that is part of your portfolio of participation. The image below is a scene that can be found in many classrooms across the world.



Figure 1

Reflection point

To what extent does this picture reflect your own experience of learning at school? How effective was this way of learning in helping you to understand difficult concepts? How motivating is this style of teaching for the learner? Which teachers do you remember from your schooling, and why?

All teachers carry images of and ideas about teachers and the teaching role. Their memories of their own schooling will influence their views of what good teachers do and they will also be swayed by the images of teachers around them in films, books and TV shows. Research from around the world shows the difficulty of changing teachers' attitudes and assumptions about teaching. In order to change, teachers need to experience different ways of learning, try new approaches and analyse evidence of the effectiveness of new practices.

1 Learning through active participation

The notion of 'active learning' challenges the idea that learners will simply absorb knowledge transmitted by the teachers. The experience of active learning may be unfamiliar to many teachers.

Reflection point

Think about something that you have learned recently. How did you learn it? Have you ever learned anything through active learning? What did it feel like?

Learning through active participation will always involve learners being cognitively active – engaging their minds in their learning. It might also involve an actual physical action (such as making a poster, building a model or doing an experiment), but will always involve cognitive action. Just reading or listening to a lecture is insufficient; understanding is actively constructed by the learner through thinking about the new material, processing information and making connections with previous learning or established ideas.

If you are interested, you can read more about different ideas of learning in Section 5 of *Creating open educational resources*, an OER course from The Open University:

- ['Introduction'](#)
- ['How do people learn?'](#)
- ['Behaviorism, Piagetianism and social constructivism'](#)

Activity 2.1: Recognising active participation in learning

Allow approximately 30 minutes

- 1 Look at these photographs taken in Indian classrooms. Focus on what the students and teachers are doing.



(a)



(b)



(c)



Figure 2

- 2 For each photograph list the evidence that the students are actively engaged in their learning. Students will be motivated if the activities are meaningful to them and if they are able to connect them to their own experiences and things that are of value to them.
- 3 [Now listen to Dr Sandhya Paranjpe from TESS-India](#) talk about what she notices in the photographs of Indian classrooms. How do her ideas compare with yours?

1.1 Examples of active participation in learning

The photographs in Activity 2.1 show a variety of teaching strategies to promote active participation: pair work, group work, building models, mind mapping, brainstorming, and role play. The teacher is rarely standing at the front, but is moving around the room, listening, watching and supporting students. Practitioners who promote active engagement in learning:

- give students the opportunity to talk
- listen to students
- encourage students to ask questions
- use a variety of different approaches to learning in their teaching
- link new ideas to students' experiences and lives.

Above all, they will use what they discover about their students to plan appropriate future activities.

2 TESS-India Key Resources

The TESS-India Key Resources detail approaches that enable teachers to take a more student-centred, participatory approach to teaching and learning. These approaches are central to TESS-India's Teacher Development OER. The Key Resources are as follows:

