

Programme 6

Understanding learners and their needs



Programme 6: Understanding learners and their needs

Key points to cover during this session

Whether you run a full-day training session or just a very short discussion, try to include these key points:

- Inclusive teachers get to know the children in their class. They often do this without realising it. The better you know the children in your class, the easier it is to notice when they are having difficulties with participating and learning, and find appropriate solutions for them.
- It is not possible for a teacher to know everything about each child, so they need to communicate and collaborate with other people in the child's life to understand better the child's abilities and needs.
- Assessing learning is important for identifying whether children are doing well or experiencing difficulties. But we need to use a creative range of different methods for assessing learning, as not every child is able to express their abilities through a formal test.

Watch the video and then facilitate your preferred selection from the following activities.

A

Basic workshop activities

Activity 6.1 – Finding out about children in your class

🕒 60 minutes

Main purpose of this activity

To encourage teachers to reflect on the ways in which they already find out about the children in their class, and share ideas for other ways to do this.

Present the following:

One of the most important things you can do as a teacher, to help ensure children are included, is to get to know them as well as possible. The more you know about them, the more you can recognise when they are having problems, and then you can find better solutions.

Children will also feel more welcome in school if they know you remember them and care about them. You need to know about their personality, their interests and dislikes, their background, and the things they find easy or difficult to understand or do in lessons.

Give participants these instructions:

- As a whole group, brainstorm how you remember the names of the children in your class, when you first meet them at the start of the year or when they join your class.

Possible answers to expect from participants

Participants may suggest some of these. You can use the following list to give them more ideas too.

- Take a register every morning or at the start of lessons so you can see which children respond to which names.
- Use word association to help you remember names. For instance, if you keep forgetting Hannah's name and she's a child who always smiles, call her Happy Hannah in your mind.
- Ask children to make a name badge (if they can write) or make a badge for them. You may need stickers or pins, or enough desk space for them to put their name on a folded paper on the desk in front of them.
- Ask children to say their name when they put their hand up to answer a question or when you select them to answer a question.

- If the resources are available, take a photo of every child and make a poster by sticking their photos and writing their names onto a flipchart.
- Play games using their names. For example:
 - Set children the challenge of lining up alphabetically according to their names (A-Z). Once they have lined up ask them to say their names. You can check if they have got the alphabet right and be reminded of their names.
 - Ask children to wait in the playground and you call them into the classroom one at a time. If you cannot remember someone's name, they must give you a clue, without actually saying the name. For instance, if you have forgotten Peter's name, he might tell you "my name starts with P" or "it's the same name as the man who sells bread next door to the school".
 - Ask children to make a chart showing where everyone sits in the class. Then get them to play a game where a few children switch desks and test your memory of their names.

Preparations for the following activity

- If you have enough paper, stick several sheets of flipchart paper together. Each group will need a huge sheet like this. It needs to be big enough for someone to lie on and have their body outline drawn onto the paper.
- If you don't have enough paper, the activity can be done on a small sheet. Simply ask one of the group members to draw an outline of a person.
- You will also need different colour pens, if possible.

Give participants the following instructions. You may want to put the instructions on the board or flipchart as a reminder:

- Work in small groups.
- One of your group members needs to lie down on the paper while someone draws around the outline of their body.
- Your task is to brainstorm all the ways in which you find out about children in your class. You need to think about how you find out about different aspects of the child.
- Using a black or blue pen
 - On the head – write down your experiences for how you find out about the child's learning abilities or difficulties.
 - On the body/heart – write down how you find out about the child's family and home life.
 - On the hands and feet – write down how you find out about the child's interests (what they enjoy doing) and dislikes.
- Once you have done this, use a green pen to highlight or write down details of all the people who help you get this information.

- Finally, use a red pen to write down the difficulties you experience. What information is difficult to get? What information do you still not have regarding some or all the children in your class?

After about 30 minutes, ask groups to merge, so that 2 groups become one group, and share their answers with each other. Give them these instructions:

- Look at each other's answers.
- Try to give each other advice on the red notes: how could you find out the things that you don't know yet, and who else could help.

Possible answers to expect from participants

Head – how we find out about a child's learning abilities or difficulties

- Observe children in class, during sports and when they are playing, to see what activities they seem to find easy/enjoyable or difficult/upsetting.
- Talk to children to find out what they find easy or hard in class, especially if you see them struggling or upset at any time.
- Monitor their work on a daily basis.
- Set occasional tests or exercises.
- Talk with parents and other teachers who know the child.
- Ask someone with more experience than me to observe or assess the child (e.g. a teacher in my school who has a lot of experience of children with additional learning needs, someone from a clinic or community-based rehabilitation service, or an itinerant specialist teacher).

