

Cue Cards: Some Ideas for Using Them in the Primary Classroom

Plácido Bazo
pbazom[at]ull.es

Marcos Peñate
mpenate[at]dde.ulpgc.es

Universities of the Canary Islands (Spain)

Cue cards have been around as a classroom resource for a very long time. Nevertheless, it seems that most teachers do not find either the time needed to make them or the opportunities to use them. So the main purpose of this short article is to provide some ideas for solving these two main problems.

What Are Cue Cards?

Cue cards are small photos or pictures stuck onto cards. They are flashcards with images.

Making Cue Cards

Traditionally the teacher has been considered the only person who must make or provide materials for use in class. However, teaching materials can also be made by the pupils themselves as a class activity with the teacher's help.

In order to prepare cue cards as a class activity, ask the pupils in plenty of time to look in magazines for small pictures relating to particular topics you are going to work on or the students are familiar with (e.g. sports, famous people, free time activities, shopping, etc.). Ask them also to cut the pictures out. If it is difficult to find suitable photographs for a particular topic, the pupils can draw the pictures instead.

Once the students have given you all the pictures, choose the ones you think will be most suitable. Then ask the pupils to cut out any part of the picture that isn't relevant to the topic.

Ask the pupils to stick the pictures onto white cards (you will have to prepare these beforehand). Collect the cards, and write a code in the top right-hand corner of each one: a letter to identify the semantic field and a number to identify that particular picture. For example, a picture of Cameron Diaz could be F23 (Famous people, card 23). In this way, you can build up a collection of cue cards to be used by the pupils in different activities.

Using Cue Cards

In a short article like this, it is quite impossible to present a reasonable number of activities using cue cards. We have decided therefore to give a few examples of simple activities where pupils are shown working in pairs or by themselves. These activities can be used by both primary and secondary school teachers.

Guess the Picture

Preparation. For this activity you need an envelope containing 20 cue cards for each pair of pupils. Go through the activity beforehand with the whole class so that the pupils know what the objective is, and what they have to do. Give the pupils

guidance as to the sort of questions they should ask.

Procedure. The pupils work in pairs. Each pair chooses an envelope and puts their cards on the table, looking at them very carefully. They then turn the cards face down, and shuffle them. The first pupil takes a card and looks at it, without showing it to his or her partner. The partner has to guess which picture it is by asking questions, e.g. Is it round/yellow? Can you play with it/eat it? Is it an animal?, etc.

Do You Remember?

Preparation. For this activity you need an envelope containing 10 cue cards belonging to one or more semantic fields. Write the following instructions where they can be seen, e.g. on a card which is kept with the activity: Follow these instructions. Put the cue cards on the table. Look at the pictures for two minutes. Pupil number 1 holds the ten cue cards. Pupil number 2 tries to remember all the cards.

Procedure. Working in pairs, the pupils follow the instructions for the activity. Every time pupil number 2 gets the right answer, he or she wins a point and the card is put on the table. If this pupil makes a mistake, he or she loses a point. The pupils can then swap roles and repeat the activity with a different set of cue cards. The winner is the one who gets the most points.

Fast

Preparation. For this activity, you need about 20 cue cards.

Procedure. This activity can be carried out in pairs or small groups. The pupils take the cards and place them face down in a heap. They take turns picking up cards, looking at them, and saying the appropriate word in English. Any pupil who makes a mistake or waits more than three seconds before speaking is given a point. The winner is the pupil with fewest points.

Lucky You

Preparation. For this activity you need 30 cue cards for each pair of pupils. The cue cards should belong to two semantic fields (i.e. there should be 15 pictures from each). Put the cards in a non-transparent bag.

Procedure. This is a pair work activity. Each pupil in the pair chooses one of the semantic fields. The first pupil puts his hand in the bag and takes out a card. If it belongs to the semantic field that the pupil has chosen, and he or she can pronounce the appropriate word in English, the pupil keeps the card and continues to play. However, if the word is not from the right group or the pupil doesn't pronounce the word correctly, his or her partner has the next turn. The winner is the first to collect all the fifteen cards for his or her semantic field.

As a variation, fold the cards in half and pin the two halves together with a paper clip. Place the cards on the floor. Using short canes with magnets as hooks, the pupils have to "fish" for the cards.

We hope that the ideas presented in this article about how to make and use cue cards will stimulate teachers to make their own cue cards and develop new and more challenging activities according to the level of their students. Cue cards will help the teacher respond to individual differences in a class by providing a framework of core activities which can be adapted or extended in different ways to stimulate both less and more able pupils.