



TeachingEnglish

British Council: TeachingEnglish

A podcast series for teachers
of English



Episode 3: How can I ensure my teaching is inclusive?

Transcript



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Duration: 0:27:05

Chris: Hello, and welcome to Teaching English with the British Council, a podcast in which we try and provide solutions to some of the key questions being asked by English teachers around the world.

Chris: I'm your host, Chris Sowton. In each episode, we address one such question and attempt to answer it in two ways.

In the first part of each episode, we hear from a British Council project, programme or publication about something which is being done to address this issue. Across the 10 episodes of the series, we hear from teachers, trainers and researchers in a wide range of contexts, including India, Lebanon, Uruguay, and South Africa.

In the second part, a leading English expert and practitioner will provide practical solutions which you can immediately try out wherever you work. Each episode of Teaching English is accompanied by a full transcript and show notes. These show notes provide additional information, a glossary of keywords and links to relevant websites.

Chris: Welcome to Episode 3 of Teaching English with the British Council, in which we will try to answer the question: *How can I ensure my teaching is inclusive?* To create positive and effective learning experiences – and learning outcomes – teaching must include *everybody*. This means respecting difference, ensuring that learners fulfil their potential, removing barriers to learning, and not discriminating against any learner because of age, disability, sex, race, sexual orientation or any other part of their identity.

In our report from the field this week, we visit South Africa, to hear about *Teaching for All*, an ambitious material and teacher development project that aims to provide teachers in South Africa with the skills to teach inclusively in diverse classrooms in diverse communities.

Nicoleen: Inclusive education is part of the African social-cultural way of life embedded in the values of Ubuntu – caring, interdependence, interconnectedness, harmony, respect of human diversity and dignity in community building and social cohesion.

In South Africa, we have eleven official languages, with many more spoken across the country. And several of these languages have their own word to express a similar concept to Ubuntu

Nareadi Phasha: In Tshivenda when they talk about inclusivity they talk about tanganese which means acceptance. People who speak Xitsonga will say angarha

meaning to accommodate or to embrace. In isiXhosa, they will speak about ukhlanganisa meaning bringing together.

Nicoleen: My name's Nicoleen Janneker and I'm the head of the British Council South Africa's *Teaching for All* programme. Despite huge gains made in South Africa since 1994, many children still face obstacles when accessing a quality education. Some are denied access while many others pass through the school system, or simply drop out, with learning difficulties and other barriers undetected and unsupported. Our Teaching for All programme aims to combat this by developing the capacity of and upskilling classroom teachers to create more inclusive classrooms. To achieve this, we made a wide range of freely-available resources, such as study guides, multilingual glossaries and training videos.

Teacher: With children in any class there will also be a range of behaviour. Outer behaviour is a way of communicating or concealing what is happening within. Psychosocial wellbeing is related to how we think and feel about ourselves, the quality of interactions we have with others and our sense of belonging. As a teacher, it's challenging but important to understand and support the psychosocial makeup of all your learners.

Nicoleen: These materials help teachers – in the beginning as well as the middle of their careers – to understand that every child is unique and every child can learn and achieve and must be afforded the best opportunity to do so.

Since teachers are key change agents in mainstreaming inclusion in the school system, and in developing an inclusive society more generally, inclusive education must be a core part of teacher education.

Male Teacher: Teaching for all as well teaches us how to involve to build a relationship between the community, the school is part of the community you cannot separate the school with the community because the behaviour of the school is shaped by the behaviour of the community.

Nicoleen: Inclusion is not just the responsibility of the classroom teachers, but all educational stakeholders. Headteachers, parents, the school governing body, other school staff, the government and the whole community all have a central role to play in making sure that every child is valued.

Head: The vision is very important to every single member of the school community and the stakeholders in the school. So we communicate our vision right at the very beginning of the year with the parents in our information sharing meeting

Head: So because schools are located within communities, that community has vested interest in what the school needs to serve. So the members of that school governing body need to be the students, it needs to be the estate staff, it needs to be the

teachers, needs to be the parents, but it also needs to be community members. It needs to be counsellors. It needs to be people that are working with the community at large.

Nicoleen: In the training we provide focused, practical classroom strategies which teachers can immediately use in their classrooms in order to make them more inclusive.

Language of instruction is one specific area which has been a significant barrier to inclusivity in South Africa, particularly affecting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. *Teaching for All* develops teachers' capacity so that they can celebrate and help, rather than punish and marginalize, their multilingual learners.

Teacher: Scaffolding strategies support all learners in different ways. An example of a scaffolding strategy may be for a teacher to use the home or familiar language to explain a concept, or to encourage a learner to respond in their familiar language.

