iatefl

Inclusive Practices & SEN

The newsletter of the Inclusive Practices and SEN Special Interest Group

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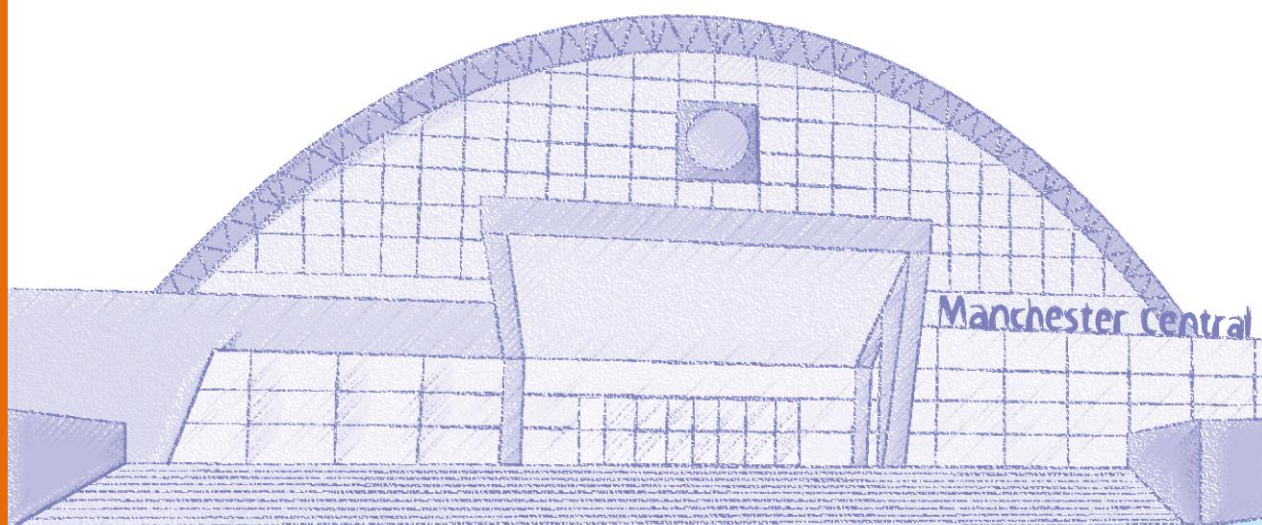
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Contents

Message from the Coordinator

For many of us, at this time of year, we have a chance to look back over the year just gone, reflecting on what has happened and what went well, as well as looking forward to a new year, and thinking about how we could do (even) better.

In 2019, we began our minicampaigns on social media, and we were delighted to hear from many of you, who contributed ideas on the topics such as the #WelcomingClassroom and #NotJustChristmas. The #WelcomingClassroom ideas are collected together in this edition's Top Tips, and I hope they will spark more ideas for continuing to foster an inclusive learning environment. Please do look out for us on social media and join in the discussions on #IPSENchat in 2020.

This year saw some fruitful collaborations with national teachers' groups, such as Portugal's APPI, and we also made contact with other groups focussed on inclusive practice, including new groups in the US and Egypt. Next year, we hope to work with them more closely, and perhaps organise an international online festival of good practice.

Our first event in 2020 was a free webinar on January 12th, jointly hosted by TESOL Spain, and we will be collaborating at their national conference, too, in March. Our PCE at the IATEFL conference in Manchester is a joint event with the Testing, Evaluation and Assessment SIG, and we are also organising an event with the IATEFL Learning Technology SIG and ATECR in the Czech Republic – watch out for details coming soon.

Working with other professionals gives us all a different perspective and helps us develop as humans, as well as enriching our teaching. It's great to know that we are not alone in facing our daily challenges, and to be able to draw on the expertise and experience of our colleagues when we need support. That is the idea behind our mentor scheme, which is continuing in 2020.

The committee changed a little in 2019, and there will be more changes next year, too, as is natural in any volunteer group. We would like to invite you to consider joining us in volunteering, either as a committee member, or as an active SIG member. More information about the particular skills we are looking for will be shared via IATEFL and social media, as well as on our website.

So, let me welcome you to this 5th edition of the *Inclusive Practices and SEN SIG* newsletter, and wish you all the best for 2020. We hope to see you, or hear from you, somewhere along the way.

Anne Margaret

Message from the editorial team

We are once again proud to bring a newsletter filled with information, ideas and suggestions for further reflection and development. We are delighted to include an extensive report from the British Council project in Uruguay, exploring the use of remote teaching, as well as reflections from a teacher in Malta on how his neurodiverse learners see their world and how this impacts on their learning. We also have a research report, and some teaching tips – something for everyone, we hope!

Again we encourage anyone who would like to write for us to get in touch at ipsensig@iatefl.org.
In our next newsletter we would like to look at the state of affairs concerning SEND and Inclusive Practices around the globe. In order to do so we would be grateful if you could spend a couple of minutes looking at this short survey https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/29XVBLL and pass the link on to colleagues.

Privacy notice:
By answering a call for contributions, to an IATEFL Special Interest Group (SIG) you are agreeing to share your details with the relevant committee member(s) of that IATEFL SIG, rather than to IATEFL Head Office.

The information included in your submission will be used only for the purpose defined in the call, and will not be disclosed to any third party or be used to send unsolicited emails. Any data that is no longer required by the IATEFL SIG for this specific purpose of the call will be deleted.

QR Code for IP&SENSIG survey

The editorial team.

Meet the team!

In this edition we meet Giovanni Licata, who joined the committee last year.

1. Who are you and where are you based?

I'm Giovanni Licata and I have an Italian-American background. I'm based in Rome at the moment although I never know where teaching and teacher training might take me.

2. What do you do for a living?

I have a background in performing arts and stage direction and that is still big art of my life. I got into teaching English in 2010, when I took the CELTA course in Rome. Since then, I started teaching all ages and levels and became a CELTA trainer myself in 2012. I'm currently Head of Teacher Training at IH Rome Manzoni.

3. Why did you become involved in IP&SEN SIG?

My partner is a special needs teacher and researcher, and this really helped me become aware of the limitations that educational systems may have in being truly 'inclusive', for lack of a better word. I then started getting more involved in LGBTQ+ rights and chose to focus on issues regarding LGBTQ+ themes in language teaching for my MA dissertation. My study became a talk which I decided to present at IATEFL, and submitted to the IP&SEN SIG for their showcase day. It was love at first sight with them; I already knew Anette Igel from IH conferences and the rest of the team just welcomed me immediately and supported me during my presentation at IATEFL.

4. What do you see as the role of the SIG?

I believe the main role of the SIG is to raise awareness. Individual learning needs in different parts of the world are often overlooked because there just isn't enough awareness of the fact that certain social groups or individuals might face challenges in a one-size-fits-all educational system.

5. What do you hope to bring to the SIG?

My experience, my point of view, a perspective on issues regarding education that will be different from that of other members of the SIG as we all come from different backgrounds and work in different contexts. I also really enjoy presenting at conferences and I hope I'll get the opportunity to speak for the SIG more and more in the future.

6. Do you have any other "hats" you'd like to tell us about?

Combining drama techniques, physical theater and language teaching has been my main objective for years. I would love to get more teachers on board and, perhaps, put on a show about inclusive practices in education. It's a story that needs to be told.

Inclusive practices through remote teaching in Uruguay
The British Council project, "Ceibal en Inglés", injects Inclusive Practices into distance teaching and learning.

Introduction by Phil Dexter, (former) Senior Education Consultant – Teacher Development and Inclusion, The British Council.

