

Getting to Know Your Students: Some thoughts and Suggestions

The quality of teacher-student interaction and relationships is a keystone for all other aspects of effective teaching and classroom management”

Els Heijnen-Maathius in *Successful Inclusive Education starts with teachers: what have we learned? A multi-cultural case study*”.

Names :

- Our names are important to us, and when people get them wrong we can take it as a sign that we are not important to them.
- Another think to bear in mind is that people might not want to be called by their official name (Joseph-Francois only here’s that when his mum is telling him off!).
- On the other hand, they may not want a teacher calling them by the nickname that their friends use, so...

ASK!! – What would you like me to call you? Am I pronouncing it correctly? What pronouns would you like us to use?

It can be hard if, like myself, you have hundreds of new students every year, so a few tips to remember their names:

- Use them as often as possible – don’t let the students answer a question unless you can remember their names, this also shows them the effort you’re making!
- Ask them to choose an adjective and a hobby that starts with the same letter as their name and to present themselves like this, “I’m rabbity Rachael and I like running”.
- With challenging names (or two students with similar names) I even offer a prize (a joker, a sweet) if I get their name wrong – this certainly encourages me to make an effort!

Remember to be sure students know each other’s’ names too! – use ice breakers and getting to know you activities (for example Activities for Inclusive Language Teaching from Delta has loads!)

Learning Styles:

By this I don’t necessarily mean simply audio, visual or kinesthetic, but in general the different ways students learn, and what they find easy and difficult.

Avoid “how do you learn?” – it’s quite hard to answer unless you’ve really thought about it before.

Instead try some of these:

- What do you love doing at school?
- How can I help you learn?
- If you could change one thing at school...?
- If you were a teacher, what would you do differently?
- What’s the best/worst memory you have of a teacher?

Getting Personal

Many course, especially for younger learners talk about family and homelife. This can be upsetting for some students so:

- Ask students to come and tell you or give you a note about anything they don't want to discuss
- Encourage students to invent an avatar if they feel more comfortable, this avatar could be the son of Lionel Messi, or have Malala as a sister...

The Classics:

Some classic ways to get to know your students (and for them to get to know each other)

- Find Someone Who – this can be a premade list, example find someone who has never read Harry Potter? Alternatively ask the students to write 5 things about themselves on a piece of paper, you can then use this to create a “find someone who” sheet especially for the class.
- What's your favourite – a simple list for lower-level students. More fun can be a “what X do you hate the most?” For some reason people are often a lot more vocal about their worst meal/sport/school subject!!
- Write a letter to your teacher – the advantage of this is students can include information they don't want the rest of the class to know, and if done in English it will also give you an idea of their level, any difficulties etc.