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This kibbitzer was occasioned not by a one-to-one session with a student at Birmingham, but by an e-mail enquiry from a teacher-trainer in Recife, Brazil. She found that her trainees

... have few ways to say what they did with an activity for their students, other than "I did an activity"- which doesn't sound right to me! I can think of "carried out", "engaged in" [but that's what the Ss did], "set up" - but then I go dry. I tried "activity" on the "Bank of English" but just got "engage" (mostly for sex). Can you help me?

It is important to note, I think, is that the use of the word 'activity' in which my correspondent is interested is peculiar to language-teaching. One of the main ways in which its meaning is different from that of 'activity' in other fields is, as she notes, that a language-teaching activity involves two types of participant: the teacher on the one hand, and the students on the other. The likely collocations for 'activity' in this context seem to depend on the participant: 'set up' (as mentioned by my correspondent), 'organise' and 'introduce' where the focus is on the teacher, and 'do' (by analogy with 'do an exercise': in this context this sounds fine to me!), 'take part in', etc. etc. where the focus is on the students. My experience suggests that teacher-trainees often find themselves uncertainly placed between the roles of student and teacher, and it is just possible that uncertainty in the use of language may here reflect that uncertainty of role.

Unfortunately, my own corpus data have virtually nothing in the way of texts on language-teaching methodology, so it is necessary to judge the appropriateness of the collocates for student activities on the basis of the way they are used in a general 100-million word corpus: a sample of one in five citations shown.

### take part in

Of the general collocates, this appears to be one of the most suitable for the classroom context. Although some of the activities we take part in may be 'strange' or 'useless' (3) they are usually collaborative, enjoyable and innocent:

1 themselves, to vote, to **take part in** voluntary activities.' At the heart of these exhortations  
2 r, Michael Howard was still **taking part in** the activities of the Labour Club, and his name appe  
3 he encierros as "one of those strange, useless activities that human beings **take part in**, in ex  
4 Curtain to **take part in** serious international activities, not to become pavement artists or to  
5 wanting to **take part in** some sort of physical activity, from which they will benefit as adults  
6 nstable neck, and that **taking part in** sporting activities has not been shown to increase the ri  
7 ts arrive from all over Europe to **take part in** activities ranging from climbing to quad biking,  
8 s **take part in** a programme of wildlife related activities. Penguin parade at 2pm, sea-lion feed  
9 ho wanted to come to Hong Kong to **take part in** activities to mark the fifth anniversary of the

### carry out

Perhaps because of the collocability of 'carry out' with nouns such as 'task', 'procedure', 'test', 'survey', etc. carrying-out activities seems to be a rather more earnest matter than the taking part in activities. Nevertheless, where the activities **are** tasks and procedures, 'carry out' would clearly be appropriate in the classroom setting.

10 dented event, showing the astonishing range of activities **carried out** by a tireless artist who  
11 ow on, Mrs Higuchi can **carry out** her political activities in open opposition to the government  
12 e members risked everything to **carry out** their activities. They didn't become prisoners of war  
13 himself by mistake while **carrying out** a sexual activity which involved wearing women's clothing  
14 s a person's ability to carry out work-related activities including walking, sitting, hearing,  
15 eated as taxable as part of the profits of the activities **carried out** by the taxpayer during th

## engage/be engaged in

As my correspondent observes, there is a good deal of sex around when we engage (or are engaged) in an activity (17, 20), and a good deal else that is idle (19), nefarious (18), carnal (24), environmentally damaging (31) corrupt (32) criminal (26) and even un-British (28). There are counter-examples in the data of innocent activities in which people engage: but the overall impression is that if language-learners, and their teachers, engage in activities those are likely to include at least cheating at examinations, blackmail, and forging of cheques (c.f. the curriculum followed by Dr. Smart-Alick at Narkover School, the invention of the late, and great, Beachcomber<sup>1</sup>).

16 ban asylum-seekers from **engaging in** political activity against the country from which they hav  
17 nage boys. The boys were not **engaged in** sexual activity but posed in a rural or outdoor setting  
18 hool and **engaging in** countless other nefarious activities. Citizens throughout the land are out  
19 thought, especially when **engaged in** as idle an activity as listening to the radio. We want to c  
20 t in future individuals **engaging in** homosexual activity that was legal in civilian law would no  
21 e Tate Gallery you're also **engaged in** an elite activity (along with the 3m other visitors who c  
22 re he was a trespasser and **engaged in** criminal activities when the injury was suffered. Any bro  
23 be to allow Members to continue only the paid activity/activities that they were **engaged in** at  
24 **engaged in** uninhibited carnal and drug-related activities. His work was reproduced in a British  
25 ry vehicles and is **engaged in** a range of other activities for the defence and aerospace industr  
26 if he was a trespasser and **engaged in** criminal activities when the injury was suffered, if the  
27 ded to intimidate persons **engaging in** a lawful activity, or to otherwise disrupt or obstruct a  
28 I Zingari and generally **engaging in** un-British activities. The alienness of opera to a narrowly  
29 y governments, and it's only by **engaging in** an activity which directly impacts on governments,  
30 y profession. So do those **engaged in** practical activities, whether they are chefs or spin bowle  
31 nown to be **engaged in** environmentally damaging activities. It has also put its own house in ord  
32 rm agenda. "He **engaged in** a pattern of corrupt activity for over 20 years," the US federal atto

## undertake

The data show that the majority of activities that we 'undertake' tend to be business or professional 'undertakings'. This collocate is, perhaps, most suitably used in that context.

33 **dertake** considerable marketing and promotional activities. It is also believed that players wil  
34 that they will not **undertake** similar business activities for three years, while the five manag  
35 that the jobseeker should **undertake** a specific activity related to improving his or her chances  
36 th on the wide range of successful campaigning activities being **undertaken** by the Labour Party  
37 r Leeson to **undertake** his unauthorised trading activities and reduced the likelihood of their d  
38 ties need lungs and the space to **undertake** the activities that are the very reason for their ex  
39 nt "quiet majority" speech, volunteering is an activity **undertaken** by the section of society "t  
40 de clear, the notion that R&D is an individual activity, **undertaken** by individual scientists wh

## pursue

In approximately half the citations (e.g. 41 and 42) the activities pursued are literally pursuits - i.e. hobbies - while in all citations it is clear that pursuing an activity involves some sort of long-tem commitment to it. It would clearly be inappropriate for the teacher to say to students "I'd like you to pursue the following activity", where the activity is introduced only as part of a language lesson, to be abandoned immediately thereafter.

41 He wants to put it towards **pursuing** social activities like fishing, golf and horse racing, &  
42 port, rugby remains for him a strictly amateur activity **pursued** after working hours - as one in  
43 nder an Italian law by **pursuing** a professional activity in Italy on a permanent basis in chambe  
44 he view that a child has a right to **pursue** any activity not positively life-threatening, in ful

## perform

The least frequent of all the collocates of 'activity' considered here, this would seem to be generally appropriate for the classroom situation, though some teachers might object to the association with play-acting.

45 incapable of **performing** certain 'work-related' activities, such as walking, sitting, hearing, a  
46 conjuring trick, or **perform** some other everyday activity such as playing a violin in the Gents.  
47 therapeutic circles, **performed** trust-building activities, and climactically talked to horses a

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Richard Ingrams (ed.) *Beachcomber: the Works of J.B. Morton* (Frederick Muller, 1974).

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