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

Internationally there is a shared commitment to securing more inclusive education systems. The fourth Sustainable Development Goal set by the United Nations General Assembly aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. The British Council believes that the inclusion of children and young people in the regular education systems of their respective countries is an entitlement and a fundamental human right regardless of their gender, ethnicity, ability, language of choice, socioeconomic background, health or medical condition. If the inclusion of all children and young people is to be successful and sustainable then it must be predicated on an approach that is achievable, empowering, and based upon a thorough and sensitive understanding of the current context of the particular school and education system. The commitment to developing inclusive practice therefore requires a multi-tiered response that addresses policy, practice and culture at all levels.

2019 was the 25th anniversary of the Salamanca Statement on Special Educational Needs Education published by UNESCO. Signed by 92 countries, The Salamanca Statement was recognised as a significant milestone in moving towards more inclusive education, providing a framework for how to make progress in terms of policy and practice. The statement advocated that mainstream schools which adopt an inclusive approach 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. It is widely understood and acknowledged that progress has been made since 1994 but many children remain excluded. The British Council takes a broad approach to special educational needs and disability (SEND) focused on i) communication and interaction, ii) cognition and learning, iii) social, emotional and mental health, iv) sensory and/or physical needs and v) other societal factors which impact on learning and may create barriers to learning and a gap between performance and potential within an education system.

The "Ceibal en Inglés" project in Uruguay is an excellent example of an inclusive education project. It directly addresses key aspects of the five SEND areas and is reaching teachers and young learners in areas of Uruguay where they may otherwise be excluded from quality education programmes. We believe this programme is also an excellent example of high quality professional development for teachers and the examples and solutions reflected in this article reflect a strong community of practice and sharing of knowledge, skills, and understanding of inclusive practices that I am sure will be of interest and benefit to teachers in all contexts.

<div align="right">Phil Dexter</div>

Ceibal en Inglés by Alicia Artusi*,* Quality Manager Argentina- Plan Ceibal en Inglés, The British Council

Plan Ceibal is a Uruguayan teaching and learning project, which started in 2007 and was developed by the Uruguayan Ministry of Education and Culture with the support of private companies. It started with the distribution of XO-1 laptops, known as 'ceibalitas,' to every primary school student with the purpose of promoting social justice through the giving of equal access to information and communication tools for all Uruguayan people in the country. The project was set up to achieve inclusion and equality of opportunities. Ceibal en Inglés (CEI) started later, in 2012, when the British Council was selected by Plan Ceibal as partners with the following responsibilities: lesson plan writing, development of digital materials, and an online course for classroom teachers to learn English. Ceibal en Inglés is a blended learning programme to teach Uruguayan children aged 9-12 via video conference equipment.

The British Council set up two remote teaching centers, one in Uruguay and one in Argentina in 2015. There are other providers that deliver lessons for Ceibal en Inglés from Uruguay and other parts of the world, five managed by the British Council and 10 institutes managed by Ceibal. At present, Ceibal en Inglés has the control of the quality of the project and works together with the British Council to ensure the quality of the lessons. Observations from the schools have been implemented which have provided a deeper understanding of the different classroom contexts and needs of the learners. Ceibal en Inglés started teaching urban primary schools and soon expanded to rural schools and difficult context schools where children may not have running water, enough food and may suffer from emotional, social and mental difficulties. From the start of the project, teaching and learning materials are being adapted, special projects are being implemented, training is being delivered in the search of reaching out and making learning happen in all contexts and classroom situations.

Technology as a tool for inclusion
Ceibal en Inglés classes are delivered remotely from Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, the Philippines and London across the country of Uruguay. The remote language teacher ('RLT') starts the lesson by calling the class in Uruguay from their teaching points using the video conference equipment. Once the call is made, the class starts and

the learners together with their classroom teacher greet the RLTwho is displayed on a big screen. Good quality of image and sound help create a sense of physical presence during the 'live' lesson. The remote control allows the teacher to zoom in and out which helps create a bond with learners and classroom teacher as well as 'walk' the classroom to monitor the learners. The learning management system called Crea2 and the learners' laptops provide an online environment to communicate synchronously during the lesson and asynchronously after the remote lesson. Communication is established at distance and teachers and students soon forget technology is mediating.

The learners

Learners are from state primary schools in Uruguay, and around 72 percent in grades 4,5,6 with learners aged 9 to 12 learn English remotely (*Remote teaching,* British Council, 2018). They are from different contexts: urban and rural, and from different socio-educational and economic contexts. This means that when the RLT is assigned a class, the classroom teacher provides relevant information which is key to bonding with learners and adapting the lesson plans and materials in order to make them work for each individual group. Schools are classified into a scale of 1-5, the first quintile being the 20% of schools with the highest vulnerability level and the last being the 20% with the lowest vulnerability level (Biramontes, 2014). Learners from quintiles 1 and 2 have a more complex social situation than the rest or urban schools, which belong to quintiles 3,4 and 5. Learners from difficult context schools have different attitudes towards learning English within the same classroom; some show genuine interest and feel attracted to the many activities and colourful materials, and some may leave the classroom, shout, throw things, or climb on desks. Remote language teachers have mentioned that they sometimes struggle to manage difficult context classes, but those teachers who manage to create a strong bond with learners and the classroom teacher have seen amazing achievements. For example, having learners with emotional barriers talk for the first time in the English lesson, or students from low socio-educational context sit for a Cambridge young learner test, feeling proud of their achievements.

85 per cent of RLTs report having at least one child with special educational needs, and 49.6 per cent are related to cognition and learning (British Council, 2018). Average classrooms have 25 to 30 learners except for rural schools, which tend to have smaller classes. Learners with different profiles may have communication and interaction needs, cognition and learning needs, social, emotional and health difficulties, and sensory and/or physical needs (British Council, 2018). Learners with special needs and/or different talents access the same lesson and content, but adaptations are made in order to engage all learners. RLTs are encouraged and trained to adapt materials for multi-level, multi-grade and multi-aged groups. Ceibal en Inglés is working to implement an American sign language programme for deaf learners.

The classroom
The classroom is where the video conference equipment is placed, which may not be the learners' regular classroom, for example, it may be in a library, computing room, music room or regular classroom. As a consequence, seats/desks should be re-arranged, and classroom walls may not be used because they are shared by several grades. Learners are in most cases seated in rows or horseshoe either on desks, individual seats, or in very few cases, on a floor carpet in a semi-circle. It has been observed that it is challenging to set up the class in such a way that children with cognitive or emotional difficulties can work together with their peers, and sometimes they are isolated, or they isolate themselves. In very difficult contexts, a high percentage of learners show disengagement and disrupt the class, so the RLT and the classroom teacher need to adapt the activities and content to engage and motivate learners.

Classroom teacher – RLT partnership
Ceibal en Inglés is a blended learning programme delivered by two teachers: a Remote Language Teacher who teaches English and communicates with learners via technology (video conference equipment and learning management system) and a Classroom Teacher (CT) who supports and guides learners in the classroom. Both teachers have expertise in different areas: the RLT is a teacher of English as a second language and the classroom teacher is a primary school teacher who may or may not know English, but has a deep knowledge of the learners, the school and the community. Both professionals have different strengths and they should coordinate and communicate to make learning possible. *WhatsApp* has been the most effective means of communication to coordinate and solve issues during the class without learners noticing.

A situation may be the following: the RLT appoints a learner to read during the remote lesson, but the learner looks down and remains silent. The CT sends the RLT a *Whatsapp* text message informing them that this learner has been particularly sad and silent in other classes that day due to a family problem. The RLT receives the message and kindly appoints another learner to participate, and offers the student the chance to think about his reply and answer when he is ready, either in the learning management system or with a peer if he prefers. Similarly, when there is a class cancellation, a technical problem, or any other issue, the CT and the RLT exchange text messages, photos and files to communicate about class content, classroom management, and the use of technology.

