

## Activities for Inclusive Language Teaching – Contents

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## 0 Introduction

Learning another language is more than just learning a new skill or an academic subject: it is akin to opening a window, through which we can start to see the world in a different way, and appreciate the incredible range of human creativity across our planet. It is exciting, but it can also be quite challenging for some people. As language teachers, we want to see all our learners succeed and gain the social and cognitive advantages of developing their linguistic repertoires. There can also be higher stakes involved, in terms of access to further education and employment opportunities, especially for those learning English, the global language. While acknowledging the role that colonialism (and ongoing linguistic imperialism) has played in elevating English to this status, it is hard to avoid the reality that being able to understand and use English is, for many, a passport to the futures they aspire to.

The history of English Language Teaching (ELT) is full of inspiring stories of individual teachers who have found ways to accommodate learners who experienced obvious barriers to learning, such as sensory impairments. Over the last 50 years, there has been a lot of work done to raise teachers' awareness of less-evident challenges, such as hidden physical disabilities, cognitive differences (e.g. dyslexia) and the barriers that arise due to the marginalisation of learners (e.g. because of their minority-group ethnicity, non-standard family groupings, or non-binary gender identities). As awareness has grown, so has the interest in inclusive teaching practices, which enable teachers to meet the needs of all their learners, accommodate a range of levels in classes and actively address issues of exclusion. Ainscow (2020) points out the benefits of inclusive education, not just in terms of education, but also more widely for societal cohesion and economic development.

### Defining 'Inclusive Teaching Practices'

There are many terms used in this field that are understood in different ways in different contexts, or as Slee (2018) suggests: the language of inclusion has been cynically appropriated to present the appearance of inclusion in exclusionary contexts. It is therefore useful to review them and clarify the way they are used in this book. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) makes clear the distinctions between four very commonly used terms:

- **exclusion** (no provision for some learners)
- **segregation** (separate provision, e.g. in 'special' settings)
- **integration** (physical access but no or little genuine interaction with their peers or the mainstream curriculum)
- **inclusion** (defined as an "equitable and participatory learning experience and environment").

First and foremost, it should be stressed that Inclusive Teaching Practices are not (only) about accommodating learners with disabilities or learning differences (i.e. 'special education needs' / SEND). Inclusion is "a process that is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers to the presence, participation and achievement of all students" (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006), whether those barriers are caused by the marginalization of learners' identities, disparities in socio-economic status or a physical, sensory or cognitive difference. As Slee (2018) wryly points out, there are so many ways of being 'different', that a definition of 'normal' is hard to pin down. This is why inclusive approaches to teaching make more sense than teaching to an imagined 'norm', and then hoping to accommodate individuals who don't quite fit.

It is crucial, as well, to recognize the combined impact that marginalised aspects of identity (such as gender or ethnic background) and socio-economic situation can have on people with disabilities / learning

differences (Price, 2018). As far back as 1962, Tomlinson was warning about the over-representation of learners from minority ethnic groups in 'Special' education, in what she dubbed 'racialization of special needs'.

Eddo-Lodge (2017) describes the 'emotional disconnect' she perceives in Caucasian people when confronted with discussions about race and racism, and Slee (2018) likens this reaction to that of some able-bodied / neurotypical people considering the idea of 'disabled' learners accessing education alongside them, rather than in segregated settings. There are sometimes concerns that the quality of education may be diminished by the presence of learners who are (perceived as) different from the majority. In fact, the research evidence suggests that inclusive education is not only beneficial for otherwise marginalised learners, in terms of their education, social inclusion and future employment prospects (Symeonidou 2018), but that all learners benefit from classes that are more accessible and more diverse (Florin, Rouse and Black-Hawkins, 2017; Price, 2018). The advantages associated with quality education have long been the preserve of the most privileged in society, and in order to challenge this status quo, we need to find ways "to work to share the power of representation and presentation" (Phipps, 2019: 89).

### Implementing inclusive teaching practices

This is the principle behind the Universal Design for Learning concept (see the CAST website for a clear explanation: <http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#X548K0VKg2w>).

In practical terms, inclusive teaching practices are the ways that teachers find to **value the contribution** made by every individual, **embrace the diversity** in any group of learners, and work towards making the curriculum **accessible to all and representative of all**. The implementation of inclusive practices is a dynamic process, always responding to the learners' needs, but there are some general foundations that can be nurtured in every classroom, developing a respectful and safe learning environment where every member of the groups feels they belong. In order to do this, teachers need to be aware of possible exclusionary factors. As noted, these are not always to do with disability or learning differences, but could be related to learners' personal characteristics or aspects of their identity.

One of the key ingredients of an inclusive classroom is the relationship between and among the members of the group (i.e. the teachers and the learner/s). Good relationships thrive when people get to know each other well and learn to appreciate the contributions that others make to the group, whether they are academic or social. When we appreciate each others' strengths and talents, we can also be more forbearing of their areas of difficulty and more willing to support them when needed. This is how effective teams are formed. By working with people from groups they may not encounter in everyday life, all learners develop better interpersonal and socio-emotional skills. These valuable qualities will enable them to succeed throughout their education, in the workplace, and in wider society. Getting to know our learners allows us to acknowledge their individuality within the group, and to personalise the curriculum for them, allowing for both access and representation.

