

# Teacher development “How to” guides

**HOW CAN TEACHERS BEST BE  
SUPPORTED IN ADDRESSING THE  
CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH  
TEACHING ENGLISH TO LEARNERS  
WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS  
AND DISABILITIES?**

How can teachers best be supported in addressing the challenges associated with teaching English to learners with special educational needs and disabilities?

# Introduction to the series

The British Council has produced a series of short evidence-based 'How to' guides for individuals and institutions who have a stake in designing and delivering professional development opportunities for English language teachers.

These short guides provide a series of **practical recommendations** and a list of key **associated research sources** designed to inform the organisation of professional development programmes and interventions for practising English language teachers. They also serve as self-access guides for teachers who are enrolling on formal professional development programmes or pursuing self-directed professional learning.

The guides are hosted on the British Council's [TeachingEnglish website](#) and complement the existing global and regional larger-scale research that provides the evidence base for what works in the teaching, learning and assessment of English.

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# Introduction

This guide will support teacher educators working with teachers engaged in teaching English as a subject or teaching through the medium of English, providing support for a better understanding of approaches to inclusive education practice. While the focus is on English language teaching and learning communities, this 'How to guide' is also relevant for teachers of other subjects.

## Understanding inclusion: a global perspective

Inclusion has become a buzz word in education systems across the world and it is likely that governments will wish to include approaches to inclusive practices in its education policies. This, of course, will then be translated into everyday educational practice. Therefore, it is essential that teacher educators have a good understanding of inclusive practices in terms of good global practice and what that means for classroom practice when they are working with teachers in training sessions and in other continuous professional development (CPD) contexts.

Inclusion in education is a process of addressing and responding to learners' needs by increasing their participation in learning, educational culture contexts and communities, aimed at reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes related to the attendance, participation and achievement of all (UNESCO, November 2005).

For teacher educators working with teachers an important policy statement that was agreed in 1994 is the Salamanca Statement on Special Educational Needs Education, published by UNESCO – <http://www.csie.org.uk/inclusion/unesco-salamanca.shtml> – and signed by 92 governments. The Salamanca Statement is still recognised as the most significant international document in the field of special educational needs and inclusive education, providing a framework for how to make progress on policy and practice in inclusive education. The Statement advocated that mainstream schools with an inclusive orientation are “the most effective means of combatting discriminating attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all”. Inclusive education, the idea of *all* children being educated together in a unified educational system regardless of any differences between them, was originally concerned with the inclusion of learners with disabilities, many of whom had historically been excluded from mainstream schools. Progress has been made since 1994, though many children remain excluded. Of course, understanding that '*all* children being educated together in a unified educational system regardless of any differences' does not mean there should be a single 'one size fits all' model of how and where learners learn. Though understanding the concept of 'all means all' is an essential element of inclusive practice in that inclusion is for everyone.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals are aimed at further global action “ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities”. Implementation of the universal global sustainable development goals – in particular goal no.4, ensuring equitable and quality education – is essential, and inclusive practices is a thread which runs through all 17 sustainable development goals; SDG 4 – “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” is the SDG most relevant for those with a stake in education.

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**“Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty. Over the past decade, major progress was made towards increasing access to education and school enrolment rates at all levels, particularly for girls. Nevertheless, *about 260 million children were still out of school* in 2018 — nearly one fifth of the global population in that age group. In terms of achievement more than half of all children and adolescents worldwide are *not meeting minimum proficiency standards* in**

reading and mathematics. In 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the globe, a majority of countries announced the temporary closure of schools, impacting more than 91 per cent of learners worldwide. By April 2020, close to *1.6 billion children and youth were out of school*. And nearly *369 million children who rely on school meals* needed to look to other sources for daily nutrition. Never before have so many children been out of school at the same time, disrupting learning and upending lives, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised. The global pandemic has far-reaching consequences that may jeopardise hard won gains made in improving global education. Understanding inclusive practices in educational systems and in teaching and learning is, therefore, not an option but an essential aspect of good practice in all teaching and learning”.

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

## One main principle of inclusive practices – access and engagement

In working with teachers, teacher educators need to be confident in understanding key aspects of teaching and learning and an essential aspect of inclusive teaching and learning is the promotion of both **access** and **engagement**. **Access** is related to people being able to receive educational provision regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, linguistic background, ability or health needs. Access therefore focuses mainly on policies, legal frameworks and structures. **Engagement** is about ensuring that what they experience when they do access educational provision is relevant, meaningful, empowering and beneficial. Engagement is therefore focused on practice and pedagogy. Without access, an engaging curriculum will be of little benefit. Without engagement, access is simply about being there rather than about learning and achieving. Therefore, any implementation of good CPD practice needs to be based on both access and engagement. Often teachers may have a general understanding that inclusion is for everyone but may have difficulty, lack confidence or feel they just lack the skills when faced with a learner who has been diagnosed or identified by clinical professionals as having special educational needs. A key role for teacher educators is in developing their own understanding of inclusion and supporting teachers in developing both their understanding and confidence in good inclusive practices in teaching and learning. Looking at both medical model and social model thinking is one way of supporting teachers in rethinking the constructs and paradigms around special educational needs and disability.

## To SEND or not to SEND – a positive dilemma in understanding inclusion and teaching/learning inclusive practices

**Understanding of the medical model and advocacy of the social model** are fundamental to the notion of inclusion and why implementation of a social rather than medical model underpins effective policy and practice. **Medical models** place the responsibility on the learner conforming to the perceived norm. Emphasis is placed on ‘helping’ or ‘curing’ people so that they can join their peers in learning – usually through classroom learning. The emphasis is therefore on the need for the learner to fit into existing systems, structures and pedagogies. This approach is based on an assumption that our systems and structures are basically ‘OK’ and that we need to help others who are ‘not OK’ to fit into the systems.

**The social model** applied to education is a more positive approach to inclusive practices. It starts from a strengths-based outlook focused on what learners *can* do rather than what they can’t do. It also focuses on understanding the learner and learning differences. The emphasis is on the need to change, adapt current structures and pedagogies to better meet a diversity of needs. Typically, this could be through the provision of whole school training for staff or the introduction of additional resources to make classrooms more accessible and engaging for specific learning needs. Approaches are advocated that will develop our understanding of inclusive learning away from labelling and medicalisation and towards a focus on the learner and learning needs. The social model is essentially a social justice and rights-based approach where society positively evolves and changes.

Medical model thinking	Social model thinking
The learner is faulty	The learner is valued
Diagnosis and treatment	Focussed on the removal of barriers
Labelling and categorising	Acceptance of the individual and individual differences
Inputs identified from diagnosis and delivered	Outcomes identified and planned towards achievement for everyone
Therapy programmes are central	Resources available in reaching everyone and towards achievement for all
Segregation and alternative services as well as different expectations of learning outcomes	Fully integrated services towards inclusion – though not a one-size-fits-all approach as there are different models of inclusion based on different learning needs
Professional services identify the needs	Individual rights and needs are expressed
Isolation and exclusion predominate	Diversity and difference are welcomed and encouraged
<b>Society remains unchanged</b>	<b>Society evolves</b>

<https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability/>

It is important to understand, though, that while we will focus on social model rather than medical model thinking there are likely to be many support interventions of a clinical nature that school support professionals can suggest for different learning needs. Teachers working together with such school support professionals – where this is possible – is really important. However, it is not the teacher's role to 'diagnose' learners but to offer learning support. Teacher educators working with teachers on what this means in reality is, in itself, an example of inclusive practices.

