## **Strategies for Practicing Writing and Speaking**

Agnes Orosz

<b>Type of Productive Skill:</b> Teaching Writing skills	<b>Topic:</b> Giving constructive feedback on written work	
Curricular Thread: Writing	Sub thread: Text Production	

# Strategy 1: Coding system for correcting written work to encourage self and peer-correction

## **Description**

The aim of this strategy is firstly, to raise students' awareness of the rules that govern effective writing, and to really learn from their mistakes and improve through self- and peer-marking. Secondly, to encourage students to pay close attention to the teacher's correction of their written work so that they make progress in their writing skills by learning from their mistakes.

Traditionally, feedback on students' written work meant the teacher correcting the writing by crossing out mistakes and writing a correct version on the student work and then grading the piece. The trouble with this is that students tend to learn very little from their teachers' corrections, and continue to make the same mistakes each time they

write. Often, students take no notice of the corrections at all; they take one look at their grade and stuff the writing into their bag, never to be looked at again. This is particularly disheartening when one has spent long hours over evenings and weekends correcting their work. An alternative to this approach is to give feedback that enables the students themselves to self-correct and peer-correct using a coding system which identifies the type of error made and underlining to locate the error. This is a much more effective strategy which forces the students to think hard about the mistakes they made and how best to correct them.

## Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

In order to use this strategy, you'll first need to set a writing task for homework specifying a topic and the number of words expected (around 150 words is ideal). Tell students they must write by hand and write only on every second line and leave a margin on both sides of their paper. Tell students that using Google Translate is not allowed. They should use a real dictionary to look up words. If they don't have a printed dictionary they may refer to the website www.wordreference.com which is a reliable free online dictionary.

Collect the writings next lesson. After class, go through each one underlining errors and specifying what type of error it is in the margin applying the coding system below using a pen that is highly visible and stands out against the pen color used by the student. Ensure your handwriting is always exceptionally clear.

sp.	spelling
gr.	grammar
w.w.	wrong word
w.o.	wrong order

w.t.	wrong tense
w.f.	wrong form
*****	wrong torm
h.	handwriting
p.	punctuation

Table 1. Writing Codes. (Adapted from Hedge, 2000)

If this is the first time you are using writing codes with your class, note down specific errors from the students' writing which exemplify the different types of errors.

In class, write some of these errors on the board, (without saying who made the errors) and ask students to work in pairs to correct the mistakes. Then elicit from the students what corrections need to be made and model the use of writing codes as you go along. For example, if the incorrect sentence includes a spelling mistake, write the code "sp." next to the sentence in a different color board marker and underline the word in the sentence that was spelled incorrectly. Repeat until you have covered examples of all the codes, keep track of the meaning of the codes for the students, as they need to copy them down and keep them safe for future reference. You may suggest they write them on the inside cover of their English notebook for easier future reference.

If your students are already familiar with the codes, then the demonstration can be skipped.

Give each pair one of the two pieces of writing that belong to them, (ones the teacher has already marked using the codes) and make very clear that students should work as a pair together on each piece of writing. This is very important in order to make full use of the input peers can give and to encourage a dialogue about the language points in question. The students' task is to make the appropriate corrections using a different colored pen on their writings using the codes as their guide. Monitor

closely and "conference" with pairs leading them and guiding them if they don't know how to correct something, keep checking that students are correcting appropriately, and check final corrections as and when students finish a piece. When pairs have finished correcting one of their writing pieces, you may give them the second one.

This is an effective technique I have been using for many years now. It really encourages students to become conscious of and learn from their mistakes, thereby improving their writing each time they write. It is easily adaptable to any group size as students work in pairs. No ICT tools are necessary and flipchart paper can be used to display the codes as an alternative to a whiteboard, which can stay in the classroom and serve as a reminder for the future. If the classroom shape and size allow it, it is best if students can sit in a horseshoe shape in pairs, so that the teacher can give guidance to each pair from the inside of the horseshoe.

#### Reference

Hedge, T. (2000). Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<b>Type of Productive Skill:</b> Speaking	Topic: How to get them speaking
Curricular Thread: Oral Communication	<b>Sub thread:</b> Spoken Production, Spoken Interaction

#### Strategy 2: Speed-dating

## **Description**

Many students find speaking the most difficult skill to master and it is also a skill that is neglected in many English classrooms around Ecuador. Students need lots of practice speaking English to each other during English lessons if they are ever to acquire this skill. Speed-dating is a really fun way to have students speaking to each other and repeating key phrases without it becoming boring or mechanical. It can be adapted to any target language that is being taught.

## Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Ask students to form two lines facing each other, either standing or sitting. Give students 4 minutes to do a speaking activity with their partner, e.g. ask and answer questions in the simple past, e.g. "What did you do last night?" "What did you do last weekend?" etc. Then, one line moves down one space, so that everybody has a new partner. Then, students have the same conversation with their new partner, but now only give them 3 minutes, this should be enough since they practiced it and are now more fluent. Now the same line moves down one space again and students have the same conversation in an even more concise form: only 2 minutes.

The teacher's role during these conversations is to monitor carefully and listen out for common mistakes, but not to correct the mistakes while students are talking as this will interrupt their flow. Rather, make a note

of the common mistakes and write them up on the board as the activity is in progress, then stop the activity, get everyone's attention and point out the common mistakes and drill the correct forms. Then, students should repeat the activity with new partners at least 2 more times. This means students are not only practicing their English, but also improving their speaking skills, as each time they do it, they will get more fluent and with your help more accurate.

No resources are necessary for this activity, but if your students are at lower levels, they may find it helpful to have the questions they need to ask written down. If your classroom space is small, you can ask students to stand in front of each other, and the line can snake around the sides of the room or take your students outside if you need more space. Changing the environment occasionally can make an activity (and therefore the language practiced) more memorable for students. A variation on speed-dating is a "carousel discussion". In a carousel discussion, half the students form a standing circle and face outwards, then the other half of the students stand in front of one of the students in the inner circle. The outer circle moves clockwise to change partners. If there is no space inside to do this, this works well outside.

Speed-dating and carousel discussions are particularly effective because they give students controlled practice of the same linguistic point, but the fact that their partners keep changing makes it interesting. There is also a kinaesthetic element (movement) to the activity, which many students appreciate.

#### Strategy 3: Back to the Board

#### **Description**

Back to the board is an activity that never fails to get students speaking English. Even in classes where students are generally shy or reluctant to speak under normal circumstances, back to the board will have them talking. It is a game that can be played to review vocabulary at any level (except complete beginners).

#### Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Split the class into 2 teams. Have one member of each team sit with their back to the board, and the rest of their team sit in front of them, fairly close to them, facing the board. The students with their back to the board are not allowed to turn to look at the board during the game.

The teacher writes a recently learned vocabulary term on the board, for example "shy". The team members who can see the word try to explain the word to their team member who has their back to the board. They must explain in English, without using any gestures or Spanish. The first back to the board student who says the word correctly wins a point for their team. Switch the students with their back to the board with another member of the teams and repeat the game with a different vocabulary item. Repeat until all team members have had a go being back to the board if possible.

If you have a very large group, you can have more than two teams. No resources are needed, if you don't have a board, you can have the vocabulary items ready on card, and stick them on the wall.

Type of Productive S Speaking	kill:	<b>Topic:</b> Improving Pronunciation
Curricular Thread: Oral C munication	com-	Sub thread: Oral Production

### Strategy 4: Minimal Pairs Map Pair Speaking

#### Description

One of the trickiest things about the English language is that the pronunciation of the words does not correspond exactly to their spelling. One way to help students with their pronunciation is to use pronunciation activities using "minimal pairs". Minimal pairs are words that are pronounced exactly the same way, except for one sound. E.g. "ship" and "sheep" are a minimal pair.

### Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

In order to use the minimal pair map activity, firstly, teach students the difference between the short /i/ and the long /i:/ in English pronunciation, by drilling the difference with familiar minimal pairs e.g. "eat" and "it" or "feet" and "fit" etc. Show students that the long /i:/ requires them to stretch their mouth to the two sides, whereas the short /i/ can be pronounced in the same way as the "i" in Spanish.

Then, hand out copies of the map below, one per student.

