



Learning Theories in Action:

A guide for teachers



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Teachers: How to use this book

This publication is called 'Learning Theories in Action' because we believe that as well as reading about particular theories, it is important to actively and practically apply these theories so that we are able to deepen our understanding of how these theories work in practice.

This book is a tool for those wanting to learn because fundamentally, being a good teacher is a never-ending process of learning about our profession, ourselves and the children in our care. It is a process of exploring inside yourself as much as performance in the classroom – what kind of teacher do you believe you should be? The way you interact with children will reflect the questions you have asked yourself over time. Your actions will show what you hold as your core values, your sense of mission and your identity. If, when you think about yourself as a teacher, you feel you can learn more and keep improving your practice then this publication is for you!

One more important thing to consider. Learners are rarely alone. This is also the case with teachers. The best way to use this publication is to share it with your colleagues. Questions are a big part of each section. These are good to ask yourself but they are better to discuss with others. Remember, be kind and generous with your colleagues. It is not an easy thing for any of us to share our ideas or examples from our experience. We don't want to feel judged or criticised for sharing, we want to feel supported and valued. It is up to you to make your colleagues feel that way.

Each section of this publication has a very similar layout. In turn we consider a number of important theories which all have very practical implications for your practice as a teacher in the classroom. None of them require the use of technology, none of them require advanced training to implement. The six parts of each section of the publication are:



What is it?

This paragraph explains, very briefly, what the 'big idea' is and the reason why it is important. Some refer to special thinkers, researchers who have developed learning theories that have stood the test of time and research. Others introduce important issues which may cause you to approach how you teach and how you think about your learners very differently.

What does this mean for classroom practice?

Having introduced the 'big idea' this part gives you some practical ideas on how it might be used successfully in the classroom. These are not commands – they are suggestions which might be more relevant to some classrooms or situations than to others. None require extra technology or the purchase of extra resources.

Inquiry questions

These questions are designed to get you thinking. Some of them are questions you should ask yourself or another colleague about how you approach teaching and learning. The answers to these can tell you a lot about yourself and your deep beliefs about what kind of teacher you want to be. Other questions are designed to ask pupils in the classroom. They are not the only ones you can ask. Instead, they are examples of how to structure interesting questions that lead to different challenges and learning experiences for your pupils.

Theory in pictures

These pictures are designed to help you organise your thinking. They will not be able to summarise the whole topic but they will illustrate one part of it. This may help you think more clearly or differently about the ideas in that section. Just like questions, the pictures can help begin interesting and fruitful conversations with your colleagues as you begin to see some similar and some different things in each picture.

Links to the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) syllabus

These links explain where these theories are explored in the ITT syllabus. The syllabus provides further ideas about how theories can be explored in the classroom as well as how they could be explored with groups of teachers learning together. Links to the Initial Teacher Training syllabus for South Sudan. Find the syllabus here: <http://bit.ly/3Xmwczs>

Useful Resources

This list of further resources is to give you an insight into other ways of thinking about each particular learning theory. They are there for you to explore, to deepen your understanding of how the theory was developed and what relevance it has to your own practice. In addition to the links on each page, all the links in this publication and more can be found on the Curriculum Foundation website.

Go to: www.curriculumfoundation.org/blog/learning-theories-in-action



Teacher Educators: How to use this book

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This book is a tool for those wanting to learn because fundamentally, being a good teacher or teacher-educator is a never-ending process of learning about ourselves, our students and the children they will be responsible for. Learning is a process of exploring inside yourself as much as what we pass on to our students in the classroom – what kind of teacher do you believe you, or they, should be? The way you interact with students and pupils will reflect the questions you have asked yourself over time. Your actions will show what you hold as your core values, your sense of mission and your identity. Teacher education is a never-ending process of reflection and improvement, learning from your own experiences and from those of others too.

One more important thing to consider. This publication is intended for you to read and think about personally, to refresh your understanding and give you new perspectives on important theories in teaching and learning. It is also intended as a tool you can share with your students. The information can be passed on but more importantly it can be a tool to help discussion. Through talking about these ideas all of us learn – you probably more than your students because you have more experience to relate to. Modelling the process of being a learner, humble, fearless and attentive, is possibly the most powerful tool a teacher educator has to demonstrate good practice their students.

Please be kind and generous with those you talk with. It is not an easy thing for any of us to share our ideas or examples from our experience. Students will want your approval and your support. No one wants to feel judged or criticised for sharing, we want to feel supported and valued. It does not mean all points of view are equally correct but everyone who shares should be recognised for their contribution.

Each section of this publication has a very similar layout. In turn we consider a number of important theories which all have very practical implications for your students' practice as a teacher in the classroom. None of them require the use of technology, none of them require advanced training to implement. The six parts of each section of the publication are:

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Inquiry questions

These questions are designed to get you thinking. Some of them are questions you should ask yourself how you approach your own teaching and learning. The answers to these can tell you a lot about yourself and your deep beliefs about the kind of teacher you have been and how you continue to change in the future. Other questions are designed to ask pupils in the classroom (which in turn gives you the opportunity to talk about how and where they could use them – what they would need to consider or to be concerned about). They are not the only ones that can be asked. They are examples of how to structure interesting questions that lead to different challenges and learning experiences for your pupils.