## Redefining special education needs and disability (SEND) for educational contexts

In light of the above, we are redefining our understanding of approaches to SEND through a different, more inclusive paradigm for educational contexts.

Historically **SEND** is informed by medical model thinking. As mentioned above, there may be necessary clinical interventions; however, in considering teaching and learning in schools, and also more specifically in English language teaching and learning, it is more helpful to redefine learners' needs as follows:

- **Cognition and learning**

This may include SEND categories or labels such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, gifted and talented.

- **Behavioural, emotional and social development**

This may include SEND areas, categories or labels such as ADHD, social, emotional and mental health.

- **Communication and interaction**

This may include SEND categories or labels such as autism spectrum, speech and language.

- **Sensory and/or physical**

This may include SEND categories such as visual, hearing and physical or mobility needs.

- **Societal marginalising and exclusion factors**

This goes beyond SEND categories and labels as such and may include gender inequality, social displacement due to movement of peoples and other factors for family, culture and factors external from school that impact on learning and achievement.

**The British Council’s CPD frameworks for teachers and teacher educators** – which this guide aims to align with in terms of inclusive practices – supports the five areas above in relation to learners and learning needs. The approach recognises and values diversity, and includes attention paid to:

- language background
- cognitive ability
- academic ability
- physical ability
- social background
- behavioural differences
- disability
- age
- gender
- race and ethnicity
- sexual orientation
- religion and belief.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers>

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teacher-educators>

In this guide our main focus will be on practical suggestions for inclusive approaches in learning with a focus on teaching and learning language. Therefore, we will focus specifically on three areas:

1. Cognition and learning
2. Communication and interaction
3. Behavioural, emotional and social development, offering insights based on research evidence and practical suggestions for application in the classroom.

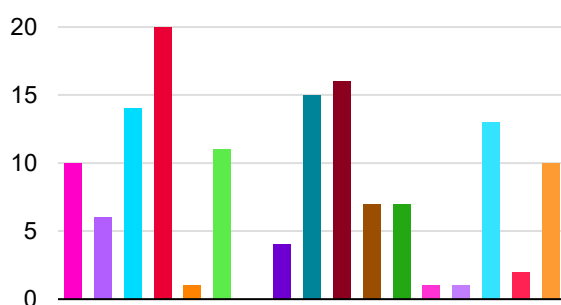
While the above represents a good practice approach, in aiming to make a positive difference it is important to take as a starting point, specific educational and teaching contexts. The evidence-base and global good practice will always inform approaches, but implementation should always be local and context-appropriate.

## The MENA survey on inclusive practices: evidence-based current thinking

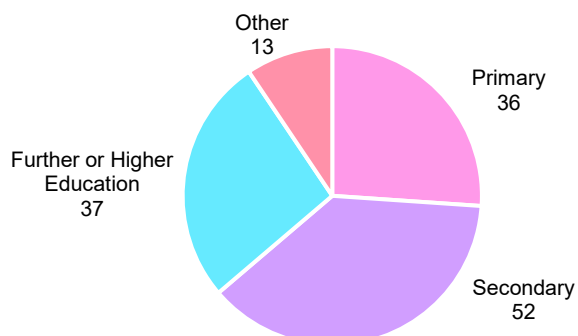
The primary research for this guide consisted of a survey of teacher educators from the Middle East and North Africa region.

### Profile of respondents

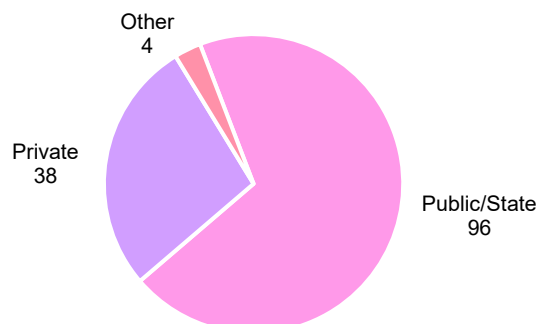
**Figure 1: In which country are you presently working?**



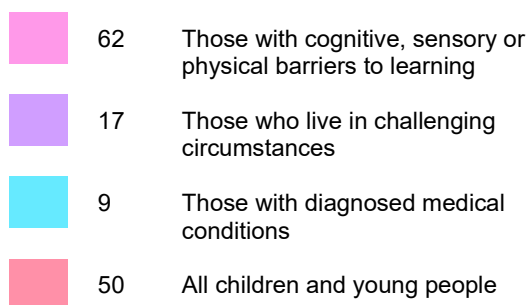
**Figure 2: Which level of education are you working in?**



**Figure 3: In which sector are you working?**



**Figure 4: Current level of understanding of the concept of a learner with special or additional needs?**



The primary research indicates that in discussing inclusive practices in education, there is an understanding that we are referring to all children and young people. This is a good starting point for teacher educators in working with teachers.

However, when breaking down what teachers perceive as their needs for support, there is an apparent contradiction in understanding what this means in practice and what confidence and skills teachers in the region currently have, as the following table shows.

Measure	Rating system	Number of respondents	Average rating
Current level of confidence in supporting children and young people with SEND	Level of confidence 1–8 1 = lowest 8 = highest	138	5.33
Current level of knowledge and skills in supporting children with SEND needs	Level of knowledge 1–8 1 = lowest 8 = highest	138	4.9

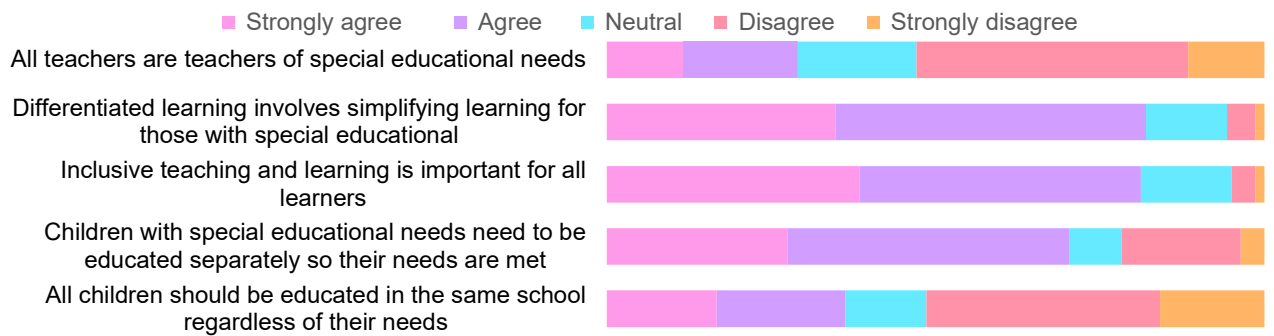
**Figure 5: The most pressing needs for educators working with children and young people, in relation to special educational needs categories/labels**



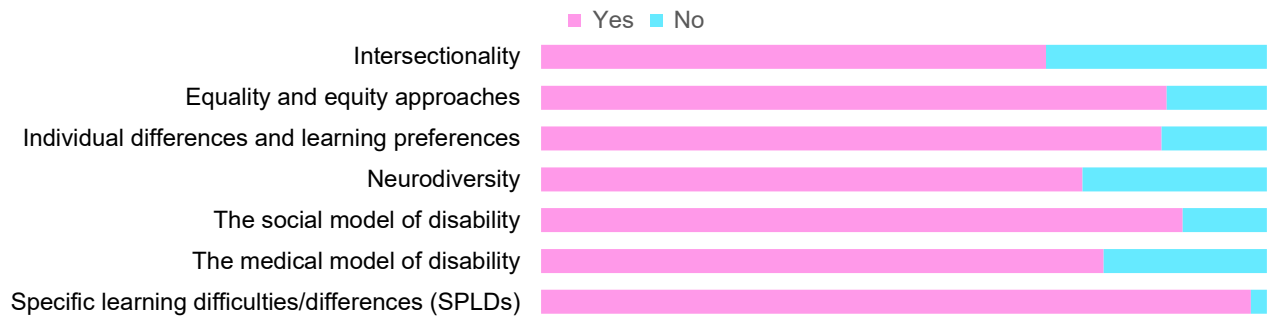


In a context of language teaching, it is perhaps no surprise that issues such as attention deficit hyperactivity, speech and language needs, social, emotional and behavioural needs, and cognitive and learning differences emerge as areas of focus for support. In exploring current understanding a little further, we can see there are some contradictions in terms of understanding inclusion as a theory and the reality of current practice in classrooms and schools. While there is a strong understanding that inclusion is for everyone, there is equally strong current thinking that those identified as having special or additional needs should in some ways be educated separately.

