



# Teachers and Teacher Aides Working Together

## Identifying Students' Strengths Module 5 Workbook



Nāku to rourou  
nāu te rourou  
ka ora ai te ākonga.

With my basket and  
your basket the  
learner will thrive.

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## About this resource

### Background

*Teachers and Teacher Aides Working Together* is a set of modules that teachers and teacher aides complete together.

Each module in this series is a 'ready-to-use' pack with a presentation, workbook and activities so learning can be put into practice. Some modules include self-paced e-learning. The module materials come in different formats to allow choice about how you learn.

Find out more at [Teachers and Teacher Aides Working Together](#).

The modules follow an inquiry cycle. The workbook has a section for each step in the cycle.



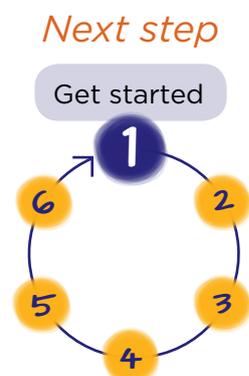
If you are leading the learning, refer to the [Facilitator Quick Guide](#) and gather any additional materials needed to complete the activities.

Download the learning materials from the [Module 5 page](#) of the Teachers and Teacher Aides Working Together site.

Note that you have some choices about how you access the module materials. This is the PDF workbook format. It includes links to required resources and printable worksheets for the activities. If you are working with hard copy, you will need to access the online version to activate the links.

For an enhanced online reading experience, access the [e-workbook for Module 5](#). In the e-workbook, activity sheets are Google Docs that you can print, download as Word documents or copy to your own Google Drive for working online.

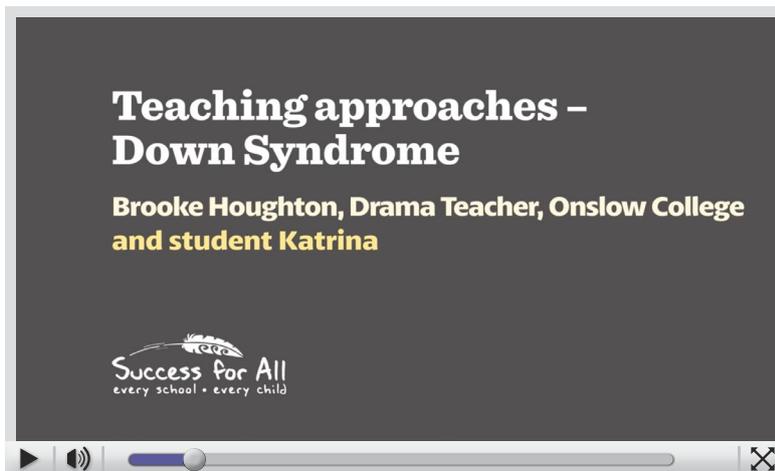
You also have the option to download a PowerPoint or view a narrated presentation.





# 1. Get started

Start by watching the short video. Then read the cartoon and key principles. They introduce the main ideas covered in this module. Discuss these as a group. The learning outcomes describe what you'll achieve once you've completed the six steps.



Watch the video about [teaching approaches for students with Down syndrome](#) at the Ministry of Education's teacher aide Vimeo album. The teacher in the video explains what it means to have a strengths-based approach.

“ Get to know your students; get to know what works for them, treat them as individuals, individualise learning plans and goals, and meet them where they are at. ”  
*Classroom teacher*

“ For some students with additional learning needs, such as those learning at a very different level to others, there is a risk of focusing only on their presence or participation at school and not paying enough attention to what they are learning. Learning must be visible for every student, no matter how much additional support they require. ”  
*Implementing an Inclusive Curriculum: Making Learning Visible*

“ Narrative assessments are great in that way because you can see the student's capability really, knowing that, OK he can do that, we didn't realise he could, and what he can achieve and now you can set new goals and push him along further. ”  
*Teacher aide*