Theory in pictures

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1: Behaviourism

What is Behaviourism?

Behaviourism sees learning as a process of changing the behaviour of the learner through conditioning. Humans learn because they associate a sensation or experience with an outcome. Learners come to associate a particular behaviour with a reward (or the absence of a reward for an undesirable behaviour) and this encourages positive learning outcomes.

Later, behaviourism influenced Social Learning Theory. This theory stresses the importance of learning through experience and the imitation of others. Children will observe and later reproduce behaviours they have seen with an expectation of achieving very similar results. This in turn informs their expectations of their own performance (self-efficacy). If students believe they can achieve, they have a better chance of doing so.

What does this mean for classroom practice?

Behaviourism has influenced many aspects of classroom management. The role of the teacher is to guide learners to produce desirable behaviours by rewarding desirable behaviours, not undesirable ones.

Many classes have clear rewards and consequences when children do the right or the wrong things. These are sometimes in the form of class contracts and reward charts.

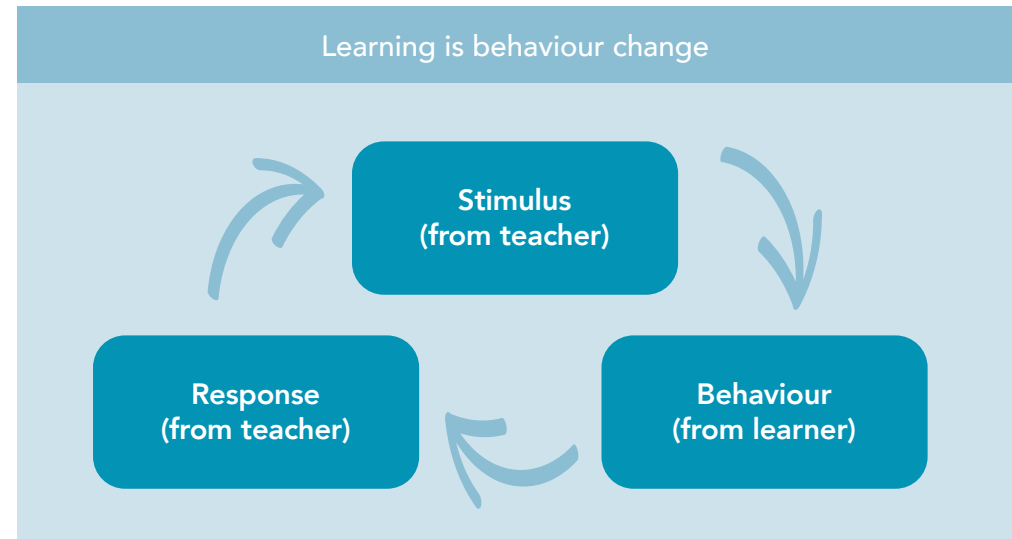
Behaviourist teaching focuses on observable behaviours and outcomes. There is an emphasis on regular assessment and measurement of change.

Social learning theory emphasizes the importance of imitation, demonstration of good learning practices, student self-belief and good adult role models.

Inquiry questions

- Do you think that we can find out how human beings learn by observing animals?
- Why are rewards more effective than punishments for long-term learning?
- Do learners do what teachers say? Or do they do what they see teachers do?
- How much of your learning comes from observing others?
- Who are the greatest teachers of children and why?

Behaviourism in pictures



Link to South Sudan ITT Syllabus:

Course 1: How children Learn (1:1 Knowledge of Learning theories)

Course 2: Teaching and Learning (2:4 A repertoire of strategies)

Course 3: Classroom management (3:1 Classroom management)

Course 9: Assessment (9:2 Using learning outcomes)

Useful Resources

Free book chapter outlining behaviourist and constructivist ideas:

<http://bit.ly/3ACPIOp>

Social Learning Theory: Children learning from adult behaviour – a video explaining the bobo doll experiment.

<http://bit.ly/3ACPXsN>

2: Constructivism

What is Constructivism?

Constructivism: Learning is a process by which we construct knowledge (or meaning), rather than receiving it. This changed the way in which people saw the learning process. It now underpins education across the world.

Constructivists see learning as a process of constructing meaning based on a learner's direct experience. The way in which they construct that meaning is influenced by their emotional and mental stage of development.

Meaning is constructed through experimentation with the environment and through interaction between children. Learners construct mental models, schema, as they explore the world. With each experience, they add to their models (assimilation) or they change their models to better fit reality (accommodation).

What does this mean for classroom practice?

All of us, particularly young children, learn best through activity, doing things, rather than by sitting and listening.

