BRITISH COUNCIL

TeachingEnglish

Understanding my learners

Theme-based workbook

Your reflective journal and additional resources

Foreword

Welcome to the workbook for the professional development theme of Understanding my learners. Thank you for joining us to develop your skills and continue your professional development with TeachingEnglish.

We know that it's not always easy to find time for professional development, so we've designed this workbook to help you find key insights, recommended materials, reflection spaces, and practical guidance.

This workbook is the second of three teacher pathways for educators looking to develop their skills and knowledge of understanding their learners:

1. Getting started with understanding your learners – a ready-made pathway of carefully chosen learning resources and tools to get you started.
2. Going further with understanding your learners – this workbook provides guided reflection activities to help you personalise your learning pathway and take your skills to the next level.
3. Working on understanding your learning with others – a group study guide that includes practical case studies and and professional development activities to explore the theme with others.

Take the pathways that are the best fit for you – or make your own. We're looking forward to learning with you.

The TeachingEnglish team

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What is ‘Understanding my learners’?

What does Understanding my learners involve?

Understanding my learners involves recognising learners’ diverse backgrounds, aspirations, needs and learning preferences. This includes factors such as their home languages, their cultural, socio-economic and educational backgrounds, as well as their motivations, goals and social-emotional needs. It also requires valuing diversity in areas like age, gender, religion, race and special educational needs. This professional practice describes the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attributes we need to develop to inform the way we practise our teaching and support learning with learners who are individuals and part of a particular group of learners.

What can a teacher who understands their learners do?

A teacher who understands their learners can:

- ☐ create inclusive and supportive learning environments
- ☐ tailor their teaching to meet individual and group needs
- ☐ foster learner autonomy
- ☐ use their awareness of diversity to make informed decisions about their
- ☐ teaching practice
- ☐ reflect on their approach to continually improve learning outcomes.

Self-assessment test

How can you start developing your skills in different elements of Understanding my learners?

Reflecting on how well you understand your learners now is an important starting point. The way that you learn more about your class, as individuals and a group, and the most effective ways of helping them develop might be different depending on whether you are teaching face-to-face or remotely and according to the type of technology you have available.

Self-assessment test (cont)

Use the self-assessment test below to evaluate your strengths and areas of development. Give yourself between ★ (not confident) and ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ (very confident), depending on how you feel about doing each of the things.

I use my understanding and recognition of the diversity of my learners to make decisions about my teaching.	
I assess and utilise the prior knowledge, skills and attributes that learners bring to the learning process to enhance their engagement and success.	
I recognise and support the individual aspirations, goals and learning needs of my learners, including their social and emotional development.	
I develop learner independence through training in areas such as learning how to learn, goal setting and identifying preferred learning strategies.	
I plan and facilitate a positive learning environment and group dynamics in my lessons.	
I reflect on my approach to understanding my learners to improve teaching strategies and learner outcomes.	

What should you do next?

How many stars did you get? Write the total here:

0–6 stars	We think the teacher pathway will help you to develop your understanding of Understanding my learners. Try the quiz again after you've followed it to see your progress.
7–18 stars	You have a good awareness of Understanding my learners. Follow the teacher pathway with us and join our TeachingEnglish activities. Come back to the quiz to see what you've learned.
19–24 stars	You have already developed lots of skills and knowledge that help you understand your learners. Which section would you like more help with from the teacher pathway?
25–30 stars	You are an Understanding my learners champion! You are already integrating this knowledge in your teaching. Share your knowledge and skills with other teachers in our TeachingEnglish community.

What are your learning goals?

Considering the elements of Understanding my learners that are most relevant for your teaching context will help you focus your study time more effectively. Check pages two and three for a reminder of what Understanding my learners involves, your strengths and development areas. Complete the following prompts.

Which elements of Understanding my learners are most important for you and your learners?

The most useful elements of Understanding my learners in my context are ...

Knowing more about my learners will help me plan and deliver more effective lessons by ...

Consider Understanding my learners. What are your strengths?

My strengths in Understanding my learners are ...

What skills and knowledge related to Understanding my learners do you want to develop?

I need to develop ...

How can TeachingEnglish help you develop?