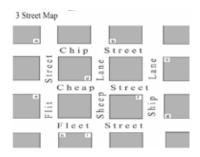


Figure 1: Minimal Pairs Map (adapted from Busy Teacher.org)

Using a blue pen, students individually write the names of 3-5 town buildings into their maps at the spots marked a-i. For example, they might write "bank" at spot "a", "pharmacy" at spot "h" and restaurant at spot "f". Then, students work with a partner but must not look at each other's maps. Student A listens to their partner describing their map and marks their partner's buildings in black pen on their map. For example:

**Student B:** At the corner of Ship Lane and Cheap Street there is a restaurant.

Student A: "d"?

**Student B**: No, at the corner of Ship Lane and Cheap Street.

Student A: Oh, ok, "f"?

Student B: Yes.

Then partners swap roles, and student A describes their map to student B, and student B adds those building to his/her map. At the end, when both have finished, student A and B compare their maps.

If pairs' pronunciation and listening was good, they should have identical maps.

This activity can be adapted to any pairs of sounds that students are mispronouncing, for example, for many Spanish speakers, the difference between the "v" and the "b" in English is difficult to pronounce, so you could make maps using streets that are pronounced the same except that one sound, e.g. "Veer Street" and "Beer Street", or "Vowel Lane" and "Bowel Lane".

#### Reference

Busy Teacher.org Available from: https://busyteacher.org/

#### Strategy 5: Contrastive Analysis to improve pronunciation

### **Description**

Contrastive Analysis refers to making students aware of features of their first language (L1) in order to gain insight into the workings of a second or foreign language. When it comes to pronunciation, there are some tricks for Spanish learners that can help them tremendously. For example, students may think that the sounds the letters "th" correspond to in English, don't exist in Spanish, when actually they do, they are just spelled differently. The Spanish letter "d" is actually pronounced exactly like the soft "th" ( $/\eth$ /) in English, e.g. the Spanish word "Navidad" contains the same sound as "this", "that", and "other" in English. Another example is the strong "th" ( $/\eth$ /) which, although not part of Latin American Spanish, does exist in Spanish from Spain, and most students in Ecuador have heard enough Spanish from Spain to be able to produce the sound quite easily. So, the way a Spanish person would say the first sound in "zapato" is the same as the English sound at the beginning of "think", "three" and "thank you".

## Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Contrastive analysis can be built into any lesson, for example, the next time your students say "tree" when they mean "three", ask them to say "zapato" in a Spanish accent first, and maybe say a few more words using  $|\theta|$  in a Spanish accent, e.g. "cerveza", "cuidad" and then ask them to use the same sound to say "three". Ask them to notice what their mouth is doing when they say "zapato" and then to form the same shape with their mouth (tongue protruding between teeth and blow air) when they say "three". This can often be an "aha" moment for students who had previously thought that the pronunciation of the "th" in English is an unsolvable mystery.

#### Strategy 6: Color Vowel Chart for pronunciation

## **Description**

Ask students how many vowels there are in English. The answer is of course that there are 5 letters which are vowels. Then ask students how many different ways there are to pronounce those 5 vowel letters. Let them take a few guesses. The answer is 20 according to the British International Phonetic Alphabet. The color vowel chart can help students make sense of 15 of these vowel sounds, which are most common in American English pronunciation.

### Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Firstly, show students the Color Vowel Chart (Taylor & Thompson, 2009) Freely available from:

https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/color-vowel-chart

Then go through the examples of words that rhyme with each color that represents a vowel sound. The examples are in the chart already, e.g. the word "tie" has the same vowel sound as "white", so belongs in the "white" segment of the chart.

Then, give each group of 4–5 students a pack of vocabulary cards, which students should be familiar with, to sort into the corresponding colours by vowel sound. It is best to include cards with words like "busy" and "women" which include vowels that are pronounced differently to how they are spelled. Students have to lay the cards out on their tables according to the chart, e.g. if they have the word "eat" it should be placed in the top left hand corner of their table, because in the chart, the /i:/ sound is on the top left.

Once most groups have finished, check the answers together. Emphasize to students that English is not pronounced how it's written, so they need to pay special attention to how they are pronouncing words.

This activity can greatly enhance students' awareness of the pronunciation of English, and once students have learned the colors that correspond to each vowel, the class teacher can continuously refer to those colors when students need pronunciation guidance about vowels in new words. For example, if the teacher is teaching the new word "cut" and students pronounce it according to Spanish spelling-pronunciation rules  $(/\theta)$ , then the teacher can say: "No, it's not "wooden" it's "mustard".

