

How do we help our learners develop?

Panel discussion handout

Idea 1: Helping students learn by using the elements of nonviolent communication

by Alicja Sablik

Introduction

Nonviolent communication (NVC) is an approach that looks to develop **empathetic listening** and honest expression through **increasing teacher awareness** of the **feelings** and **needs** that are behind student **behaviours**. One element of NVC is the **ability to create observations based on facts, and not judgements**. Why is it worth using? Because empathetic communication creates the safe environment where everybody's feelings and needs are acknowledged. This opens up space for respectful discussion when facing challenging situations.

Examples

Statement	Nonviolent / empathetic statement
Teacher: <i>Maria, why are on your phone again, playing some silly games and not paying attention? (judgement)</i>	Teacher: <i>Maria, I see you hold a phone in your hand (observation)</i>
Teacher: <i>Liam, why are you again talking and going off the track while others are speaking? (judgement)</i>	Teacher: <i>Liam, I've noticed you were chatting with your friends while others were speaking (observation)</i>

Words such as *always, never, again* can be judgemental and make students feel hurt. *Playing silly games* and *going off track* is an interpretation of a situation and might not be entirely true. When we start our sentence with: *I see you .. / I've noticed you ...* we try to name only what we can observe, without adding our own, personal interpretation.

Advantages of using NVC in the classroom

- helps reduce classroom conflict and misunderstandings
- promotes positive communication skills
- can be used with all age groups and levels

References

Corry, C. (2009). *Becoming emotionally intelligent*. Bloomsbury Publishing

Rosenberg, M. (2015) *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life: Life-Changing Tools for Healthy Relationships (Nonviolent Communication Guides)*

Idea 2: Walking in someone else's shoes

By Hiba Mahmood Ali

Overview

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) enhances learners' cognitive, social, emotional, and moral growth, fostering skills for academic success, strong relationships, and lifelong well-being.

Practical steps for building learners' empathy

Step 1 – Define empathy: Understand others' emotions and perspectives, going beyond sympathy to actively see from their viewpoint.

Step 2 – Choose from one or more of the following activities:

- Pair students with unfamiliar classmates to break social barriers.
- Share personal stories focused on emotions like joy, sadness, or anger.
- Practice active listening with eye contact and clarifying questions like, "What was the most challenging part of that experience?"
- Reflect back to ensure understanding, summarizing feelings and perspectives.
- Switch roles and repeat.

Step 3 – Discussion: Reflect on the experience in a group setting to deepen insights.

What's the impact?

Empathy strengthens relationships, builds trust, and fosters compassion, creating more connected and supportive communities.

Explore articles related to empathy on our website:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/knowning-subject/d-h/empathy>

www.britishcouncil.org

www.teachingenglish.org.uk

Idea 3: Supportive teacher talk

By Marina Yesipenko

TTT (Teacher Talking Time) is often limited in class for obvious reasons. But what if we, instead of limiting it, start using it as a tool to help our learners of various ages grow and develop as a personality in an ELT environment? Below are a few valuable ideas for different age groups. Feel free to implement these activities into your everyday teaching practices, which might give your lessons a more humanistic perspective.

A practical activity for young learners and teenagers

It is well-known that young learners like art and try to develop their creativity everywhere, including an ELT classroom, while teens continue this trend, eager to deal with pictures, thought-provoking photos and even metaphorical cards. How can we put it into practice?

Try asking questions like:

- Can you see yourself in this picture? Where are you?
- How are you feeling here? Are you happy/lonely/sad? Why?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation in your life? How did you feel?

A practical activity for adults

Lower-level adult students might be guided through the hard times with grammar, developing skills, or whatever activity which might prove challenging to them, with the help of reflection procedures. Try using the following questions with your low-level adult students:

- What did you do to get the answer?
 - Which part of your strategy worked out well?
 - Which part could you change next time?
 - What can you learn from this activity?
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A recording of Alicja, Hiba and Marina's webinar can be watched here:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/helping-our-learners-develop-mini-event>