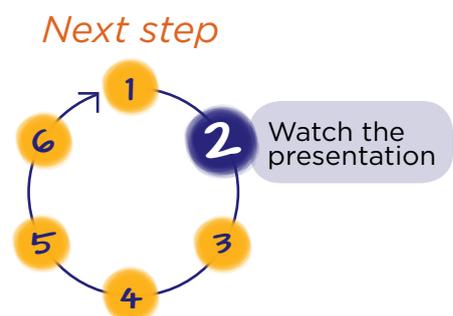
## Key principles

- All students are active learners. Students learn different things, in different ways, at different rates.
- The best way to learn about a student is to ask them and include them in teaching, learning and assessment practices.
- Teachers are responsible for student assessment; teacher aides support this.
- Effective assessment is an ongoing process of noticing, recognising and responding to student learning. It helps make learning visible to the student and those around them. Information from assessment is used to identify next steps for learning and to create a rich picture of each student's progress over time.
- Teachers use a variety of assessment approaches. The most frequently used approaches are learning conversations and observations.
- Narrative assessment and learner profiles are two ways educators can identify students' strengths and preferred ways of working. They can help educators understand students' interests, aspirations and challenges.
- Narrative assessment draws on the knowledge of the student's team, including family and whānau, and identifies teaching and learning across key competencies and the learning areas.

## Learning outcomes

This module is intended to support teachers and teacher aides to achieve four aims:

1. Develop a shared understanding of why it's important to know and celebrate what students can and love to do.
2. Explore and discuss observations, narrative assessment and learner profiles to gather information about students' strengths and interests.
3. Trial observations, narrative assessment or a learner profile in collaboration with students and whānau.
4. Reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of what they have tried together and make any necessary changes.

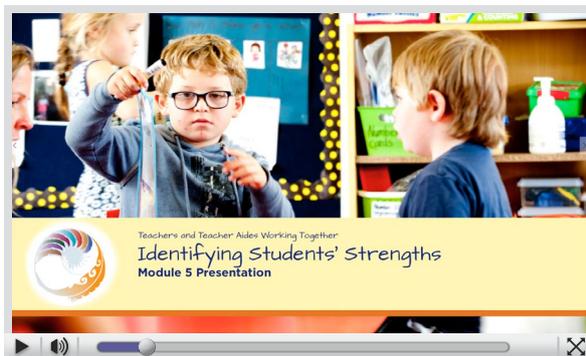




## 2. Watch the presentation

Watch the presentation about confidentiality, safety, and professional behaviour at work. Read the discussion on the next pages for further information.

Visit the [Module 5 e-workbook](#) to download or watch the presentation.



### Further information

#### Why this module?

All students are active, capable and competent learners. When educators know what students can and love to do, they can use this to guide how they teach and support them. For example, a teacher might incorporate music or drama into the classroom programme if a student in the class loves music or drama.

This module supports teachers and teacher aides to learn about their students and use this information to support their students' learning.

#### Learning about your students

The best way to learn about a student is to ask them and include them in the teaching and learning process. For some students, this involves discussion with them. For others, it will mean working alongside them to observe and understand what they want to learn and how to make learning accessible for them. Recognising what families and whānau know about their children can help schools to get to know their students better. Students may reveal different strengths and skills outside of school, which can then be recognised in school.

## Assessment

*The New Zealand Curriculum* states that “The primary purpose of assessment is to improve students’ learning and teachers’ teaching.” (Ministry of Education, 2007, page 39)

Assessment involves gathering, analysing and interpreting information to show what the student knows, what they can do and what they need to learn next. Teachers use this information to inquire into their own teaching practices and how they contribute to student learning outcomes.

Teachers are responsible for the assessment of all the students they teach; teacher aides support this. Teachers and teacher aides work together to gather and share information about their students. The way this often works is by the teacher designing the assessment approach and the teacher aide collecting some of the data. For example, a teacher aide may take photos or complete observations about a student’s involvement in a particular activity, as directed by the teacher.

## Conducting observations

Observations range from informal ‘noticings’ to more formal, structured observations. Observations should always focus on what the student is trying to learn. This means that the observer needs to understand the purpose of the learning and what it looks like to succeed.

“ Good observation requires detailed knowledge of what you expect a student to be able to do and in order to make progress. You then observe whether they can do this or not. If not, what do they do and what are the implications for what you need to do next? ”

*Absolum, 2006, page 11*

There are many different approaches to observation, but Robinson and Lai (2006) identify two broad types: those where the purpose is to explore what is happening and those where the purpose is to check what is happening. You might explore a hunch that some bullying is taking place or check whether a student is taking part in group discussions. Observations aimed at exploring a situation involve recording a stream of events and activities. Observations that check on what is happening tend to be more formal, precise and structured. If the goal is to increase students’ participation in group discussion, you might keep a tally of how often individuals engage in discussion over a particular period.

