

Questions often asked by teachers

A common plea from teachers is 'I want to stop streaming but I don't know how.' Below are some questions that teachers often ask along with responses provided by facilitators from Education Support Services (ESS) at Otago University. You can contact them (essadmin@otago.ac.nz) or other PLD providers to discuss in-depth support.' We will continue to add more questions and answers over time.

Literacy

1. How can I meet the literacy needs of learners when there is such a wide range of achievement in my class?

Classes in Aotearoa include learners from a diverse range of linguistic and cultural experiences. Teachers who value and use the languages and narratives of their learners within their teaching programme provide all learners with the opportunity to participate and find success. Consider also the range of texts being used in the class, and how you facilitate, build and extend dialogue.

2. I teach whole class writing, so this covers every learner.

Although you can address general need in whole class writing, it is important to differentiate your teaching through flexible grouping or workshopping to ensure you are progressing all of your learners and responding to need. A good question to ask is 'How am I going to build on this student's learning tomorrow?'

3. How do I teach reading without using the colour wheel or reading levels?

Using multi-levelled text is a great way to support mixed-ability reading. Multi leveled text have a body of text, but are supported by captions, diagrams, speech bubbles etc, that can be accessed at different levels.

4. How do I do mixed-ability grouping in reading?

One way is to look at topics of interest and have a selection of texts on a topic that have varying degrees of complexity. We know that children who have a keen interest in a specific topic, often have accompanying vocabulary that allows them to read and comprehend more complex text, allowing for more flexible grouping that isn't leveled.

Numeracy

5. I already use achieve, merit and excellence groups in my classes and it works well for me.

Students have strengths and weaknesses so the groupings need to be flexible, not static, and where students can build on their strengths and develop further skills and talents. Students can be exposed to and participate in rich, open activities which are equitable and encourage success for all. This encourages high expectations for all from the kaiako, school and community.

6. I have such a diverse range of ability in the class of 30 and teaching to the majority is the only way that works.

Moving from being a 'sage on the stage' to facilitation will assist with your mahi and student ownership of the learning journey – being inclusive and involving all in the learning with support.

7. There is so much constant change that has happened since NCEA started and the curriculum refresh now, I just want to teach mathematics.

All kaiako are on a continuum in their professional development, improving their own practice, improving student outcomes and supporting students in progressing. One size fits one, and knowing your students and understanding them as a whole and not a proportion, assists in meeting their needs and growing them as an individual.

8. I've done it this way for the last 20 years and it works for me.

But is it working for the students in your class? Analysing student data and tracking is important for each teacher to assist each student to be successful. How can you monitor success, engagement, and wellbeing of students?

9. The textbooks we use do not cater for differentiation.

Differentiated teaching is where a teacher plans a lesson that can be adjusted by either the content, or the process used to learn to ensure that all learners, who enter at different starting points, can receive the support they need to grow and succeed. It is utilising a range of resources to meet the needs of each student in the learning process to challenge and extend each.

10. Getting to know students takes too long, I need to focus on the curriculum.

Getting to know your students is beneficial to aid the development and blossoming of a working, reciprocal relationship that you will have with each student. Considering them as a part that fits with your specialist curriculum area is not appropriate.

11. Each student has a limit of what they can be successful in. So, grouping them by ability helps them learn best.

Having a fixed or deficit theorising stance is not empowering for students. Instead, it is developing a growth mindset that is important. Students need to be exposed to different ways of thinking and doing so that they can hear, see and be involved in rich and challenging activities.

General

12. How will mixed-ability or flexible groupings help my high-ability learners?

In flexible grouping all students will have the ability to grow their thinking and their ability to explain their understanding in a way that all students can benefit from the discussion. The more able students will be able to learn how to explain their thinking in a simple way that will enable all learners to grow and consolidate.

13. How will I cater for the wide range of abilities in my class without ability grouping or streaming?

The use of open-ended questions to ascertain student understanding of concepts will enable the teacher to then flexibly respond to the needs of the students based on a need to know basis rather than a one size fits all basis. These individual needs can be catered for in workshops, rich tasks, student-led interest topics etc.