They should be allowed to learn from their mistakes, because this is how they construct meaning. A teacher's focus should be on the process of learning, and not just the outcome. Learning needs plenty of opportunity for interaction between children of the same age. Through exploring and communication they are able to try out their ideas and build a better model of the world around them.

Up to the age of about eleven years old, children cannot learn well by sitting still and listening. They need to have actual objects to touch and manipulate in order to understand the ideas behind them.

Inquiry questions

- Do we all experience the world in the same way or differently?
- Is a mistake a bad thing when you are learning?
- Is 'play' learning or is it a break from learning?
- How do you explore something new?

Constructivism in pictures



Link to South Sudan ITT Syllabus:

Course 1: How children Learn (1:1 Knowledge of Learning Theories)

Course 2: Teaching and Learning (2:3 Encouraging Creativity and Independence)

Course 3: Classroom management (3:3 Creating learning environments)

Useful Resources

Watch this video to understand Piaget's Theory of Development. Do you give children the chance to explore the world and construct meaning?

<http://bit.ly/3GAE9em>

Read this research article and think about the way you use resources for learning. Do you make space for discussion and exploration?

<http://bit.ly/3GCYn7w>

Watch this video to understand Piaget's Schema: Accommodation and Assimilation of New Information. Do you tell your students information or do you let them discover for themselves?

<http://bit.ly/3Xn8hQw>

3: Social Constructivism

What is Social Constructivism?

Social Constructivism stresses that learning is a social process that takes place through language and in a particular context (the culture and the location). Learners need to talk and discuss new ideas to negotiate shared understanding of the world.

Social Constructivism sees learning as an active process - learning through doing. But Social Constructivists do not see cognitive development happening through fixed stages. Instead, learners grow in their use of language and in their experience, able to organise their ideas into more complex forms.

This theory also emphasises the role of the teacher or a more experienced other person as essential to encourage learning and the development of new skills.

What does this mean for classroom practice?

Learners need small challenges that they can complete with support from either an adult or a more competent other person (like an older learner). Over time they get better at these and then need less support to complete them. This is called scaffolding.

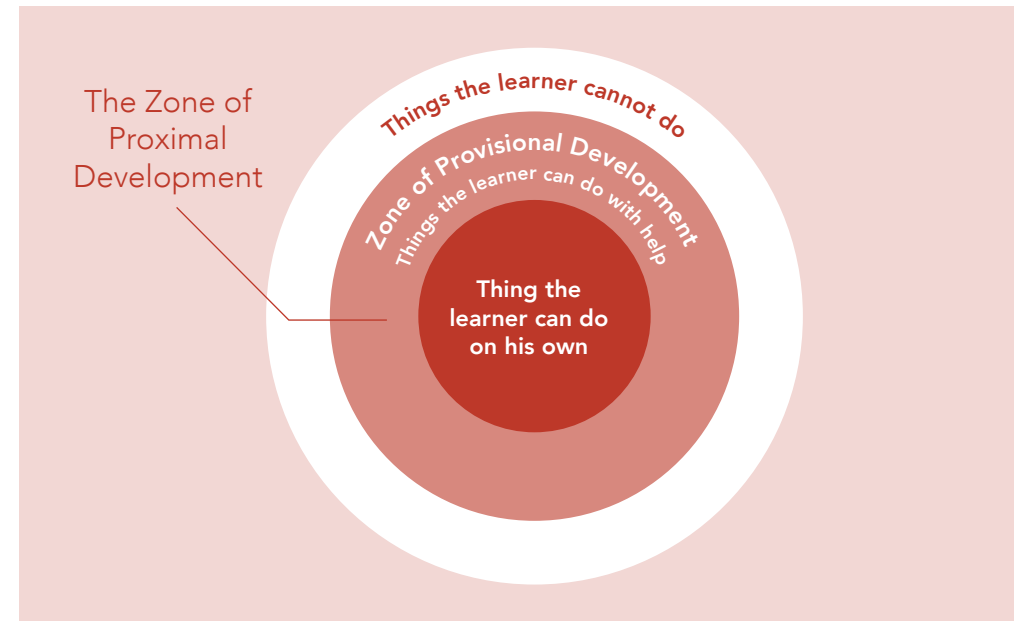
Sometimes children need challenges that they can complete only with the help of a teacher or a more experienced person. This is called the Zone of Proximal Development – the gap between things children can do on their own and the things they cannot do at all.

Play is very important for learning – it is where children experiment with abilities and challenges which are currently beyond them but which they may experience

Inquiry questions

- Can you think of a time when needed help to do something you could not do on your own, who helped you?
- Do you create opportunity for collaborative learning and discussion?
- Are learners sometimes supported by more skilled partners or adults?
- Do you teach how to use key words (and not just the key words themselves)?