When designing and/or adapting learning materials, both the content of the materials and their pedagogical construct should be considered. As a rule of thumb, when our materials use a context familiar to our learners, they will have more relevance for them. Tomlinson (2011: 9–23) reminds teachers that, when selecting, adapting and designing materials, we should prioritize our learners' confidence and authentic engagement along with the pedagogical content.

Inclusive teaching practices are not something that can be added to the classroom at the last minute, like icing on a cake – they have to be baked in, as part of the planning and preparation stages, as well as the delivery and evaluation of teaching.

## Using this book

The activities in this book have been contributed by experienced ELT practitioners who are (or were) members of the IATEFL Inclusive Practices and SEN Special Interest Group committee. Each activity is only a suggestion, of course, and can be adapted to suit the learners in your group. There are suggestions for differentiation but it is not possible to cover every individual learner's requirements. **One size does not fit all.**

There are some suggested resources at the end which may be helpful in supporting learners who are facing specific challenges (e.g. visual impairment, dyslexia). If you would like to discuss any particular issues, feel free to get in touch with the committee members via the IATEFL IP&SEN SIG email address: [ipsensig@iatefl.org](mailto:ipsensig@iatefl.org) or contact us at [info@deltapublishing.co.uk](mailto:info@deltapublishing.co.uk).

The book is organised to reflect the process many of us work through during a course (or a term). Chapter 2 is all about welcoming our new learners, suggesting activities for establishing a sense of group belonging. The activities in Chapter 3 develop learners' well-being, making sure everybody feels comfortable, so that we can employ the activities in Chapter 4 to safely explore and embrace the diversity in the group. Chapter 5 outlines a process for project-based learning, in which everybody can contribute their talents and learn from each other, and finally, the activities in Chapter 6 offer some methods for ensuring that classroom assessment of learning can also be inclusive and affirming. Preceding all of these, though, is a selection of 'micro-strategies' which form the basis of general inclusive practice. These are not activities as such, but ways of managing the classroom to the benefit of all.



## 1 Micro-strategies for the inclusive classroom

### Working together

Genuinely inclusive teaching is based on good relationships, between teachers and learners, as well as among the learners. Good relationships develop through getting to know each other, so anything we can do to accelerate that process will be helpful.

**Modelling respect:** One of the most important roles of a teacher in establishing a positive learning environment is to demonstrate the respectful and accepting behaviour that we want our learners to show to each other. This includes:

- using learners' **names** correctly. (See Activity 2a 'My names' for a good starting point here.) Name badges or name cards on the tables can be a good idea when there are new learners in the class;
- modelling the use of '**please**' and '**thank you**' as pragmatic features of the English language;
- **listening** carefully to and valuing all suggestions, asking for clarification if necessary;
- **explaining** the rationale behind requirements or requests (in very simple terms), or L1 if necessary;
- adhering to the **class contract**, if applicable (see Activity 2b 'A class contract').

**Buddies:** If new learners arrive in the class part-way through a course, a couple of classmates could be assigned to help them settle in. If your context involves constant new arrivals (i.e. 'roll-on-roll-off' courses) pair each new learner with a continuing student as a buddy.

**Study groups:** Four or five learners can be informally linked to support each other with course work. Get to know the learners before assigning them to their groups, so that a spread of talents is represented in each group.

**Disagreements:** Inevitably, human relationships sometimes hit difficulties, so it is important to recognise that if learners fall out, they may want time apart. You may also be able (or may even need) to mediate, if an issue develops that is having an impact on the rest of the class.

**Group roles:** When learners work in groups, perhaps for project work, as in Chapter 4, it can be helpful to allocate roles within the group, so that everybody knows what they have to do:

- A **chair** or **co-ordinator** makes sure everybody is engaged and able to contribute;
- A **time-keeper** keeps an eye on the clock (or the calendar, for longer-term projects);
- A **scribe** or **secretary** keeps a record of decisions and action points to complete.

Other roles may be useful in certain circumstances, such as a member of the group responsible for researching relevant information, or for liaising with other groups.

It is important also to acknowledge that there are some learners who really prefer to work alone and find group work very challenging, even distressing. A decision needs to be made on a case-by-case basis as to the benefits of encouraging, or requiring, **solitary learners** to join in. While it can be good for all of us to expand the boundaries of our comfort zones now and again, if the distress caused outweighs the productivity or language development, there may be an argument to allow for a team of one.

**Think > Pair > Share:** This technique promotes classroom participation, from even the most reticent of learners. When a task is set or a question is asked, learners have a bit of time to think silently about their response (usually from 15 seconds to a minute, depending on their age and demands of the task). Then time is allowed for them to share with one other student, to check out whether their ideas are similar. Then the pairs can be combined into bigger groups, or a plenary discussion can be encouraged, where