**Figure 8: Current thinking regarding aspects of inclusion**



**Figure 9: Current awareness of concepts connected with inclusive education**



**Figure 10: Awareness raising and content most needed by teachers (aggregated ranking)**



What is really significant in terms of this “How to” guide is what this actually means in practice in terms of what teachers do, or can do, in supporting learners and learning inclusively and how teacher educators can support this. Respondents have indicated that understanding their learners is the most significant issue for them. We need to hold this in mind as we look at the key published research sources and then the practical application solutions.

# What does evidence from global research tell us?

## The British Council approach: creating an inclusive school environment

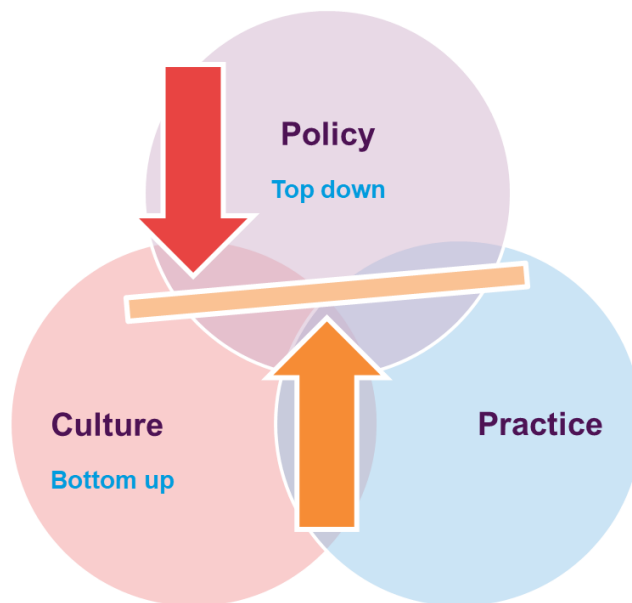
In the British Council publication *Creating an Inclusive School Environment*, Ed Susan Douglas et al, British Council (2019). <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/creating-inclusive-school-environment> it is stated:

**“The two statements that all children have an entitlement to education and that all children have the capacity to make progress are easy ones to make and to secure agreement on. However, while these fundamental beliefs are common, the building blocks that create our educational landscapes – policies, infrastructure, educational culture – teaching and learning practices, societal values and resources, often mean that fully achieving such aspirations can at best be challenging and in worst cases, almost impossible.”**

What this statement implies is that inclusive practices is always and will always be a process. Therefore, if inclusion of all children and young people is to be successful and sustainable, then it must be based on an approach that is achievable, empowering and informed by a thorough and sensitive understanding of the current context of the particular school and education system. The commitment to developing inclusive practices therefore requires a multi-tiered response that addresses policy, practice and educational culture at all levels of an education system. The British Council advocates this change process as stated in the diagram below – which teacher educators need to be aware of in working with teachers.

Figure 11: The change process towards inclusive practices

How does inclusion happen:  
What do schools need to consider?



### Change at different levels:

- Systemic
- Social
- Cultural/attitudinal
- Physical infrastructure
- Pedagogical change

### Specific Learning Difficulties in ELT, Cambridge University Press

The term **Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)** – often described more inclusively as **Specific Learning Differences** – is a generally used term across the literature. In the Cambridge University Papers in ELT series (January 2020) it is considered that the label SpLDs is important because it shapes and expresses how people think about learning difficulties, and because the inappropriate use of labels can lead to stigmatisation, which in some contexts might result in the denial and lack of recognition of SpLDs. The labels 'learning disorder' and 'learning disability' are common in the fields of biology, medicine and psychology, where the focus is on examining the exact nature and cause of SpLDs. In the field of education (at least in the UK), individuals are often described as having specific learning differences, which reflects the view – social model approach – that if institutions meet the differing needs of learners, these learning differences need not hinder successful learning.

A similar, more recent conceptualisation of neurodiversity also highlights that individuals vary in their cognitive, affective and social skills and that this diversity needs to be respected. The neurodiversity movement also advocates that rather than expecting neurodiverse people to adapt to their environment, institutions should actively seek ways to remove obstacles to full participation. The term specific learning difficulty, which is used in the CUP paper, reflects an interactionist position and helps us describe how processes of language learning are jointly influenced by learners' characteristics and by barriers in the educational system.

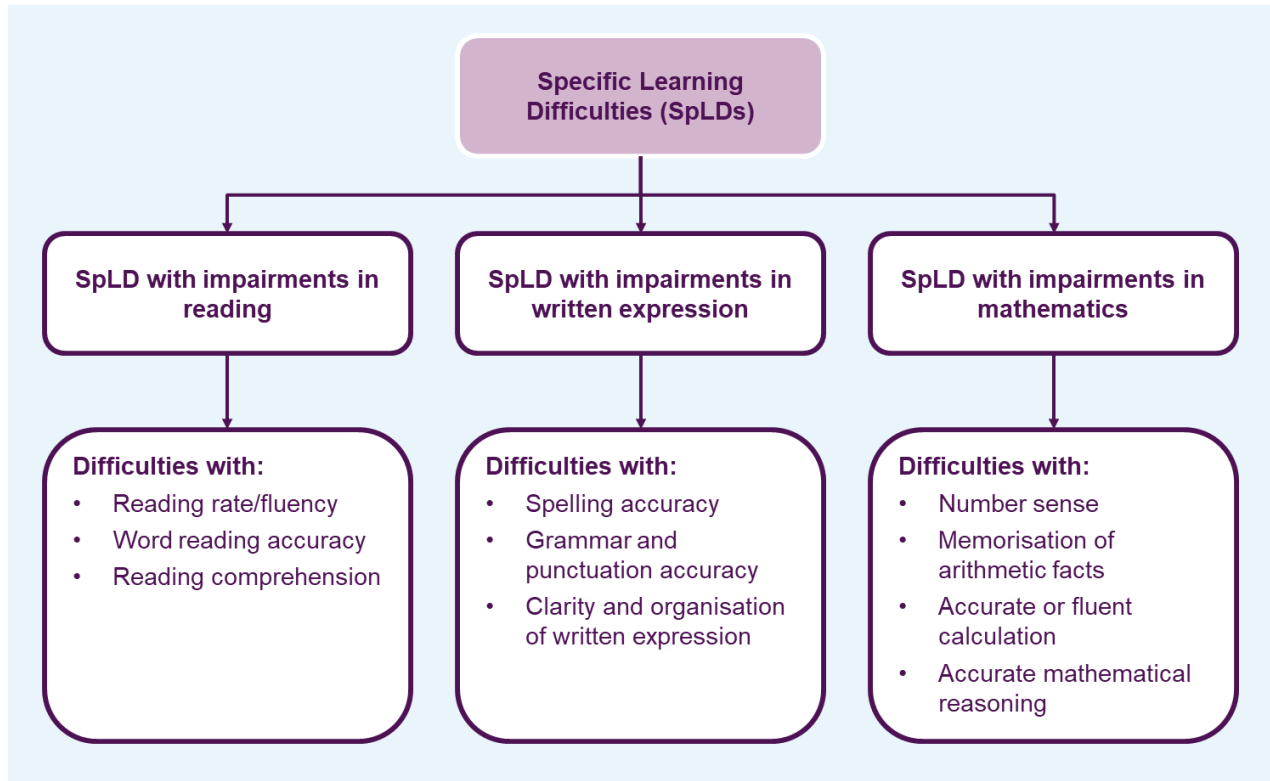
How can SpLDs be defined and categorised? Individuals with SpLDs may have various strengths, such as holistic thinking, outstanding pattern recognition and visuospatial skills. They have been found to excel in creative fields and are often very good problem-solvers.

