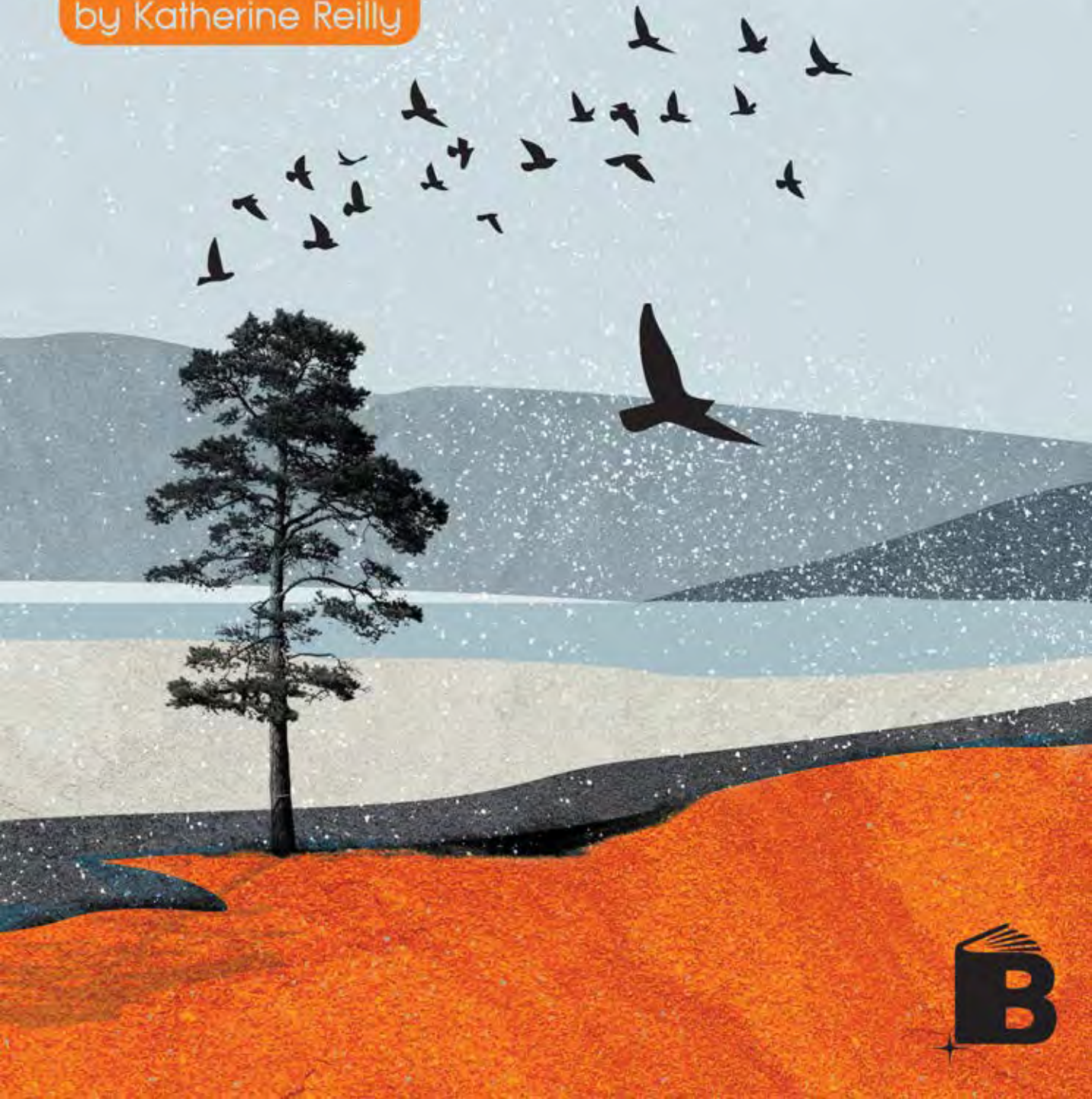


Breaking Barriers

Inclusive ELT Through Critical Discourse Analysis
and Universal Design for Learning

by Katherine Reilly



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Reader's Guide

Privacy and Confidentiality

This handbook includes real-life scenarios and experiences to illustrate key concepts and strategies. In order to protect the privacy of the individuals involved, names, specific details, and identifying features of students have been altered. This preserves confidentiality without compromising the integrity of the learning experiences.