Teacher: So I apply multilingualism in my class. Normally what we do is that we write a sentence in English and then we follow with their own native languages. It does help a lot by using different languages, because that's what they know. It's their language, their mother tongue. So it's easier for them to understand it better. The devices that I use to teach English; I use the flashcards written in different languages, and then buddy system where they help each other in the class. The ones that are more advanced, they help these ones with their learning difficulties. And then I also have a reading corner in my class, and also we have the writing. I write a sentence in English and they have to translate that to their own language. Scaffolding is very important in class because that's where as a teacher you break down the lesson. Scaffolding is making things easier for the learner, so that they are able to understand. Not that you are changing the questions. The questions are there, but you're just accommodating everyone. Even those who have difficulties will be able to answer.

Nicoleen: One of the best aspects of the programme, for me, is to see how positively students have responded. You can do all the training you like, but if there's no impact on the learners in the classroom, the programme hasn't met its goals.

Student 1: Inclusion to me means everybody's being included not being left out because of their challenges or differences. I can relate to this because when I was still very young, my friends all used to leave me out, out of the group and I used to feel really like a real loner sometimes.

Student 2: The teacher and the learner must also create a bond, the relationship between them

Student 3: Children with special needs, also deserve an equal chance at education. Because, just because they have a certain challenge does not mean they're different.

Student 4: Everybody has the right to have the exact, to have the same education whether they are blind, or deaf, or can't use their legs or arms

Student 5: I think what makes an excellent education is interacting with all the students

Student 6: At the end of the day, we are all different and unique. You never know you might learn something new every day from somebody else.

Nicoleen: As well as having impact at the classroom level, *Teaching for All* has also had an impact at the policy level. We have worked very closely with national, provincial and district level government, in order to ensure that the gains made by this programme in terms of inclusivity are not forgotten about. It's trying to change people's mindset about inclusive education, and seeing that it can improve the quality of education for everyone.

Teacher: This course is about transforming what it means to be a good teacher, and it's saying that excellence sits in inclusion.

Teacher: It has to do with ensuring that we give expression to our commitment to social justice and human rights to embrace all learners irrespective of the background so that they can be part of the learning process.

Teacher: I'm often reminded of the African concept of Ubuntu, where I am, who I am, because of you. So in the classroom the children are who they are, because of the teacher

Chris: You can find out more about *Teaching for All* in our show notes, including project videos, materials and ideas for how you can make your classroom more inclusive.

For our second part of the podcast, I'm delighted to welcome Anne Margaret Smith. Anne Margaret has experience of teaching and learning in a wide range of contexts. As she writes on her website, eltwell.com, "I have had the pleasure of working with multilingual children, disgruntled teenagers, emergency rescue teams, weary factory workers, eccentric senior citizens (including a real live duchess!) and culture-shocked asylum seekers. Some of my students have had sensory impairments, some are dyslexic or some have other specific learning differences, some have chronic illnesses or physical disabilities, and I continue to learn something from each student I work with." Anne Margaret, welcome to the podcast.

Anne Margaret: Thanks very much, Chris. lovely to be here. I often feel that when people introduce me, I often do think: how have I done all of that? But it's absolutely true. I have, I have covered a lot of ground in the 30 years or so that I've been teaching

Chris: And what are some of the similarities that you've seen? Working with such a disparate group of people?

Anne Margaret: The similarities, I suppose, are that they are all different, that everybody has a goal and that the key thing is to find out how to work with that person. So you know, it's about relationships, it's about getting to know the students, getting to know what their motivation is, and then trying to adapt teaching to suit them.

Chris: The report that we just heard from South Africa, one of the challenges in South Africa, as in many sub-Saharan African countries and elsewhere, is of large classes. How would you reconcile that. That, sort of, trying to understand the individual in that situation when you have such large classes? 50, 70, 100 students, what can teachers do?

Anne Margaret: That is a tricky question. It's a question that's often asked, and of course, unfortunately, the very large classes are often in the lowest resourced contexts. I actually did my very first year of teaching in Kenya, where I had quite a large class. It was a bit of a baptism of fire. But I do believe that it is still possible to implement inclusive practices. You perhaps need more creativity, but as I said before it comes down to relationships. I know it can be really difficult to get to know that many students but the students can get to know each other. So obviously, larger classes can be split into smaller groups, and they can support each other, they can get to know each other and find out how to work together as a team, which is a great skill to have in life anyway. I think what the teachers need to do in that context is to think about how the physical environment can be adapted. And yeah, you do have to be quite creative I think: I haven't got many resources, but what do we have? One of the greatest resources you have of course that of the students themselves. And when you've got 70 or 100 of them, that's quite a rich resource!