In many cases the RLTs and CTs have to manage classrooms with learners experiencing diverse barriers to learning. Both teachers have to work closely together and adapt the content of each class to engage learners. Bonding with learners becomes priority to make learning happen.

Challenges

Some of the challenges remote language teachers face are the following:

- **Lesson Planning**, mainly adapting and personalizing the existing lesson plans and materials in order to suit the different kinds of diversity in each classroom.
- Finding ways to **work together** with the CT despite technological limitations, timetable differences and availability.
- **Discipline and classroom management** of learners who may ignore rules and defy authority
- **Motivation** as some learners may find following the English lesson difficult and they may feel they are not achieving much.
- **Lack of resources** like a few laptops available in a class (5 laptops to be shared with 25 or 30 learners) or poor connectivity.
- Dealing with the **unexpected and last-minute changes** like finishing the class earlier for lunch, public health vaccination clinics vaccinate at school, a flood, a violent episode in the community, or any other.

Click here to see a case study which gives context to these challenges.

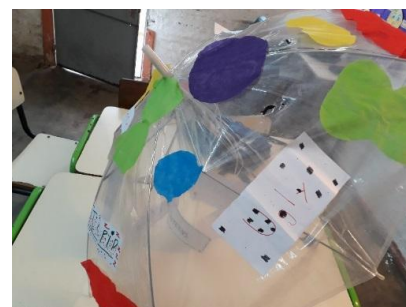**Successful strategies used by RLTs to support all learners**

RLTs, CTs and remote teaching coordinators have shared some strategies which have worked in practice in most Uruguayan classrooms in rural and urban areas, to support all learners. Click here to see the suggested strategies for managing the remote classroom, and for managing learning before, during and after the class.

Special Projects

There are several projects in Ceibal en Inglés which are designed to involve all learners, four of which are described here:

Umbrellas for Peace

4th-5th grade learners (9- and 10-year-olds) from difficult context schools in Tacuarembó and Rivera departments in Uruguay decorate "umbrellas" that can be used to stop words that hurt and that affect relationships, thus affecting this culture of peace. The objectives of this project are the following:

- Developing empathy and capacity to understand the scope of our behaviours.
- Encouraging communication and internal dialogue to resolve discrepancies.
- Developing critical vision of the learners' own acts, assuming the errors and the commitment to repair attitudes.
- Proposing meaningful contexts for the use of the English as a second language.

Other activities further help in reflecting on behaviours and promote the use of English to communicate in a meaningful context:

- 'Detective thoughts' is an activity where learners have to identify the 8 cheating thoughts that plague their mind and role play different situations.

- 'The distrustful fox' is an activity in which learners discuss a social situation. For example, a girl sees two classmates giggling and she thinks her classmates are laughing at her. Learners should discuss what is wrong and find ways of building truthful relationships with classmates.

These tasks, together with mindfulness activities and mandalas, have had a positive impact on the learners' behaviour, lowered the levels of anxiety and aggression and provided an opportunity to use English in a meaningful context.

William Shakespeare festival

Primary school learners dramatized an adapted Shakespeare play and performed it for the school community and families. The RLT and CT worked on language, values and theatrical skills.

The objectives of this festival were the following:

- Providing children with opportunities to engage in meaningful communication and display their different talents. Every play offers ample themes to develop empathy and spark interesting cross-curricular content like bullying, betrayal and conflict-solving and gender roles.
- Working on language by sharing the play script and practising pronunciation.
- Giving learners meaningful input. An introduction about Shakespeare is provided together with an adapted version of plays like Much Ado about Nothing, Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet.
- Integrating learners through roles and tasks. Learners should solve tasks - shared on the LMS-during the preparation of the play. Learners are given different roles, and those who do not want to dramatize, perform other roles. Finally, learners rehearse, invitations are sent, and learners perform for the school community and families.
- Empowering children with life-long tools in a memorable and fun experience that transcends the limits of the classroom.

Summer camps

Ceibal en Inglés organizes two day camps, one called 'Sing Along' for primary schools and one called 'Tutorial for Differentiating Learning' (TDL) for secondary schools. Both are contests and the winners receive a prize, which is a summer camp day at Costaventura theme park. 'Tutorials for Differentiating Learning' are asynchronous tutorial activities for students in middle and high schools that focus on digital literacy and reading comprehension. They cater for students at different levels of appropriation of technology and English as a second language, offering topics which are alternative to those in the curriculum, so that students may find variety according to their own interests. 'Sing Along' promotes team work and aims at providing a space in which children from primary schools use their oral skills in an entertaining way. Each class presents a song from a specific decade through a video clip, singing and performing the chosen piece.

The objectives of the summer camps are:

- Using the language purposefully while learning about the American culture. Students are always highly motivated to keep on learning and improving their linguistic skills, while their teachers show great interest in using English in a real-world situation.
- Learning about another culture. The activities developed at Costaventura show students different regions of the USA. These locations are presented in different stations across the theme park, where students answer questions and play games related to the American geography and culture.
- Engaging students in different activities and giving them the opportunity to show their different talents.

Materials for blind learners
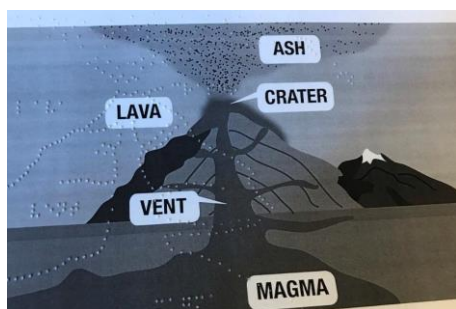
Ceibal en Ingles has started to produce materials for blind learners. Narrative books and cross curricular materials in Braille are being developed to include deaf learners in the classroom.

References
2018 *Innovations in education Remote Teaching*, British Council, Plan Ceibal

Videos
Escuela 11 de Tacuarembó- Sing Along**-:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xegSWESs3jA
Summer camps Differentiating learning: Campamento-Costa Aventura
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPgxmVZI3AM
Health and well-being (Red Global) Red Global de Aprendizaje:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sQXiq3que4
Shakespeare festival: Romeo and Juliet https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZCGzCg24Gw
https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teacher-development/continuing-professional-development/using-inclusive-practices

Teaching and Re-Teaching, a multi-sensory approach
Marjorie Rosenberg suggests presenting and recycling language.

Teaching styles

Teachers tend to teach in the way we best learn ourselves. All of us have spent a number of years on the other side of the desk in the classroom, learning as pupils and later learning our craft as teachers. In addition, many of us continue to take part in continuing professional development and have created our own strategies and preferred methods of understanding, remembering and recalling the information we are given. What this translates to in the classroom, is that the individual learning preferences of the teacher will be reflected in their classroom practice. A teacher who is primarily visual may use illustrations and photos, symbols or different colours to explain a point. A teacher who relies more on auditory sense may use music, rhythm, intonation, etc. to explain something to learners. Teachers who are more kinaesthetic are likely to demonstrate the material they want the learners to understand through movement or emotions. For educators who have been in the field for a long time, this may not even be a conscious decision, it is 'just the way we teach', whereas for those entering the field, they might experiment with ideas they got in their training sessions or at university until they settle into a routine which is comfortable for them.