Heart/body – how we find out about the child's family and home life

- Talk to the child.
- Plan activities that give children a chance to share what they do outside school (e.g. 'show-and-tell', writing stories, drawing pictures).
- Talk with parents – formally during scheduled meetings, and informally in the community.
- Talk with other teachers who know the child.

Hands and feet – how we find out about the child's interests and dislikes

- Observe the child during different activities.
- Talk to the child, especially if you see them happy or sad, to find out what has made them feel happy or sad.
- Ask children to do written, drawn or performance projects on topics they choose for themselves.
- Plan activities that help you find out about children but which act as educational activities too (e.g. get children to design a survey about interests and dislikes, ask them to collect the answers from each other and analyse the results. They could create charts or work out percentages to help learn maths.)
- Play debate games, such as 'agree-disagree'. Read out statements and get children to stand on a line depending whether they agree, disagree or are not sure, and ask them to justify their answers to each other. You could read out statements such as "football is the best game in the world" or "maths is very boring" and see who agrees or disagrees and why.

B

Important theoretical issues to discuss

Activity 6.2 – Collaboration and networking

🕒 60 minutes

Main purpose of this activity

To highlight to teachers the importance of collaborating with a range of people when identifying and addressing children's learning needs.

Present the following:

One of the most important messages we need to remember when we are trying to make education more inclusive, is that we cannot do this on our own. Inclusive education is a concept that is built on collaboration.

We saw the importance of collaboration in Programme 2 when we discussed the twin-track approach of making both system level changes that help all learners and supporting individual learners' needs. On our own we cannot always create and deliver solutions on both tracks – we need other people to help us.

Understanding learners is vital if we are going to take appropriate steps to address their individual needs. Also, the more we understand about individual learners, the more ideas we get for appropriate wider, system-level changes.

Everyone involved in education can contribute towards making education more inclusive, child-focused and better quality. A key part of being an inclusive teacher is knowing who your support network is and who else can and should be helping to make education more inclusive.

Give participants the following instructions:

- Work in pairs, with someone from your school if possible.
- Read the case study about Peter in Handout 6a.
- Make a diagram showing all the people the teacher, Mr Joseph, plans to consult, in order to find out more about Peter, and how he plans to consult them.
- Can you think of any other people Mr Joseph could talk to?

Possible answers to expect from participants

Other people the teacher could talk to:

- Peter's siblings, especially if they attend the same school
- Other relatives who may play a central role in looking after Peter, such as grandparents
- The teacher who teaches sport or runs the school football club, where Peter performs well. Maybe they have found a good way to manage Peter's behaviour.

After about 20–30 minutes, give this next instructions:

- In this story about Peter, there is a local clinic, where there is a psychologist and someone who can test hearing and eyesight, and nearby there is a teacher with experience of working with children who need additional support. These people are not available everywhere. Think about your own school. What people are available inside or outside the school who may be able to give you advice or support in a similar situation?
- Imagine that Peter is in your school. Draw a diagram showing all the people you know could provide advice or support. Show what sort of help or advice you think they could provide.
- Then add details of any people you think may be able to help or advise, but you need to investigate further to confirm.

Display all the diagrams on the wall. Where possible, group together diagrams drawn by people from the same school. Invite everyone from that school to look at the diagrams. Have all the participants from that school identified the same people who could help or give advice with supporting a child like Peter? Are there some useful resource people that some of the teachers in the school did not know about before?

Invite each participant to make a note of one person shown on the diagrams whom they will contact, so as to build or strengthen the relationship with them or find out what sort of advice or support they may be able to offer in future.

C Digging deeper into specific issues

You may want to focus on some of the specific issues relevant to Programme 6. A key issue is:

- Assessing what children have learned.

Activity 6.3 – Assessing what children have learned

 **90–120 minutes**

Main purpose of this activity

To give teachers ideas for how they can assess children’s learning in class, to understand their needs better without using just formal tests and exams.

Present the following:

There are lots of reasons why children are not included in education or struggle to learn. We need to do as much as we can to understand all the factors that affect whether a child comes to school or learns when at school. We also need to understand what they are learning and how much they have learned.

Often education systems use tests and exams to reveal what children have learned. However, not every child performs well in formal tests. This means sometimes we can get a false picture of how much – or how little – they have learned. Some children are learning well, but cannot convey this in a test. Other children experience problems with learning, but are able to pass a test so we may not notice their problems. In this session, we will think about different ways to assess children’s learning, so we can more accurately understand their abilities and learning needs.