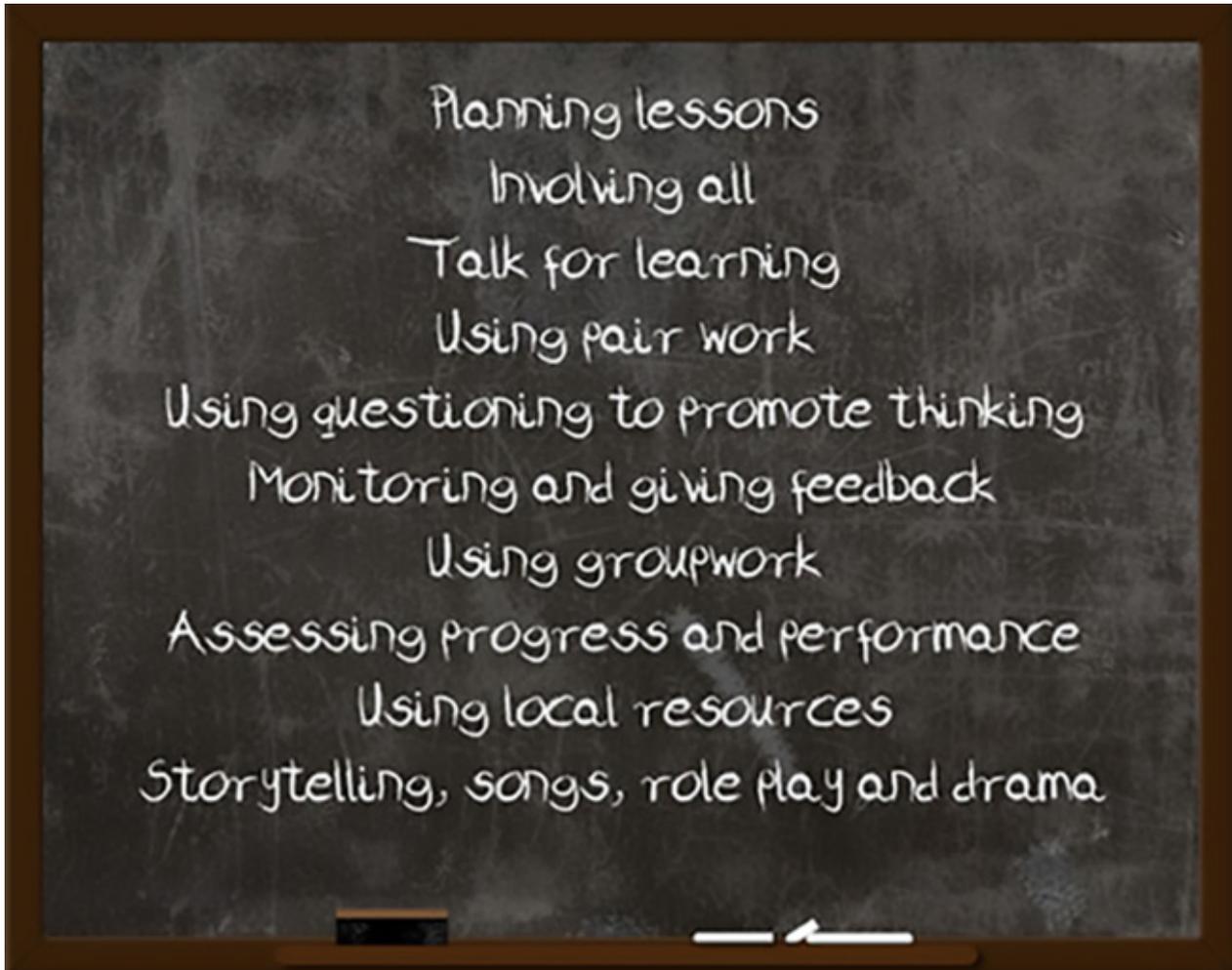


Figure 3

These Key Resources apply to all subjects and levels, and offer practical guidance on the approaches advocated by Indian educational policy.

Activity 2.2: Tess-India Key Resources

Allow approximately 45 minutes

- 1 Find the [TESS-India Key Resources \(English\)](#) and [TESS-India Key Resources \(Hindi\)](#) on the TESS-India website. Also look for the related [TESS-India video clips \(English\)](#) and [TESS-India video clips \(Hindi\)](#).
- 2 Choose three Key Resources related to your work and focus on reading these carefully. We suggest you also look at the related video clips – for example, you might choose to look at 'Using pair work', 'Talk for learning' and 'Using local resources'. For each Key Resource, note three important points relevant to

classroom practice that you would want teachers to pay attention to. For example, in the video 'Talk for learning: Lower primary English' you might want teachers to notice what role the teacher takes while the children do the activity.

- 3 Revisit your responses to Activity 2.1. Do you notice any more evidence of active learning as a result of your reading?

Reflection point

Think about the teachers you work with and the Key Resources you have studied in Activity 2.2. How could you introduce these teachers to the ideas you identified?

