

Introduction

Welcome to Module 1 of Working with English Language Learners: A handbook for learning assistants (WELLs).

As you embark on this professional learning journey, it is helpful for you to reflect on your experience as a learner and on your role as a learning assistant. Reflecting on your own prior knowledge and experiences can help you to think about ways to support learners more effectively. You play a vital role in supporting English Language Learners (ELLs) and you come with a wealth of knowledge, life experience, and expertise. It is useful to think about your own language learning journey (whether monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual) and what has helped you to learn new language and new concepts in the past. When working with ELLs, we should always find out about their prior knowledge and life experiences and try to connect with and build on those.

In this first task, you will focus on your personal experience of school and what made a difference for you in your learning. This task provides an example of ‘Think, Pair, Share’.



Module 1 Task 1: 'Think, Pair, Share'

'Think, Pair, Share' is a collaborative learning strategy where learners work together to surface prior knowledge, solve a problem, or answer a question. The 'Think' stage helps learners to process their ideas individually prior to sharing. It provides time to find out what they think or know about a topic before sharing with others. Using 'wait time' or 'think time' supports learners to connect their own knowledge with new learning.

Draw a picture or create a brainstorm that describes your own experience of schooling. Some helpful questions to get you started might be:

- What languages did you grow up with?
- What languages do you speak now?
- When you went to school, what helped you to learn?
- If you are bilingual, were you supported to use your heritage/first language at school?
- How was your school learning similar or different to the ways you learnt at home?

After this 'Think' task, work together with a partner to 'Share' the meaning behind your picture or brainstorm.

- What can you learn from your own experience as you consider your work with ELLs?
- What can you learn from your colleague's experience?
- As you share your thoughts with each other, are there common themes surfacing that are important to enact in your work with ELLs?

Module 1 Task 2: Reflecting on our Roles

It is useful for learning assistants to clarify their roles in discussion with school leaders to develop shared understandings of:

- how to plan effectively.
- how to support learner progress over time.
- how to use heritage/first languages in teaching and learning.

Learning assistants often have multiple roles in schools. This handbook provides effective practice to support learning assistants as they work with learners in language and literacy learning across the curriculum. The following task focuses on recognising and articulating what you already know and do in your role as a learning assistant. Good professional learning always builds on what we know. Think about your role, your strengths, your professional learning needs, your language and cultural background as you complete the Y-Chart in Task 2.



Module 1 Task 2: Y-Chart: Reflecting on our Roles

Supporting learner progress:

How can we support learner progress over time?
What areas of the curriculum are you focussed on?
What have you found works well when working
with learners?

Planning for learning support:

Are you involved in any planning meetings/
decision making? In what capacity?
What other professional learning opportunities
have you had?

Using Heritage/First Languages:

Do you speak a language other than English?
Or do you use different types of English in
different contexts? Discuss.
Do you use it with learners? If yes, how?
Is there anything professionally or personally that
supports you/hinders you from using languages
other than English in your teaching?

Planning to Work Effectively with Learners

Having completed the Y-Chart, you can think about how your experiences connect with the ideas below around planning to work effectively with learners.

Planning with Teachers

Learning assistants are more effective in their role when they:

- engage in regular planning time with teachers before learning experiences.
- have time to provide feedback to teachers about student learning.
- are supported to engage in regular professional learning and development that align with schools' visions and goals.
- are provided with opportunities to practise new learning strategies and knowledge with learners.

Supporting Learning in a Range of Contexts

Learning assistants work in different contexts including:

- one-to-one with learners in a learning support space.
- with small groups in a learning support space.
- one to one with learners in a modern learning environment or classroom.
- with small groups in a modern learning environment or classroom.
- after-school clubs and homework centres.

Working with Learners

Learning assistants work more effectively with learners when:

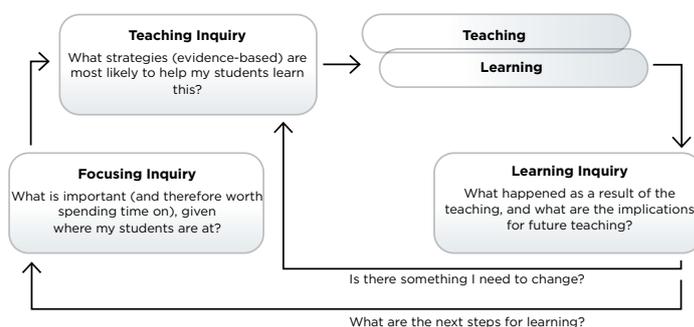
- supporting learners to understand the learning intention and what will help them to complete a task.

- encouraging learners to say or write their ideas in their stronger language and English.
- using activities that require learners to talk with others about meaningful topics.
- using “wait time” to support learners to process their thinking.

Teaching as Inquiry

‘Teaching as Inquiry’ (NZC, 2007) is a useful framework to support professional learning in education contexts. It recognises that the teaching – learning relationship works in an ongoing cycle. At the **‘Focusing Inquiry’** stage, we ask what is important (and therefore worth spending time on), given where my learners are at? At the **‘Teaching Inquiry’** stage, we ask what strategies (evidence-based) are most likely to help my learners to understand this? We then engage in **teaching and learning** and at the **‘Learning Inquiry’** stage we ask what happened as a result of the teaching, and what the implications are for future teaching.

Useful questions to ask throughout the inquiry cycle are: Is there something I need to change? What are the next steps for learning? In Module 1, you began your ‘Focusing Inquiry’ stage by reflecting on your own experiences of school. In Module 2, we will focus our inquiry on learners.



Recapping Key Vocabulary: Module 1

Term/Acronym	Definition
Prior Knowledge	Experience and information a learner already has that can be connected with new learning.
Language	What learners understand or speak.
Monolingual	Understands and speaks one language.
Bilingual	Understands and speaks two languages but could be a receptive bilingual (understands but does not speak one of the languages).
Multilingual	Understands and speaks more than two languages.
Language and Cultural Resources	The languages, knowledges, histories, values, customs, and beliefs that learners and their families hold and bring with them to school.
Literacy	Traditionally, reading and writing, but can include listening, speaking, viewing, presenting, and embodied ways of communicating and representing meaning.
English Language Learners (ELLs)	Learners who are in the process of acquiring English as a second or additional language.
Teaching as Inquiry	A process that supports a learning assistant or teacher to learn more about their learners and their practice by noticing the impact of their teaching on learners, and considering implications for future teaching.
Heritage Languages (HL)	Language/s that may be spoken by parents or grandparents, but not necessarily by their children and grandchildren. HL can also be a spoken first language.

Coming up: Module 2

Module 2 is about valuing and using learners' language and cultural resources.

Preparation: Think about a learner you work with, the languages they understand or speak, their experience with English, their education background, and whether New Zealand born/migrant/former refugee background.