'Teaching' new materials

Generally, when we 'teach', we present material to an entire class or group at one time. Ideally, we should be considering a multi-sensory approach from the start, so that we have the best chance of reaching the largest group of learners, allowing them to receive the information in the way which is most comfortable for them. In general, the more channels we transmit information in, the more vivid and alive the material becomes for the learner. It is possible, however, that some learners are still uncertain how to use the information we have passed on to them, or feel stressed when confronted with something unfamiliar. It is at this point that we break down the material of the lesson into multi-sensory elements. For example, when teaching question and negative forms in the simple present tense, we can begin by writing a simple sentence on the board such as: 'Maria loves pizza.' Making this multi-sensory for all could involve using different colours for the three words, reading it aloud, and asking if the learners also love pizza. We then introduce the question form by erasing the full stop and putting a question mark in its place, crossing out the 's' on 'loves' and putting the word 'Does' at the beginning, perhaps with an arrow leading from the crossed out 's' to the word 'does'.

'Re-teaching' new material

Even by carefully including all three of our most common learner types, there may still be learners who are uncertain about the use of this form. This is when we need to employ our skills and 're-present' material for specific modalities. Using the example above of the present simple questions, we can make cards using different colours and/or shapes and write out the words we need on them, creating cards as well for a full stop, a question mark and the 's'. Five learners hold up cards to form

the sentence 'Maria loves pizza.', making sure the 's' card is held close to the 'love' card. We repeat the sentence aloud and ask the class to say it with us again. We then ask the learner with the question mark card to replace the learner with the full stop. The learner with the 'does' card then gently pulls the 's' away from the rest of the group to join the full stop, off to one side. The 'does' card then goes to the front of the line and all say together: 'Does Maria love pizza?'. The reverse sentence is made again with the 's' pulling the 'does' away until the students are comfortable with the concept. In my experience, this multisensory re-teaching makes it clearer to some learners that 'does' and 's' cannot be in the sentence together.

Making the abstract tangible

In addition, when we break presentation of material down into these elements, we greatly help an abstract concept become more concrete and tangible for our learners. Some learners will understand abstract concepts with no problems, others may struggle but not admit it or be too embarrassed to ask for additional help. By coming up with ideas to help those learners, we can add an element of fun to the lesson but also create the opportunity for a wider number of learners to understand what it is we are trying to get across. Another difficult point for many language learners is the concept of contractions. We begin by writing out the two words on the board such as 'He is' and reading aloud to the learners. We then cross out the 'i' and add an apostrophe and say it aloud again with learners following our example. Some learners may be confused and want to know what happened to the 'i', we can have them take a strip of paper and write the two words on it. We then ask the learners to fold it over so that the 'i' is hidden, and give them a paper clip to hold the folded paper together. The paper clip now looks like an apostrophe and learners understand the concept that the apostrophe simply 'covers' the 'i'. In order to find the 'i' again, they simply remove the paper clip and unfold the paper.

Conclusion

The concept of 'teaching' and 're-teaching' can be used across a wide range of subjects and topics. It is something that we can keep in mind when first preparing a lesson and give some thought to how to 're-present' the material for those who may need to experience it in a different way and in a specific modality. The results can be extremely rewarding for both the learners and the teachers and can have long-lasting effects on the ultimate success of a lesson and its learners.

References

Grinder, M. (1991) *Righting the Educational Conveyor Belt*, Portland, OR: Metamorphous Press
Rosenberg, M. (2013) *Spotlight on Learning Styles*, Peaslake: Delta Publishing

Marjorie Rosenberg *has been teaching in Austria for close to 40 years. She has done research on learning preferences and published several books and a number of articles on the topic. Marjorie is a Past President of IATEFL.*

Inclusive education – what do teachers need?
Agnieszka Dzięcioł-Pędich presents the findings from a questionnaire to uncover teachers' perceptions of inclusive practices.

Introduction
Nowadays, inclusion is one of the buzzwords in English language teaching, but the question arises as to what inclusive education is and what are teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and needs related to it. In view of these issues, the aim of this article is to present a brief overview of various aspects of inclusive education and the results of a small scale study, the main purpose of which was to collect teachers' opinions on what they would need to work with students in a more inclusive way.

What is inclusive education?
In the preface to the Salamanca Statement (1994), Federico Mayor defined inclusive education as "recognition of the need to work towards 'schools for all' – institutions which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning and respond to individual needs". In the past, inclusive education focused mainly on the rights of disabled children, but nowadays its scope is much broader (Grant and Newton 2019: 120). For example the British Council's approach to inclusive education is focused on communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, emotional and mental health, sensory and/or physical needs, and other societal factors that affect learning and may create barriers to learning and a gap between performance and potential (Dexter 2019: 117). Foreman et al. (2004 in Kurth and Gross 2014: 23) emphasize that inclusive education means that learners who need additional support should be "full-time members" of school life rather than visit the classroom to participate only in certain activities. This full-time membership should extend beyond classroom walls to the playground, canteen and extracurricular activities. Booth, Nes and Strømstad (2003: 1-2) observe that inclusion is about reducing barriers to learning and enabling participation for all learners. They further add that inclusion leads to reducing discrimination on the basis of gender, class, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity and family background. Similarly, according to *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education* (UNESCO, 2017: 12), the central message of inclusion is that every learner matters and matters equally. However, this simple message, when put into practice, requires changes in thinking and the teaching-learning process. For instance, when a school decides to introduce inclusive practices, all relevant parties i.e. administration, parents and other school institutions need to be involved (Kurth and Gross 2014: 37), as teachers alone cannot be expected to take responsibility for creating an inclusive environment (Indrarathne, 2019).

Benefits and barriers to inclusive education
There are strong educational benefits of inclusion (UNESCO 2012: 11). For example:
- In inclusive environments learners who need additional support are less stigmatised and more socially included while those who do not learn tolerance, learn how to accept differences and respect diversity.
- Children who need additional support have access to a richer curriculum than

the one usually developed by special schools.
- In inclusive environments learners have higher achievements than in segregated settings.

There are also economic factors in favour of inclusion. According to UNESCO (2012: 11) "Educating children with disabilities is a good investment" as it reduces the costs of welfare as well as current and future dependence. Household members freed from caring responsibilities can increase their employment or other productive activities. Young people who need additional support and who did not receive education are not likely to enter the job market. In consequence, the state bears the costs of supporting individuals who are not self-sufficient. Despite the fact that inclusive education is seen as beneficial there are still some barriers to its implementation. One of them is the attitudes and/or misconceptions on the part of administrators, parents, teachers, and learners. Teachers and administrators might feel that learners who need additional support will monopolize their time and that they will not have enough energy for other students. Parents and learners are usually afraid of the unknown – they do not know what to expect of learners who need additional support.

Inclusive practices can be successfully implemented only when there is regular collaboration between various professionals within the institution. Indrarathne (2019) observes that teachers might struggle with implementing inclusive practices to accommodate learners with, for example, dyslexia due to the lack of support from their colleagues, parents, or the school authorities. Apart from poor cooperation in educational environments, the lack of teachers' training, as well as willingness and enthusiasm, might impede the implementation of inclusive practices. Unenthusiastic and sceptical teachers are likely to resent developing different approaches for the same lesson (Murphy 2015). Another obstacle to inclusion is a curriculum which does not encourage experimentation with different teaching methods. Those who prepare study plans need to take into account different learning styles (Kurth and Gross, 2014) so as not to hinder the school experience of all students, including those who do not need additional support (Murphy 2015).

Learners with disabilities cannot learn in inclusive schools if they are unable to enter the building. Some schools still need lifts, ramps, paved pathways to enable learners to enter and move around the building. Moreover, classrooms must be spacious enough to accommodate student's assistive technology devices or necessary furniture adjusted to individual needs (UNESCO 2012.