However, people with SpLDs are also characterised by underlying weaknesses in the areas of:

- working memory (a memory system for the temporary storage and manipulation of information before it is encoded in long-term memory)
- executive functioning (planning, organising, strategising and paying attention)
- processing speed and phonological processing.

According to the CUP paper, each language learner is unique and has experiences and personal characteristics that are special and different. Students with SpLDs can be successful language learners if the role of individual differences in the processes of L2 acquisition is acknowledged and appreciated and if their needs are met in an inclusive learning environment. [cambridge.org/gb/files/2415/7856/0079/CambridgePapersInELT\\_SpLDs\\_2020\\_ONLINE.pdf](https://www.cambridge.org/gb/files/2415/7856/0079/CambridgePapersInELT_SpLDs_2020_ONLINE.pdf)

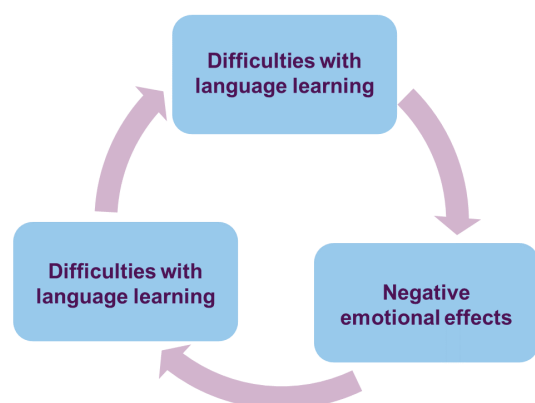
**Figure 12: An empirically supported conceptualisation of SpLDs (following DSM.5 [APA, 2013])**



### What effect do SpLDs have on learning additional languages?

First language skills are an important foundation for L2 learning. This explains why students with SpLDs often face challenges in learning additional languages where their feelings towards their challenges and difficulties are not given sufficient attention and if the instructional environment is not inclusive. Given a choice, students with SpLDs might decide to opt out from learning an additional language altogether (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: The vicious circle of the emotional effects of SpLDs on language learning**



## ***Inclusive Practices in English Language Teaching, Oxford University Press***

In *Inclusive Practices in English Language Teaching* research from Oxford University Press [oup-expert-inclusive-practices2.pdf](#) the emphasis is on how English has become a global lingua franca, is widely perceived as a prerequisite for success in many areas of life and how inclusive practices are also important to understand achieving such success. Language learners identified with 'special educational needs' may find that they are disadvantaged by the way their learning environment interacts with their individual differences. The OUP research aligns strongly with that of CUP and good practice thinking on equality, diversity and inclusion. Neurodiversity is also discussed in the OUP paper and how an attainment gap can develop between these learners and their peers, which only increases during the school years. Bridging this attainment gap is at the core of the inclusion agenda developed by international organisations such as UNESCO and the OECD to promote the implementation of inclusive educational systems in which all learners are actively engaged in learning and can reach their potential. Learning an additional language can present significant challenges to learners with special educational needs. Consequently, the English language teacher may be the first to notice indicators of neurodiversity. At the same time, the English language classroom can provide the ideal environment for addressing these challenges. Through its long association with learner-centred communicative methodologies, the English language classroom offers many opportunities to implement inclusive practices which allow all learners to participate fully and achieve success.

The OUP paper suggests, similarly to the CUP research, what is termed the **Interactional model**. There is a growing awareness of the importance of recognising and understanding individual differences of learners. The Interactional Model considers the interplay between multiple factors affecting the behaviours and needs of an individual. These factors include a learner's cognitive processing capacity, individual abilities, and their personal and wider contextual circumstances. The Interactional Model recognises that difficulties in learning are the result of an interaction between individual and environmental factors. As no two learners respond to the environment in the same way, the range of barriers they experience will be unique to them.

### **A two-level approach to inclusion**

As stated by UNESCO, "Inclusion is a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners". The OUP paper advocates a two-level approach to inclusion: **the general level** and **the individual level**. At the general level, teachers need an understanding of the most common kinds of difficulties that learners with SEN often experience in the classroom. Teachers can then work towards developing a classroom culture and environment that will make the learning experience more accessible. This in turn will engender a feeling of belonging to a learning community, in which individual differences are seen "not as problems to be fixed, but as opportunities for democratising and enriching learning". At the individual level, teachers work with each learner to identify any barriers that they are experiencing as a result of the interplay between environmental factors and the learner's neurodiversity. Once these are identified, teachers can put specific interventions in place and differentiate their teaching to meet the needs of the individuals they are working with. The OUP paper suggests **Positive Attributes** as a main approach in supporting learners, which aligns with a strengths-based approach as a starting point.

This recognises that the specific educational needs of learners are not viewed only in terms of the difficulties experienced. On the contrary, it is important to look for each student's strengths and to find out about their interests, and to draw on these in the language learning process. There is a rich variety of individual differences and identifying learners' strengths and finding out about their interests is a key part of getting to know them well, letting them know they are valued, and ensuring that their individual characteristics are not reduced to a clinical diagnostic label. Without overgeneralising, there are some common strengths that teachers could observe in students identified as having special educational needs. For example, learners with autism spectrum condition sometimes have excellent memories for facts and rules, making them confident in the grammatical aspects of the language. They may have a deep interest in (and knowledge of) a particular topic, which can be directed towards learning vocabulary and project work. Students with ADHD often have a lot of energy which, if channelled into learning, using engaging and varied tasks, can help them to keep working for longer. In practical activities, such as drama or art projects, their enthusiasm and energy can have a very motivating effect on their peers, too.

Learners generally benefit from a structured and well-organised learning environment, but those who are experiencing barriers to learning may appreciate this even more. Students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) in particular might respond well to openness and support from their teachers, with whom they can then develop a relationship of trust and respect.

# Practical methodology – implementing quality inclusive teaching and learning practices

## Developing an inclusive language learning environment in schools

A continuous thread in the research reviewed above is concerned with **developing an inclusive environment in English language teaching in schools**

There is a long tradition in English language education of using learner-centred methodologies, such as communicative language teaching (CLT) or a task-based approach. These methodologies, which rely on student-to-student communication, foster collaboration and co-operation between learners. When it comes to developing inclusive practices, English language teachers can often build upon the CLT training they have already received and the teaching skills they have already developed in the classroom.

