support session 5

module 5: inclusive schools and classrooms

approximate time – 2 hours

Preparation before the meeting

Arrange the desks in groups so that teachers are able to talk easily with each other.

Make sure you have thick marker pens and flipchart paper for the brainstorms and feedback sessions. You will also need the handout about the School Support Teams (SSTs).

You need to prepare by:

- setting up the DVD (set it at the start for the first activity in the support session);
- writing the aims of the session on the blackboard or on a flipchart.

Welcome

Welcome all the teachers and ask them to sign the register. Explain that the purpose of this session is to:

- explore what an inclusive approach to education is;
- consider ways of making teaching more inclusive and effective.

Part 1: What is an inclusive approach to teaching and learning?

Begin by telling the teachers that the move towards a fully inclusive approach to teaching and learning in every UNRWA school will take time, but that it is important to understand why it is so crucial to students’ personal and academic development.

Tell them that the UNRWA Inclusive Education Policy is available for all of them to read and refer to as they work to strengthen their inclusive practices. Tell them you are showing them a very short extract from the start of the video for this support session that illustrates the reason why UNRWA has adopted this approach.

Show the video and stop the video at the end of the section on each child’s potential, which ends with the words ‘more responsive to the needs of the students’.
Ask the teachers for any comment on what they have just watched (children talking about what they would like to be when they grow up). Do the teachers know much about individual students they teach, other than with regard to their academic performance? Why do teachers need to know more if they are to really help each student? Refer them back to the Units in the first three Modules about learning and teaching. Remind them that teaching the same way every day does not mean that the student will learn. The task of the teacher is to encourage the student to want to learn and to enjoy learning. To do this, a teacher has to get to know how their students learn best, so that they can modify and adapt their lessons to meet their needs. Inclusive education requires teachers to adapt and modify their teaching to enable all learners to be able to access the material being studied and to reach their potential. So how can they do this?

**Part 2: Ways to support learners**

Show the next short extract about ‘Addressing barriers’.

Ask teachers to discuss in their groups their experiences of working with students who have specific learning difficulties. If they have also experienced students with physical disabilities, how did they accommodate the students into their classes?

Ask each group to share the ways they helped the students. Make a list of the ways on a flipchart and give it the heading ‘Ways to support learners’. Put the sheet on the wall to come back to throughout the session, adding any new ways of helping students as they are mentioned.

Now show the whole group the following sections of the video:

1. Identifying and responding to individual needs;
2. Improving classroom practice;
3. Inclusive language and attitudes;
4. Structure and routines;
5. Clear communication;
6. Positive behaviour management;
7. Classroom organisation and layout.

Then ask them for any comments. Try to turn any negative comments they may make into more positive ideas. For example, teachers may say: ‘This means a lot more work’ or ‘I haven’t got time to do this’. You could suggest that although it may
seem more work initially, once you know more about learners and try these ways of working you will find that students are much better behaved because they are interested and they do better. Point out that over time and with more experience, teachers will do many of these things and use these different strategies almost without realising it. Try to encourage some positive comments.

Divide the teachers into groups of about seven, and ask each group to say which of the areas in the numbered list above they would like to focus on in this session. Assign one of the ‘headings’ to each group, by mutual agreement if possible.

Now ask the groups to think about the video as a starting point and then to brainstorm what kinds of things a teacher could do in their classroom and in their teaching to make their work more inclusive in the area they have chosen. Show the sections of the video again and encourage each group to watch all sections for ideas to support the activity. Give the teachers about 10–15 minutes to discuss and write their ideas on a flipchart so that they can display them on the wall.

Next, ask one person from each group to act as reporter and to talk briefly about the key features that are important in their area. Allow other teachers to comment and ask questions about how these ideas might be realised.

At the end of the feedback, you should provide a summary of the key things a teacher could do to make their practice more inclusive. There will be some overlap between areas – for example, clear instruction and good communication will have similar elements. The two groups concentrating on these two areas might have said:

- use simple language;
- explain things clearly;
- plan how to explain things you find difficult;
- give meanings for new words;
- write new words on the board to show spelling.

It is important to emphasise that many of the ideas articulated are simply good teaching practice and help all students to access the curriculum, not just those with particular needs.

However, many teachers may be anxious about those students who need more support and now is the time to talk to the teachers about the Student Support Teams (SSTs) and their role.
The very short section of the video about the SSTs explains this, but not in much detail. Explain to the teachers that the SST will be there to support and advise teachers as they support their students, particularly those who are at risk of marginalisation and exclusion, and those who have additional learning, health or psychosocial needs. The SST will be made up of a group of teachers, ideally including a teacher counsellor, health tutor and other teachers who can support the learning and well-being of students. The team will meet regularly and also on demand, although not all team members may need to meet every time. Parents, other teachers, health or education specialists may also be invited to attend meetings as necessary. The SST will be aware of support services available outside the school (for example, health clinic, doctor, psychologist, physiotherapist), and will refer students to relevant services when the need is identified.

Show the section from the video and then give the teachers a copy of the handout and ask the teachers how they think this could work to help them to support students’ learning. Give them time in their groups to discuss the work of the SST. Ask them to share their thoughts and any questions. For example, the teachers may want to know more about how to identify a student’s needs, how members of the SST who have more expertise could help with strategies to try with a particular student or students, or ways to organise activities in the classroom using mixed ability or ability groups.

Close the session by reminding the teachers that good teaching is inclusive. All teachers should do their best to help all the students they teach by modifying and adapting their teaching, their organisation, their language and their strategies to meet diverse needs. Wish them well, and ask them to try out one small thing to help their students access the work more easily in their classroom over the next few weeks.