It’s always important to get rid of preconceptions and simply observe what is happening. Your interpretation may or may not be correct. The time to draw inferences from an observation is after they have occurred, in conversation with students themselves and with colleagues, families and whānau.

## Using narrative assessment

Sometimes teachers and teacher aides know that a student is learning but the assessment they are using doesn’t show this. Narrative assessment may be an effective alternative to show actual progress and help to plan next steps.

Learning stories gather information from a range of sources, including families, whānau, other teachers, peers and the student themselves. They describe what the student is doing, how they are doing it and their interactions with others and their environment. This information is then analysed to show the learning. The learning is described in relation to the New Zealand Curriculum, for example, a curriculum learning area such as the arts, and/or a key competency such as managing self. It may also be connected to Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals.

The stories should clearly identify both student achievement and the next steps for learning. Over time, strings of linked learning stories help everyone to see the learning that is taking place in relationship to a particular aspect of the classroom programme.

## Using learner profiles

“Learner profiles give students opportunities for self-advocacy, enabling them to express who they are and their strengths, aspirations, and passions. Learner profiles help students to address assumptions and to share what helps them learn and the challenges they face when learning. Profiles inform teachers about their students, and they help school teams to understand students’ perspectives and to build relationships with them, especially at times of transition.”

*Implementing an Inclusive Curriculum: Building a Rich Knowledge of the Learner, page 13*

Profiles can be used in a range of ways. For example, in a secondary school, a learner profile might be used at the start of the year to give each teacher a ‘snapshot’ of the student.

Profiles can be developed in a range of formats, such as a document with photos, a video clip, blog, PowerPoint, or audio recording. Teacher aides can help students find and develop a format that suits them.

It’s important to involve the student’s whānau so their knowledge is incorporated into the learner profile. Their views should determine how the information about their child is shared with others.

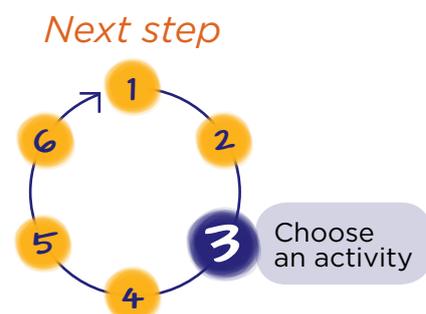
## Reference

Absolum, M. (2006). *Clarity in the classroom*: Auckland: Hodder Education, pp. 76–95.

Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1–3*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Ministry of Education (2015). *Implementing an inclusive curriculum*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Robinson, V. & Lai, M. K. (2006). *Practitioner research for educators: A guide to improving classrooms and schools*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin.





## 3. Choose an activity

Choose one or two activities to do in pairs or small groups. Go to the back of the workbook for each activity's instructions, worksheets, and resources.

### Activity 1

#### Recognising and celebrating students' strengths

In this activity, watch videos about how a strengths-based approach recognises and celebrates students' successes. Relate the ideas in the videos to your own practice.

Each pair or small group needs a laptop or tablet with Internet access and speakers.

### Activity 2

#### Conducting observations

In this activity, you will learn about the purpose of observations and how to conduct them.

### Activity 3

#### Narrative assessment exemplars

In this activity, choose a narrative assessment exemplar from the website *Through Different Eyes* and relate this to your work.

Each participant needs a laptop or tablet with Internet access and speakers.

### Activity 4

#### Learner profiles

Look at three examples of learner profiles and relate these to students you work with.

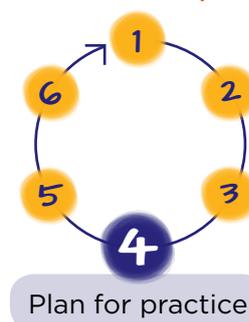
### Activity 5

#### Exploring online resources about learner profiles

In this activity, you will explore a section of the guide *Developing an inclusive classroom culture* on the [Inclusive Education](#) website. It covers content about supporting students to develop their own learner profiles. There are questions to guide your discussion.

Each pair or small group needs a laptop or tablet with Internet access and speakers.

*Next step*





## 4. Plan for practice

It's time to plan how you will put your learning into practice. Try one of these suggestions in your work together over the next few weeks.

