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Activities for Inclusive Language Teaching

Valuing diversity in the ELT classroom

Edited by Anne Margaret Smith

DELTA Publishing

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Preface

The DELTA Publishing Ideas in Action series aims to help teachers to relate specific areas of theory and research to their classroom practice. It aims to bridge the divide between these through explanation of the theory from a practitioner perspective, discussion of major research findings and linking both of these to example activities, strategies and suggestions for the classroom. Written by practising teachers and experienced materials writers, Ideas in Action titles show that theory and practice can come together to make English language learning both effective and enjoyable for all.

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Search the internet for terms such as 'inclusion' and 'inclusive practice', and you'll likely find a wide range of definitions, models and understandings of what it means to be an inclusive teacher. Particularly to trainees and teachers in the early stages of their career, it can be a complex area, and attempts to understand and relate the different recommendations to their own classroom can cause challenges.

For this reason, I am particularly delighted to introduce this title in the DELTA Publishing Ideas in Action series. **Activities for Inclusive Language Teaching** provides over 30 activities that enable all of us to understand what inclusive practice is, and provides the means by which we can all become inclusive practitioners in our classrooms. The activities are accompanied by an accessible, informative Introduction and a range of micro-strategies that we can use on a daily basis in our classrooms. While many resource books for teachers are written by just one or two authors, **Activities for Inclusive Language Teaching** has been developed by a team of inclusive practitioners, each with areas of specialist interest that have informed their contributions. As such, the title itself is inclusive of their perspectives and suggestions for being an inclusive teacher!

As I read through, and learnt from, the activities in the book, one thing that struck me is the danger of excluding certain topics from the language classroom. Because publishers are always attempting to maximise the appeal of their material to wider markets, the list of topics that do not make it into textbooks, teacher support websites and resource material seems to be growing by the day. Yet airbrushing issues relating to mental health and well-being, gender equality, sexuality, ethnicity and religion can often leave many of us unrepresented and, from a linguistic perspective, unable to talk about what matters to us most. For this reason I was particularly pleased to see activities like 4c Turn it Over and 4d In your Shoes, which help students to explore and discuss gender and sexuality stereotypes, 4a Talking about us which facilitates a discussion on the relationship between our appearance, our identity and our faith, and 3g Mood Boosters for Fast Finishers, which provides some great ideas for those of us who experience the challenge of differentiation in the classroom. It is also refreshing to see activities such as 2a My Names and 2d What on Earth is that? that also encourage us to bring and share aspects of our cultural and language identities into the classroom, rather than leaving them at the door, as so often happened in the world of 'English-only' monolingualism that dominated the 20th century. There are so many more I could mention!

I look forward to trying out the tasks in **Activities for Inclusive Language Teaching** in my own classroom, and thank the authors heartily for their contribution to the DELTA Publishing Ideas in Action series!

Jason Anderson
Series Editor: Ideas in Action

Activities for Inclusive Language Teaching – Contents

				Page
0	**Introduction to Inclusive Language Teaching**			8
1	**Micro-strategies for the inclusive classroom**		Strategies for working together, arranging the physical classroom, managing the virtual classroom and creating inclusive materials.	11
2	**The welcoming classroom**	*Levels of example activities*	The activities in this chapter are all designed to foster a collaborative and supportive learning environment.	17
2a	My names	A1 and above	Learners reflect individually on all the names they are called by different people, introduce some of them, and choose which they would like to use in this group.	18
2b	A class contract	A1 and above	Learners think of, discuss, and decide on 6 rules for the classroom through a pyramid discussion.	21
2c	Our connection	A1 and above	Learners share some information about themselves and find out what they have in common with each of the other learners in the class.	24
2d	What on Earth is that?	A2 and above	Learners show the group something that is specific to their home country, culture or family and explain why it is important to them. (Or a picture or photo of the object if it's not easy to bring to class.)	27
2e	Survival tips	A1 and above	Learners prepare a letter to give to new learners (or next year's learners) giving advice on how to get the most from the class.	31
2f	Why I'm special	A2 and above	Learners work in groups to make up questions that form the basis of an interview with another student. They try to discover what the other person is good at.	34
2g	Who will I be? (The L-2 identity tree)	B2 and above	Learners work in small groups to discuss and reflect on their personal goals, and how they will overcome any barriers to achieve them.	36
2h	Motto it up	B1 and above	Learners choose a saying that they like and try to explain it to the other learners in English.	39