Give participants the following instructions:

- In pairs, read the short lesson plans in Handout 6b.
- Think of at least 3 different ways to assess the children’s learning.
- Try to think of:
 - at least one way of assessing how well children are understanding during the lesson
 - at least one way of assessing how much they have understood and remembered at the end of the lesson
 - at least one way of assessing how much children understood and remembered some time after the lesson.

After about 20 minutes, ask participants to share their ideas with the whole group. Write these onto a flipchart or blackboard.

Encourage participants to think critically about the suggested methods of assessing learning. If they have listed a lot of activities that are like formal tests, encourage them to think of some more alternatives.

Possible answers to expect from participants

There are so many possible ways to check if children have understood and remembered. The following are some ideas that could be used if participants are struggling to think of any ideas beyond formal tests.

Assessing understanding during the lesson:

- Ask children to highlight nouns and adjectives in sentences. They could work in pairs; one child highlights the nouns, the other highlights the adjectives and then they check each other's answers. You can walk around and see if anyone is having difficulty.
- Ask children to write some sentences that contain nouns and adjectives. Walk around and check them and provide help for any child who appears not to understand. Or, if you have a very large class, you could ask a child who does understand, to explain it to them.
- You could give children cards with words on and they must stick them on the wall under the heading 'noun' or 'adjective'. You could do this on the blackboard too – write a list of words and ask each child to come and pick one word and rewrite it under the correct heading.

Assessing learning at the end of the lesson:

- Run a quiz. Give everyone 2 pieces of paper. One piece says 'noun', the other say 'adjective'. They could also be different colour paper. Read out words and the children have to hold up the relevant piece of paper to say if the word is a noun or an adjective.
- Slowly read a paragraph from a story the children like. They need to wave the noun paper every time they hear a noun, and wave the adjective paper every time they hear an adjective. Observe to see if anyone waves the wrong paper a lot, or does not wave any paper.

Assessing learning after the lesson

- In a future lesson, ask each child to write a sentence about what they did at the weekend. They then hand the paper to the child next to them, who has the task of inserting an adjective next to each noun. So for instance, if one child writes "I went to visit my aunt and she took me to the café", the other child needs to add "I went to visit my **old** aunt and she took me to the **busy** café". They can check each other's work, and you can also mark it.
- Set a short test. Give children several sentences that contain nouns but no adjectives. Ask them first to underline the noun and then to insert an adjective with every noun.
- For the next few lessons, every time you ask children to read or write something, ask them to underline every noun and double underline every

adjective. You could do this in any subject, not just in the language lessons. For instance, if they are reading or writing something about history, science or geography, you could still ask them to underline the nouns and adjectives.

Then give participants the following instructions:

- Work in 4 groups.
- Look again at the lists on the flipchart/board.
- **Group 1 – think about children who cannot see very well.** Which of the assessment activities might be difficult for them to do? Which would be most accessible? Suggest an adaptation or a new assessment activity that will be ideal for these children.
- **Group 2 – think about children who cannot hear very well.** Which of the assessment activities might be difficult for them to do? Which would be most accessible? Suggest an adaptation or a new assessment activity that will be ideal for these children.
- **Group 3 – think about children who have difficulty learning or remembering.** Which of the assessment activities might be difficult for them to do? Which would be most accessible? Suggest an adaptation or a new assessment activity that will be ideal for these children.
- **Group 4 – think about children who have difficulty moving** (this may include mobility problems such as moving around the classroom or fine motor skills like holding a pen). Which of the assessment activities might be difficult for them to do? Which would be most accessible? Suggest an adaptation or a new assessment activity that will be ideal for these children.

After about 30 minutes, ask each group to feed back to everyone. Allow other groups to add their suggestions.

Possible answers to expect from participants

There are many different adaptations that could be made. In general, participants need to be thinking about the following:

- Assessment activities suitable for those who cannot see very well may include verbal or tactile activities.
- Assessments suitable for those who cannot hear very well may include visual supports such as pictures, role play, drawing and writing.
- Assessment suitable for those who have difficulty learning or remembering may include picture cards, pointing, drawing or selecting options.
- Assessment suitable for those who have difficulty moving may include pointing, selecting options or verbal options.

Present the following

On these flipcharts/board we have various ideas for how to find out whether children are learning, and how to adapt these activities for particular children. Think back to the earlier activities [if these were done] and remember that there are other people in your support network who can help you find out about children's learning achievements and needs. So if you are not sure how to assess a particular child's learning progress, ask someone from your network.