Optional activity: Teaching large classes

One of the greatest challenges that teachers and teacher educators face is involving all their students in the lesson, particularly when dealing with large classes. If you haven't already done so, you might like to read in detail the Key Resources 'Involving all', 'Using questioning to promote thinking' and 'Using pair work'. These resources are particularly important because they provide strategies that can be used to promote active learning in large classes.

3 TESS-India Teacher Development OER

The TESS-India Teacher Development OER take the ideas or principles of the TESS-India Key Resources and videos and model them in the context of the school curriculum.

As you saw in Week 1, there are TESS-India OER for Elementary English, Maths, Science and Language & Literacy, and Secondary English, Maths and Science. (Titles of the OER can be viewed under [Learning resources](#) on the TESS-India website.)

In Activity 2.3 you explore in detail some of the TESS-India OER and begin to identify how they encourage teachers to move to more active approaches to learning in their classrooms.

Activity 2.3: Looking at the OER

Allow approximately 40 minutes

- 1 Select one of the TESS-India Teacher Development OER that you looked at in Activity 1.5. You will also need the document 'Structure of a TESS-India OER'. For example, if you work with science teachers in elementary schools, you might choose *Using groupwork: floating and sinking* from the Elementary Science OER, or if you work with English teachers at secondary schools you might choose to look at *English grammar in action* from the Secondary English OER.
- 2 Read the 'Structure of a TESS-India OER' document and then your selected TESS-India OER.
- 3 Record your responses to these tasks.

- What is the role of the case studies in the OER and the overall purpose of the activities? Avoid focusing on the teaching points of each individual example of the case studies and activities – instead, try to identify the general purpose and role of these elements in the OER.
 - What is the purpose of the narrative text between the case studies and activities?
- 4 [Now listen to Dr Sandhya Paranjpe](#) talking about why she likes a case study from TESS-India's Elementary English OER on promoting the reading environment. The case study is '[Mr Shankar reflects on his role](#)'.
- Dr Paranjpe talks about how the case studies highlight general principles for practice in teaching. These principles draw on the changing understanding of learners and learning discussed by Professor Murphy in Week 1. You might like to revisit her talk and think about how the practices in the TESS-India activities and case studies such as this one connect back to the learning characteristics that she highlights – learners as knowledgeable and active in the learning process.
- 5 Next, choose one activity and one case study from the TESS-India OER that you are using.
- 6 Note your thoughts about the following:
- What will the teacher learn from engaging with the case study and the activity?
 - What is the teacher being asked to do to make sure that the students are actively involved in the lesson?
- 7 Discuss your thoughts about the TESS-India OER with a colleague or peer. We suggest that you:
- indicate which TESS-India OER you have studied (you may like to provide them with a printed copy or a link to the online document to aid your discussions)
 - describe one aspect you liked about the OER and one question you have about the OER
 - respond to any questions they have about the OER or how it could be used.

3.1 Key messages from the TESS-India Teacher Development OER

- The OER positions the teachers' classroom as the site of learning and teachers as agents in learning.
- By participating in the activities, rather than just reading about them, teachers experience and come to understand the participatory pedagogy as they enact it in practice. It is intended that teachers will then be able to use the ideas in the OERs to teach any topic in the curriculum.
- The OER focus on pedagogy, but as teachers engage with the activities and case studies, the OER will also help to support their subject knowledge development.

- Each OER is written to make a coherent account for the teacher, but individual case studies, activities and resources can be used effectively depending on the context.
- The language is designed to be straightforward and clear.
- The OER can be adapted if necessary – the topics and examples can be changed.
- By engaging with active, participatory pedagogy, teachers are provided with direct evidence from their own classrooms of how this new practice enables student learning. In this way the TESS-India OER takes policy developments into the classroom, motivates and sustains pedagogic innovation, and improves student learning and achievement.
- The OER also encourage teachers to work collaboratively and promote planning lessons in advance. They invite the teachers to reflect on their past experiences and provide opportunities for the teachers to extend their knowledge and understanding.

