
How can you break down barriers in your classroom?

Panel discussion handout

Idea 1: Foster empathy towards disabilities

by Ana Lucía Castells

Here is a brief description of the project I carried out on disabilities.

- **Title project:** *We Are All Differently Able*
- **Level/age of learners:** A2+, ages 9 - 12
- **Driving question:** How can we ensure the well-being of disabled people?
- **Final task:** design a new plan of the school to make it wheelchair friendly
- **Activities:**
 - explore different types of disabilities through simple informative texts
 - take photos of wheelchair-friendly places in your town
 - evaluate if your house is wheelchair friendly
 - read fiction that includes differently abled characters to empathise with them
 - watch shorts/videos to trigger discussion

Resources

Some novels that I suggest using are:

- *A Boy Called Bat* by Elana K. Arnold (Harper Collins). This deals with autism.
- *Out Of My Mind* by Sharon Draper (Atheneum Books). Features a nonverbal wheelchair user
- *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio. (Knopf Books). This deals with facial differences.

Some audiovisual material that I suggest using is:

- The Present short film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XA0bB79oGc>
- Mario Bros Super Mario Bros Enables Access For The Disabled video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAwJlxO2hW0>
- Amazing Things Happen video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ezv85LMFx2E>
- We're The Superhumans | Rio Paralympics 2016 Trailer + activities <https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/study-break/video-zone/were-superhumans-rio-paralympics-2016>

Idea 2: Using surveys to promote gender equality

by Khouloud Attaya

Assessing Students' Assimilation of Gender Equality

Teaching languages is not only about teaching grammar and vocabulary; it is also about teaching life skills and human values, shaping students' personality with each lesson. Promoting gender equality in ELT classes is urgent in light of the former being one of the pillars of a fair society. Many research studies, international projects, and teaching materials have evidenced numerous ways to promote gender equality in the classroom. Here are some examples:

- incorporating inclusive teaching materials,
- role plays, and
- role-reversal activities.

Nonetheless, students' real-life application and practical use of such values may not only be the result of mere exposure to gender-related themes in the classroom.

Gender-focused Surveys: Tips

Surveys can be an all-inclusive, comprehensive and multitarget assessment tool. To design an efficient one, you could divide it into different sections that can be structured as follows:

Design Example:

	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3
Target	General understanding of gender equality	Deeply-seated beliefs on gender	Reflection on gender equality in the classroom
Objective	To assess the baseline knowledge and awareness of students regarding the concept of gender equality.	To uncover underlying beliefs and stereotypes about gender roles.	To evaluate students' perceptions of gender equality within their immediate learning environment.

Sample Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Which of the following best defines gender equality?” • “Do you believe that gender equality is important in our society?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a. "Men are naturally better leaders than women." ○ b. "Women should primarily focus on home and family rather than careers." ○ c. "It's okay for boys to cry and show their emotions openly."" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Reflecting on our classroom environment, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Our classroom promotes gender equality and respects all students' contributions equally." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strongly Disagree ▪ Disagree ▪ Neutral ▪ Agree ▪ Strongly Agree”
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Follow up Activities:

Based on the survey results, follow up activities would help address the identified issues.

Classroom debates, discussions and role-plays can work well.

Idea 3: How to respond to insensitive language

by Verónica Higareda

Educators may face offensive language in the classroom, sparking reactive responses. Using calling-in skills can address insensitive behaviour respectfully, leading to learning opportunities.

Calling in: What and why

Calling-in is wanting to bravely have difficult conversations with students while respecting their differences, typically in a private conversation. There are many reasons why we use it.

1. We use calling in **when we are seeking to understand or learn more** about where this language or behaviour stems from.
 - Did the student hear this: in the playground? from his/her parents? in a song/tv series?
2. We use calling in when we want to help students **imagine different perspectives, possibilities or outcomes**.
 - Does the student understand that people have different opinions and lived experiences, and that their intent, even as a joke, can still be hurtful?
3. We use calling in because we **care about the relationship**, so we **invest in each other**.

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- We build rapport and trust by modelling kindness and active listening skills.
 - 4. We use calling in as a way to **foster awareness without shame** and provide **an opportunity for growth**.
 - We create a brave space for students to safely explore and be curious to ask the “wrong questions” or say the “wrong word”.

Suggested sentence starters

- *Hey, hang on a minute, that's a strong word. What do you mean by_____?*
- *Ok, so, where did you hear/see_____? What do you think it means? Is it_____?*
- *What is the connection between ___ and ___? How is ___ different from ___?*

Further resources

- A guide on Calling In and Calling Out from Harvard University:
https://edib.harvard.edu/files/dib/files/calling_in_and_calling_out_guide_v4.pdf
- An article *Speaking Up without Tearing Down* by Loretta J. Ross:
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/spring-2019/speaking-up-without-tearing-down>

A recording of this panel discussion with Ana, Khoulood and Veronica can be seen ere:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/breaking-down-barriers-mini-event>