In so doing, they can base their approach on good practice in English language teaching and how this aligns with inclusive teaching and learning. In essence, good inclusive teaching and learning practices are good practice in teaching and learning generally. Some examples of good practice are given below which teacher educators can work with teachers on are:

- understanding the principles underpinning inclusive education
- the aims and ethos of inclusive education
- the benefits to all learners of being in an inclusive learning environment
- the difference between inclusion and integration, (i.e. engagement versus access)
- teaching and learning methods that value learners' diversity.

## Making inclusive choices

There are decisions to be made at the stages of planning a course, planning each lesson, and delivering a lesson in the classroom. Reflection on the results of these choices should then inform future choices. These are choices regarding:

- methodology, (e.g. interactive and participatory approaches and techniques)
- range of materials (especially multisensory activities and multimodal resources that reflect and celebrate the diversity within the group)
- classroom environment and management (ensuring that the lighting, temperature, and noise levels are comfortable for everyone, as far as possible)
- assessment of progress (allowing students to demonstrate their learning in different formats, giving explicit and constructive feedback, focusing on one or two areas for development).

## Raising awareness regarding issues of diversity and inclusion

There are various ways of raising awareness regarding issues of diversity and inclusion, including:

- initiating self-exploratory discussions in the classroom; for example, creating a values-led class contract with each class, and encouraging students to compare their responses to different tasks or challenges
- sharing experiences in the staff room; for example, informal conversations to compare ideas about how to respond to the barriers to learning encountered by some learners
- organising formal CPD events in the school; for example, inviting a speaker to offer input on a particular aspect of inclusive practice
- providing a forum for parents to meet and share experiences; for example, setting up a private area on the school website for online discussions.

Inclusive teaching and learning is fundamentally a rights-based and social justice approach founded on a values-based approach to education.

## Top ten approaches to quality inclusive teaching and learning

This section provides a framework for the practical application of inclusive practices for the classroom, reflecting the evidence from the primary and the secondary research, and reinforcing strengths-based and needs-based interventions. The intention is to demonstrate how inclusive practices in teaching and learning can support the view that 'all means all'. Here, we're exemplifying this approach through the **top ten approaches to quality inclusive teaching and learning** in the form of a pie chart showing ten different aspects of inclusive practices. There are practical ideas for each section of the pie chart, though these are not intended to be a recipe or 'magic solutions' for success and are rather more examples of *what might work*. Working with the sections of the pie chart, teacher educators can demonstrate and work with teachers in trying out some ideas in their own settings and decide for themselves if they might work well. Inevitably, they will require adaptations for context as appropriate. Different sections are integrated, showing how the pie chart represents a connected approach.

## Top ten approaches to quality learning and inclusion

This approach is concerned with developing knowledge and skills but also teacher confidence. Teacher educators can point out that teachers will likely be doing much of this already. Specific interventions around the ten approaches can meet specific needs for particular individuals and groups of learners (and in turn meet everyone's needs). This puts the emphasis on inclusion rather than special educational needs or 'clinically diagnosed conditions' such as dyslexia, ADHD and autism.

The ten approaches in this framework are:

- **Celebrate diversity**

Encouraging and celebrating diversity is primarily concerned with ensuring positive contributions from *everyone*, whatever the learning differences and difficulties and where special educational needs may have been noticed and identified. The unique contribution of everyone is valued and expressed through materials and resources, and also represented through texts, images, audio, etc. Encouraging learners to engage in a variety of ways in how they respond in their learning is celebrating diversity.

- **Have clear, achievable and measurable learning outcomes**

A learning outcome-based approach will ensure that everyone can positively participate, and learning can be measured according to appropriate and agreed criteria. Everyone works to agreed learning outcomes – perhaps taking different paths or routes depending upon the learning needs identified. In considering learning outcomes we start from where learners are and what they 'can do' and not from an abstract level or outcome based on what they 'should' achieve. Proceeding from learning *intentions* may be a better approach than learning outcomes...

- **Start from and link to what is already known**

This involves starting from what is already understood and what needs to be understood in meeting a learning aim. This is sometimes called a 'constructivist approach to learning'. Learning is related to a topic or interest – so everyone can be engaged in what needs to be understood and learnt.

- **Remove clutter**

Clutter is anything that detracts from the purpose of promoting learning. Modifications to the materials may be necessary to permit everyone to learn more effectively. This may also involve avoiding stylistically 'busy' materials and over-colouring of materials that may obscure the content and tasks. Clutter might include teachers' instructions, or teachers talking too much. It's all about making meaning comprehensible and understandable – how to support learners to get on task, keep on task and complete the task. Is there clutter from outside the classroom or school that is a barrier to learning?

- **Scaffold teaching and learning**

Scaffolding involves promoting confidence and providing achievable aims. Scaffolding also promotes a concept of 'learning for understanding' and approaches that encourage learner/learning independence in a supportive, 'laddered' way. There are clear steps where everyone is supported but can make their own decisions. However, there is an additional aspect to scaffolding. It is not only about 'structuring' but also about providing the space within the structure for learners to explore and creating the space for learning to happen.

- **Differentiate**

Differentiation involves providing different learning routes for everyone based upon their learning needs but focused on achieving similar outcomes. Differentiation is also used in ways to avoid signalling negative concepts of difference, e.g. where individuals are targeted for particular tasks such as, 'Here's a simpler task for you'. There are different ways of differentiating – the task itself, different tasks, different types of content and different ways of responding to tasks. There are lots of different types of differentiation, many that the teacher can do – but perhaps the strongest differentiation is where learners have a range of options and they, in fact, choose the differentiation.

- **Plan and cater for accessibility, access needs and engagement in learning**

Accessibility is concerned with environmental factors such as ensuring physical conditions allow for inclusion and equality of access to learning. This may involve the physical conditions in a classroom or access via technology. Access needs are much more related to specific needs of the individual in promoting learning. For example, for learners with visual impairment use of braille versions or screen readers. There are dyslexic-friendly fonts or tasks related to access needs. Also, resources for individuals with speech and language difficulties. Most importantly, however, how do we move forward from accessibility (ensure learners can participate in learning) to engagement (ensure learners can develop learning and achieve)?

- **Use multisensory and multi-modal approaches**

Most people can learn through a combination of linguistic, verbal, visual, auditory or kinaesthetic channels, though most have a preference, and it is good to know what these are. However, integrated multi-modality approaches are the most inclusive. The importance of multisensory approaches is that they allow for a range of options in accommodating the way learners learn. If content is only delivered through a single sensory channel, then we are less likely to meet both individual and group needs.

- **Ensure appropriate space for the learner's voice**

The learner's voice is concerned with understanding learning through the experiences of the individual participating in the learning. It also involves actively encouraging and enabling a sharing of responsibility for achieving a productive, purposeful and harmonious working and learning atmosphere through a co-operative learning approach.

- **Include assessment for learning**

An inclusive learning assessment approach starts from an 'assessment for learning' rather than an 'assessment of learning' approach. This will require evidence of ongoing/continuous formative assessment which is achievable at every stage of learning and moves individuals in 'a scaffolded way' towards achievement at a summative assessment stage. It is also collaborative between learners, between learners and teachers, and is based on a concept of positive affirmation of what someone can do rather than what they can't do.



### How do we use the top ten approaches to quality learning and inclusion?

As we've seen, the top ten approaches are presented in the form of a pie chart divided into 10 sections. Teacher educators can work with teachers in looking at the pie chart section by section (or a combination of sections) and explore these areas for themselves in their classrooms – which could be through a training workshop/online event, doing some reading around the issue, trying out ideas with learners, discussing in a classroom or on an online forum. This is all good practice CPD. The sections are not numbered, and it is not necessary to work through them in a linear way. You can choose any starting point and you may decide that some activities belong in different sections. Focus on the sections you feel are most relevant to the context of the teachers you are working with and encourage teachers to reflect and evaluate what they are doing.