If you have a projector, the color vowel chart can be projected during the activity. If not, you could consider printing a color copy for each group. This could be laminated for future use. Alternatively, the class teacher could reproduce the chart by hand on a large sheet of flipchart paper using the corresponding colored markers. Or, if none of the above is possible, the teacher could ask the students to look up the chart on the internet, and copy it into their notebooks using colored pencils for homework before the lesson where s/he will use this activity.

#### Reference

Taylor, K., & Thompson, S. (2009). The Color Vowel Chart. Retrieved from https://americanen-glish.state.gov/resources/color-vowel-chart

## **Writing Strategies for Effective Learning**

Andrea Tatiana Avila

<b>Type of Productive Skill:</b> My Friendly Sentence Maker	<b>Topic:</b> Lifestyle (Writing simple sentences)	
Curricular Thread: Writing	<b>Sub thread:</b> Text Production	

## Strategy 1 My Friendly Sentence

#### **Description**

When pre-basic users are asked to write down simple sentences, most of the times, they forget the relevant parts of the sentence. One convenient way to help them place their ideas in a visible and appropriate way is the use of a visible aid called "My Friendly Sentence".

Beginners can also use this strategy; more structured sentences can be written down following a specific order modeled by the teacher. The order of the sentences can change depending on the level of the student and type of sentences.

### Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

Teachers can use a color coding system to facilitate students' learning. For instance, the teacher can assign a color for each WH questions and a color for the target language. In this way, students will learn the order immediately just by focusing on the color. Teachers can use cardboard cards, markers or sticky notes. For instance, the yellow color stands for <a href="who">who</a> "the subject"; the red color stands for <a href="who">what</a> "the verb"; the green color stands for <a href="townoon, for whom, to what or for what">the time</a>"the object", the blue color stands for <a href="whom, for whom, to what or for what">when</a> "the time", and the orange color stands for <a href="whom, the time">where</a> "the place". Taking into account the color coding system, the teacher can design their own yellow, green, red, blue and orange word cards, so students can use them to make their own sentences.

Figure 1. Colour coding scheme in constructing sentences

Who		To whom, for whom, to what, for what	When	Where
Tom	Plays	Basketball	every day	at school.

Through the use of "My Friendly Sentence" the students will be able to write a variety of sentences (simple or more structured ones) about familiar topics. Also, they will develop their creativity while structuring their own sentences. Finally, as this activity can be done in groups, they will be able to respect their ideas through negotiations and value their participation.

This strategy can be used from beginners to intermediate students. The materials that the teacher needs in advance is "My Friendly Sentence" template that is attached in Figure 2. This template can be drawn either in paper chart or on the board. As a first step, the teacher writes down the title "Lifestyle" in the circle and show a picture. The teacher asks students to describe the picture and writes down all the students' ideas on the board. After, the teacher writes down the following questions

in the bubble speeches; 1. Who 2. What 3. To whom – for whom; to what –for what – 4. where, 5. when. Using students' previous ideas, the teacher answers the Wh questions and writes down the corresponding word (subject, verb, object, place, time) in each speech bubble. After that, the teacher uses the words in the bubble speeches one more time and write them down in order in "My Friendly Sentence" box (figure 3). As a result, the teacher ends up with a complete sentence. It is advisable to make students learn each Wh question and its matching color for the students to understand better how a sentence is formed. To continue practicing, the teacher displays another picture and motivates the students to answer the Wh questions. When all parts are complete, the answers are put together to make a complete sentence, and students are encouraged to do this task to enhance their ability to construct sentence.

When the students are used to the new strategy, the teacher can ask students to work in groups of three or four and using the attached template. Two or three pictures to each group can be given to students. Students have to paste the pictures in the circle and answer the questions related to the picture. As the students work, the teacher monitors the activity and helps if necessary. When students have finished answering the questions, they have to write down the final sentence in "My friendly Sentence" box (figure 3). To check students' work, the teacher can use the attached checklist.

Figure 2. " My Friendly Sentence" Template

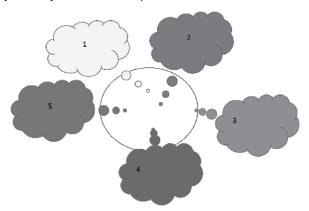


Figure 3.