				Page
3	**Well-being in the classroom**		The activities in this chapter build on the activities in Chapter 2, going beyond the introductory stage, and offer strategies that can be used throughout the year, to boost self-esteem and motivation to learn. This is particularly important for those learners who experience barriers in their education.	41
3a	Memory jar	A1 and above	Learners regularly write down the best thing that has happened to them recently, or the biggest challenge they have overcome. They note these events on small slips of paper anonymously and place them in the class memory jar. At a chosen moment (end of year/term/course) open the jar and read it out. The learners then guess whose paper it is and the author can add information/feelings as appropriate.	42
3b	Personal journal	A2 and above	Learners write a reflective journal of achievements and positive moments that happened during the week which are not related to learning English but their personal lives.	45
3c	Meet the expert	A1 and above	Learners choose an activity they excel in; this can be playing football, loading the dishwasher or defrosting pizza in the microwave. They then present a detailed explanation of how to do this activity to the class.	48
3d	Present perfect me	A2 and above	Learners write down a number of things they have done, the teacher reads them out and the class guesses which student did them.	51
3e	Who am I? Where am I going?	A2 and above	Learners are invited to reflect on their personal attributes and plan their route to reach their goals and dreams.	54
3f	Learners' activity code (LAC)	A1 and above	Learners communicate how they are feeling or progressing with their work.	60
3g	Mood boosters for fast finishers	A2 and above	An activity for learners to do autonomously while waiting for the others to finish an exercise or activity.	64

				Page
4	**Understanding difference – embracing diversity**		The activities in this chapter are designed to help learners to recognise some of the many forms of diversity, and harness the benefits that diversity brings to their group.	68
4a	Talking about us	A2 and above	Learners identify different aspects of their own identities, and describe themselves and others using appropriate terminology.	69
4b	STOP!	A1 and above	Learners experiment with the space they need and decide how to give this message to another person.	73
4c	Turn it over	A2 and above	Learners re-write famous songs (e.g. *'Bette Davis Eyes'*, *'I'm On Fire'*) changing the gender of the language used in the songs and discuss the consequences.	76
4d	In your shoes	A2 and above (aged 16+)	Learners engage in a series of roleplay activities where they assume different gender/sexuality, age or ethnicity roles.	79
4e	No reasons why	A2 and above	Learners analyse anti-bullying campaigns as complex text (video, photography, and text) and design their own anti-bullying campaign. Their poster or video can be written or spoken.	84
4f	Good ol' stereotypes	B1 and above	Learners analyse pictures and quotes from famous novels, songs and movies, which reveal gender and sexuality stereotypes. In two groups, learners come up with stereotypes / roles that apply in their country and divide the group into for / against to stage a debate.	88
4g	The uncool quiz	A2 and above	Learners reflect on things that are considered uncool in their sociocultural context. They design a quiz to test how uncool their classmates or their teacher is, and vote on the best quiz to reveal the level of *uncoolness*. The quizzes are then used to reflect on why certain things are considered uncool.	93
5	**Working together**		Projects allow all members of the group to contribute their talents and learn from each other, highlighting their skills and abilities rather their differences. The activities outlined here provide the basic structure of planning, preparing, implementing and evaluating a project.	96
5a	Setting up the project	B1 and above	The class agrees on a topic that interests them, preferably related to the community, perhaps reflecting a problem or a need that could be addressed by some voluntary work.	99

