

Why and how should we teach English in crisis and emergency situations?

Show notes





In this podcast series from the British Council, we try and provide solutions to some of the key questions being asked by English teachers around the world.

Each episode explores a specific topic through interviews, a focus on recent developments or reports on British Council initiatives in English language teaching. Practical show notes, classroom activities and transcripts are available to download for each episode.

Episode overview

Many parts of the world are currently experiencing significant levels of violence and conflict. The role of education and language learning in these areas is very important, and can provide short and long term benefits for people in these situations. This episode is released on the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and in recognition of this our field report focuses on a British Council programme entitled “Teaching and Learning in Difficult Times”. This programme has, to date, provided training in trauma-sensitive pedagogy to more than 1,000 Ukrainian English language teachers. In our interview, we talk to Diana Abu Zayed, a teacher in Gaza in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, who shares with us some of her practical experiences of teaching in a conflict area.

In this episode



Crises don't affect ... all students at the same level.

If you have a traumatised teacher or stressed teacher that will impact all students.

We believe that teachers should be in a good mental, personal and professional state so that they can support the learners.


This course is really essential one because it enhances teachers on the ground regarding teacher a trauma-informed approach and at the same time, it helps them to overcome their own problems, issues and reactions.

Nowadays we have war, then we will have victory



Detailed notes

Additional information about particularly interesting, relevant, or challenging terms are given in the table below.

Phrase used	Explanation and further information
Field report	
This episode does contain some sensitive and saddening information in it.	Please do listen carefully to the contents of this episode, and be especially careful if you are sharing this episode with young people. Some of the contents may be distressing.
I've worked quite a lot in challenging situations	Chris has written a book with Cambridge University Press which focuses on his experience. This practically-focused book is called <i>Teaching in Challenging Circumstances</i> and can be accessed for free using this QR code or the link: https://tinyurl.com/TeachingInCC . 
Somaliland	Somaliland is a de facto sovereign state in East Africa. It claims independence, but is considered internationally to be part of Somalia.
West Bank and Gaza	The West Bank forms the majority of the Palestinian territories. Gaza, according to UNRWA (see below) <i>“has a population of approximately 2.1 million people, including some 1.4 million Palestine refugees. For at least the last decade and a half, the socioeconomic situation in Gaza has been in steady decline. A blockade on land, air and sea was imposed by Israel following the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007. The blockade continues to have a devastating effect as people’s movement to and from the Gaza Strip, as well as access to markets, remains severely restricted.”</i>
Interview with Diana	
UNRWA	UNRWA is the UN agency that supports the relief and human development of Palestinian refugees.
Applied linguistics	Applied linguistics is the branch of linguistics which is focused on the practical application of language studies. For example, applied linguistics can help us understand real-life problems in areas such as psychology, sociology, and education.
Education is a fundamental human right	Many international organisations have identified education as a fundamental human right. UNESCO , for example,

	<p>states the following: <i>“Education is a basic human right that works to raise men and women out of poverty, level inequalities and ensure sustainable development. But worldwide 244 million children and youth are still out of school for social, economic and cultural reasons. Education is one of the most powerful tools in lifting excluded children and adults out of poverty and is a stepping stone to other fundamental human rights. It is the most sustainable investment. The right to quality education is already firmly rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international legal instruments, the majority of which are the result of the work of UNESCO and the United Nations.”</i></p>
Digital literacy	<p>This article contains interesting information about digital literacy in Palestine. There are many organisations working in the development of digital literacy in Palestine, for example Gaza Sky Geeks.</p>
Teacher wellbeing	<p>Episode 9 of Series 1 of the <i>Teaching English with the British Council</i> podcast focuses on this issue. If this topic is of particular interest to you, please do listen. The summary of the episode contents are as follows: <i>“COVID-19 has affected so much of how we deliver education and language teaching. As schools (in some parts of the world) return to something approaching normality, it’s important to consider the mental health impact of the pandemic. Confronted with other challenging issues as well, such as climate anxiety, students are looking to teachers for mental health support more than ever before. In this episode, we’ll look at British Council set of activities created as part of its Connecting Classrooms programme. These materials help teachers promote wellbeing activities for both you and your students. In the second half of the episode, we speak to the teacher trainer, author and researcher Sarah Mercer and discuss how teachers can make their classrooms places where mental wellbeing is maintained, and even improved.”</i></p>
Using a journal	<p>Using a journal can help teachers reflect on what they do in the classroom, and to evaluate what happened during a lesson. If something does go as planned, teachers can think how they would do that again next time. If something doesn’t go as planned, teachers can identify the reason why, and what they would do differently next time.</p>
Using drama	<p>Drama is a very effective language learning tool as students can act as a different person. This helps students who may lack confidence in using the target language. It can also help students explore ideas which they might otherwise be afraid of discussing. The Hands Up project is an organisation working in Palestine which uses drama to support the teaching of the English language</p>
The psychological protection of using a different language	<p>Some people argue that the act of learning, or acquiring, another language can develop resilience and psychological strength. By developing this, people can protect themselves more effectively from negative feelings</p>

	or trauma
Code switching	Code switching, also known as language alternation, is when a speaker alternates between two different languages (or sometimes dialects or registers), using words from each.
South Sudan	South Sudan is a country in East Africa which has experienced considerable violence in recent years.
The unknown soldier	Many countries have a so-called grave / memorial place for an “unknown soldier”, who is meant to represent or symbolise all people who have fought for that particular country in a conflict.
Visualisation	Asking students to imagine something outside of their immediate location can be a powerful way of getting them to think more positively, and also as a way of managing their lives in the present. One way of doing this is to ask students to think about their future selves – i.e. where will they live, what will their family look like, what kind of work they will do etc.

Discussion

Training Ukrainian teachers in trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive pedagogies	<p>The programme which is focused on in the field report is called <i>Teaching and Learning in Difficult Times</i> (TLiDT). TLiDT is an initiative of the British Council to respond to the immediate needs of Ukrainian teachers, focusing on trauma-sensitive / trauma-informed approaches to teaching and learning. You can discover much more about this course using this link.</p> <p>TLiDT is a programme which emerged out of the British Council’s work on ‘Language for Resilience’. The British Council website describes this area as recognising that “language learning is absolutely essential. It helps refugees and their host communities to withstand challenges, to recover from crisis, to overcome barriers – to build resilience.” The original language for resilience report can be downloaded here. The follow-up report, <i>Cross-disciplinary perspectives on the role of language in enhancing the resilience of refugees and host communities</i>, can be downloaded here.</p>
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Field report

Ukraine is at war with Russia at the moment	Russia invaded Ukraine on the 24 th February 2022. This episode was released on the anniversary of the invasion, on 24 th February 2023.
Displaced learners	<p>There is often confusion about the descriptions of people who have left the place where they were living. The different terms are used as follows:</p> <p>→ A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country due to a conflict or a credible fear of</p>

	<p>persecution based on reasons of race, religion, political opinion, membership of a social group in that country and is seeking refuge in another state;</p> <p>→ An asylum-seeker is someone who applies for protection as a refugee in another country and his or her request for refugee status has not been assessed or is yet to be processed;</p> <p>→ Internally displaced people are people seeking refuge from conflict or disasters but within the borders of their own country;</p> <p>A migrant is an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.</p>
Trauma	<p>The language classroom can be a space in which students can learn to manage their own feelings and behaviour. There is also good evidence that the ability to switch between languages can help people manage their trauma – either to distance themselves from the traumatic event, or else to focus in on it, allowing them to self-regulate.</p>
Perry model	<p>You can learn more about the Perry model, and the work of Bruce Perry himself, at his website, https://www.bdperry.com/clinical-work.</p>
Blackouts	<p>A blackout occurs when there is no electricity available in a particular area. In Ukraine, blackouts have been very common due to missile attacks by the Russian army.</p>
Fireworks that seemed normal for Poland, they, they are a crisis for us	<p>In this example, the fireworks are a kind of psychological trigger (see below for more).</p>
Trauma-informed approach	<p>“Trauma-informed teaching starts with an understanding of how trauma can impact learning and behavior. With this approach, educators think about what student behavior may be telling them. And they reflect on their teaching practices to find ways to better support students who may be experiencing trauma.” Click here for the source and to discover more.</p>
Using first language as scaffolding to access the target language	<p>According to Neil Mercer, an effective teacher provides the kind of intellectual support which enables learners to make intellectual achievements they would never accomplish alone. According to this article in Edutopia (which also lists several useful scaffolding strategies), scaffolding is breaking up the learning into chunks and providing a tool, or structure, with each chunk.</p>

Field report (2)

Aleppo

Aleppo is an ancient city in Syria which has been devastated by war. Find out more about Aleppo in [this report](#) by International Crisis Group.

Trigger

Triggers are anything that might cause a person to recall a traumatic experience they've had. Common triggers include: strangers being in the school; loud noises; vehicles (especially planes); shouting; pushing; bangs etc.

Using this podcast for lessons or training

- You can download a transcript of the episode from the podcast homepage. To help you and your learners with preparation and language analysis, all words at the B2, C1 and C2 CEFR level have been highlighted.
- The British Council have produced an 'activity pack' for this episode, which contains activities which you can use in your classroom. The activities focus on speaking, listening, grammar and language. They are available in both pdf and in editable PowerPoint format, in case you wish to edit them to make them more relevant for your specific classroom.





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