Figure 4. " My Friendly Sentence" Checklist

	Yes	No	Observation
Do I follow the word order of a sentence?			
Do I use capitals and periods?			
Do I use all of the words from the bubbles?			
Does the sentence make sense?			
Does the sentence have no spelling mistakes?			

#### Differentiation

This strategy can be performed in a typical classroom where the class size ranges from 30 to 45 students. At the beginning of the activity, the teacher can work with the whole class asking for ideas and modelling the activity as well. It can be done several times. After that, students work in small groups and write down their own ideas and sentences. The teacher walks around the class scaffolding his/her students and giving them feedback. With regard to the materials, copies of the template is

necessary. However, if it is not possible, students can use a piece of paper of their own notebooks and draw the template by themselves. Also, the teacher can draw the template on big pieces of paper; so they can work together and share ideas.

## Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

To perform the activity, the teacher needs markers, pens, pencils, sticky notes or cardboard cards. It all depends on the materials the teacher would like to use and the materials they have at hand. In addition, if necessary, the teacher can use pictures or flashcards of the target words in order to check students' previous knowledge and then start to work on new vocabulary. This is especially important for younger or beginner students. Considering that in most public school, technology like internet access, projectors, and computers are not available in each classroom, the teacher can use the board, markers and pictures to explain what the activity is about and how to accomplish it.

Type of Productive Skill: MY IDEAS ORGANIZER	Topic: Writing paragraphs (Describing my Likes)
Curricular Thread: Writing	Sub thread: Text Production

## Strategy 2 " My Ideas Organizer"

## **Description**

This strategy is used in the pre-writing stage. It helps students put their ideas together in a more organized and clearer way. They have the opportunity to split up a paragraph into smaller sections and focus on them to write a paragraph. Thus, students will not feel anxious or confused while writing paragraphs. The teacher should monitor the

activity from the beginning to avoid misunderstanding or committing errors in spelling. Also, teachers can use a color coding system to facilitate students' learning. For instance, the teacher should assign one specific color for the main idea, another color for the supporting details and another for the conclusion. This method can be modified to meet students' needs and levels. For example, for true beginners, the teacher can use pictures with words to make the strategy comprehensible. For beginners, the students can add a detail and a connector, so they end up writing down short paragraphs. For intermediate students, they can add transitional words and more details in order to obtain a long paragraph. Using this organizer, students will be able to communicate and organize their ideas in a clear and comprehensible way. Later, they will be able to write a simple short paragraph about familiar topics (interests, likes, dislikes, and so on). Finally, it will reduce students' affective filter toward the writing process.

## Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

The teacher familiarizes students with the strategy, "My Ideas Organizer", by asking them to design their own template. They use their imagination and creativity to obtain the best one (Refer Figure 4). They can use white paper, coloured paper, or a manila envelope to make the organizer. The teacher asks students to fold the paper or manila envelope into four parts and draw a square at the center. They write number 1 in the square at the center, and numbers 2, 3, 4 and 5 are written in the other squares. After labelling the parts with numbers, the teacher writes down the name of the strategy on the board and asks students to guess what it is about. The teacher writes down their ideas and introduces the advantages and importance of the strategy. Later, the teacher hands out two yellow sticky notes to each student and asks them to place the sticky notes in squares 1 and 5.

The teacher may giveout three more sticky notes of another color and ask the students to place them on the squares numbered 2,3, and 4. Using sticky notes will allow students to reuse the template. In square number 1, the students have to write the topic sentence of the paragraph

which is given by the teacher. Later, based on the topic, the students write one supporting sentence in square number 2, 3, and 4. Depending on the level of the students, they will write down either words or simple sentences. Finally, in the fourth square, the students have to write a summary sentence that becomes the conclusion. They can describe their feelings related to the topic they have in square 1. As the students write down the details and concluding sentence, the teacher walks around the class checking and scaffolding students' work. As soon as the students finish, their work can be reviewed based on the below attached checklist. This review can be done by the teacher if the group is small or by the students if the group is big. If the review is done by the students, the teacher can hand out the checklist to each student or project it for the whole class. The students exchange their work "My Ideas Organizer", and as a result, each student will be in charge of reviewing one of their classmate's work using the checklist. After that, students receive back their work and the checklist; they review their work and correct it if necessary. Finally, the students write their final version on lined paper or a small notebook. If the students are using manila envelope, they can keep their writing in the envelope.

