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# How do we use differentiation in our classes?

## Panel discussion handout

### Idea 1: Inclusive classrooms in overcrowded schools

by **Khanyisa Prais Makhubele**

Overcrowded classrooms present unique challenges for teachers, particularly in resource-limited environments like no-fee schools in South Africa. For instance, high student-to-teacher ratio limits individualized attention and limited physical space and learning materials hinder engagement. However, with intentional planning and inclusive strategies, we can create learning spaces where every child feels valued and supported.

#### Principles of an inclusive classroom

1. Equity: Provide fair opportunities for all learners to succeed.
2. Diversity: Embrace cultural, linguistic, and ability differences.
3. Safety: Ensure a supportive, respectful, and non-judgmental space.
4. Participation: Promote collaboration and active learner involvement.

#### Practical strategies to build inclusive classrooms

1. Peer learning: Pair learners to support each other, grouping stronger and struggling learners together.
2. Visual aids and content summaries: Use posters, diagrams, and summary handouts to simplify complex topics.
3. Differentiated instruction: Create tasks that cater to varying skill levels, using tiered activities.
4. Technology (if available): Use simple tools like mobile devices or projectors for interactive lessons.

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Inclusive classrooms can thrive even in overcrowded settings with creativity and intention. Focus on learner-centred planning and encourage collaboration. Small changes can make a big difference in fostering an inclusive learning environment.

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## Idea 2: Multisensory tips and tricks to include all learners

by Josipa Kardum

In my presentation we looked at how some students can face challenges such as sensory issues (noise, light, touch), executive functioning (organisation, time management, planning), social interaction and communication, emotional regulation or have processing differences. We saw activities for the classroom that may help these learners. Many of these activities/strategies are based around the principles of Universal Design for Learning (read more here <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>). These include using names, removing distractions, slowing your pace, giving visual support when possible, and also using tools/activities such as ‘the whisper phone’ (see my presentation for an example of how to make your own!). One other activity that can be effective is ‘skim and stick’ – using sticky notes to work with grammar. A more detailed explanation of that activity is below.

### Using sticky notes for grammar

**Preparation:** Choose a short passage that includes the Past Simple Tense. Print the text for students to analyse.

**Step 1:** Tell students to read the text: Allow students 5–10 minutes (depending on the length of the text) to carefully read the passage.

**Step 2:** Tell students to identify key parts: Using sticky notes, mark all the verbs in the past simple. Use green sticky notes for regular and red sticky notes for irregular verbs.

**Step 3:** Group discussion: Once everyone has marked the verbs, pair up with a partner or form small groups.

**Step 4:** Tell students “Compare your findings. Did anyone miss any verbs?” Share with the class.

**Homework:** Write a short story using at least five regular and five irregular Past Simple Tense verbs that were found in the text.

**Tips for teachers!** Double-check that students use the correct colours (green for regular verbs, red for irregular verbs). A quick pre-activity demonstration can help. Remind students to place the sticky notes on top of the correct verbs without covering other parts of the text.

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## Idea 3: Inclusion - a vocabulary activity

by Amir Esmaeili

### Introduction

There is no denying that any class with more than one learner includes varying abilities, preferences, and needs. This requires us teachers to deliver lessons where all such differences are acknowledged and exploited to maximize learning opportunities. That is when inclusive practices come into play. We can define inclusive practices as *'recognising and valuing diversity among learners in areas such as language background, cognitive and academic ability, physical ability or disability and social background.'* (<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/inclusive-practices>)

### Practical activity

Below is a simple yet powerful inclusive practice to integrate language and skills with a focus on vocabulary.

**Step 1:** Give a set of numbered vocabulary items (words/pictures) to students to match with the lettered equivalents individually.

**Step 2:** Put learners into pairs/groups to check their answers.

**Step 3:** Ask pairs/groups to choose a number and think of a way to convey the word without saying it explicitly (students can mime it, draw it, define it, etc.).

**Step 4:** The first student in each team to shout out the right word gets a point.

**Step 5:** Once all the words are clarified (meaning, use, pronunciation), ask students to make/write as many sentences with the new words as they can (encourage stronger learners to use more words in one sentence).

**Step 6:** Finally, invite volunteers to read out/write down their sentences with the new words either bleeped or blanked for the entire class to guess the right word.

### Tips

- Make sure to demonstrate steps 3 and 6 above for students' full comprehension.
- Challenge fast finishers and stronger students to include as many new words as possible in one utterance/sentence.
- Avoid immediate corrective feedback on learners' production, especially for weaker students in step 6, and keep the feedback for later.

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A recording of Khanyisa, Josipa and Amir's webinar can be watched here:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/planning-every-learner-mini-event>

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