



## **SOCIAL INNOVATIONS EDUBYTE 9 2020, INTERMEDIATE PHASE SUPPORTING STRUGGLING READERS**



When the teacher reads an English book or passage aloud and the learners are required to answer questions or complete worksheets, teachers may find that weaker readers 'switch off' halfway through the reading. This may be particularly so for learners with weak English skills. Teachers may find that the worksheets accompanying some of the lessons are too difficult for these learners to complete.

### **A word from PEP Academy alumni**

PEP Academy has helped learners gain confidence in English.

Lauren: "PEP Academy built my confidence, especially in English when we had orals."

Buhle: "Now I can stand in front of people and speak (in English) with confidence."

Alumnus in group discussion: "Every day I saw an improvement in my English and that made me happy."

### **To help learners better understand, participate and build their confidence, teachers can:**

- Code switch or summarise parts of the reading in the learners' home language;
- Ask additional questions or make comments that relate the reading to the learner's life;
- Let learners work in pairs and/or only complete part of a learner's worksheet;
- Give learners a simpler or alternative task based on the reading.

#### **1. Code switch or summarise parts of the reading in learners' home language**

Depending on learners' level of English, the languages represented in the class, and the teachers own linguistic ability, a teacher can code switch or move between English and another language as they read. This will be particularly important if the book is non-fiction and has a word or concept that is critical for learners to understand. Sometimes it might be more appropriate to summarise parts of the reading in another language once the teacher has read a page, paragraph, or particular section. If a teacher cannot speak the language/s represented in the class they can ask a learner to summarise the story thus far. Of course, knowing that they may be called upon to summarise the text will help keep learners focused. Calling on them to do this will also build their confidence.

## **2. Ask additional questions or make comments that relate the reading to the learners' lives**

For learners to be focused and interested in the reading, the teacher has to relate the text to their own lives. To keep learners, especially weaker ones, focused a teacher may therefore choose to add a few additional questions. For example, if the school/area is near railway lines and the book is about trains, the teacher can ask a specific additional question such as, 'Thulane, have you ever walked under the bridge when the train passes over?'. Struggling readers often feel excluded from class work because it is so far above their level. Remember that all questions and comments are more effective when directed to a particular, named child, e.g. if you were reading a book about China: 'Lebo, do you think you would enjoy going to China for a holiday?' Including children in this way builds confidence.

## **3. Let learners work in pairs and/or only complete part of a learner's worksheet**

To help struggling readers a teacher may let them work in pairs or groups to complete a worksheet. If a teacher does this, it is important not to pair a weaker reader together with a stronger reader as this will only lead to both children being frustrated. Rather, readers with a similar reading ability should work together. If learners are weak it may be a good idea to let them complete only part of a worksheet, if appropriate.

## **4. Give learners a simpler or alternative task based on the reading**

Try to give learners work that you know they can do. On the odd occasion, you may decide to give a weaker learner/s an alternative, and simpler writing task. For example, an exercise might be to write a letter. If this is too difficult for some of your weaker learners you might ask them to rather write a postcard, a sentence or draw a picture related to the same activity. If learners are able to do the writing task they will not make too many mistakes AND their confidence will grow.