Toolkit for inclusive teaching strategies

How to manage the environment for everybody

Module 2
Module 2: How to manage the environment for everybody

🏁 Start here!

You have five sections to complete in Module 2:

- Introduction
- Principle 1: Leverage the physical environment
- Principle 2: Improve communication in the digital environment
- Apply the strategies
- Put it into practice

Then we recommend you set up a group discussion to:

- Reflect on the module

Before you begin, we recommend that you get yourself a notebook for taking notes as you work through the toolkit.
Introduction

What’s Module 2 about?

Case study

Before we start, read the quote. Did you feel like Veronica when you started teaching online?

Veronica (remote teacher)

“My biggest fear with remote teaching was that my learners would be far away in a different environment. I was scared they’d be distracted and I wouldn’t be able to create a rapport with them.”

Why do we need to think about the learning environment?

Your remote classroom is made up of both physical and digital learning spaces. The physical space is where your learners are based, and the digital space is the environment you create in your online classroom. They both contribute to the ‘climate’ of your classroom.

Although we have less control over the physical space, we will look at how to support learners to participate from a range of different physical environments.

We will also look at how you can make your online environment more inclusive.

Are you ready to start?

Take out your notebook. As you go through this module, take notes on:

- What inclusive strategies you already use
- Why we recommend these strategies
- What other small improvements you can make to create a more inclusive practice in your classroom
Principles and strategies

Read two principles behind making your learning environments more inclusive.

Principle 1: Leverage the physical environment

Before you begin this section make a note on the following questions:

- What is the physical environment of your learners?
- Can you think of any challenges caused by their physical environment?

What is this principle?

In some remote learning contexts, each learner will be accessing the lesson from a different physical space (e.g. home), but in others all learners will be together in one location (e.g. a classroom).

Before planning your lessons, take some time to think in advance about how the physical and social aspects of the physical environment restrict or support learning.

How does this benefit our learners?

Taking a proactive approach toward the barriers in our learners’ physical environments enables us to anticipate and plan for challenges, resulting in a smoother learning experience for all.

Let’s read about three different physical learning environments.

You might want to make a note of possible disadvantages or advantages from your own context.

Physical learning environment 1:
Learners studying remotely from the classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible disadvantages</th>
<th>Possible advantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Noise</td>
<td>• Options for live group work and interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lines of sight of remote teacher</td>
<td>• Learners are already in an established 'learning environment'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remote teacher can’t see all learners</td>
<td>• Easier access to learning materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Audio issues</td>
<td>• Support mechanisms from school and class teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of interaction</td>
<td>• ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classroom management</td>
<td>• ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ...</td>
<td>• ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Physical learning environment 2:
Learners studying at home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible disadvantages</th>
<th>Possible advantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Distractions</td>
<td>● Comfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Interruptions</td>
<td>● Helps to develop autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Isolation</td>
<td>● Parents or family can help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Connectivity issues</td>
<td>● Relaxed and safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Access to device</td>
<td>● Able to learn in different environments (bedroom, garden, living room, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Domestic duties</td>
<td>● ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Added pressure from family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Privacy issues around use of camera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Physical learning environment 3:
Learners studying in a public space (e.g. a library or cafe)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible disadvantages</th>
<th>Possible advantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Distractions</td>
<td>● Access to more stimuli and ‘realia’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Connectivity issues</td>
<td>● Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Noise (e.g. in a cafe)</td>
<td>● ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Social rules, e.g. inability to talk freely in a library</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can you apply this in your online classroom?

- **Strategy 1**: Plan for interruptions
  - If it’s likely that learning will be interrupted (e.g. by poor internet connection, or domestic duties) plan a way to keep learners up to date (e.g. by sharing notes or recording the lesson)
  - If possible, be flexible about when you have breaks to accommodate interruptions
  - Share ideas and options for when there are interruptions with learners at the start of the session (e.g. ‘If internet cuts out, please spend the time journaling on the following topic’)

- **Strategy 2**: Make sure tasks are appropriate to the environment
  - If learners aren’t in a good environment for speaking, consider if it’s necessary for tasks to be completed all at once, in any particular place. Could they instead submit a video or audio recording, at a later time?
  - If learners are in a noisy classroom, set solitary reading and writing for homework and use the class time to practise communication
○ Create tasks based on the environment. Involve home or classroom situations in the lessons (e.g. ask people to bring something from their environment to show on camera)

● **Strategy 3**: Make sure tasks are appropriate to the device  
○ What are the tasks your learners are required to do? For example, will learners accessing from phones be required to read a lot of text? If so, you could set the reading task for homework and use the class time for discussion

💡 Prepare to discuss:

- How does the learning environment in your context support or restrict learning?
- What barriers do you anticipate before a class?
Principle 2: Improve communication in the digital environment

Before you begin this section make a note on the following question:

- What changes to your communication style do you make when moving from the traditional classroom to a remote setting?

What is this principle?

Communicating is an essential part of learning a language! The traditional language learning classroom can be an intimidating place for many learners, but online learning can provide ways for learners with low confidence or other learning barriers to communicate in a way that better meets their individual needs or preferences.

How does this benefit our learners?

