



Practical Plan B's!!

We all start the year with a clear plan for our students, knowing what topics are being covered and in what order, knowing when assessments will be offered and knowing what we expect the outcomes for our classes to look like ... and then sometimes we need to offer some alternatives NOW to ensure we can recognise each student's skills and knowledge ... at whatever level they are working at to offer "success for all".

Ever had or overheard a conversation like this ...

Student: I don't see the point in this assessment.

Teacher: Just give it a go, you may surprise yourself.

Student: I don't even know what I have to do.

Teacher: Just take your time, I'm sure you can do it.

Or ...

Teacher: Why aren't you doing the work?

Student: I am.

Teacher: Everyone else has nearly finished and you are still on the first part.

Student: (No answer)

Teacher: Do you need more help?

Student: (No answer)

Teacher: I can't help you if I don't know what you are struggling with.

Student: I'm fine.

We know students don't all work at the same pace and complete work to the same standard ... Sometimes we forget what it must be like to be a student that is struggling with what is expected, struggling to understand the questions, struggling to get their ideas/thoughts/knowledge across, struggling to keep up with the pace of a class and maybe even struggling to keep interested.

Student: I am trying.

Teacher: What do you need help with?

Student: Nothing.

Teacher: You look like you need help.

Student: I'm fine (and again either nothing gets handed in or it is not at the required level).

Sometimes we keep going with Plan A even though we know it isn't right for each student. We often miss the most obvious Plan B ... simply re-engaging a student by offering them learning opportunities at the right level for where they are at NOW.



We know most students want to keep up with their peers, they enjoy feeling success, they don't like being different from others. What we all need are some Plan B's, C's and D's (just in case!) that will help build a student's confidence, allow them to build a relationship with staff and re-engage with subjects or topics that they are interested in.

1. **A Plan B style within a lesson - Build these three tips for a student into a lesson (... they could take 2mins or 50mins!): -**

- a) **A chance to move** (either outside a class collecting information, taking photos, using technology, linking into other groups, collecting tools/material, making things, putting out equipment, doing a survey, researching, allowing them to leave the classroom, replicate a visual diagram, use short content blurbs to create games etc.)
- b) **A chance to be creative** (recording information, collages, models, making something, putting up a display, talking to people, using technology, observing people, animation etc.)
- c) **A chance to think** (including quiet time, offering a quiet space at times, not butting in and prompting them, allowing a student to take their time to answer, looking for alternative answers rather than the obvious, linking ideas with other skills/topics, asking questions, having a conversation etc.)

2. **Mini Plan B's within a lesson - take a small step back and think about adapting tasks for a student struggling with small tasks or a key area: -**

- attempt a shorter version of the key task
- embed skills into a theme so they are not focusing on "literacy" or "numeracy"
- give verbal instructions
- rephrase complex words into student language
- link one small skill to another skill in a clear sequence
- offer more small practical tasks – see above (**A chance to move**)
- use technology aides to help a student express their knowledge or understand a question (.pdf readers, visual clues, audio and visual books, cartoon or animated strips, apps etc.)
- offer a different assessment opportunity in line with your subject (e.g.: Fun Fitness in PE or Masterchef Madness in Food Tech – see below)
- create some "differentiation" or adapt a task to lessen what they are struggling with (e.g.: if struggling with writing, they offer their ideas verbally, either to us or to a small group)
- don't ask them to sit an assessment you know they will fail
- build positive relationships by linking into their interests and skills

3. **A Plan B for key assessment opportunities – use an alternative rather than pursuing what isn't working:**

- Sometimes **the alternative internal assessment** is simply assessing a DIFFERENT WAY – share ideas in a group first, verbalise a summary, dictate to a teacher or TA the answer, discuss rather than write show they can meet the evidence requirement, record/video an answer, produce



electronically rather than write, complete a table, do a survey, be observed, share in a presentation etc.

- sometimes we may have to re-write (re-scaffold) parts of assessment material so it is less “wordy”, uses more visuals/tables and easy to follow formats that focus on the skill, not the literacy ability.
- Or, sometimes **the alternative** may be better suited a different unit or achievement standard altogether that may be a better option for a student or maybe only offering part of an assessment blend ... **there are thousands of different options on the NZQA framework!**
- And, sometimes, we may focus on the teaching and learning and not offer the assessment at all, after all, we may need to go right back to engaging them and building positive relationships about learning.

For some students offering a Plan B is enough to get them back on the pathway they started on ... for others they may need different options altogether. With over 19 000 options on the NZQA framework there MUST be something for each student that is better than struggling and not feeling “success for all”.

Note: Thoughts in this series are based on © Supporting Learning experiences with over 900 NZ schools and schools worldwide, as well as research used for articles, presentations and study.

For NCEA students SLR offers some different options that can be completed in mainstream classes, in specialist areas, with teachers or TA’s, at home, in small groups, 1:1 and offer practical, engaging and achievable tasks and link into some of the other areas on the NZQA framework:

NCEA L1 & L2 Core Generic unit standards
NCEA L1 Tikanga unit standards
NCEA L1 Numeracy Portfolios

NCEA L1 Supported Learning unit standards
NCEA L1 Literacy Portfolios
NCEA L1 Skills for Working unit standards

For students working lower or leading into NCEA L1, have a look at the SLR Resources page and the different workbooklets (including the full alternative Science workbooklets range) that may offer options for your staff and opportunities for your students.

READ ON ...

TAKE 5 MINS #2 – Putting a jigsaw puzzle together ... similar but different combinations!