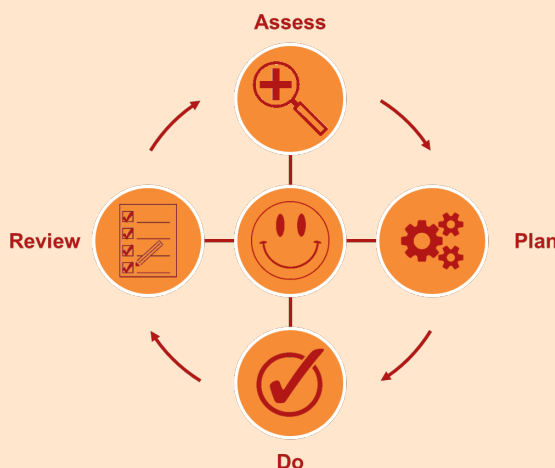
### Top ten approaches to quality inclusive teaching and learning – practical examples

This guide is primarily for teacher educators in their role in supporting language teachers, though the examples are also relevant for supporting teachers of other subjects. Only a selected number of ideas can be presented, some of which are in the form of general guidance while others are example language activities. The aim is that these ideas will encourage and inspire reflection relevant to your work with teachers around inclusive practices. As stated above, the analysis of the results of the survey and the ideas drawn from key published sources, the main focus is on the three areas of **cognition and learning; behavioural, emotional and social development; communication and interaction.**

#### Practical activity 1

##### Clear, achievable and measurable learning outcomes/Starting from and linking to what is already known

In your role as a teacher educator encourage teachers to consider this model – **Assess, Plan, Do and Review – as a learning cycle.** It can be helpful for teachers to continually add to their knowledge, skills and understanding of learners, learning and inclusive strategies by, for example, discussing with colleagues, doing research and attending professional development events. Encourage teachers to think about the four levels in the cycle as follows:



**Assess** – this relates to both their teaching and their learners' learning. This could be formally or informally in getting to know their learners better. What are they noticing about how they teach and what and how their learners are learning? What are their learners' strengths and weaknesses? What can they do well and what might be difficult for their learners?

**Plan** – consider how best to make any changes to include everyone. How can they gradually make changes that make sense for them and their learners that can make a difference? What will they need to say and do? What resources or organisational arrangements might they need to support approaches to inclusive teaching and learning?

**Do** – as they put their plan into action, what do they notice as they are doing it? Do they need to make changes as they apply the plan? **Remember they are teaching people – not the plan – and they will inevitably need to adjust.**

**Review** – reflect on how the lesson went from both their and their learners' perspectives. What part of their practice needs attention and what differences can be made through any changes they make? **Reflection is key to learning.**

**Inclusion is also about collaborating with others.** How can they, as teachers, support each other? Can they team teach, plan collaboratively, watch each other teaching and share ideas?

## Practical activity 2

### Celebrate diversity/ensure appropriate space for the learner's voice

We – teacher educators, teachers and our learners – bring our own diversity to the training room or classroom, whether this is reflected by age, gender, disability, different cultural, social or religious experiences, views on different types of personal and social relationships and our life experiences. All of us also bring our personal values to the classroom or training room.

We want to support ways in which we can enable teachers to encourage learners' individual voices to be heard. An example might be in creating a 'safe space' in the training room or the classroom through the existing curriculum. Many, if not all, coursebooks have lessons on the family. These are usually rather stereotypical, where the family is shown as mum, dad, 2/3 children and perhaps a stereotypical view of an extended family. While that might represent some families, it is often not the reality. There may be social / emotional needs that could be catered for through such a safe space. Rather than impose a family model, we can work on an activity asking learners to bring in a photo of their family or one on a mobile phone or tablet and talk about their family. Learners may just wish to give information on their family, but it may also be a way of giving them a safe way of expressing some of these more difficult social / emotional issues if they wish to, which should be supportive and with no fear of judgement. Having this space to do

so can then facilitate engagement in other aspects of learning which can be extremely positive as learners can understand better the inclusive support role schools can have if for any reason this support is not obviously there outside the classroom. By modelling this activity in the training room teachers can see how this might work in their classrooms. Experiencing this activity in a training room as if they are learners can be a very powerful way for teachers to understand the learner experience.

### Reflective task

Ask teachers to describe or illustrate the diversity of their classroom. They may write this description or create a visual representation of their classroom, with all the differences that are likely to be present. Consider what is really positive and what might present a challenge. Focus on what can be a positive, enabling and inclusive environment that they can create to bring out the best in everyone.

**Make it clear there are no right or wrong answers.**

### Exploring values

What thoughts and words might be helpful in creating an inclusive culture in the classroom? For example, kindness, creating personal space, helpfulness, collaboration, empathy. What do these words mean to them?

Values can be understood through personalising activities. We know we all do this but think how this supports inclusive teaching and learning. For example:

- Who has an older/younger sister or brother?
- Who is wearing something red, blue, green, etc?
- What kind of music do you like? Who can play a musical instrument?
- How many languages can you say hello in?
- Who has lived in two or more places?
- If you could travel somewhere, where would you go and what would you do?
- How do you celebrate your birthday or family/cultural events?
- What three things do you like to do?

Consider other questions in getting their learners collaborating and how can they share the similarities and differences represented in the classroom?

### Practical activity 3

#### Plan and cater for accessibility/access needs and engagement/remove clutter

Considering the environmental conditions in the classroom are important in ensuring everyone can have access to learning. We need to think about the environment in practical ways, making adjustments where we can to:

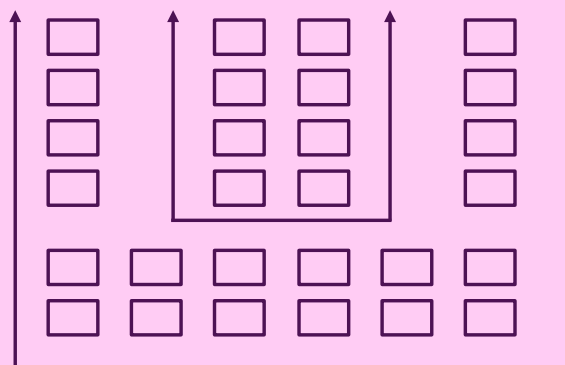
Classroom layout (furniture, seating, seating plans) and materials, e.g. presenting content and tasks through worksheets and assistive technology.

These adjustments are the starting point for equity. They give all the learners the means to progress at the same rate of learning, but they don't guarantee progress; that is dependent on how learning and teaching can happen successfully in classrooms. Even in a large class with limited resources there are creative ways to arrange the classroom to ensure that learners can move around, interact and engage fully in all learning opportunities. Ask teachers to reflect on what they are trying to accomplish and how to make their space work for them rather than against them. In a large class, a hearing-impaired child or one who struggles to concentrate may find it difficult to focus in a noisy class if seated at the back of the room. Here are some issues to consider:

- **Visibility:** Are there areas of the classroom where learners cannot easily see the board or a screen? If so, consider using these areas for small-group work or storage. Ask teachers to arrange their room so they can have eye contact with all their learners, and to make sure that each learner is able to see the board. Can you do the same in your training room so that you model the activity?
- **Proximity:** Can they easily reach each learner in the room to provide extra instructional support? Can they circulate round the classroom during whole-class teaching? Can learners easily move into peer groups when necessary? One way of ensuring this is to arrange the desks in two loops—an interior and an exterior loop. This arrangement gives you proximity to all learners and allows learners to move easily into peer groups. Can you do the same in your training room so that you model the activity?