				Page
5b	Researching the project	B1 and above	Learners analyse where the project will have most impact and decide where to implement it, and how.	102
5c	Rehearsal	B1 and above	Learners run through the steps of the actual event or implementation of the project.	105
5d	In the real world	B1 and above	Learners start to implement the activity they have planned.	108
5e	Evaluation of the project	B1 and above	Learners reflect on what they have accomplished, and how they did that, as well as what they learnt, by completing individual 'I can' sheets and group 'SWOT' analysis sheets.	110
6	**What can we do now?**		The activities in this chapter offer ways of allowing learners to reflect on and evaluate their own learning, using methods that are less intimidating, and more accessible, than traditional tests.	114
6a	Must I paint you a picture?	A1 and above	Learners take it in turns to act and draw clues so that their team can guess a word they are thinking of.	117
6b	Roll the die	A1 and above	In small groups, learners answer 6 questions to review what they have learnt during the lesson.	119
6c	Assessing you, assessing me	A2 and above	In groups of 3, learners set their classmates a 5-question quiz about material covered in the last week.	122
6d	Independent assessment	B1 and above	Individually, learners look back over their notes and course materials and write down 2 or 3 questions to clarify (or extend) what they have covered.	125
6e	Peer assessment	B1 and above	Learners assess each others' work and offer constructive feedback.	127
6f	Thank you for thanking me	A2 and above	This is an activity suitable for the end of a course or a term. Learners are allocated one classmate and they must write a short note thanking that person for their contribution to the class, whether academic or social.	130
	References			133

0 Introduction

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

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

Defining 'Inclusive Teaching Practices'

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

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

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

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

differences (Price, 2018). As far back as 1982, Tomlinson was warning about the over-representation of learners from minority ethnic groups in 'Special' education, in what she dubbed 'racialization of special needs'.

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

Implementing inclusive teaching practices

This is the principle behind the Universal Design for Learning concept (see the CAST website for a clear explanation: http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.Xt48k0VKg2w).

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

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

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

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

Using this book

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

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

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

1 Micro-strategies for the inclusive classroom

Working together

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

learners can confidently share their ideas and those of their partners / groups publicly, having tried them out first, more privately.

Raising expectations: Some learners will not have experienced much success in the classroom before, and might come to English lessons with a feeling that they will never succeed. Until they believe that they can learn, they probably won't. We all have a role to play in raising our learners' self-esteem and showing them that they can make progress, and are in fact doing so. Frequent reviews help with this, as well as direct and explicit praise for something they do well (e.g. "That's an interesting idea, and great pronunciation of the word 'squirrel'!").
We need to be honest with our learners about the length of time they may require in order to achieve their goals, but never let them think that there is no point in trying.

L2-identities: Research (e.g. Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) has shown that successful language learners develop an L2 identity, which is closely intertwined with their motivation, so it is of the utmost importance not only for social reasons but also to maximize language learning opportunities. Activity 2g 'Who will I be?' helps you find out from your learners who their L2-models are. You might find out they love old Hollywood movies where actors spoke with a transatlantic accent or that they enjoy practising their English with their Swedish friends. Once you know this, it is possible to introduce a variety of appropriate L2-models in your listening materials whenever possible (e.g. interviews with international football players, musicians, politicians or scientists).

Monitoring progress and well-being: Many learners feel shy in asking for help, but might be encouraged to use a subtle visual signal to indicate how they are feeling about the activity they are working on. If they ask for support, it could come from you, or another learner who has indicated that they are willing to help. There are many forms that this could take, but see Activity 3f 'Learners' activity code (LAC)' for one example of how to implement this.

The physical classroom

Room layout: There is no single solution that maximises learning for every situation or every phase of a lesson. Flexibility is the key, therefore; furniture needs to be adaptable if possible, and establishing routines for rearranging it will save time in the long run. Single tables at the right height for the learners can be moved together for group work, but can also stand separated for learners who need a clear space to themselves to be able to focus.

> NB: If you are new in your setting, you should probably discuss with colleagues what the protocol is for moving furniture, and if it needs to be returned to the original set-up at the end of the class.

Audio-visual equipment: The whiteboard or interactive screen should be positioned so that learners can see it comfortably, without being distracted by reflections from the sun or lights. The volume of audio material may need to be adjusted to be comfortable for all learners: loud enough but not too loud.

Individual work: Essentially, everybody needs to feel they have enough space; some learners may have wider personal-space boundaries than others. In some classrooms this can be challenging, so careful observation is important to identify any discomfort. See activity 4b STOP! for a way of raising awareness of this issue in the group.

Pair work: Encourage learners to turn their chairs slightly towards each other, so that they are able to make eye-contact easily, as well as look at any prompt material.

Small group work: Where possible, chairs should be arranged around a table or in a small circle. If the usual layout of a room is linear, some learners can turn their chairs round to work with the people directly