Inclusive education in teachers' eyes
Inclusive education is something that needs to be pursued. However, it is not enough to praise its benefits to create inclusive schools. Since teachers are the people mainly responsible for the implementation of inclusive practices, we need to know what they need to work with students in a more inclusive way. Hence, an idea for a small-scale research project, the results of which I would like to present in the following part of the article. It was conducted with the help of an online questionnaire prepared on the Google Forms platform. I posted the link to the questionnaire in one of the Facebook groups for English language teachers (to

protect the anonymity of the respondents the name of the group will not be revealed). One of the reasons why I searched for respondents among Facebook users was that I wanted to obtain an international perspective on inclusion. I also sent the link to some of my Polish colleagues I work with to broaden the sample of respondents.

The survey was designed for teachers of all levels of education, regardless of the length of their professional experience, to collect answers to the following questions:

1. What would respondents need, to be more inclusive teachers?
2. What would the institution they work in need, to be more inclusive?
3. Who do they feel most/least adequately prepared to work with?

The questionnaire was administered in May, 2019 and was completed by 51 respondents from 27 countries such as Afghanistan, Ghana, Italy, Poland, Turkey, Ukraine. *(If you would like to know more, please contact me using the email address below.)*

As for the length of professional experience, the largest group (16 respondents) were novice teachers, i.e. those who had been teaching for no longer than 5 years. When it comes to employment, the data shows that the respondents work both in the public and private sector, frequently in more than one institution and at more than one level. For example, one of the respondents works in a private primary school, private middle school, private secondary school and private language school. This varied employment history enables respondents to discuss inclusion from various perspectives.

1) More inclusive teachers

As mentioned earlier, the first question in my research project concerned things teachers might need in order to work with learners in a more inclusive way. The respondents were provided with the definition of inclusion developed by the British Council (Dexter 2019: 117) and were asked what, in view of this definition, they would need to be more inclusive teachers.

The most frequent answer to the first question was 'training'; teachers need to know how to put principles of inclusive education into practice. As one of the respondents observed: "*I would know how to activate inclusion meaningfully and effectively*".

The second most frequent answer was 'better facilities', which might indicate that the institutions the respondents work in are not properly equipped or that their infrastructure is dated. Equally frequently the respondents mentioned 'support' from the institution they work in. In their opinion, this support might take the form of funding, resources, training opportunities, and teaching materials. This answer suggests both that the respondents do not receive enough support from their institutions and that there is an opportunity for these institutions to play a role in creating a more inclusive environment. Moreover, this answer seems to confirm a statement made by Indrarathne (2019), namely that teachers alone cannot be expected to create an inclusive environment.

The third most frequent answer was 'knowledge'; the respondents would like to know what specific learning differences (SpLDs) are and how they affect students' behaviour. The respondents also emphasized that they need to know how students'

learning styles differ and what learning needs their students have. As one of the respondents observed: "*[I would need to] identify my students' needs more accurately*". The emphasis on these three areas (i.e. detailed knowledge of SpLDs , awareness of learning styles and needs analysis) shows that these issues could be covered in more detail during teacher training courses.

The fourth most frequent answer was 'cooperation with parents', which is important because they are usually the first source of knowledge on how a given SpLD affects the child's functioning. Parents also provide information on the child's strengths, needs, interests, preferences and priorities. Interestingly, one of the respondents argued that "*the teacher must work first with the parents and then with the kids*". Again, this might mean that in order to understand what the child is going through, teachers have to consult their parents. Cooperation with parents is thought to be necessary but it is not always easy, as parents "*are sometimes not willing to work with teacher*".

2) More inclusive institutions

The next question was what the respondents' institutions would need, in order to be more inclusive. The answers to this question were similar to the answers to the previous one. In the first place the respondents indicated that their institution would need 'more training programmes on how to build inclusive classrooms'. The second most popular answer was that their institutions could have 'more training programmes on how students with special educational needs learn and process information' as well as 'more adequate teaching aids for all groups of students'. The next most popular answers were as follows: 'better facilities for students who find it difficult to process sensory input (visual, auditory or physical)' and 'greater cooperation between teachers'. Other popular answers were: 'more support from school authorities', 'better facilities for students with delayed cognitive development', 'greater awareness of what inclusive education is', and 'more training programmes on how to introduce LGBTQ issues into lessons'. Interestingly, the least popular answer was 'more training programmes on how migration might affect students' lives'.

This accentuation of training in answers to the first and second questions once again shows that it is not enough to understand how important inclusion is to be able to build an inclusive classroom. The answers also show that facilities in schools around the world need to be adapted to increase accessibility and that teachers alone are not able to create inclusive classrooms – to do so they need to cooperate with their colleagues and be supported by school authorities.

3) Adequate preparation

The third question in the research project concerned adequate preparation for working with learners who need additional support. The respondents stated that they feel most adequately prepared to work with 'students with different sexual orientations'. In joint second place the respondents indicated 'dyslexic students' and 'migrants' while in the third place the respondents cited 'ADHD students' and 'students with physical disabilities'. Next, the respondents mentioned 'refugees' and

'autistic students' and 'students with Asperger's syndrome'.

When it comes to learners which the respondents feel least adequately prepared to work with, the most frequent answer was 'students with delayed cognitive development'. In the second place the respondents indicated 'autistic students' and 'students with Asperger's syndrome'. Next most common were 'dyspraxic students' and 'students with physical disabilities', and finally they indicated 'dyscalculic students'.

These answers suggest that the sense of preparedness varies from teacher to teacher depending on their individual circumstances. However, it also seems that teachers feel most adequately prepared to work with these SpLDs and problems which are most common (for instance it is estimated that between 5 to 10 per cent of children have dyslexia (Understanding Dyslexia, no date) while 2 per cent of children have severe symptoms of dyspraxia (Dyspraxia by the Numbers, no date)) and which are therefore most frequently discussed during conferences, e.g. the annual IATEFL conference, and teacher training courses.

Conclusions

Inclusive education (when practisd well) is crucial because, among other things, it establishes a culture of belonging and respect. In inclusive classrooms, apart from having better opportunities for learning, students see different ways of acquiring knowledge and perceiving the world, and learn to accept individual differences.

The research that is presented in the article confirmed that the majority of respondents think that inclusion is an achievable and lofty goal, but it showed that teachers alone cannot implement inclusive practices – they expect and need support from school authorities, as well as collaboration with colleagues and parents. Furthermore, the research proved that in order to work with students in an inclusive way, it is not enough to know definitions of inclusion and consider it a necessity - teachers need to be shown how to put inclusive principles into practice.

The research highlighted that teachers need theoretical knowledge related to SpLDs that would allow them to understand how a given issue affects students' functioning and learning and to select appropriate teaching methods. What is more, the respondents stressed that effective implementation of inclusive practices depends on how well they know their students and their learning needs.

Finally, the research has made it clear that school facilities, infrastructure, funding and teaching resources are important pillars of inclusive education.

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Accommodating students with autism
Donald Bezzina shares his thoughts on working with neurodiverse learners.

I have been a mainstream and TEFL teacher for the past 26 years, and I now proudly call myself 'different'. Seeing the world differently is an asset to me, and I am able to reach out to learners with autism and ADHD in my class. To my mind, someone with autism or Aspergers does things in his own time and space, and I deeply respect this. I think that being autistic is totally the opposite of having a disconnection with the world. Having a meltdown because of overstimulation is, to me, proof enough that an autistic person is extremely connected with the world, is getting too overwhelmed and needs a safe space.

