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 dent activity, 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, Beachcomber1).

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 der take 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 ded to intimidate persons engaging in a lawful activity, or to otherwise disrupt or obstruct a
38 I Zingari and generally engaging in un-British activities. The alienness of opera to a narrowly
39 y governments, and it’s only by engaging in an activity which directly impacts on governments,
40 y profession. So do those engaged in practical activities, whether they are chefs or spin bowle
41 nder an Italian law by pursuing a professiona l activity in Italy on a permanent basis in chambe
42 he view that a child has a right to pursue any activity not positively life-threatening, in ful

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-term 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, a
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.

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

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