Social Constructivism in pictures



Link to South Sudan ITT Syllabus:

Course 1: How children Learn (1:1 Knowledge of Learning Theories)

Course 2: Teaching and Learning (2:3 Encouraging Creativity and Independence)

Course 3: Classroom management (3:3 Creating learning environments)

Course 4: Language development (4:1 Theory background & the importance of talk)

Useful Resources

A video summarising the main ideas of Lev Vygotsky, the first Social Constructivist:
<http://bit.ly/3ETZYEo>

A blog post summarising the ideas of Piaget, Vygotsky and contrasting the two thinkers:
<http://bit.ly/3gp8Dpb>

4: Active Learning

What is Active Learning?

Whilst the teacher or other adults can be a real help for learners, they do also need to learn to become independent learners when they can.

Active learning emphasizes making meaning through experience and action by developing their existing knowledge and skills to achieve deeper levels of understanding. Active learning emphasizes the ability to analyze, evaluate and synthesize ideas (the higher order skills of Bloom's Taxonomy).

In an active learning approach, learning is not only about the content, but is also about the process. Active learning develops students' autonomy and their ability to learn independently. Active learning gives students greater involvement and control over their learning. This means that students are better able to continue learning once they have left school and college.

What does this mean for classroom practice?

Physical, direct action and cognitive engagement (not just passive sitting and listening) has an important impact on the learner's brain. Repeated experiences (doing things more than once) and challenges like problem solving strengthen the synapses in our brains, building learning that is more transferrable and more long-lasting.

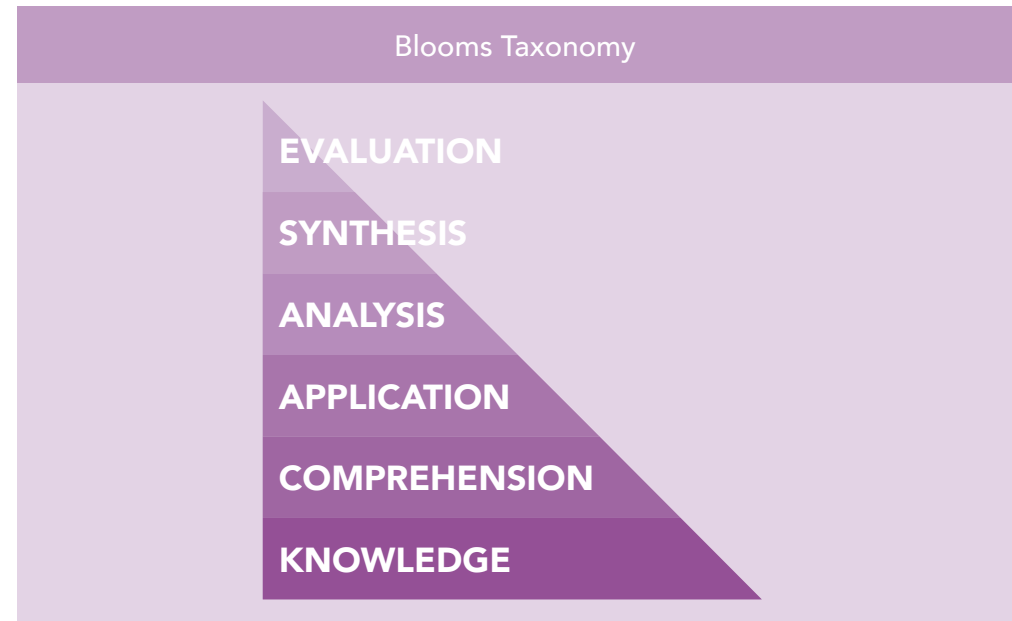
The more that there is practical learning in every day contexts (or play contexts) the better for learners. Learners need to feel they can direct their own learning and explore different areas for themselves. They also need to be able to play with and observe other children who will give them ideas and inspiration for their own activity.

This is most important for younger children but if you can do this for learners of any age then it provides an important opportunity for development.

Inquiry questions

- Where do my learners find things out?
- Are my pupils just repeating what they have been told?
- Have I given students enough time to discuss this question?
- Do any students have previous experience of this topic?
- Have I reminded my learners of past learning in this area?

Active Learning in pictures



Link to South Sudan ITT Syllabus:

Course 1: How children learn (1:3 Higher order thinking skills)

Course 2: Teaching and Learning (2:1 Creating learning opportunities)

Course 3: Classroom Management (3:3 Creating Learning Environments)

Useful Resources

Introducing Active Learning for older students (but still relevant to Primary School) – advice from Cornell University:

<http://bit.ly/3TWocCy>

A blog post on Active Learning in the Early Years:

<http://bit.ly/3GzhAqr>

5: Creativity

What is Creativity?

Creativity is something that everyone recognises as important for future life and work, like language or mathematics. However, there is confusion over what it actually is. Creativity (with a big 'C') is found in great works of art or music and reserved only for the very few. However, creativity (with a small 'c') is something we all need every day. It is nothing more or less than the everyday solutions we find for new problems. This means that creativity is something we can practice and we can learn. It is not only related to a few subjects or areas – sciences, arts, technologies, or languages – all need learners to develop creative solutions.

