

# Spotlight on Schools



Sharing good practice nationally



## Incorporating numeracy into the MFL classroom: a countdown game

In this project, Wanlin presents her activity in which students play with numbers in the target language and she discusses how this could promote numeracy.

### What are the aims of the project?

- To encourage students to actively use and engage with the target language
- To develop numeracy skills through a gamified use of the target language
- To recognise a range of patterns and structures in the linguistic and numerical systems of the target language

### How does the game work?

Once students have learnt the numbers (e.g., 0-99) in the target language, a countdown game can be used to practice reception, production, mediation and simple addition and multiplication in the target language.



Arrange the students in a circle with the teacher standing in the centre. The teacher announces a range of numbers and a starting number for counting up or counting down, such as 0-50. Make one or multiple numbers a 'taboo', e.g. the number 4. Whenever the 'taboo' appears in a number, e.g. 14, 34, 42, the countdown should be replaced with a clap. Provide a certain amount of time for students to prepare and then the teacher begins the game by spinning around while holding their arms out. When the teacher stops, the student who is being pointed at begins the countdown. Students need to go around the circle counting down the numbers. Students should say either a single number, two numbers in sequence or three numbers in sequence. The game becomes one of strategy because the person who ends up on zero is out. Students need to choose carefully whether to say one, two or three numbers in sequence to ensure that they do not end up with zero. At the same time, students must pay attention to the taboo ones. The person who makes a mistake or can not think of anything replaces the teacher in the middle of the circle and carries on the countdown.

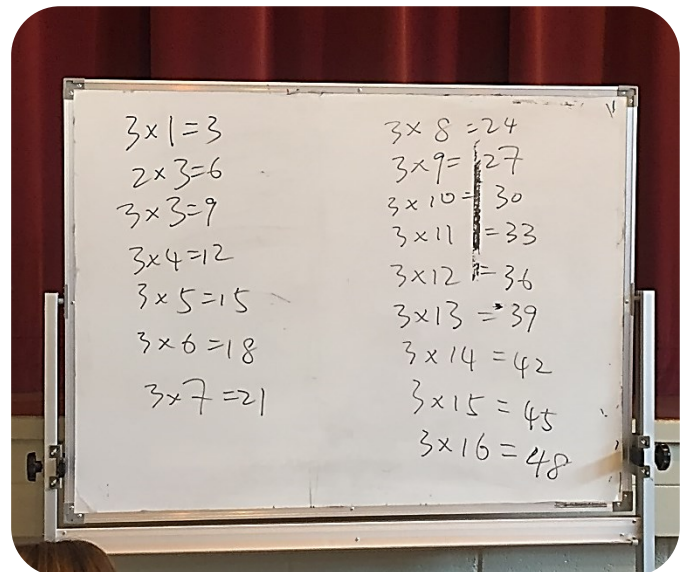
An element of competition could be added by changing it into a group game. To do this, divide students into groups. Each group is then further divided into gamers (students who will perform the countdown) and inspectors (students who will check the countdown of other groups). After preparation, all gamers of different groups begin the countdown and all inspectors begin to take down the numbers (in the target language or native language depending on the learning outcome) and check if there are any mistakes. Any group that is spotted to have made a mistake must pause their countdown for five seconds. The first group to complete the countdown wins. After each win, swap the gamers and inspectors.

There are also a number of variations that could be implemented for different purposes.

- **Differentiation:** Reduce or increase the time for preparation before the countdown and/or adjust the speed of spinning, arrange roles of students (gamers or inspectors) and the sequence of these roles based on their language learning backgrounds (e.g., a mixed group with heritage and non-heritage learners) and needs (e.g., students with different level of production and reception skills).
- **Scaffolding:** Arrange the 'taboo' based on target language acquisition theories and practice (e.g., postponed or emphasis numbers that are more difficult to pronounce).
- **Pluricultural awareness:** Arrange and link the 'taboo' to cultural references, such as number culture and/or superstitions in the target language country/ies. The 'taboo' could also be replaced by 'lucky numbers' or other themes.
- **Motivation and stimulation:** Arrange rewards simultaneously or interchangeably. For example, set up a prize for reaching a certain number with no or a certain amount of mistakes.
- **Numerical skills:** Liaise with the math teacher where appropriate to adjust the type and level of arithmetic used (e.g., avoid the occurrences of a certain number, simple addition and multiplication) to suit the age and stage of the students, while also balancing the communicative and cognitive workload of the activity.
- **Mediation:** Change the countdown into a Chinese Whispers, where students pass on a serial number by whispering it to the next person. The number should be long enough that it needs to be taken down first and then passed on again orally to incorporate mediation.

Why would you recommend this project?

- Numeracy is one of the most important life skills and a national strategy which could be implemented into MFL classes throughout different learning stages.
- With appropriate planning and differentiation, it could increase students' confidence and motivation in learning both the target language and mathematics.
- These activities require little to no preparation and are very flexible in terms of complexity and length.



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