Alternatively, while desks arranged in neat rows may make movement through the class easier, this arrangement may not help to create a warm, friendly environment. Many teachers find that using a semicircle or cluster to arrange the desks in their classrooms encourages co-operative learning, builds a sense of community, and makes the best use of the space. Can they use walls and vertical space for displaying learners' work and learning enrichment materials? However, remember not to over-clutter.

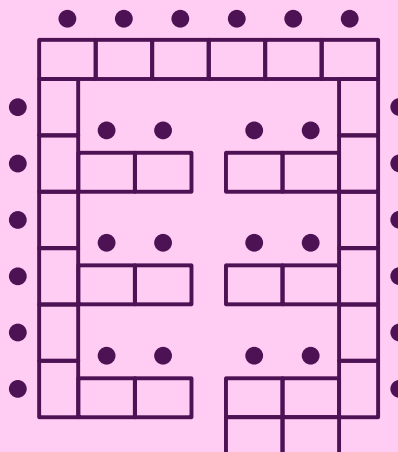
It is unlikely they will have exactly what they would like, so an important question is "If they don't have exactly what they want, how can they improvise?" And, of course, if we can't move furniture – we can move our learners! Can you do the same in your training room so that you model the activity?



### Accessibility audit task for teachers you work with for their classroom and learners

Ask teachers to draw the layout they think will work best to meet the following requirements. Ask them to choose what is most relevant for them and their learners as they are unlikely to be able to do everything.

- All learners can see you and the board.
- Learners can easily move into groups for group work.
- Activity or workstations are included.
- Materials and resources are easily accessible.
- Wall space is utilised well.
- Individual learners are seated in ways that best support their learning.



Explain layout choices. Ask teachers to do this either in writing or drawing the classroom layout you would like to explore. If you have materials such as Lego or other similar 'building material', you may find it meets their learners' preferences to actually 'build' the design in a visual tactile way.

**Remove clutter:** Clearing clutter in the classroom can really make a difference in learning. The overarching aim for teachers who work inclusively is to have enough stimuli in the classroom to enable all learners to engage enthusiastically in, and make meaning from, a learning task—but not so much that it detracts from learning. Clutter is anything that overwhelms learners and detracts from learning. Sometimes materials — for example posters, worksheets, signage, presentations (either on chalk board or using technology) — can be too “busy” with text, pictures, colour, or a combination of these. Ask teachers to consider the balance between sufficient and distracting stimuli.

### Practical activity 4

#### Scaffolding/differentiation and multisensory approaches

##### What is scaffolding?

A scaffold is a temporary structure that is erected around an unfinished building, supporting the structure until it is sufficiently stable to stand on its own. Share with teachers a metaphor such as learning to ride a bike. They may remember that someone probably helped them at first, by holding on to the bike and then letting go as they became more confident. Instructional scaffolds are temporary support structures teachers put in place to help learners in mastering new tasks and concepts they can't master on their own. The teacher builds supports, based on **what learners already know**, as new skills or concepts are introduced. As they work on tasks, learners become less dependent on these support structures, which can be removed gradually. In supporting learning it's really important that this process happens – as 'we can teach someone, but we cannot learn for them – only they can do that'.

In implementing scaffolding strategies, ask teachers to consider how they might use scaffolding in breaking down a lesson into a series of “mini-lessons”. For example:

- building on prior knowledge and learner experience
- modelling what the learners need to do or achieve
- breaking down the learning into steps (often called “chunking”)
- providing cue cards (reminders of key information that learners need to reach the learning outcome, including vocabulary, sentence starters, formulae, questions for discussion)
- encouraging use of first language in discussion or thinking processes to increase understanding
- pre-teaching vocabulary needed for later in the learning
- using visual cues like gestures, pictures, diagrams
- using short excerpts from a longer text as a basis for discussion – the longer text is introduced later in the learning process
- verbalising the thinking process while solving a problem (sometimes called “think-aloud”)
- giving hints – suggestions and clues
- giving time to practise chunks of learning before moving on to new chunks. and gradually hand over more independence to the learners as their confidence grows.

Ask teachers to work in groups choosing any three of the above. Ask them to show to others in the group how they might use the examples or deliver a mini lesson in using the examples.

Allow time for discussion of how it might work and to consider any difficulties that might arise. Ensure they focus on how they will use scaffolding as a support and then begin to remove the scaffolding.

### Differentiated teaching and learning

What is the difference between scaffolding and differentiation? Scaffolding is a way into applying differentiation. The main difference is that scaffolding is mainly what teachers do – they put support structures in place to help learners master new tasks and concepts that they cannot master on their own. Differentiation is what teachers *and* learners do. Teachers create the conditions and environment for learners to make differentiated choices, so increasing their ownership of learning, agency, decision-making and independent learning skills.

Differentiation is directly related to inclusive practices as the overall aim of differentiation is equity, to ensure that everyone in the classroom can equally take part in – and succeed in – learning. A strong inclusive approach for differentiation is where everyone works towards the same learning outcome, but learners are given choices about how they respond, either within a given medium or by being able to choose from a variety of media. Differentiation, therefore, is not simply “a variety of activities”. It is a process that is unique to each context and is continually developing. There is no “how to” recipe for differentiating teaching and learning. However, it is possible to identify certain underlying principles and approaches to differentiation. Firstly, differentiating teaching and learning is about teachers being prepared to develop flexibility in their approaches to teaching as well as learners’ approaches to learning. Ask teachers to consider that differentiated teaching and learning requires teachers to recognise that:

- all learners are different and are capable of achievement
- every class is a mixed-level group
- it is essential to know individual learners well in order to be responsive, i.e. so you know which strategy to choose at which time and for which learners
- learners with specific learning needs, like their peers, are all on a “continuum of learning”.

Differentiation, therefore, is not about teachers making lots of different lesson plans. Primarily, effective differentiation involves learners making choices and being engaged in different ways. Below in practical activity 5 is an example which can be used for any language learning context, and also involves **participating and engaging learners** in different ways – including through multisensory choices based on their learning preferences. This example starts with basic ‘teacher scaffolding’.

### Practical activity 5

The aim of this activity is to support speech and language through differentiated multisensory learning and to promote effective communication. The language classroom is a where all sorts of learning skills can be facilitated. As a trainer take teachers through the activity below, it’s important they experience it as if they are learners and then reflect and consider how it might support inclusive learning.

1. In a training session draw an image on the board as below:



Drawing something rather odd is done on purpose, though it is intended to be a house and a surrounding area/river. Participants can interpret it in ways they wish.

2. Participants are then invited to add to the drawing by coming out to draw on the board and drawing whatever they wish. At this point no language is used – only visuals. A drawing might turn out to be something like this:



#### Task for teachers/participants:

- Ask the question – what have we just produced? They will say a drawing, a picture, etc. It is a visual text that we can do some language work with....
- Follow up by asking how we can use this drawing or visual text for communicative language work. Participants should work in pairs or small groups so that can share. Ask them to discuss and list as many things as they can think of for their classrooms. Some suggestions are given below, though no doubt they will have many more ideas – especially given the different contexts they might work in – primary, secondary, with different language levels. Ask them to feed back – and there will be a variety of suggestions and types of activities.