I perceive the defence mechanism of shutting down from overexposure as a natural reaction, so I do my best to adapt the teaching and learning to suit the needs of all my students. A classroom is new, uncharted territory and this can be very difficult for the learner to manage. Setting out teaching aims and objectives and making tasks clear help my learners navigate an unfamiliar environment. The more clearly things are structured, the better. As regards the English language, students on the autism spectrum need help to realise which parts of the text carry the most meaning. In view of this, I take care to share my lesson plans and resources with the Learning Support Educator (LSE) so that she would be able to adapt the texts according to the learner's needs. Adaptations take time, and these have to be done ahead of the lesson. Learners with autism would do better with easier multiple-choice questions that help them navigate through a text. Finding a text or a poem with a picture is not always possible, but I try to find a suitable picture to go with the texts to make the work more accessible to all. Maximising visual supports is key to contextualising and making things as pragmatic as possible.

Creating a safe space
I allow students with autism to leave their place if they feel the need to move about, but only after asking for permission. This kind of behaviour is not easy to be taught at all. The approach that I find the most effective is to concentrate on what a learner with autism or other needs can do, rather than on what he or she cannot do. This paradigm shift has helped me optimise my time with the learner to be able to find the key to unlock his or her interests and lower the affective filters and barriers that spring up when a learner is uncomfortable or feels unsafe. I recognise my students' fear, anxiety, discomfort and pain from sensory overload, and their way of coping with these emotions does not surprise me at all. Hatching up ways to help these learners has been of particular interest to me for a long time. Helping learners with autism or other conditions has become an accidental specialisation for me. I do not want my learners to go through the added pain of being misunderstood and ridiculed for being themselves. I strive to teach acceptance and understanding of autism to the rest of my neurotypical students. My overriding priority has become to protect my learners from the unseen, very subtle and dangerous emotional triggers of stress that can set them off. Creating a safe class needs to be intentional and goes beyond

what is immediately apparent. It takes passion and dedication to restore some very beautiful voices that hide behind what I perceive as a shroud of fear of such a loud and oppressive world. Inevitably, this leads me to ask some fundamental questions: Why should people with autism beg for a safe class, a safe school and a safe environment when it is their absolute God-given right to have and live in one? Who and what should they be safe from and why? They should feel safe to open up, be themselves, flourish creatively and show the world what compassionate souls they can be if only they are given the chance. The key to bridging the chasm that we ourselves have created between society and persons on the autism spectrum is to practise empathy, compassion, kindness and connecting.

Reassuring learners

Helping my students to come together as one class is something I take to heart, but I do not do everything for them, and much less do the thinking for them. I do not shy away from the major issue of isolation that hampers so many autistic students, and throughout the years I have developed strategies to help learners bridge the emotional gap that creates so much anxiety. I have resorted to lateral thinking using PMI (positive, minus, interesting) strategies and also used thinking strategies I had learnt from chess to help neurologically different learners. Reading body language is key to connecting with my learners. I smile and acknowledge things like self-soothing when a student self-hugs and rocks on the chair or has a soothing gadget to help them cope with stress. Encouraging proper breathing helps recovery. Echolalia is like a soothing mantra to learners who do it. When I hear it in class, I do not take offence when a student repeats what I have said in an automaton-like fashion. Should the particular student decide to suddenly interject into my conversation with another student, I welcome the ill-timed intervention because I know how hard it is to stop oneself from engaging in conversations. Making eye contact, and pausing to listen when the person talking to you has something to say, are things that take time to teach. I use a lot of positive reinforcement in class to show the learners that they are on the right track and are behaving in ways that are productive, and this supports their personal growth both in and outside class. I praise learners to show them that they have improved in their general behaviour. I strive to form a personal relationship with my special learners. I call them special with so much pride because they are indeed very special to me. I try to help them build a relationship with me that helps them emotionally with coping with the outside world. This relationship is fundamental to me, and it takes a lot of time to nurture until the student learns to trust me. It is the first building block that I need to start the slow but immensely satisfying journey with the learner to raise his or her tolerance of different triggers both inside and outside of the classroom. Over the passage of weeks, the learners become emotionally stronger, and this inner strength acts as an emotional buffer when stressors come their way. In this way, meltdowns become less frequent and much less intense because the learners are able to draw on their newly-acquired and developed stress tolerance threshold. Inevitably, some days are harder than others, but I use positive reinforcement to reward positive actions with a desirable action like a high-five or a compliment. I do not give too

much attention to undesired behaviour but rather direct learners towards more desired behaviour by giving simple instructions. Use of visual schedules in class by the learner's carer makes things a lot easier and helps keep the learner focused.

Managing the environment

Preparation is essential to prevent sensory overload in the case of a student who might find a combination of stimuli challenging. Just getting to class alone may be a real hazard since this involves a dangerous mixture of visual, auditory, tactile, thermal or olfactory stimulations that may be overwhelming to the learners. The school corridor may be too brightly lit, and that alone can be very irritating. The noise level in between lessons is usually quite extreme as some students feel less supervised as they move from one class to another, and so take the opportunity to shout and speak loudly. Then, it is often the case that there are overwhelming smells emanating from the home economics labs or deodorant sprayed in the corridor or class. A construction site just next door completes the cacophonic misery. It is no wonder that autistic learners have meltdowns to protect themselves. Autistic learners can take alternative routes like the emergency stairway to avoid the corridors or the lift if that suits them. They may come to class a bit later when the confusion has died down a bit. I try to head off situations of meltdown where conflict from sensory or emotional overload can arise by keeping the presentation simple, uncomplicated and in bite-sized chunks that students can process visually. Minimising buzzing sounds is a priority. The LSE may decide that it is best to take the student out of class at certain points.

Behaviour

Managing behavioural challenges in the classroom is not easy at all, and I do everything I can to prevent the conditions for the occurrence of situations that may give rise to students slipping into what I have termed "the accident slope" when they find the tension and anxiety too much to handle. Upon entering the classroom, I immediately start focusing on the strengths of the learners involved and on how to exploit their great visual acuity and eye for detail rather than focus on their weaknesses. Any unforeseen stimuli, a new situation or a hard task can suddenly tip a student over the edge because they cannot cope with the sudden spike in anxiety. Not being able to handle a sudden change in routine is very stressful. Getting a grammar exercise repeatedly wrong or not being able to figure an exercise out even after a lot of help can exacerbate an already stressful environment and initiate the episode. Getting bad marks in a test may also prove too much to handle. The worst part is that their peers, and even school staff at times, might not have any idea about what is going on or what triggered them off, and why. Even worse, they may think of the reaction as a bothersome overreaction. Tension is sometimes almost tangible and can be seen when a learner tenses up and becomes non-verbal because they are fighting anxiety and stressful factors. Not being able to process and be aware of emotions leaves leaners unable to gauge their emotional awareness until they get overwhelmed, and this triggers a meltdown. I have realised that there is no meltdown like any other; each and every one has its own unique circumstances even though they may look similar in the classroom environment. This is because

the emotions that the students in particular have to handle vary widely. Sometimes, the student wakes up stressed and has to deal with a set of circumstances that contribute to raising the stress levels to a threshold where they are already struggling to keep their cool. What might appear as an insignificant episode in class may very well be the final straw to make them buckle under the enormous pressure mounting up to near migraine headache levels. When a student's frustration sets in, it is essential not to focus and highlight the learner's anxiety, but to stay calm while behaviourally and verbally staying focused on the learner's task without making an issue of what happened. An episode handled well can become a non-issue, and the learner learns to move on rather than become even more frustrated and let emotions ruin the rest of the day.