Whatever aspect of English teaching you want to improve, TeachingEnglish has the resources and support to help you make a difference, whether you have five minutes, an hour or more.

Find the best combination for your needs, available time and context by exploring the following options.

Online communities (5 minutes+)

A dedicated, vibrant and inclusive online English language teaching community to empower teachers and teacher educators to collaborate and share knowledge. Join the conversation and access interactive live sessions and links to further professional development opportunities on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Which TeachingEnglish online communities or social media channels will you use to connect with us?

The TeachingEnglish online communities I'd like to join are ... I might use them to ...

TeachingEnglish resources (10 minutes+)

Access lesson plans, podcasts, articles and publications to help you develop your skills and knowledge of understanding your learners. Choose from the resources on page eight or search TeachingEnglish to develop your skills.

Which kinds of resources would you use to develop your skills and knowledge of understanding your learners?

I'd like to listen to, read, watch or use resources like ...

Live events and webinars (1 hour)

Our webinars are given by TeachingEnglish community members working in classrooms throughout the world. Our free webinars for teachers are held monthly, and you will receive a certificate for participating. Many webinars are followed by additional Q&A sessions that give teachers a chance to reflect and ask questions as they bring new ideas from the webinar into their teaching. Learn more about attending live on Zoom, Facebook and YouTube, or watching a recording.

Which TeachingEnglish live events and webinars would you like to join or watch?

The TeachingEnglish live events and webinars I'd like to join or watch are ...

Training courses (12 hours+)

Explore a range of courses related to understanding your learners. Each course takes approximately 12 hours to complete, and you can access and complete the self-study modules at your own pace. Join our Courses for teachers Facebook community to share your learning with other teachers and get feedback and guidance from our experienced tutors. Learn more about current courses you can enrol on or join immediately.

Which TeachingEnglish training courses would you like to join?

The TeachingEnglish training courses I'd like to join are ...

Resources

Below you will find a selection of resources to develop your understanding and application of Understanding my learners. Use your answers on page three to guide your learning and the tick boxes to keep track of which resources you have used.

Time (mins)	Type	Resource description (tap/click to open)	Used?
5	Use	Activity (40 mins) The challenges of being a migrant	☐
10	Read	Article: Class journals	☐
10	Read	Article: Getting teenagers talking	☐
10	Read	Article: Learning circle ideas checklist	☐
10	Read	Article: Maximising the language learning of senior learners	☐
10	Read	Article: Three wishes for our learners	☐
10	Read	Article: Tips for teachers starting to teach primary	☐
10	Read	Lesson plan (60 mins): Challenges at school	☐
10	Read	Lesson plan (60 mins): Families	☐
10	Read	Lesson plan (60 mins): Favourite places	☐
10	Read	Lesson plan (60 mins): Managing emotions	☐
15	Read	Article: Addressing trauma in the classroom	☐
15	Read	Article: Counselling learners	☐
15	Read	Article: School life for learners with Special Educational Needs	☐
15	Read	Article: Teenage angst	☐
30	Watch	Video: How do you know your teaching works?	☐
35	Listen	Podcast: How can we motivate our students?	☐
35	Watch	Webinar: Action research panel discussion	☐
45	Watch	Video: Series of videos on inclusion with supporting tasks	☐
60	Listen	Podcast: Systemic action research	☐
60	Watch	Webinar: Motivating secondary learners – the ideal L2 self	☐
70	Watch	Webinar: Motivation, identity and resilience	☐
120	Read	Publication: Research in the language classroom	☐
120	Use	Handbook: A handbook for exploratory action research	☐
120	Use	Training: Gender balance toolkit	☐
180	Read	Publication: Exploratory action research case studies	☐
180	Watch	Webinars: Inclusion, neurodiversity and neuromyths in ELT	☐
180	Watch	Webinars: Planning for every learner	☐
240	Watch	Webinars: Breaking down barriers – mini-event	☐

Resources (cont)

At TeachingEnglish, we're constantly updating and adding to the selection of free articles, publications, lesson plans, live sessions and webinars available for teachers. Check our TeachingEnglish website and TeachingEnglish YouTube for the latest resources.