The ideas below may be mentioned, but if not, offer these or make up your own:

- Work on vocabulary – name what you can see. Consider ‘hidden’ vocabulary such as in rooms in the house. Can some learners support others in what they already know? How can we work with the vocabulary to develop our language? Can we make phrases or sentences?
- Give simple information using prepositions.
- Make dialogues between the different items in the visual. Express thoughts and feelings.
- If we ask when this pictured happened – last week, yesterday, today, tomorrow/next week, we can work on any tense/time.
- Make a story.

#### Reflective task

In what ways can this task be regarded as inclusive? What learning needs are addressed? How can teachers integrate this activity into something they would want to teach in their curriculum, syllabus or lesson plan? In what ways can this activity support any additional needs of SpLD learners?

If appropriate, offer these ideas. The above are only examples and all learners will be doing what they can do, leading to a positive outcome integrating different learning preferences, getting out of their seats and moving around and using linguistic and visual content. While the teacher has scaffolded the activity in the beginning, the activity becomes differentiated as the drawing has been differentiated by the learners and is now ‘owned’ by them. The teacher then uses differentiated activities to support learning.

Ask teachers: Are there other ways we can regard this a differentiated activity? In what different ways are we differentiating? Think of language content, ways of engaging with the activity, materials, supporting different language levels. Who is doing the differentiation? Ask teachers how they could use this or how they might adapt it for their context.

In the CUP and OUP research the concept of neurodiversity is discussed. Think about how neurodiversity may impact on language teaching and learning. How might you reflect this in your **Assess, Plan, Do and Review model**? Neurodiversity has been described as follows:

*In understanding neurodiversity, we recognise cognitive differences as part of a natural spectrum of 'ways of thinking' that are unique and should be educationally and socially celebrated. Traditional approaches based largely on purely linguistic learning and responses may not be appropriate for neurodiverse thinkers. The continuum between neurodiverse and neurotypical is a complex one in understanding how we process ideas and language and needs to be considered as part of inclusive teaching for all.*

### Integrating scaffolding, differentiation and multisensory approaches

In developing our language and communication skills we understand the importance of working on the basic skills involved in syntax, sentence structure, how different parts of speech – nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc. – are connected in word order as well as in the rhythm of spoken language. We can, of course, do all this work in the traditional linguistic way though this may not be the most effective inclusive teaching for all approach for those identified as having SpLDs or those who are likely to be neurodiverse. The colour-coded sentence making game might be both a fun and 'real' language work way of engaging everyone. As with other examples, it's important or at least helpful for teachers to experience the activity as if they are learners so they can effectively reflect on how to do the activity and to consider why it can support inclusive practices.

## Practical activity 6

### Assessment for learning

The final section of the quality teaching and learning pie chart is Assessment for Learning. However, it is not really 'final', as it needs to be integrated with all the other sections.

**A Thinking Task.** Ask teachers: What is the difference between **assessment for learning** and **assessment of learning**? Ask them to write a definition for each.

Ask teachers share their definitions and then to compare their definitions with the definitions below. Ask them what they notice?

**Assessment of learning** is a traditional way of testing a learner's knowledge. It involves an assessment, usually by the teacher, of what the learner has learnt so far. It occurs at the end of the learning module, week, term, year. It is summative, which means the learner's mark is taken as an evaluation of their learning.

**Assessment for learning (AFL)** is a collaborative process between the teacher and the learners and involves the learner in identifying what they already know and enables them to take an active part in assessing their progress and what they still need to do to improve against their own goals and not against the results of others. Though AFL focuses on progress, it can strongly contribute to developing skills for summative assessment.

### Key shifts related to moving from assessment of learning to assessment for learning

From	To
Assessment that is disconnected from teaching and learning	Assessment that reflects the curriculum and what is taught
Assessment in one-size-fits-all formats	Flexible ways of getting the information, knowledge, understanding and skills that show what the learner can do
Learners are not or may be not aware of what they are being assessed on	Learners know what they are expected to demonstrate
All assessments and assignments count towards marks	Some count towards marks and others are for formative information for both teachers and learners
Learners are passive participants in the assessment process	Learners understand assessment as part of their learning experience
Learners may not be aware of what they are good at and what they need to work on until they get their marks	Learners are able to identify their strengths and areas for development and improvement
Only academic and linguistic skills are usually assessed	A broader range of personal and social qualities and skills can be assessed

### Considering how to do assessment for learning

Ask teachers to put themselves in the shoes of their learners. Ask them to consider key questions focusing on AFL, such as:

1. What am I learning today?
2. Why am I learning this?
3. How will I know that I have learnt it?

These questions can be asked when doing any activity.

Another strategy is to consider “non-academic” factors that contribute to learners’ overall development, both academically and in everyday life. For example:

Resilience; determination; self-awareness; leadership; persistence; creativity; resourcefulness; curiosity; motivation; critical thinking; identity; humility; enthusiasm.

Ask teachers to think of others.

**Task: Ask teachers to design an activity for a class they teach that will enable learners to demonstrate some of the above qualities or others they have thought of.**

**In providing some scaffolding for this activity teachers might like to consider the following:**

- How to vary the form of assessment, (e.g. printed text, visual or auditory representations; using technology, written tasks; oral responses). Visual representations of information enable learners to use both words and pictures to make connections and increase memory, facilitating retrieval of information.
- How to encourage self-assessment. Learners gain skills to self-monitor, recognise their learning needs and answer questions such as: What do I know? What do I want to know? Where am I now? Where am I going? How can I close the gap between what I know and what I need to know?
- How to use peer assessment and learn from each other.
- How to individualise the timeline for completing a task; pace learning differently for learners (increase or decrease time allocation).

**Another approach is a self-, peer- and co-operative assessment task where both learners and teachers assess themselves:**

Area	My mark	Teacher’s mark
Knowledge, subject, content	6	5
Participation	4	6
Behaviour	7	5
What I’ve learnt	8	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>

Ask teachers to consider how this is an inclusive activity and what learning needs it will support. The differences between the learner’s and the teacher’s assessment can be a discussion point and a way for teachers to learn much more about their learners and their learners’ needs. Importantly learners can understand that they can have control over their own assessment and understand what that means for their own learning.



# Conclusion

The top ten approaches to inclusive quality teaching and learning is a framework for applying and reflecting upon inclusive practice in the English language classroom and a model that teacher educators can refer to in supporting the professional development of the teachers they work with. It draws upon the social model, a strengths-based approach, learner-centred approaches to language teaching, and the principle that inclusion means considering the needs of all learners, as individuals and as individuals within a group. It focuses on what learners can do rather than what they can't do.

As a summary to this guide and in light of the discussion of the results of the survey carried out, the key research insights reviewed, and the practical training room activities suggested the image below captures the main considerations of inclusive teaching and learning. As we have suggested, solutions to integrating policy, educational culture and practice, to supporting access and engagement, to creating an environment in which all learners are able to reach their potential are context specific.



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How can teachers best be supported in addressing the challenges associated with teaching English to learners with special educational needs and disabilities?

## About the author

Phil Dexter worked for the British Council from 1987–2019 as a teacher, trainer, project manager and since 2011 has worked as a specialist in the area of special educational needs and disability (SEND) for the British Council English in Educational Systems team in teacher development and inclusive practices. In 2018 he was awarded an MBE for his work in supporting learners with special educational needs and equality, diversity and inclusion. Phil is now freelance and continues to support governments in projects supporting quality inclusive teaching and learning practices – most recently on the Teaching 4 All Project – embedding inclusive education in teacher professional development in South Africa.



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