Creativity is a social process where learners can support each other to develop new solutions to the challenges they face. Yes, individuals have brilliant ideas, but teachers must always be aware of the social context in which ideas develop.

What does this mean for classroom practice?

Creativity must start with the teacher – they have to model this as a way of thinking and learning.

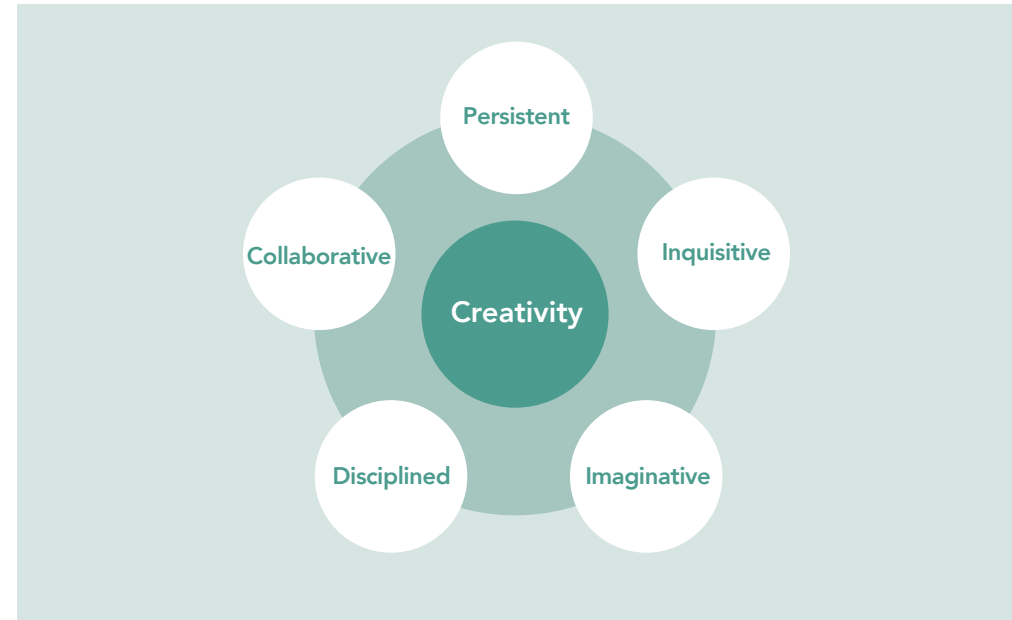
A great way to do this is to begin a new topic with key inquiry questions – ones to which there is no correct answer (or ones to which the answer is not yet known). The teacher makes time and space for activities which allow learners to be curious, maybe extending beyond the classroom or beyond the school day.

Learners have time to play and to experiment. Learners are asked to think of original solutions and their ideas are valued. Ideas can be improved by critical reflection (which should be a supportive and positive experience). There is respect for diversity and learners are encouraged to see the creativity in other people. Creative activity involves learners as co-designers – the teacher does not have all the power all the time.

Inquiry questions

- Do I already know the answer to the question I am asking my students?
- Is this information to be learned or a problem learners can solve?
- When I start questions, do I start with words like... "I wonder..." "What would happen if..." "What if...?"
- Do I believe I am creative? What have I done that is creative today?

Creativity in pictures



Link to South Sudan ITT Syllabus:

Course 1: How children learn (1:4 The importance of interest, enjoyment & relationships)

Course 2: Teaching and Learning (2:3 Encouraging creativity & independence)

Useful Resources

Short clips on teaching creativity in schools:

<http://bit.ly/3tSDo8U>

Exemplar lessons plans for lessons focused on creativity:

<http://bit.ly/3UZKcgZ>

Mpofu, E., Myambo, K., Mogaji, A. A., Mashego, T. A., & Khaleefa, O. H. (2006). African perspectives on creativity. The international handbook of creativity, 465.

<http://bit.ly/3EtiCSj>

6: Language Development

What is Language Development?

Many benefits of multi-lingual education:

Increased education access: Children who understand the language of instruction are more likely to enter school on time and attend regularly.

Improved learning outcomes: Being able to understand the language used in the classroom helps learning of academic content.

Facilitation of child-centered learning: If learners and teachers share a common language, they can engage together more actively.

Improved gender equity: Education in the first language increases girls' enrolment, attendance, and school participation.

Accurate assessment of student learning: When students can express themselves in a familiar language, teachers can better monitor and evaluate learning outcomes and identify which students need further assistance.

Increased cost-effectiveness: Teaching children in a language they understand reduces repetition, dropouts, and poor learning outcomes which is more cost-effective for the country.

What does this mean for classroom practice?

To develop good language skills children need an environment that is rich in talk, stories and books. Children's efforts at early writing need to be valued and they need to be listened to. Most of all they need lots of time to talk both to adults and to each other.