Chris: I think that's an interesting way of looking at education differently, isn't it? Sometimes teachers can feel we haven't got enough textbooks, we haven't got maps, we haven't got this, we haven't got that, we can't learn or we can't create a positive learning environment. But as you say, if you haven't got students, you haven't got anything, if you have students, you have something and they are the key learning resource.

Anne Margaret: Yeah, they each have their story. They each have their point of view. It's about, I suppose, nurturing a culture where they feel that they can share their experiences. In terms of language learning that they can try, and that whatever they say will be valued. It's about the culture of the classroom as much as anything

Chris: As we know, sort of, students thrive when they feel safe in a classroom environment, particularly when doing something difficult like learning or trying out a new language. When you've got such a range of different students and they may have these, some of these issues, special educational needs, some of which may have been diagnosed but some which may well not have been diagnosed. How can teachers do that, how can they create a platform where those students feel safe within that environment?

Anne Margaret: I think it comes down to the teacher modelling the kind of attitudes and behaviours that we want to see. So modelling respect, taking time to listen to students, you know, making their requests in a polite manner and thanking students when they do what they're asked to do. You know, just little things like that. Just modelling this way and also projecting positive expectations on to the class and on to individuals. I think students who have additional barriers to their learning, whether it's physical disability or sensory loss or cognitive difference, the barriers to learning may not be, yes, as you have said they may not have been identified, but you might, the teacher might notice that the student has additional challenges to overcome. But that doesn't mean that they should have lower expectations. I think having positive expectations of every student is important and letting them know as well, that you still believe that they can learn. And of course, not everybody is going to learn the same, not everybody is going to learn at the same pace. You know, it comes down as well to motivation and to aspiration and what they want. If we're talking about English language teaching what they want their English for, but definitely, I think, projecting positively onto the student our positive expectations of them, I think can change the culture of a classroom quite a lot. And I often say to my students, at the beginning of a course when we get a new bunch of students, I sort of try and make it clear to them that I see us as a team. We're all working towards the same goal. We're not in competition. And really, we need to work together. We need to help each other. So where I said before about getting to know students, I also try and find opportunity for the students to get to know each other as well so that they understand what every one of their classmates is contributing to their learning environment.

Chris: And again, that can create an atmosphere of trust, which the learning experience is better, but also the learning outcomes are better as well. And it's interesting what you're saying about students not knowing the script of education sometimes and what's expected of them in the classroom. I've seen some of the work I've done myself with Syrian refugees in, in Lebanon where they've had such gaps in their education, or they may never have attended any kind of education or formal education before. And they don't know the basic script of what it means to be in a class or sitting still or how to use pens or to borrow things or to share books, all those sorts of things. So you would say in order to create that inclusive atmosphere, it's about teaching students how to, the learning to learn aspects of education as well.

Anne Margaret: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's absolutely crucial if you're working with students who are relatively new to education, whatever age they are, there are learning skills, which will facilitate their learning, and I think that's the first step really. What I often find that teaching in Britain now, I find that students who come to Britain to learn in whatever context whether it's ESOL or whether it's EAP at the university, the culture, the educational culture, is probably going to be different from their home culture. And when I was working at the university, teaching English for Academic Purposes, the fact that they call their tutors by their first names, was really shocking for some students, but then they didn't understand that we weren't actually their friends. You know what I mean? It was like, it seemed very informal, but actually, they didn't perceive where the boundaries were, in terms of relationship. You know, what it was okay to say to us, so yeah, definitely spending some time at the beginning of the course talking to students about how we envisaged that the class will run, what we hope that they will bring to the class, how they can navigate their way through the system, maybe setting up some class ground rules that they all agree to, things like that, I think are really valuable in terms of forming a cohesive group. Yeah.

Chris: Just the act of letting the students input into that, those ground rules for example, is not something which is set by the headteacher or the class teacher. It's a collaborative exercise.

Anne Margaret: Yeah, absolutely. As we say, when, when students arrive, they may not necessarily have that much experience of formal education. They may have some preconceived notions of what it might be. So I think it's worth you know, if you have your class contract or whatever you call it up on your wall, revisiting it from time to time to see if the students still think everything on there is, is valid and you know, worth adhering to if they want to change anything

Chris: In some places and some institutions or countries, there may be resistance to more inclusive forms of education, that resistance might be quite obvious and in policy or it might be more hidden. What can you say to teachers who are working in those sorts of environments, but want to include their students as much as possible in the life of the classroom?