Use this space to note teaching ideas – and where you found them – that may help you and your learners with understanding your learners. You can record ideas from training courses, articles, podcasts, webinars or other teachers in live sessions or online communities.

An idea that may help improve my teaching is ... I discovered it in ...

What are you going to change?

Now plan to change your teaching. Starting with a SMART goal will help you make the change and better understand the impact it makes.

A SMART goal is:

- **S**pecific (What exactly do you want to achieve?)
- **M**easurable (How will you know if it happened and the difference it made?)
- **A**chievable (Is it challenging but possible?)
- **R**elevant (Does it help you and your learners?)
- **T**imebound (When will you do it?)

Look back through this workbook and think about your learners. Choose one thing you'd like to be different about your teaching or classroom experience. Write it as a SMART goal.

Something I'd like to be different in my classroom or teaching is ...

A change I can make that will help achieve that is ...

I will need ...

Some challenges might be ...

To solve those challenges, I could ...

What have you learned from making a change?

Using this reflective cycle as you work through the theme and introduce new ideas into your teaching will help you learn from experience and develop further. It can deepen your learning by guiding you to apply new ideas, assess their impact and adjust your approach. Use it after lessons, when trying new strategies or when facing challenges. By making reflection a habit, you'll continue to grow as a practitioner and better support your learners.

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

Make the change you planned in the last section, then reflect upon it. Sharing your answers to the following questions will guide you through the reflective cycle.

The change I made was ... When I made the change, my learners ...

Description

After making the change, I felt ... My learners felt ...

Feeling

Some good/bad things about the change were ... I know this because ...

Evaluation

I think things happened this way because ...

Analysis

The main things I learned from making this change to my teaching are ...

Conclusion

In future I will ... I will develop the skills and knowledge I need by ...

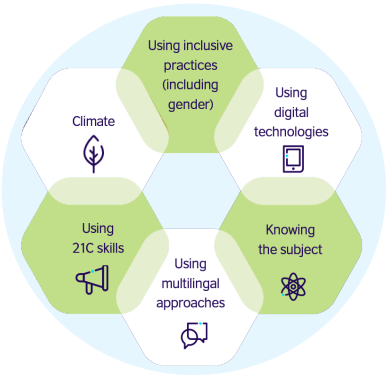
Action plan

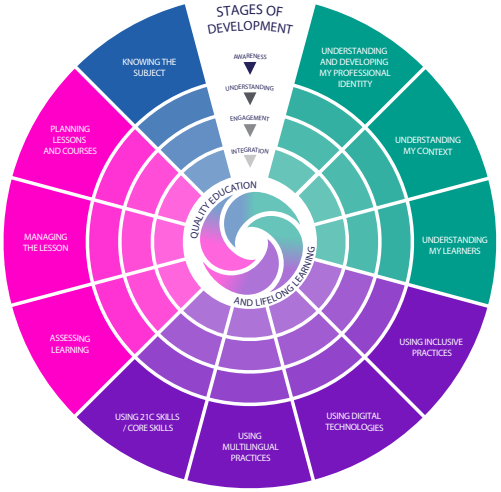
What can you do now?

Well done — you've developed the professional practice of Understanding my learners. We hope you've found this teacher pathway workbook useful.

On pages 10 and 11 you planned to introduce a change into your teaching and then reflect upon it. You can follow the same steps to experiment with other ideas you've discovered while exploring Understanding your learners. We'd love to hear how this goes – you can connect and share your experience, questions and insights with us, and our global network of English teachers in any of our online communities. Follow #UnderstandingLearners.

The British Council professional practices are deeply interconnected and not meant to stand alone. Therefore, we encourage you to take a look at and consider how you might use our CPD Framework for teachers.





Continue your learning with us by:

- Joining the conversation and following our English teacher communities on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.
- Subscribing to our newsletter
- Enroling on a free TeachingEnglish training course.
- Accessing TeachingEnglish webinars for teachers and teacher educators.
- Listening to TeachingEnglish podcasts for teachers.
- Exploring our framework for teacher knowledge and skills and other professional practices for inspiration, support and materials.
- Finding out what else is happening on TeachingEnglish.