

Trinity CertTESOL

Study Resource 5: Focus on the Individual Learner for CertTESOL

Almost all those working in ELT (English Language Teaching) will at some time in their careers do some one-to-one teaching. Some start their careers this way, some do it in the evenings or at weekends to supplement their earnings. Some teachers specialise in teaching one-to-one or small group tuition. One-to-one teaching is now frequently done online using Skype or a similar platform so it is even possible to do this kind of teaching at home.

One-to-one teaching offers a rare opportunity to be able to focus on an individual learner. On the CertTESOL course, in the assignment known as the Learner Profile, you'll analyse the difficulties one particular learner faces, as well as outlining their strengths. You will also teach a one-to-one lesson and draw up a brief programme of study for your learner.

This module will introduce you briefly to the work involved in the Learner Profile component of the CertTESOL course and the requirements for the assignment:

- Advantages and disadvantages of teaching one-to-one
- Useful hints for one-to-one teaching
- How to best inform our plans for teaching an individual learner
- How to best collect information for a needs analysis
- What you can do to prepare yourself before the course starts

*For each **Reflection Task**, take a moment to think and make notes mentally or in writing before you continue to read.*

Reflection Task 1

Have you ever taught or been taught in a one-to-one situation? If so, how would you describe the experience? If not, do you think you would like it? Why/Why not?

ADVANTAGES OF TEACHING ONE-TO-ONE

The opportunity to focus on an individual learner by teaching them one-to-one has its advantages, and also its disadvantages and difficulties, both for the teacher and the learner.

Reflection Task 2

Consider some of the potential advantages for both the teacher and the learner. Then look at the suggestions below. How many did you predict?

Advantages for the teacher

- having the opportunity to tailor a course precisely to the learner's needs
- being able to relate lessons to their interests, work and experience
- the opportunity to learn about the learner's first language, and use this knowledge for error correction
- being able to plan lessons and activities according to the learner's motivation and personal interests
- learning about the learner's life outside the classroom: their culture and their background
- not having to deal with classroom management issues, such as motivating students to work together

Advantages for the learner

- developing awareness of their strengths and the areas in which they need to improve
- working at their own speed, with an opportunity to raise questions without feeling foolish in front of peers
- receiving language input adapted to their level of English
- being motivated by participation: being able to contribute to the content, design and structure of the lessons
- possibility of developing a close rapport with the teacher

USEFUL TIPS FOR ONE-TO-ONE TEACHING

- The learner and teacher need to develop a positive relationship for lessons to be effective and enjoyable.
- The lesson may become unbalanced if the teacher does most of the talking, or does not follow a coherent syllabus.
- There is often a lack of individual processing time for the learner to take things in, to reflect, to work things out, to write things down etc. Learners need some 'private' time in a lesson, but teachers in one-to-one situation tend to feel guilty if they are inactive.
- There is no learner-to-learner dynamics with pair and group work and variety in partners. Instead the teacher will take on the role of a partner in information gaps, role plays, and discussions.
- Long reading and writing activities are generally not the best use of time in a one-to-one lesson but more suited to homework, with preparation and follow up done in class.

Materials for one-to-one lessons

Due to the individual needs of your learner, you are unlikely to follow a set course book (unless you are helping students with their school work) and more likely to draw on a wide range of resources based on the learner's needs: course books, websites, authentic materials etc. One-to-one lessons provide excellent opportunities for personalising materials by having learner contribute pictures, texts or videos in their areas of interest. You are also more likely to use m-learning through tablets, phones and apps.

Reflection Task 3

1. Think about how you might use the following materials with a one-to-one student:
 - A newspaper
 - Their laptop
 - A mobile phone camera
2. Look at the apps listed on englishclub.com. Which ones do you think could be used with a one-to-one student?

WAYS TO INFORM OUR PLANS FOR TEACHING AN INDIVIDUAL LEARNER

To focus our planning, we can start with the 'wh' questions: Why? Where? Who? When? What? Which? How?