A copy of these key messages and a PowerPoint slide titled 'TESS-India OER: addressing these problems' are available. You might find these useful for later activities in the MOOC.

Reflection point

In what ways are the TESS-India OER different from the resources that you currently use when working with teachers and student teachers? Do you think these units will support the vision for change that you set out in Activity 1.1? Why, or why not?

Optional activity

One of the challenges highlighted by many teacher educators is the size of the groups that they have to teach. [UNESCO has produced a toolkit](#) for creating inclusive learner-friendly classroom environments that would be useful in your work with teachers. Access the toolkit and spend some time becoming familiar with the content.

4 Promoting learning through active participation

Enacting active learning strategies in the classroom requires teachers to develop specific knowledge and skills. For example, for groupwork to be effective, a teacher needs to think about how to:

- arrange the classroom
- divide the students into groups
- (most importantly) design a task that will help students to learn.

In Activity 2.4 you will be examining the skills that teachers need to use different active learning strategies effectively.

Activity 2.4: The skills and knowledge needed

Allow approximately 1 hour

For each of the strategies listed in the table, identify the skills that a teacher needs from the list below. Complete the table by dragging and dropping two or three skills for each strategy into the correct box.

Interactive content is not available in this format.

A larger version of this table ('Active teaching and learning methods') is available. It has further strategies for you to use in the classroom, along with the suggested answers for this activity.

Read through the table. Many teachers know that they should be helping students to construct knowledge, or organising opportunities for them to talk. Doing it in practice is difficult, but breaking it down in this way makes it easier.

5 Modelling principles and practices

Shifting from a teacher-centred approach to the pedagogy advocated by the NCFTE (2009) is challenging. Simply telling teachers to adopt active approaches to learning is not effective – they need to experience the approaches for themselves.

Teacher educators play an important role in helping teachers to acquire the knowledge and, more importantly, the skills to use the approaches needed. An effective way to teach teachers about any of the approaches mentioned so far is to model them in your own work with teachers. By modelling the principles and pedagogy underpinning TESS-India, the teachers or student teachers that you are working with can experience the benefits of active learning. Even though you may be working with a large number of teachers or trainees, you can promote active learning by using a variety of different types of questions, giving students thinking time or the opportunity to talk about their ideas in pairs before responding.

When teachers are actively engaged – doing, sharing, discussing, writing, solving problems – you have the opportunity to watch and listen, and intervene and encourage if necessary. You will find out how they are responding to new ideas and ways of teaching, what they are thinking, and what they find difficult or useful. This will give you the opportunity to adapt your approach and be more effective in meeting their needs and context-specific requirements.

The next activity focuses on how active learning can be modelled through working with teachers. The perspective is from someone working with pre-service teachers, but the ideas apply just as well to in-service training.

Activity 2.5: Modelling the pedagogy for active learning

Allow approximately 1 hour

- 1 Imagine that a young colleague has come to you for advice. She is planning a session on 'using group work in teaching your subject' for 50 pre-service primary

school teachers. She has come to you to ask for some suggestions about how she could make the two-hour session interactive.

- What suggestions would you make about the activities that she could use?
- 2 Summarise your advice and the subject to which it relates in around 100 words. Share your advice with a peer or colleague and ask for their feedback. What thoughts or suggestions do they have? Do you agree with their advice? How effective might it be?

6 Reviewing your learning

Activity 2.6: Assignment 2 – Active learning quiz

Allow approximately 20 minutes

To complete the second week of the MOOC, complete this short quiz (10 questions) about learning through active participation. Once you have responded, click on 'Check' to check your answer.

This is part of the portfolio of participation.

7 Moving forward

The TESS-India OER position teachers and teacher educators as active learners. They bring together theory and practice to support educators in implementing active participatory approaches to learning. They are underpinned by the belief that students and teachers create meaning through participation. As teachers come to know their students, and value and respect what they bring to the classroom, they will start to innovate. By doing so, students will enjoy their learning and learn more.

In Week 3 you explore how you can use video in your work with teachers.

Now go to Week 3: Using video to support teacher development.

References

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