Programme 6 transcript

Understanding learners and their needs

It is easier to be inclusive if you understand each child as an individual.

What are they good at, and what do they need more help with?

What can you do?

Learn the names of every child in your class. Children feel more included if you have noticed and remembered them.

Activities often used at the start of the day can help you find out more about the children.

For example, children can use a 'show-and-tell' activity to say what they did at the weekend or to talk about something they like or dislike.

You can observe children to see whether they are struggling to participate or learn.

If you see a child who is having difficulty participating or learning, you can be creative and experiment with different ideas for how to help them.

You can ask other people to help you understand a child's needs, and to give you ideas for how to respond to these needs.

You might ask the child's parents or other teachers about their experiences of supporting this child or similar children.

Other teachers can provide a lot of advice based on their experiences.

If available, you might also ask more specialist staff for help.

For instance, you might be able to work with a community-based rehabilitation worker or a special educational needs co-ordinator.

They could help you understand better a child's disability or learning needs, and may have ideas for how you can support the child in class.

Handout 6a

Peter's case story

Peter is 9 years old and is in Mr Joseph's class. He is a very quiet boy most of the time, but sometimes he gets angry and aggressive. He usually does not finish the tasks set during the lesson, although the work he does complete is often quite good. Peter gets angry when Mr Joseph reminds him that the lesson is nearly finished and he needs to hurry up and finish his work. Sometimes Peter will throw his book on the floor and a few times he has even run out of the room. Mr Joseph has watched Peter in the playground and during sports lessons and he seems to play well with other children. But the other children seem reluctant to work with Peter during group activities in class. Peter has been absent from school more often in the last few months and Mr Joseph is worried that he may stop coming to school completely.

Because he is so worried about Peter, Mr Joseph has made a plan for investigating the problem, so that he can try to help Peter.

He is keeping a notebook of observations about Peter (and about a few other children who worry him). He wants to see if there are any trends in the bad behaviour, such as certain lessons or types of activities that trigger Peter's worst behaviour.

He has also spoken to Mrs Mina who taught Peter last year, to find out if he behaved the same then. Mrs Mina mentioned that she had spoken to a psychologist at a local clinic to get advice about Peter, so Mr Joseph plans to speak to this person too. He has also decided to speak to someone at the clinic who could test Peter's hearing and eyesight. Mr Joseph needs to discuss this visit to the clinic with the school's head teacher first though. He will also ask if the head teacher knows anything about Peter's home life or background.

Mr Joseph plans to meet with Peter's parents. He has booked a formal meeting with them after school next week, but there is also a football match tomorrow that Peter is playing in, so Mr Joseph hopes to talk to Peter's parents then too, informally. Mr Joseph would like to visit Peter's home, but he will wait until the other meetings have happened before deciding the best way to arrange this.

Peter's best friend seems to be Saidi, so Mr Joseph plans to talk to him. He does not want to ask Saidi directly about Peter, but instead will encourage Saidi to talk about the things he likes and see if he reveals anything about his friend. Mr Joseph is hoping to find out why Peter's friends do not like working with him during group tasks, and see if he can find a solution to this, because he thinks group work could help Peter.

Mr Joseph knows that the school in the next village has a teacher, Miss Ravi, who provides support to children with additional learning needs. He is going to visit the school next week and ask Miss Ravi if she can give him some advice. He hopes she may be able to visit and observe Peter. If this teacher is useful, Mr Joseph thinks he may even visit the district education officer (if his head teacher approves) and ask if

there could be a formal arrangement between the two schools, so that Miss Ravi can help other teachers who are worried about children in their classes.

However, before he does any of this, the first thing Mr Joseph has planned is to talk to Peter. He does not want to make him stay late after school, or keep him in class during break time, as he thinks this will upset Peter. So he has planned a lesson where children will work in groups on a simple science experiment. Individual children will be asked to come and demonstrate part of the task to the teacher. Peter will not be the only child doing this, so he should not feel uncomfortable. Mr Joseph hopes to use this individual time with Peter as an opportunity to ask him about what he finds easy and difficult in school.

Handout 6b

Simple lesson plan

Objective:

- Students will demonstrate the use nouns and adjectives in sentences.

During this lesson the teacher will:

- Read some sentences to children.
- Explain what a noun is.
- Explain what an adjective is.
- Highlight the noun in these sentences.
- Highlight the adjective in these sentences.

What activities could be used to help the teacher assess whether children have understood the lesson about nouns and adjectives, and whether they have remembered it?