Anne Margaret: Well there are a number of things that can sway the argument. I mean, one of the things is, of course, the UN Convention on Education, which most countries signed up to which advocates for inclusive education, and then there are arguments for managers. about inclusive education, actually having a lot of benefits for everybody. So it improves achievement and improves certainly retention. So looking at the bottom line, if managers are worried about oh, that's going to be too expensive, or

oh, that's going to disrupt you know, how we do things there is quite a lot of research that's been done on the benefits for everybody of inclusive education. So they could, they could have that discussion with their managers and sort of suggest that actually, this is going to make the school better for everybody, both in terms of retention and achievement. Then there are arguments around social justice you know, do we want to be known as a school who values social justice? Or do we want to be known as a school who doesn't care about the community? And I was struck by the comments that we heard before about I can't remember the term that was used

Chris: Ubuntu. Ubuntu, is the word I think

Anne Margaret: I would call it joined up inclusion, about getting the community involved. You can't have inclusion just in one classroom. If the rest of the school is not inclusive, that's going to be really tricky, and not just a school but the whole community. So all the stakeholders need to perhaps come together and have this discussion together. About how to include every member of the community. And I think schools will take a lead on that, they have a really important role in bringing everybody together and maybe facilitating that conversation.

Chris: Students who may have physical challenges or who may be neurodivergent one of the challenges particularly faces in doing exams and participating in assessments. What support could teachers give to those students or how could school support those students more effectively, so that they are they have an equal playing field as it were to participate in those forms of formal assessments?

Anne Margaret: So there are a couple of things here. The first thing of course, is the preparation for the exam. And in order to support those learners who might need to overcome particular barriers, whether it's sensory impairment, as you say, physical challenges or cognitive differences, you need to understand what the barriers are. So the first step is always getting to know the learner, possibly doing a formal assessment, find out what the barriers are, putting interventions in place so that the classroom is a level playing field for them so that they can access the curriculum alongside all of their classmates. That's the first step of preparation and then in terms of the actual assessment, applying for exam access arrangements may be an option. Now, it depends a lot on the context. Generally, I would say, talk to the exam board. Whoever has set the exam, find out what kind of exam access arrangements are available, find out how to apply and do this quite a long way in advance because my experience of exam boards is that they work quite slowly. So you need to apply for exam access arrangements six months before the exam. And if the particular arrangement that you want to apply for for your student is not available, ask them why not. Just as an example, when I was teaching ESOL a few years ago, we had a student in our cohort who had narcolepsy, which meant that she would occasionally just fall asleep or she'd

be out for 5, 10 minutes and then she'd be awake again, back in the room ready to go. But she would fall asleep three or four times in a two-hour lesson. So we went to the exam board and they said, well, she can have extra time. We're like, well, extra time is fine, but we don't know how much extra time she's gonna need. Because we don't know how many times she's gonna fall asleep or how long she'll be asleep for. So in the end, we had negotiated that she could have what they call rest breaks, so and she had to obviously have the exam in a separate room with a separate invigilator with a separate clock. And whenever she fell asleep, stop the clock and just wait for her to come to again, start the clock. So sometimes you need to have really quite individual arrangements. And if the exam board is not offering that it's definitely worth going and saying this is what we need for these reasons. Can we do this because exam boards have their way of doing things they may not always be aware of the individual needs. So don't be afraid to suggest something different and really push for it for your students.

Chris: Absolutely. And it may also just be, if you know your students' needs, if they, if they have poor sight for example, it may be making sure that they can sit wherever they feel they can read as effectively as possible or if they're hearing impaired and it's a listening exam sitting as close as possible to the machine where it's coming from. So again even in low resource environments, there may be still things that can be done to support those students as effectively as possible.

Anne Margaret: Absolutely, there are, yeah, and the best person to ask about what will be necessary will be the student themselves.

Chris: Anne Margaret, thank you very much for your time today.

Anne Margaret: It's been a pleasure, Chris, thank you for inviting me.

Chris: One of the best and most interesting things about teaching is the diversity of our learners. Each learner is an individual, and has their own personality, their own interests, their own skills and their own challenges. It's up to us, as teachers, to try and create a classroom atmosphere in which each individual feels comfortable. This is not always easy, but it's something we should try to achieve as well as we can.

Thank you for listening to this episode of Teaching English with the British Council. We hope you enjoyed it. Please do like, subscribe and review. And please remember to download the show notes and transcript.

Join us next time, for episode 4, where we will try to answer the question: *How can I teach refugees, migrants and IDPs effectively?* Until then, goodbye.