Planning lessons

Teaching can never happen via a one size fits all approach, even more so when students on the autism spectrum are involved. Adapting a standard lesson plan requires time, but it is necessary and ultimately rewarding for both the teacher and learner. It sometimes makes more sense to me to start from scratch with what I need to achieve with that particular learner in mind while searching through my mental corridors for a way of contextualising a poem and explaining something that the learner in question might only take in a literal sense. This has to be coupled with a parallel lesson delivery with the class as a whole. This very much depends on what I am teaching. Poetry greatly facilitates this approach of teaching with as much scaffolding as I can use to fire up the learners' imagination. Many times, there are multiple ways of how to teach and learn something in any subject and often, the delivery method lies in the learner's own sphere of interest. At times, I have to allow for some hang time to get an answer for a carefully worded question which many times has not been answered by the rest of the class. Then, a few minutes later, the learner in question would come up with the right answer, much to my joy, and I reward this with positive reinforcement. I tend to ask the questions a few minutes before we discuss the relevant topic by way of expressing the lesson objective and then the learner would be in synch with the rest of the class by the time we start delving into the topic. Understanding how a student with autism learns is key, to avoid wasting time with wrong pedagogies and feeling disheartened should plans go wrong. Hyper-focusing may be an issue when a certain topic is being explained and, when I spot this behaviour I try to draw the learner out of it. Anxiety issues are not something that I take lightly. I do my best to establish and maintain the same class routine as far as possible so that the learner in question may have a safety anchor or line to hold onto. The whole class can do a lot here in making learners feel part of the class for real and seamless inclusion.

Interpersonal communication

Autistic students need help with establishing rules of interaction in a casual conversation. Teaching interaction is challenging. It takes a lot of patience to teach students how to take turns, and it is not always easy to recognise and interpret their expressions and facial gestures. Interpersonal skills need to be taught in a rather direct way. Things like eye contact and the appropriate distance to keep need to be

talked about. The appropriate facial expressions and gestures need to be demonstrated. Situations can be simulated during discussions. Many times, autistic students need to be reminded and their memory refreshed not to miss steps in their tasks in and outside of class. The simpler the task instructions are, the less the learners worry that they are going to miss out on something and fall behind. I have realised that giving the students a reason for what they are doing is key to help them rationalise what they are being asked to do. Since they are visual learners, they need to be able to see the task to visualise it and process what they need to do. I do my best to write instructions on the whiteboard so that everything is clear. Something that learners with autism love is when the teacher is consistent and predictable. In other words, routine leads to comfort in the classroom and students thrive when they find safety. Learners will not remain young forever, and it is the educators' duty to see that they are sufficiently able to handle change once they leave school. Introducing change in small doses helps learners train to handle the stress of change and develop a resistance to not buckle under pressure.

Finding a channel that opens up communication is not easy, and one has to be on the guard against staying too specific to that particular topic of interest. I discovered that learners with autism may sometimes be obsessed with a particular topic and will only talk about that topic in question in an obsessive manner. Drawing the students away gently from their special topics of interest and keeping them and the whole class focused on what is being learnt is very tricky, but possible. I use a mixture of praise, non-verbal language and warm, suggestive language towards the students. I discovered that focusing my undivided attention on the students while they say what they have to say makes them feel fulfilled and appreciated and ready to cooperate. I approach students with autism and tap on their great visual ability and their fantastic way of seeing the world the way that others cannot see and this makes me so enthusiastic about what they can do! Their sharp perspective when shown a photograph impresses me when they point out an elusive detail that everyone else ignored. It is very clear that being different does not mean being inferior.

Raising awareness

I strongly believe that inclusion is best facilitated through the education of both neurotypical students as well as teachers. Teachers should have hands-on training on autism. They need to be empowered to act to protect voices that would otherwise be silenced into submission and oblivion. All students deserve to feel welcome in a safe classroom. Knowing that the class they are going to next for a lesson is a calm oasis is a game-changer for any leaner, let alone for the autistic child. Clearly, creating a supportive environment to help learners cope with change is hard but so rewarding. Once the educators are themselves well-equipped to assist students on the autism spectrum, they would also be better able to teach neurotypical students how not to judge. Students should be taught that self-soothing behaviour is acceptable and necessary and it is often a safety valve to prevent a meltdown. I teach my class to appreciate that self-soothing is a way of coping when stress reaches unacceptable levels. I get very irritated by unnecessary comments from

those who associate self-soothing with mental illness. It is the only way of coping and blocking out excessive input and, if started early enough, can effectively stop a meltdown in class and restore the learner's balance.

If teachers and students were a little more mindful of how autistic people experience their classroom, school and general surroundings, there would not be any need to provide all the care they need when a meltdown ensues. Inclusion in class is, to me, primarily a matter of mutual respect and acknowledgement and, more than that, a matter of creating an environment where all my learners are free to be themselves and are accepted. It is only when differences between learners are embraced and cherished that a shift in mentality is actualised and true inclusion is brought about.

Donald Bezzina *is a 49-year-old teacher of English from Malta. He has been a mainstream teacher for 26 years and a TEFL teacher for 25 years. For Donald, reaching out to Autistic children goes beyond perfunctory inclusion requirements and is a source of joy and a great passion. As a person who sees himself as neurologically diverse, he has found himself in a position where he could promote a culture of change and acceptance through what he does in class.*

Interview with Rossie Stone

1) How and why did you get involved in producing educational comics?
I had grown up with dyslexia, constantly at the bottom of the class and not enjoying school. I found it difficult to fit in, particularly absorbing information through reading words. Eventually, in my last year of school, I decided I'd try revising in my own way: not relying on reading. I loved the Beano, and graphic novels, and I decided to turn my revision notes into comic strips, because they would be more fun to make, and to re-read. I realised that the information stayed in naturally. Because it was enjoyable, I kept doing it. I thought that even if I failed, as least I would enjoy failing. But I didn't – I got an A! That made me think there could be value in educational comics.

2) What do you like about it, and what are the challenges?
I love being able to see the technique that helps me also help other people - seeing kids enjoy the comics. Even more than helping kids with school work, I love seeing comics turn dull boring subjects into something so enjoyable that kids are reading it on the weekend.
The challenges are the business and marketing elements of running a business. It's not natural for me. It requires a lot of organisation and focus of thought. I'm a creative person; I find it difficult to concentrate, and my mind goes off into different areas. Business requires hard focus. I'm getting better, but that is the challenge, to get the idea out there.

3) What do you think are the main benefits of using comics in the classroom?
Comics break down the resistance barriers, because they are more sensory. They are visual, using stories and humour, and they give you more than just words to engage with the information and remember it. We know children, regardless of learning differences, don't have such differences when it comes to engaging with other forms of entertainment. Comics level out the playing field, and can even give neurodiverse learners an advantage, because sensory input is their thing. They don't rely on just words, they give you lots more, and so teachers can connect with everybody in the class more easily.

4) Have you ever learnt any other languages? What helped you to do that?
No. I tried to get my girlfriend to teach me Mandarin, and I learnt French and Latin at school, but it didn't stay in. What's helped me with English is reading comics and graphic novels; now I actually read for pleasure. I used to play computer games that had no voice-over, so I had to read the text. These things are motivating. I learnt a lot of words this way, and I also got over the intimidation of reading and it helped me to progress to books.

5) What does the term "inclusive education" mean for you?

Well, you'll always get some pupils who prefer some formats to others, but 'inclusive education' to me, is where you get more winners than losers. Teaching in one particular way - and only measuring intelligence by just one factor, e.g. using words and reading and absorbing information that way - is not inclusive. Think about it: if you put everyone in Art School and only measured success by drawing, some good readers would really struggle there. So, we need more visuals, more interactivity, more chances for people to use their diverse range of skills.

6) Do you have any practical tips for teachers, teacher trainers and other educators who would like to use more comics in their work?

