

Planning for Variety-ideas to help. Information Sheet

To help you think widely about the different aspects of variety that you might include across your sessions, some possibilities have been grouped together below.

1. Variety in the thinking process

Perhaps the most important aspect of variety concerns the intellectual challenges that you make of the learners. Learners need the skills of thinking in different ways. So in the course of your sessions, you might plan for them to:

- recall ideas, information or data
- monitor, observe information or data
- measure or evaluate and record data and information
- explain ideas, trends and patterns and manipulate data and information
- apply knowledge and understanding to solve problems
- analyse, synthesise and evaluate. (See Information Sheet: Bloom's taxonomy of learning - cognitive domain.)

There are many types of activity through which learners can be asked to work with information, data and ideas. The following list offers some possibilities:

- interrogation and comprehension of text
- decision-making exercises
- calculations (including use of spreadsheets)
- retrieving and evaluating data or information and ideas
- transforming data and information from one form to another
- interpreting charts, graphs, photographs performance and diagrams
- devising charts, graphs diagrams
- discussions and word storming
- making presentations, including written verbal, visual, ICT
- role-play and debate
- activities using cards and other resources; making models, including physical and computer-generated models
- concept mapping
- carrying out investigations
- gapped handouts
- e-worksheets.

2. Variety in sources of information

Information, ideas and data may come from primary or secondary sources, controlled experiment, fieldwork or workshop practice is a source of primary data. For example, learners might:

- work on an experiment or practical activity set up by a teacher;
- design and carry out an investigation of their own.

There is a wealth of options for enabling learners to obtain secondary data and information and acquire knowledge and understanding. No doubt you often select and present a lot of information to your learners, for example, by:

- talking to them
- giving them worksheets
- providing them with self-study resources in the form of either print materials or web-based interactive tutorials.

You may well get your learners to:

- access the internet
- read books and articles from journals and magazines
- watch a video or DVD
- ask other, more advanced, learners or listen to 'experts' invited to talk to them
- play a specially designed 'game'.

Obtaining ideas, information and data this way requires learners to make decisions and be selective.

3. Variety in how and where learners learn

There is no rule that says learners must sit in the same seat, facing the teacher, throughout a session. They can work in pairs or small groups, or as a whole class, with seats arranged around tables, in a horseshoe, in a complete circle or in rows. They might also undertake activities that take them outside the classroom to the library or to a computer centre or outside the institution, for example on field trips, work placements and workplace visits.

4. Variety in use of equipment and 'props'

The learning process can come alive with the judicious use of equipment and 'props':

- computers, electronic tablets and a range of different software;
- video cameras;
- models;
- laboratory or workshop equipment;
- everyday objects used in unusual ways as 'props'.

5. Variety in assessing learning

You need to know how your learners are progressing in the short as well as the longer term. Importantly, they need to know about their progress. The more information you collect during a session, the more you will be able to adapt your session plans to meet learners' needs.

You can collect information:

- walking around the classroom, listening to the way learners are tackling a problem;
- using cards and games;
- asking learners to write down their reasoning, so that you can check the accuracy of use of language and level of understanding;
- asking learners to present what they have learned to their peers;
- asking learners to capture key points on mini whiteboards, and hold them up for the teacher and other learners to see;
- assess learning by using electronic worksheets or quiz words.

Planning for Variety Information Sheet (Bloom's taxonomy of learning – cognitive domain)

Dimensions of variety

Variety in the thinking process

Knowledge: ask learner to define, duplicate, label, list, memorise, name, order, recall, recognize, relate, repeat, reproduce, state.

Comprehension: ask learner to classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, indicate, locate, recognize, report, restate, review, select, translate.

Application: ask learner to apply, choose, demonstrate, dramatise, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, practise, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write.

Analysis: ask learner to analyse, appraise, calculate, categorise, compare, contrast, criticise, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test.

Synthesis: ask learner to arrange, assemble, collect, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, manage, organise, plan, prepare, propose, set up, write.

Evaluation: ask learner to appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose, compare, defend, estimate, evaluate, judge, predict, rate, select, support, value

'Knowledge' is the least challenging process in this taxonomy. 'Evaluation' is the most challenging.