

Teaching with Purpose: Responsive Practice for All Learners

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1. Investigation: Understanding Learners Beyond Assumptions



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“The problem is not that we make assumptions.
It’s that we forget they are assumptions.”

A Teacher's Reality

- Learner diversity without placement data
- Assumptions about:
 - ✓ ability
 - ✓ motivation
 - ✓ or behaviour
- Limited or no evidence of learner needs

Exercise 1: What Do I Notice First?

Task: You enter a new class. Within minutes, you form opinions.

Write: 5 things you notice immediately. (*focus on what you can actually see or hear*)

Write: What makes each one noticeable? (e.g. speed, volume, participation)

Pair Share (x2): 7 minutes

Compare what you notice (sharing different perspectives)

Exercise 1: What Do I Notice First?

Examples:

- ✓ Who speaks first
- ✓ Who avoids eye contact
- ✓ Who starts the task immediately
- ✓ Who finishes quickly
- ✓ Who uses L1
- ✓ Who asks for help
- ✓ Who watches others before acting
- ✓ Who dominates interaction

Exercise 1: What Do I Notice First?

1. Participation patterns

- who speaks / who doesn't
- who volunteers vs waits

2. Task behaviour

- starts immediately / delays
- finishes early / doesn't finish

3. Interaction style

- leads / follows
- works alone / with others

4. Language use

- accuracy vs fluency
- use of L1
- risk-taking vs avoidance

5. Non-verbal signals

- eye contact
- body posture
- signs of confidence or hesitation

Assumption vs Interpretation (quick reality check)

Assumption = jumping to a conclusion
(often fixed, untested, and riskier)

Interpretation = making sense of what you see
(can be reasonable, grounded, tentative)

Interpretation: multiple experimentation → evidence

““Not all assumptions are wrong, but untested assumptions are risky.”

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Group Work **EXAMPLE SCENARIOS (x3): 10 minutes**

You observe the following in a lesson:

- Student A completes tasks very quickly but makes frequent mistakes.
- Student B does not speak unless called on, but written work is accurate.
- Student C starts tasks late and often watches others first.

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Group Work (x3): 20 minutes

- 1) What **assumptions** might a teacher make based on each statement?
- 2) Offer interpretations for each statement (there can be many, **share two** for each)
- 3) What might the **learner need**? (based on your interpretations)
- 4) What would you do **next lesson**?

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Bear in Mind:

- 1) Each group will present their findings after time is up.
- 2) Each teacher will present one case: one student per teacher.
- 3) The other groups will observe and contemplate.
- 4) There is no right answer. We're making assumptions and driving towards an interpretation. (evidence can be only acquired in a live setting after trial and error).

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Careful!

fast = strong ✗

fluent = competent ✗

quiet = weak ✗

helpful = positive ✗

L1 use = lack of ability ✗

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Group Work SET1 (x3): 10 minutes

You observe the following in a lesson:

- Student A does not start the task even after instructions are given
- Student B writes slowly but produces accurate sentences
- Student C avoids participating and keeps their head down

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Group Work SET2 (x3): 10 minutes

You observe the following in a lesson:

- Student A speaks fluently but consistently goes off-task during activities
- Student B waits before starting and watches others
- Student C completes tasks quietly and accurately but does not participate in any discussion

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Group Work SET3 (x3): 10 minutes

You observe the following in a lesson:

- Student A asks multiple questions before starting a task
- Student B finishes early and becomes distracted
- Student C gives short but correct answers (speaking and writing)

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Group Work SET4 (x3): 10 minutes

You observe the following in a lesson:

- Student A rarely makes mistakes but gets frustrated/angry when corrected
- Student B participates throughout the lesson but with frequent errors
- Student C starts tasks but never finishes them on time

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Group Work SET5 (x3): 10 minutes

You observe the following in a lesson:

- Student A copies from the board but does not attempt tasks independently
- Student B attempts all tasks but with frequent errors
- Student C finishes early, makes minor mistakes, and asks for extra work

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Group Work SET6 (x3): 10 minutes

You observe the following in a lesson:

- Student A dominates group work and often answers instead of others
- Student B disturbs the lesson with constant movement and occasional verbal disturbances
- Student C stops working and waits until the others finish and share their answers in class

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Group Work SET7 (x3): 10 minutes

You observe the following in a lesson:

- Student A participates actively in L1 (language 1 - mother tongue) during lesson but not in English
- Student B lacks basic manners and is rude towards their teacher and classmates
- Student C says the lesson is boring and does not participate

Exercise 2: Evidence and Interpretation

Mixed Level Without Labels

Group Work **SET8** (x3): 10 minutes

You observe the following in a lesson:

- Student A participates verbally, but refuses to do any writing task (lowers head, looks away, verbal refusal etc.)
- Student B goes to great lengths to use AI for his writing tasks (in class), even though his abilities indicate he doesn't need it
- Student C frequently participates but always copies his classmates during tests

Resources for Inclusion & Empowerment

Using Inclusive Practices

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/inclusive-practices>

Understanding My Learners

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/understanding-learners>

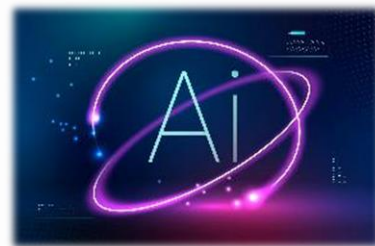
New Lesson Plans: Listening & Empathy

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/community/top-stories/new-lesson-plans-listening-and-empathy>



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Resources for Inclusion & Empowerment



*AI futuristic technology background
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AI & Inclusion

British Council. (2025, May 23). AI & inclusion webinars. TeachingEnglish.

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/ai-inclusion-webinars>

British Council. (2025, June 7). AI for inclusion: Q&A [Video]. YouTube.

https://youtu.be/inbNO_Zj7Ho

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<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/professional-development-pathways/pathways-ai-language-teaching>

British Council. (2025, July). South Asia TeachingEnglish Online Conference 2025. British Council Bangladesh. <https://www.britishcouncil.org.bd/en/programmes/teach/sa2025>

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THANKS!

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