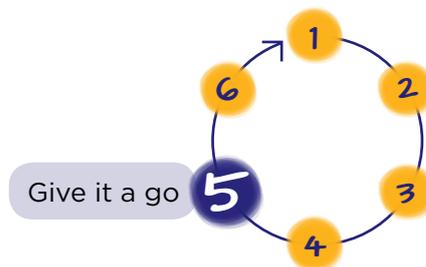
Work in a teacher-teacher aide pair to plan and conduct an observation. You could use the reporting template on page 59 of *Making Learning Visible* or one that is used in your school or that you have developed yourself. Remember that the purpose of your observation is to notice, recognise and respond to what is happening in the classroom. To do this effectively, you should:

- Have a pre-observation conversation where the two of you clarify the purpose and focus of the observation.
- Record the actions you see and the words you hear, as accurately as possible and without comment. You could take photos or make a video recording.
- Share and discuss what you have observed. Check anything you're not sure of. Remember that if you're not sure why something took place, you can usually find out by asking the student!
- Agree on an appropriate response.

Write a learning story together about a student you both work with. Refer to your brainstorm from Activity 1 or 2 to remind you of ways to notice, recognise and respond to your student.

Complete a learner profile about a student you both work with. Identify ways of working with students and their families and whānau and others to gain information for the profile.

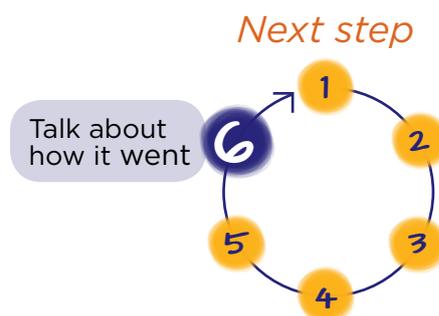
Next step





## 5. Give it a go

Implement the strategy you decided on in Step 4. Use the space below to make notes about what you did and how it went.





## 6. Talk about how it went

Meet to talk about how the strategy from Step 4 went. Discuss and plan how you might adapt or modify your practice. Use the questions below to guide your reflection.

- What did we try?
- What happened when we did this? How did the students respond to the strategy? How did the adults experience and respond to the strategy?
- How might we change our practice next time?
- What have we learned about ways to recognise and respond to students' strengths and interests?
- What did we do differently when we wrote the learning story or learner profile?
- How did the task change our understanding of the student's strengths and interests?
- What are we going to do next to recognise and respond to our students' strengths and interests?

### Possible next steps

When thinking about what you might do next, consider the other topics in this series:

- Teachers and Teacher Aides: Who Does What?
- Keeping Our Work Confidential, Professional and Safe
- Supporting Students with Complex Needs
- What Do We Think about Disability and Diversity?
- Students Participating in their Individual Education Plans (IEP)
- Understanding the New Zealand Curriculum
- Fostering Peer Relationships
- Creating Inclusive Classrooms
- Supporting Student Learning in the Whole Class
- Teacher Aide Interaction that Supports Student Learning

Visit [Teachers and Teacher Aides Working Together](#) to access these modules.



# Activity options

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## 5 Identifying Students' Strengths

### *Recognising and celebrating students' strengths*

## Activity 1

In this activity, watch videos about how a strengths-based approach recognises and celebrates students' successes. Relate the ideas in the videos to your own practice.

Each pair or small group needs a laptop or tablet with Internet access and speakers.



Work in pairs. Ideally, your pair will consist of a teacher and teacher aide who regularly work together.



Watch the videos that feature a student named Katrina:

- My dreams and future plans:  
<https://vimeo.com/album/2950799/video/100662381>
- Teaching approaches - Down syndrome:  
<https://vimeo.com/album/2950799/video/100662339>



In pairs or small groups, discuss the videos.

Use these questions to guide discussion:

- How have Katrina's school and teachers recognised and celebrated her success?
- Do you recognise any of your brainstorm ideas in the videos?
- What ideas in the video could be adapted in your practice for recognising and celebrating students' success?

## 5 Identifying Students' Strengths

### Conducting observations

### Activity 2

In this activity, you will learn more about the purpose of observations and how to conduct them.



Work in pairs ideally consisting of a teacher and teacher aide who regularly work together. Brainstorm and record the ways you recognise students' strengths in your classroom and school. If you have done Activity 1, you can skip this task.



Read the passage about teacher observations on pages 58 to 61 of *Making Learning Visible*.



Discuss the content you have just explored.

To support your discussion, consider these questions:

- Think about a time when your informal 'noticing' helped you better understand where your students were in their learning and what their next steps might be. What did you need to know about the students, the classroom programme and the expectations for learning in order to make sense of what you noticed?
- Think about the students you work with and the questions you have about them. When might you use an 'exploring' observation? When might you use a 'checking' observation?
- Focus on the example of an observation on page 60 of *Making Learning Visible*. How does Sam support Miss Malcolm to conduct an observation? What do Sam and Miss Malcolm notice about Mark's learning interactions? What do they know about Mark that allows them to recognise the learning that is taking place? How do they *respond*?



If you have questions about how to conduct observations and use the information to support student learning and improve your own practice, talk about this activity with a member of the leadership team. If possible, follow up this activity by planning and conducting an observation, as suggested on page 8.

## References

Ministry of Education (2015). *Implementing an inclusive curriculum*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

## 5 Identifying Students' Strengths

### Narrative assessment exemplars

### Activity 3

In this activity, choose a narrative assessment exemplar from the website *Through Different Eyes* and relate this to your work.

Before you begin, look at the *Through Different Eyes* website. It provides guidance on using narrative assessment for students with the highest learning support needs, with examples of narrative assessment in practice.

Each participant needs a laptop or tablet with internet access and speakers.



Work in pairs (ideally a teacher and teacher aide who regularly work together). Brainstorm and record the ways you recognise students' strengths in your classroom and school.



Explore one of the narrative assessment exemplars [www.throughdifferenteyes.org.nz/browse\\_exemplars/a-z](http://www.throughdifferenteyes.org.nz/browse_exemplars/a-z) to see the way another group of educators notice, recognise and respond to the student's strengths.

You can choose an exemplar for a certain school level, learning area, key competency or an aspect of effective pedagogy. Select a relevant exemplar that interests you both.

Spend 15 minutes reading. Click on the PDF or Word icon on the right side of the page to open the whole exemplar. It will be about six pages and include photos and diagrams.

As you read the exemplar, think about these questions:

- Do you recognise any of your brainstorm ideas?
- In what ways are the student's strengths recognised and responded to?
- How are the teacher and teacher aide planning next learning steps that build on the student's strengths?



Talk in pairs or small groups about your impressions of the exemplar. Discuss the questions above.

If you are doing this module with a group of people, have each pair or small group share their impressions of the exemplar they read.

## 5 Identifying Students' Strengths

### Learner profiles

### Activity 4

Learner profiles are one way of learning more about students and sharing this information with others who support them. Look at three examples of learner profiles and relate these to your work.



In pairs or small groups, look at the learner profiles that can be downloaded from the Inclusive Education website. Go to the guide about *Developing an inclusive classroom culture*. Find the section about valuing what each student brings to the classroom. Scroll down to the resources and downloads for learner profiles for Rachel, Laiza and Stephen.



Discuss the profiles in your pair or small group.

Use these questions to guide discussion:

- How are the profiles similar, and how are they different?
- How might each profile be suitable for different purposes, settings or students?
- If you use learner profiles in your school, how are the examples similar and different to those you already use?



Think about a student you both work with. Begin to design a profile for this student. Consider how you would collect information about the student from a range of sources, including directly from the student.

## 5 Identifying Students' Strengths

### Exploring online resources about learner profiles

## Activity 5

In this activity, you will explore a section of the guide *Developing an inclusive classroom culture* on the [Inclusive Education](#) website. It covers content about supporting students to develop their own learner profiles. There are questions to guide your discussion.



Explore the section of the guide *Developing an inclusive classroom culture* called Support students to develop their own learner profiles. [http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/developing-an-inclusive-classroom-culture/?suggestion\\_id=valuing\\_what\\_each\\_student\\_brings\\_to\\_the\\_classroom\\_suggestion\\_3040](http://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/developing-an-inclusive-classroom-culture/?suggestion_id=valuing_what_each_student_brings_to_the_classroom_suggestion_3040)



Download and read the Ministry of Education [information sheet about learner profiles](#).



Discuss the content you have just explored. To support your talk, consider these questions:

- What formats have been used for our students' learner profiles (e.g., a document, a slide presentation with pictures, a video)?
- What are learner profiles used for in our school? Given the purpose/s, do our students' learner profiles contain all the necessary information?
- To what extent are students in our school involved in developing their own learner profiles? How could they play a greater role?



If you have questions or ideas about how learner profiles could be used or created at your school, talk about this with activity with others, such as a member of the senior leadership team.