Figure 5. "My Ideas Organizer" Template

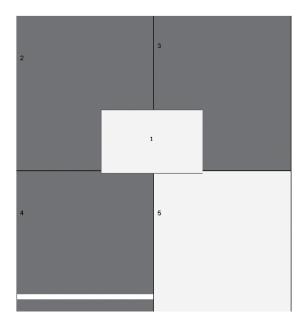


Figure 6. " My Ideas Organizer" Checklist

NAME:	YES	NO
Are the reasons related to the topic sentence? Does each one respond the question WHY?		
Are the supporting sentences (reasons) repeated?		
Does it have a concluding sentence?		
Is the concluding paragraph linked to the topic sentence? Does it express students' feelings?		
Are there any mechanical errors (spelling, capitalization, punctuation) in the whole content?		

Modified from https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B9Sqcv8QfUV0bjVhdF9WdXpHd0E/edit

#### Differentiation

Strategy 2 can be used in any classroom setting since the number of students does not affect the planned activities. The students can work individually, in groups of four or five or in bigger groups in a cooperative approach. It all depends on the teacher's preference and the class size. Regarding the materials, the students are the ones who design their own template; they need a piece of paper, colored paper or manila envelope and some sticky notes. Also, the students need a notebook or extra pieces of paper to write down the paragraphs.

Type of Productive Skill: Tongue Twister	Topic: Improving pronunciation – Working with my Tongue
Curricular Thread: Oral Communication	Sub thread: Spoken Production

## Strategy 3: Working with my Tongue

#### **Description**

High school students are reluctant to use L2 in their English classes because they feel afraid to commit pronunciation mistakes. One way to overcome this problem is to include tongue twisters in English lessons. By using them, students will be able to differentiate English sounds and they will be able to pronounce them correctly.

To start this strategy, the teacher invites students to say some tongue twisters in their native language. The student who says the tongue twister in a fast way receives a prize. After that, the teacher explains the importance of learning tongue twisters in English. Later, the teacher chooses a tongue twister based on his / her students' level. Tongue twisters can be downloaded from YouTube and other ESL websites.

The key to effective use of tongue twisters is repetition. The teacher has to write down the tongue twister on the board and repeats it several times emphasizing the pronunciation of the taught sounds. The teacher can use pictures or pantomime to help students internalize the tongue twister. To practice it, the teacher removes or deletes gradually a part of the tongue twister, so students are challenged to say the tongue twister by heart in the end.

When students have learned how to pronounce the tongue twisters, students are grouped and they need to write down the tongue twister on a chart paper and illustrate it in a silly way. After repeated practice,

students present their works on the wall, and the teacher can choose the best picture. To keep on practicing, the class is divided into two groups. A member of each group receives a ball and is asked to pass it on around the group. The student who has the ball has to say the tongue twister either in a slow or a fast way depending on what the teacher shouts. The teacher uses two magical words "fast or slow". For instance, if the teacher says slow, each student of the groups says the tongue twister slowly, but if the teacher says fast, each student says it in a fast way. Finally, the teacher divides the class in groups of 10 and distributes a ball to each group. The teacher uses a chronometer to check the time. The group that says the tongue twister in a fast and well pronounced way in a short time is the winner. Each time that one student of the group gets confused or mispronounces a word the group will restart until all of the members of the group can make it. The chronometer will never be stopped.

#### Differentiation

To have students internalize their tongue twister and overcome pronunciation problems, it would be ideal for EFL teachers to introduce a tongue twister on the first day of the week; thus, students can practice it the succeeding days. It will become an engaging warm-up at the beginning of each lesson. The teachers can choose the most appropriate tongue twister that can be found in the links provided before taking into account the students' level. If a tongue twister does not meet their expectations, the teachers can create their own tongue twister. This activity can be carried out in pairs, small groups, and large classes without any difficulty. They are powerful tools that do not need any additional preparation; the only materials that teachers need are their own voice, markers, a board, chart paper, small plastic balls and a chronometer. If there are no plastic balls or chronometer, the teachers can replace them for paper balls or a watch.

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