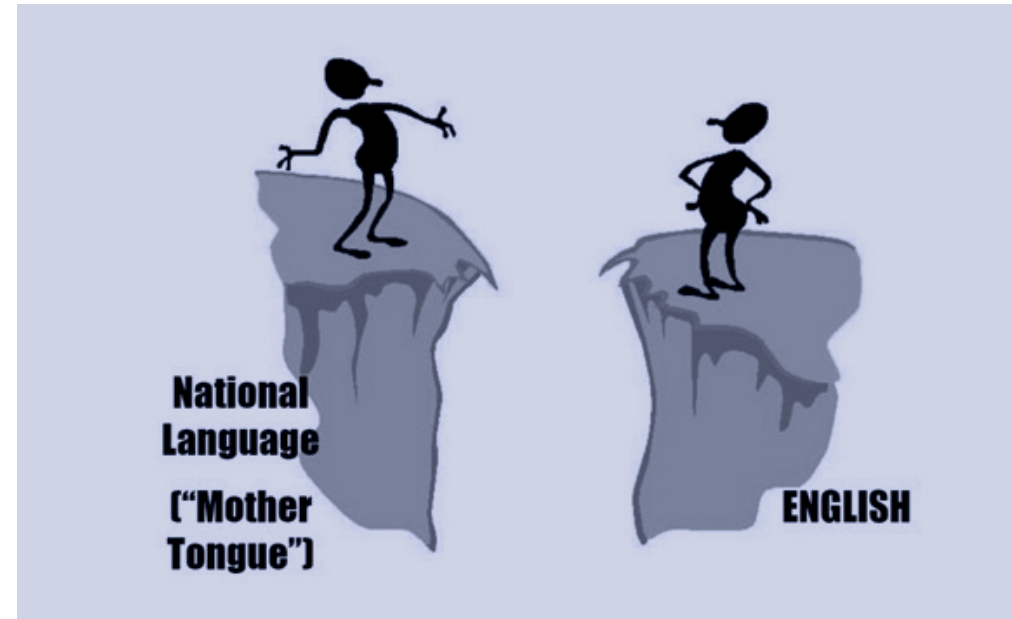
A teacher should try to use children's mother tongue where possible, if necessary learning a few words in the language if it is unfamiliar to them. Encouraging children to share stories, rhymes or games in their language.

Instruction in the mother tongue is a great opportunity to involve parents, family members and the wider community in the education of children as they have memories and experiences which they can share and teach which relate to the language and culture of the learner.

Inquiry questions

- What was the first language you learned to speak from your parents/family?
- How many languages can you speak?
- How many languages can you read and write?
- Which language did you learn to read first?
- Do you think being literate in your mother tongue is important?
- What difference would it make in your community if the next generation could read and write your language?
- Are there many books about your area? What are they? What languages are they written in?

Language Development in pictures



Link to South Sudan ITT Syllabus:

Course 4: Language Development (4:1 .Theory, background & the importance of talk)

Course 4: Language Development (4:6 The transition to English)

Useful Resources

Mother Tongue Education matters
<http://bit.ly/3EBctUm>

Questions and answers for school leaders, teachers and communities
<http://bit.ly/3i48d88>

Resources for Mother Tongue Education from UNESCO
<http://bit.ly/3GwYtNU>

7: Classroom Management

What is Classroom Management?

Teachers have many pedagogic strategies available to them to influence learning. The most effective teachers are personally more organised than others. They take more time to question students, to explain what is required and to give feedback to students who are having difficulties.

Fundamentally this comes from their belief in what they see their role as a teacher to be. They see it as focusing on interaction with people and not simply a custodial role. They work with groups of learners when possible and do not always talk to the whole class at once. They do not feel personally threatened or angered by undesirable behaviour, they deal with it calmly.

Finally, they have a strong sense of self-efficacy. That is they believe that they can manage the class and the learning successfully, learning from their mistakes and

What does this mean for classroom practice?

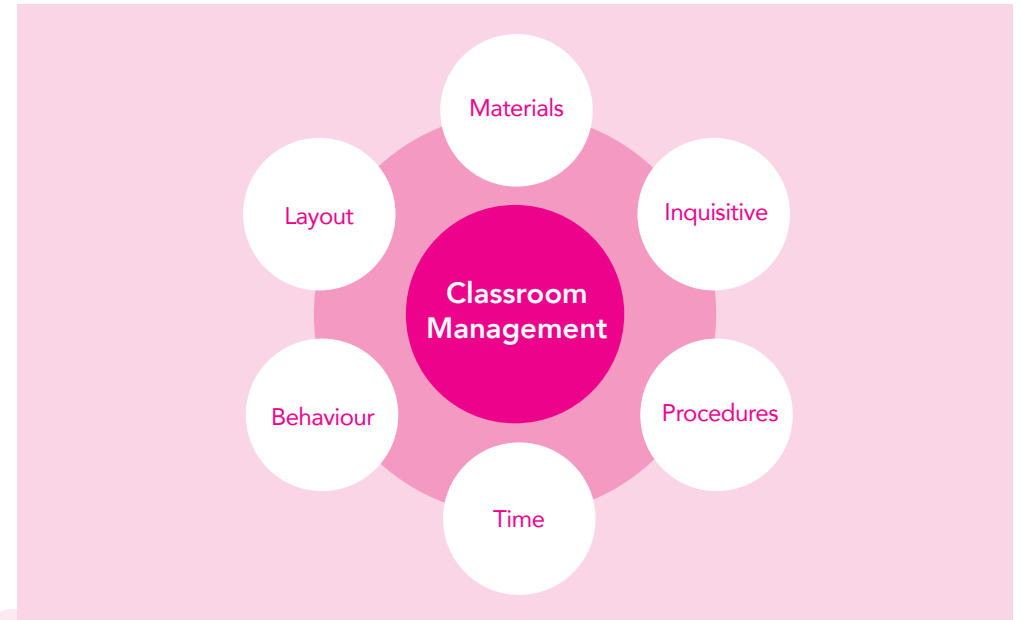
Consider these elements in your planning and practice:

1. Do you have the materials you need to teach what you want to?
2. How will you give instruction – to the class? To a group?
3. Do the students understand how you will organise the activities – do they have clear routines?
4. How much time have you got for your lesson – are your goals realistic?
5. Do you set clear expectations for good behaviour – how do you reward this?
6. How is your classroom set out – is there any way it could be better organised?

Inquiry questions

- Do I know the names of all my students?
- When was the last time I talked in a group with this student?
- What did I do well today to support better learning that I should do again tomorrow?
- What should I stop doing because it is not working as well as I would like?
- What should I start doing to improve learning in my class?

Classroom Management in pictures



Link to South Sudan ITT Syllabus:

Course 3: Classroom Management (3:1 Class Management; 3.3 Creating learning environments)

Useful Resources

Behaviour management is not class management

<http://bit.ly/3EtnWfK>

Muchena, K. C., & Moalisi, W. T. S. (2018). Teacher efficacy and classroom management in Africa: a meta-analysis. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 13(2), 26-35.

<http://bit.ly/3Eto6fU>

8: Formative Assessment

What is Formative Assessment?

Formative assessment is the process of finding out what a student has learned (or not) and identifying what they need to do to develop next. The shift away from Learning Outcomes that focus mainly on knowledge to Learning Outcomes that focus on skills and deeper understanding. The formative assessment of knowledge is relatively straightforward, but formative assessment that focus on skills and understanding requires different approaches.

The role of the teacher in the formative assessment of skills and understanding becomes much more important. It is not to write tests for students, but to make professional judgements about students' learning in the course of the normal teaching and learning process.

Most importantly, it is the formative assessment strategies that need to be used to ensure that learning is effectively monitored and supported at frequent intervals throughout a lesson to ensure that misconceptions and uncertainties are corrected at timely intervals.

What does this mean for classroom practice?

When assessing knowledge-based Learning Outcomes, teachers will typically present a task or activity that begins with the lower order Bloom's Taxonomy verbs including: "state", "name", "list", "describe", "label", "write", "recall".

When assessing students' understanding, teachers will typically use verbs like "explain", "compare", "predict", "outline".

When assessing skills, teachers will need to set relevant mental or physical tasks or activities connected to the Learning Outcome and observe/ assess students' abilities using verbs like "carry out", "construct", "perform", "investigate", "carry out".

Inquiry questions

- By using the Learning Outcomes as criteria for formative assessment, teachers can assess the pupils' learning in knowledge, skills and understanding. For example (from a geography class):
- Knowledge: Do they know effects of the human activity on climate change?
- Skills: Can they draw and label maps that show the physical features?
- Understanding: Do they understand the processes leading to the formation of the key physical features?

Formative Assessment in pictures

Diagram: Self-assessment with KWL

What I know (K)	What I want to know (W)	What I have learned (L)

Link to South Sudan ITT Syllabus:

Course 9: Course 9: Assessment (9:1 Principles of assessment; 9:2 Using learning outcomes; 9:3 Assessment methods; 9:4 Using assessment to improve learning)

Useful Resources

Prof. Dylan William on Formative Assessment
<http://bit.ly/3tT9wJQ>

A Formative Assessment case study from Ethiopian schools
<https://uni.cf/3TYr4ys>

Resources to help teachers design effective formative feedback:
<http://bit.ly/3VeWFgw>

9: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

What is Special Educational Needs and Disabilities?

Every child has the right to education. That includes children with disabilities. Different countries have different approaches to this issue. Some deny students with disabilities access to any education (Exclusion). Some systems educate students with disabilities in separate schools and they do not mix with students without disabilities (Segregation). Some place students with disabilities in regular schools but don't really try to change these schools to help those students fit in – this is something they have to do by themselves (Integration). Finally, some systems try to change schools so that all education is accessible to as many learners as possible just as they are – without them trying to be different (Inclusion).

This may require changes to how and what is taught, to school policies and to the training of teachers. If done well, inclusive education leads to better learning for all students, it is more cost effective and it builds future societies which are more inclusive and together.