Online learning can feel isolating for some learners. Encouraging communication and collaboration in the remote classroom can help learners to make connections with their peers and build confidence. Collaborating with learners from different backgrounds also encourages open-mindedness and a sense of belonging, which is especially important in remote learning settings.

Creating an environment with clearer visuals and written communication benefits the access, understanding, and attention of all learners, but can be especially useful for some SEN learners who may struggle with phonological processing.

How can you apply this in your online classroom?

- **Strategy 1:** Manage how learners collaborate
  
  Ask yourself these questions to review how well your learners are able to communicate together:
  
  - Are you able to put learners in groups to collaborate on your platform? (e.g. Does your school’s safeguarding policy allow the use of break-out rooms, or chat functions?)
  - Do learners have access to headphones to communicate clearly?
  - What etiquette do you set for muting, responding to others and turn taking?
  - What software can learners access to support collaboration and feedback? (e.g. Google Docs)

- **Strategy 2:** Improve the clarity of your visual communication
  
  Find a presentation, or the learning material for a recent lesson. Review the material using the following visual communication guidelines.
### Visual communication guidelines

#### Text and formatting
- Is the text large enough to be read by your learners in their context?
- Is your font readable? Some things that allow for general accessibility include:
  - Sans Serif, humanist typefaces
  - Letters spaced 0.5 apart
  - Approx size 12
- Is the layout uncluttered?
- Have you used headers where appropriate?
- Does the background colour make it easier to read? (To reduce glare between text and page try using a very pale sky blue, or beige)

#### Images and video
- Are images and graphs clear (not crowded)?
- Are videos short and clear?
- Are closed captions available?
- Do the images match the message?
- Have you used colours consistently to convey meaning?
- Have text and images been designed for ease of processing?
  
  *(Note: text is usually processed most easily when it is next to, or underneath, an image. To reduce strain on working memory, avoid placing text over the top of an image, or requiring learners to move back and forth by placing instructions or text and images on separate screens.)*

*Note: These guidelines have been written with Dyslexic learners in mind but will benefit all learners. This is not an exhaustive list, more information can be found through the [The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)](https://www.w3.org) online.*

#### Prepare to discuss:
- How can we more effectively involve our learners in the design of our learning environment?
Check your understanding

Read the scenarios with different problems from the learners’ environment. Are any of these scenarios familiar to you? What strategies could you use to manage the environment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Possible strategy to manage the environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You have one learner who accesses the class only from her mobile device. The lesson you’ve planned involves reading a text and answering questions in small groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the lesson, some learners are having internet connectivity issues, and keep coming in and out of the class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners are accessing the lesson from different environments. Some are able to talk freely, but one is in a library and unable to talk.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example answers: 1. Ask learners at the beginning of the course what kind of device they will be accessing from. Set reading tasks for homework. 2. Give learners options about what to do when the lesson is interrupted, or the connection fails. Provide these options in advance (e.g. by email) in a place they can see without being in the lesson. 3. Provide the option to submit answers to speaking tasks before the lesson. Ask learners to listen and respond to the ‘silent’ learners’ responses. Give learners advance notice that the lesson will require a lot of speaking so they can prepare to be in a good location.
Apply to your classroom

Think about an activity that you are planning to do with your class in the next week. Make notes about:

- one or two ways you can take advantage of the learners’ physical environment in this lesson
- a change you can make to improve the ways learners communicate.

Make some notes to share with in your group discussion on:

- the changes you will make
- the benefits for your learners
- any challenges you see with using these strategies.

👏 Nice work. You’re done for today! Your next task is to meet your group to discuss your ideas from the module.
Reflect on the module as a group

Welcome to your group discussion for Module 2 on managing the environment.

This is a self-facilitated peer-learning session. Please follow the guide to go through the activities. Nominate a person for each letter A, B, and C.

When it is your turn, lead the activity by reading the instructions aloud to the group and ask any questions. See below for details of each activity.

Note: The group discussion is a powerful way to share ideas and build a sense of community and accountability around inclusivity at your school. However if you’re not able to join a group discussion in your context, the activities can also be completed alone as reflection and review tasks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity leader</th>
<th>Activity name</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Check in and introductions</td>
<td>Five minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Group review</td>
<td>Ten minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Group reflection</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check in and introduction - led by Teacher ‘A’

Before you begin, prepare for the session with a short ‘check in’. A check in is a short pause at the beginning of a meeting to reflect on how you feel at this moment.

It might be that you have just had a very stressful class, or maybe you were running late today and feel in a rush. Sharing with the group helps to build empathy. When we have shared we are ready to begin the discussion.

Look around your environment and find an object near you that represents how your day is going so far. Then, introduce yourself: tell the group your name and share the object you have chosen and why.

Spend about five minutes on this section.

Review - led by Teacher ‘B’

Choose a strategy and take turns and tell each other one or two things about this strategy.

Spend about ten minutes on this section.

1. Leverage the physical environment
2. Improve communication in the digital environment
Reflection - led by Teacher ‘C’

Discuss the following reflection questions from the module as a group. Spend about 15 minutes on this section.

1. How does the learning environment in your context support or restrict learning? What barriers do you anticipate before a class?
2. How can we more effectively involve our learners in the design of our learning environment?

If you're interested in this topic check out the links for further reading: