

# Empowering Refugees & Asylum Seekers through English Language Teaching

## Webinar handout

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### Issues our refugee & asylum seeker students face:

- disrupted life (being out of education / work, personal issues, traumatic experiences)
- lengthy and bureaucratic legal procedures, necessitating retelling of traumatic events
- mental or physical health concerns; poor living conditions; financial difficulties
- lack of structure and activities in their life (e.g., not being able to work or go to school)
- uncertainty as to when their situation will end and being stuck in a limbo
- desiring your one-on-one extended attention due to feeling isolated
- anxiety associated with being in the class (e.g., about difficulty, separation from family)
- poor concentration and self-confidence levels
- sensitivity (e.g., to not knowing or not feeling able to do something)
- sensory overload, or easily feeling overwhelmed, especially about admin and writing
- discomfort feeling excluded, inferior or wrong, or when being treated differently



### Challenges we faced delivering the *Transitions* programme we worked on in Hong Kong:

- recruiting enough volunteer teachers to commit to regular classes throughout the year
- sustaining motivation in our volunteer teachers and also our students
- low or non-attendance (due to lack of routines, no schooling, other appointments)
- lack of parent involvement and engagement due to their own issues or commitments

- cultural differences (e.g. late arrivals, parents completing children's work for them, getting upset if teacher wanted to give constructive feedback)
- students having varied online accessibility
- students not completing homework tasks
- enforcing boundaries with communication and managing expectations



### Suggested solutions:

- **rules and routines** that you regularly remind students of (even before each lesson)
- **ease separation anxiety** by getting parents to attend the first few lessons with children
- **parents' training** same time children are in class (e.g., strategies for getting involved with their children i.e., crafts or reading tips, or teaching them relaxation techniques)
- **encourage emotion regulation** in class (e.g., calming activities, allowing breaks)
- **needs analyses and regular feedback surveys** so that you integrate student interests in lessons (also, giving toys or books to choose from, and talking to them one-on-one)
- **sense of belonging** (giving name badges & British Council branded bags/folders/books)
- **inclusion** (getting them places in regular classes e.g., summer school; IELTS workshops)
- making them **feel important** (organising Children's Day and Refugee Week events)
- making them **aware of special days** (e.g., Mother's Day, Father's Day, etc) and giving them opportunities to show gratitude to others
- organising events to **showcase their work** to the public and motivate them
- giving **certificates** and hosting **end-of-year** parties to celebrate their achievements
- **validating their challenges** and acknowledging that it's difficult but not impossible
- making students **feel that it's okay not to be ok** and that extra support is available



### A general framework for being more inclusive

#### 1. Be respectful of your students' diverse backgrounds, through being mindful of their:

- Religious / spiritual identities
- Economic backgrounds
- Sexual & gender identities
- Psychological maturity
- Ethnic-cultural-racial identities
- Chronological development & challenges
- Trauma and other threats to well-being
- Family history and dynamics
- Unique characteristics
- Location of residence & language differences

From: D'Andrea & Daniels (2001) <https://www.montana.edu/counseling/documents/Cultural%20Identity.pdf>

**Be wary** of you (or your students) displaying **cultural encapsulation** (being unaware of how our background informs our beliefs and values) and **ethnocentrism** (coming across as our way is the 'better' or 'right' way).

**Be conscious** of the areas you are **privileged** that could enforce a **power-over dynamic**.

(e.g., <https://www.recipesforwellbeing.org/the-wheel-of-power-and-privilege/>)

*Students could easily remember things you say for a long time, so **choose your words wisely!***

## 2. Consider cross-cultural communication differences that could affect classroom dynamics.

For instance:

- *Do you and your students prefer low context (precise, simple, clear, repeated) or high context (sophisticated, nuanced, layered, implied) communication?*
- *How 'confrontational' are you? Do you and your students prefer or avoid direct feedback (positive or negative)? Is it best to give this in front of, or away from others?*
- *Do you and your students view time in a flexible or linear way?*

Adapted from: Meyer, 2014; <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-culture-map-8-scales-for-work-2015-1>

## 3. Follow trauma-informed education guidelines:

- ✓ Be a sensitive, safe space for learning
- ✓ Be consistent and predictable
- ✓ Be empathetic and responsive yet firm
- ✓ Respect privacy and different comfort levels
- ✓ Make adjustments and be flexible
- ✓ Give choices and a sense of control
- ✓ Help students feel similar to others
- ✓ Foster autonomy and independence
- ✓ Scaffold with small steps and realistic goals
- ✓ Support emotion regulation strategies
- ✓ Make learning explicitly relevant to real life
- ✓ Be positive and encourage hope

Adapted from: Palanac et. al. (2023) <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/publications/case-studies-insights-and-research/beyond-resilience-facilitating-learning-and-well>



## Recommended resources

- Trauma in the English language classroom:  
<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/inclusive-practices/articles/how-address-effects-trauma-english>
- Trauma informed teaching strategies for children:  
<https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/trauma-informed-teaching-strategies>
- Teaching with strengths in trauma-affected students:  
<https://gla.memberclicks.net/assets/OpenAccess/brunzell.pdf>
- Podcast on teaching refugees, migrants and IDPs effectively:  
<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/podcast/teaching-english/teaching-english-podcast-how-can-i-teach-refugees>
- The contribution and relevance of English to security, stability, and peace (a collection of articles):  
[https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Pub\\_English\\_Across\\_Fracture\\_Lines.pdf](https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Pub_English_Across_Fracture_Lines.pdf)
- Tips on delivering trauma-informed care in human service organisations:  
<https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/social-research/institutes-centers/institute-on-trauma-and-trauma-informed-care/what-is-trauma-informed-care.html>
- More on refugees & asylum seekers in Hong Kong can be found here:  
<https://www.branchesofhope.org.hk/about-refugees>

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A recording of Beatrix and Reena's webinar can be accessed here:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/inclusion-classroom-mini-event>