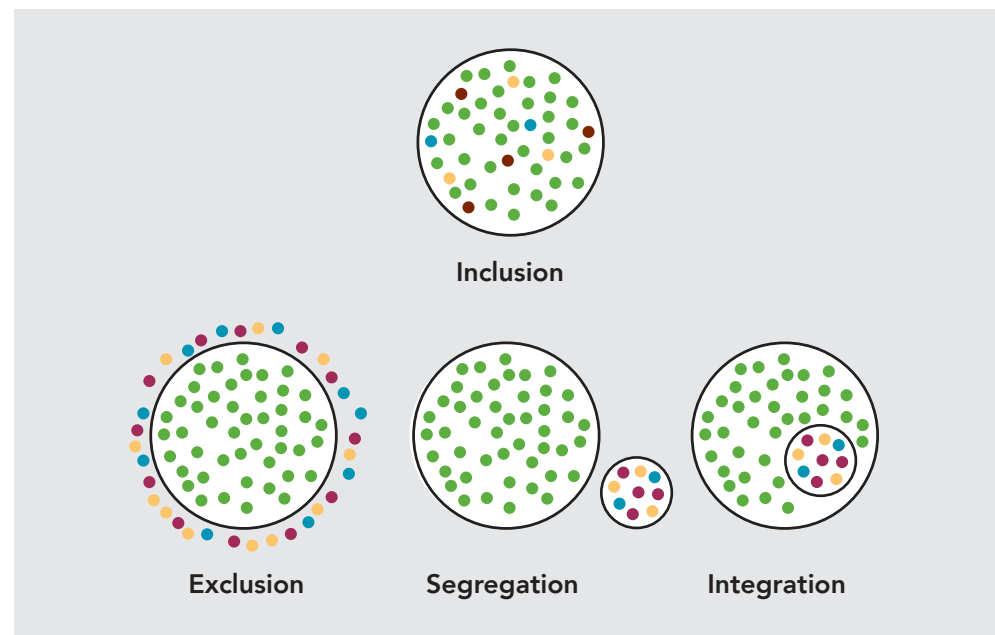
What does this mean for classroom practice?

An inclusive classroom is based on the belief that all learners, even if they have special educational needs and disabilities have a lot to contribute and the same right to learn as any other person. The teacher needs to model this belief for others – to make it clear that all are welcome in their class. Inclusive learning can mean changing the way activities are designed or presented to make them more accessible to everyone. Varying activities and watching the results (through formative assessment and observation) can help you find out what works best for your students.

Inquiry questions

- How can I create a spirit where everyone is valued?
- Is there anything I can DO to help my students learning?
- Is there anything my students need to help their learning?
- Do I always teach in the same way and is this helpful for everyone in my class or do I vary the way I teach?

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in pictures



Link to South Sudan ITT Syllabus:

Course 8: Inclusive Education (8:1 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities; 8:4 Creating inclusive environments)

Useful Resources

Disability Equality Education – a case study from South Africa:
<http://bit.ly/3i6hFrp>

Good inclusive teaching practices from South Africa:
<http://bit.ly/3AwVaCj>

A UNICEF information booklet on inclusive education:
<https://uni.cf/3XlstST>

10: Gender Equality

What is Gender Equality?

Improving society: Girls' education goes beyond getting girls into school. It is also about ensuring that girls learn and feel safe while in school. They should have the opportunity to complete all levels of education acquiring the knowledge and skills to compete in the labor market. They should also learn the socio-emotional and life skills necessary adapt in a changing world and make decisions about their own lives.

Improving the economy: Better educated women tend to be more informed about nutrition and healthcare, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and their children are usually healthier, should they choose to become mothers. They are more likely to participate in the formal labor market and earn higher incomes.

What does this mean for classroom practice?

In the classroom it is up to you to create an environment where girls feel as welcome to learn as boys. Teachers positively influence their classes by varying the kinds of stories they choose (do they have stereotypical characters or ones which challenge accepted roles?).

Teachers have to reflect on their own beliefs and behaviours. For example, if you use gendered language (e.g. "Man" kind and not 'people') does this send a bad message to your students? Do you expect as much from girls as from boys in all subjects (e.g. Maths and Sciences) – do you challenge them to work harder in these subjects?

Inquiry questions

- How can I create a spirit where everyone is valued?
- Is there anything I can DO to help my students learning?
- Is there anything my students need to help their learning?
- Do I always teach in the same way and is this helpful for everyone in my class or do I vary the way I teach?

Gender Equality in pictures



THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development

Goal 5: Gender Equality
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



Link to South Sudan ITT Syllabus:

Course 8: (8:2 Gender equity; 8:4 Creating inclusive environments)

Useful Resources

British Council: What does the evidence tell us about girls' education?
https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/sub-saharan_africa_education_series_21_july_r.pdf

WOB: Gender Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education
<https://bit.ly/3OzunLB>

UNICEF: Gender Policy Action Plan Papers
<https://bit.ly/3UZICNo>

Notes for personal reflection



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