Reflection Task 4

1. What may be some different reasons why learners attend one-to-one lessons?
2. What questions could you ask your learner in an initial meeting to find out more about their background and needs?
3. What are some different learning styles or preferences among learners?
4. Is it sufficient to ask the learner what their wants and needs are?

Suggestions

Why is the learner studying English? What is their motivation?

Learners learning English may have integrative motivation (they need/want to be able to operate in an English-speaking environment) or instrumental motivation (they need/want to have English for a purpose e.g. for their job, to help them find work or for study). One-to-one lessons for younger learners are usually arranged by their parents as a way of improving success in exams, and in this case it can be more challenging to engage the student.

Where will they use their English? Within an English-speaking community or elsewhere? In an office, in a nightclub, in a university, on holiday?

With whom will they use it? Friends, strangers, business contacts, officialdom?

When are they going to use it? Immediately? Later when they get a new job? To apply for a place at university?

What knowledge of English and language skills do the learners need to meet the demands of their target situation (day-to-day living, job, study?)

Which language do the learners regard as their mother tongue or first language? In what way will this language impact on the way they use English (we call this L1 interference)? Does it have a very different grammatical structure to English? Is it written using the Latin or Roman alphabet, as are English and most of the language of Europe, or in another alphabet or script?

How are the learners most comfortable learning? Some prefer learning by 'doing': through moving, handling, or physical involvement with the language. Some learners enjoy listening and talking more. Some learners like to see things written down or represented pictorially (see Study Resource 2).

We also need to be able to assess the following

- What are the learner's strengths in using English? What do they say or write to give you evidence of this?
- What are the learner's English learning needs? Where are they rather weak in comparison with what they want to achieve? What do they say or write to give you evidence of this?

Sometimes there is a conflict between a learner's wants (what they perceive as a need) and the teacher's view of their needs. This is where one-to-one teachers learn to be diplomatic.

In order to find out what the subject of your learner profile wants and needs to know, so that you can plan the one-to-one lesson, and also give advice on their further language study, you will need to collect data to help you to answer the questions considered above. You'll do this by asking questions, mainly in informal meetings with your learner, and then by analysis of the samples of English you will have collected from them.

COLLECTING INFORMATION FOR A NEEDS ANALYSIS

A major advantage of focusing on an individual learner is that we are often able to find out the information we need quite easily.

On the CertTESOL course you will collect samples of your learner's language by:

- having a conversation with him or her about their previous English language lessons, and about any other languages they speak
- asking a learner with some experience of the language to tell us the main differences they've noticed between their own language and English
- recording a sample of your learner's spoken English, which you will then analyse in terms of phonology (or pronunciation), grammar and vocabulary
- asking the learner to write a personal account to give you the opportunity to analyse their written English
- setting brief listening and reading tasks to analyse their receptive skills

When you complete your Learner Profile on the CertTESOL course, a large part of the assignment includes noting errors and trying to identify their causes. Becoming more familiar with important grammatical features of their L1 can help you to identify the cause of some (but not all) of the learners' errors. (See also Study Resource 2)

Don't forget to give your learner praise for the way in which they use English well - perhaps their use of a good piece of lexis, or good pronunciation - as well as noting their weak points. This is very important if you want them to stay motivated, and be able to take on board your feedback.

WAYS TO PREPARE BEFORE COURSE START

- Be aware of how different people learn. Think of your own learning experiences: has there been one which satisfied you more (or less) than others? What was it about the experience which was significant to you?
- If you happen to know another language try to imagine the likely potential problems of a speaker of that language in learning English.
- What is likely to motivate adult learners of English? Try to think of the situations in which learners are likely to want/need to use English. You might be surprised by some of the things they tell you. You could start by thinking about what motivated you to consider taking the CertTESOL course!

Useful links

- The British Council's 'Teaching English' site
(www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/teaching-one-one)
- One-stop-english
(www.onestopenglish.com/business/teaching-approaches/teaching-one-to-one/).

We hope you have enjoyed this introduction to the Learner Profile component of the Trinity CertTESOL course and found it useful.