Dekko comics are a useful resource to start with. You can also encourage students to make their own comics, for example, staring with verbs. Show them some examples of simple stick figures, or an existing comic, but you can give them the freedom to learn in a way that is creative, and they can use their favourite characters to engage them. The comic format allows you to be concise with the information. Comics have to be concise, because each speech bubble can only hold a few words, and the visual must dominate in the comic panel.

Teachers can make comics, too. Instead of giving information to students on a worksheet, they can use a format that's more interesting. You don't need to be a good artist – you can cut out pictures to use.
If you want children to read more, have comics and graphic novels available in the classroom to get them started. They are more accessible and appealing as a starting point.

Rossie Stone *studied Art and Design and Animation at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design. He is the founder of Dekko Comics Ltd. who turn the school curriculum into entertaining short comic stories, to make them more engaging and easier to remember for a wider variety of learners. They have proven popular and helpful across the board, but are especially well appreciated by children with dyslexia, autism, ADHD, dyspraxia and more. www.dekkocomics.com*

Top Tips: #Welcoming Classroom
Suggestions collected from our social media contributors

Nurturing a welcoming classroom is an important foundation for an inclusive classroom. Inclusive practices are based on healthy respectful relationships, and that starts in the very first class.

During September and October 2019, on #IPSENchat, we asked you to share your ideas for how to develop a welcoming environment in the classroom. There were two main themes that emerged:

1) learning and pronouncing students' names, both for the teacher and the rest of the class, and

2) developing a supportive and collaborative learning culture.

Here is what you told us (many thanks for all your contributions to this!):

Students' names

Learning students' names

- Ask the students to offer a word that describes them that starts with the same letter as their initial (e.g. Rachael the runner / Friendly Frank).
- Glance around the room while they are busy working and check if you can name them all.
- Outside of class time, test yourself with the class photo, or the id photos, if you have them.
- Use their names every time you speak to them, to make sure that everybody hears the names, and model respectful communication.
- Ask your students to correct you if you get them wrong. When they correct their teacher it created a more equal relationship, and shows that there is no stigma in being corrected. We are all human: it is OK to make mistakes, and this is how we learn.
- Mix up the pairs and groups on a regular basis, and always encourage them to make sure they know who they are working with.

Pronouncing students' names

- Invest some class time writing your names in phonetic script, so that everybody knows how to pronounce each others' names. (This is also a good opportunity to introduce the phonemic symbols for common sounds in English.)
- Write a phonetic version on the register.
- If you have difficulty with a particular name, ask the student to record it for you on your phone, so you can practise it, and help others to say it correctly, too.

Bonnie Jean Nicholas (@EALStories) has shared a collection of ideas and activities for learning students names: bit.ly/2FTiWK4.

Building group cohesion, developing relationships

- 2 for 10: If you have a learner who is withdrawn, or reluctant to contribute in class, build your relationship with them by spending 2 minutes with them every day for 10 days in a row. Just asking how the student is doing, and showing that you are interested in them as an individual can help them trust you and have confidence in themselves.
- Let students choose where they want to sit. You may need to give an occasional reminder that they should respect their neighbours, and monitor the amount of off-topic chatting. If the seating choices they have made don't seem to be working well, group work is a great opportunity to mix them up and rearrange them.
- If you notice a student who seems a bit uncomfortable, or not very happy, find time to have a quiet word with them – let them know that you see them, including their discomfort or their distress. Reassure them that you are on their side, and make sure they know where to find you if they want to talk to you.
- A group trip out of the classroom gives students space to get to know each other in less formal context, and see a different side of each other.

IATEFL Annual Conference
Pre-Conference Event Manchester 17th April 2020

Accessible Assessments?
Inclusive Practices in Language Testing and Assessment

In collaboration with our sister IATEFL SIG, the Testing, Evaluation and Assessment SIG, we would like to invite you to our PCE on Friday April 17th, 2020.
Our invited speakers Richard Spiby (British Council) and Judit Kormos (Lancaster University) will be joined by 5 others, all talking about inclusive and accessible classroom and formal assessment. The day will end with an opportunity to hear from exam boards about how they are making their assessments more accessible.

Richard Spiby, British Council Assessment Research Group, London

Date and time: Friday 17 April 2020, 10.00-17.00
Location: Friends Meeting House

Judit Kormos, Professor in Second Language Acquisition at Lancaster University

Thanks to our sponsors for supporting us in this event!

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Book Review: Chris Reynolds Understanding Teenagers
By Rachael Harris

This is a book is full of practical ideas and advice; what makes it interesting is the author wanting to "talk about" teaching teens rather tell us how to do it. He shares anecdotes and ideas in a chatty, often funny, style which makes the book a good read.

The book is divided into twenty-four chapters, each on a different topic such as planning, differentiation, skills, assessment, etc. Each chapter starts with a section entitled 'Discussion', which develops aspects of the theme in question, often through the form of a personal anecdote in which Chris shares his experiences. Don't be surprised to feel yourself nodding while recollecting a similar moment in your own classroom.

The second part, 'Practical Applications', is full of easy-to-implement ideas, and each chapter ends with a three-part section on reflection. 'Questions for Reflection' helps us to look at our own teaching practice. 'Things to Try' has plenty of ideas to try out in class, and the final part, 'Things to Share' gives tips on distributing what you have learnt amongst your colleagues. The reference list at the end of each chapter is more useful than a whole list at the end of the book. The book also includes a link at the back to a whole selection of downloadable material, and the '20 Key Tenets for teaching teens' at the start includes ideas such as 'try to leave students' sense of dignity intact' or 'allow self-expression and personality in class'.

Questions and suggestions I loved:
- Ask yourself: "what am I going to enjoy about this lesson?" and "Why are we doing this?".
- Don't be drawn to extremes, the really strong or really weak students (in fact Chris suggests choosing a student randomly and aiming the lesson at them).
- Read a text to students who have their books closed, to first give them a feel for it before more in-depth study.
- Give students answer sheets to correct their work autonomously to free up the teacher.
- Play predictive vocabulary bingo at the start of a new topic.
- Remember that making phrases with vocabulary is a great way to practise grammar.
- Write a pronunciation list on the board and have students see how far down the list they can read correctly.

Rachael Harris has taught English for over twenty years and presently teaches ELT and English literature to teens in a secondary school in Geneva, Switzerland. She holds an M.A. TESOL and has completed a SEN Coordinator award. She is a member of the IATEFL Inclusive Practices and SEN SIG committee. She fervently believes in the importance of making positive connections in the classroom to underpin student well-being and learning.

Call for articles

The IATEFL IP&SEN SIG invites the submission of original articles on various aspects of inclusive practice in English language teaching of both young learners and adults, including, but not restricted to, research, methodology, lesson ideas, teaching materials and other resources. Reviews of books, webinars, courses etc. on this theme are also welcome. Please see the policy on selection of articles on our website: https://ipsen.iatefl.org/write-for-us

Submissions may be in any of these formats:

- *Full-length articles*: Articles should not exceed 2,500 words but may be shorter, including references.

- *Shorter articles*: Articles should not exceed 1000 words but may be shorter, including references.

- *Reviews*: between 500-800 words, including references.

All manuscripts should be printed on A4 pages upright and left justified, as Word document in a black, 12-point font of your choice. Please do not use columns or have hyphenated words at the line end. Diagrams should be formatted in Word (other illustrative material should be sent separately by mail).

Please do not use headers or footers. Please use the Harvard referencing system: http://www.citethisforme.com/harvard-referencing

All articles must be original. Articles that have already been published elsewhere, even in a slightly different form, cannot be accepted.

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Please send submissions to the editor at ipsensig@iatefl.org, and attach:

- a short biography (50 words)
- a photo (headshot of yourself)

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