Note on References and Explanatory Notes

To ensure clarity, this handbook uses two types of notes:

- **Latin-symbol footnotes** which provide brief explanations or clarifications within the text.
- **Numbered endnotes** for citations which are listed at the end of the book in the 'References' section.

Section: Think and Engage

This section presents thought-provoking queries at the beginning of each subchapter, with the ultimate goal of delving into the key concepts in focus. Each question invites readers to ponder upon personal experiences and how these relate to the subchapter's theme, rendering the material more relatable and meaningful. Readers are called upon to consider how these ideas connect to their own teaching context, preparing them to engage more deeply with the chapter's main themes.

Section: Reflection Prompts

Situated at the end of each chapter, the Reflection Prompts invite readers to evaluate the practical implications of the chapter's ideas. These prompts encourage self-assessment and critical thinking, as readers evaluate how the material aligns with their current beliefs and practices in inclusive teaching. This section aims to deepen understanding and inspire educators to make meaningful changes in the educational environment.

Section: Metacognitive Mastery

Metacognition^{lxxxiii} is a key feature integrated within the pages of the book, designed to support both student-centered and teacher-led reflective practices. By encouraging educators to think critically about their teaching methods and student engagement, the book fosters a deeper understanding of inclusive strategies.



A. My Personal Journey in ELT



If one were to assume that my journey in education was easy, they'd be sadly mistaken. For those of you who don't know me, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Katherine: I'm an English teacher, ELT instructor, ELT author, and, lastly, a trans woman. Perhaps you might say, "But surely, your gender shouldn't matter within the field of education?" I wish that were the case. Sadly, marginalized individuals are often excluded from educational spaces, and I don't mean this metaphorically. People of color, people of various genders, and those of diverse ethnic backgrounds have long suffered due to the persistent misconception that education is a privilege reserved for a select few. Education is – or rather, should

be – a right for all, and to deny this is a violation of our fundamental human rights.

I, too, struggled with constant contempt and disapproval from both scholars and fellow students. Not everyone dismissed me, mind you, but peace of mind often felt like an unreachable dream. I might have abandoned my education altogether, were it not for the support of a handful of people. Even now, in my role as an educator, I continue to experience a degree of exclusion within the ELT field.

A few years ago, I recall being taunted during a conference while delivering an academic lecture. Three women in the front row mocked my voice and gender throughout. Despite the frustration and blow to my self-esteem, I left the lecture unscathed, and more importantly, I received appreciation from many attendees who thanked me after the session. Moments like this fuel my resolve to stand strong and persevere. Education is evolving at an incredible pace, incorporating new methodologies and approaches. Still, not everyone has embraced the concept of inclusive education.

My experiences as both a student and a teacher have shown me the urgent need for a handbook like this. A reassessment of our educational approach is long overdue, and writing this book is only the first step. But I can't do it alone – and that's where you come in. The fact that you're reading this means you're committed to making a change that will benefit your students. Whether the issue is race, gender, ethnicity, or special educational needs, we can make a difference by celebrating the unique qualities each student brings. By embracing 'differences' as 'assets,' we can expand our worldview – and, more importantly, that of our students – to include a richer, more diverse wealth of knowledge, helping us all become true global citizens. I hope this handbook serves as a valuable tool in this endeavor.

As for me? I haven't really spoken much about my own professional achievements, have I? Suffice it to say, with over forty publications in ELT, this one holds special importance to me. Giving lectures at conferences and universities is one thing, but leaving behind a written legacy that could improve the life of even a single student? That's priceless. Thank you, dear reader and colleague, for believing in this vision. Let's make our lessons more inclusive and welcoming!

B. Building a Vision for Inclusive ELT

When discussing English Language Teaching (ELT) in today's educational landscape, accessible and unbiased teaching materials are expected. Publishers now frequently emphasize the inclusivity of their materials, proudly showcasing 'inclusive' practices in each new coursebook. Admittedly, some publishers have made genuine progress.

We now occasionally see portrayals of characters with physical disabilities, a few with skin tones that deviate from the traditionally dominant white, and more 'guest' characters of various nationalities offering brief insights into their cultures and countries. Diverse approaches to teaching these materials are also increasingly reflected in the accompanying lesson plans.

Now, don't get me wrong—I genuinely applaud the efforts of some publishers. To a degree, I've managed to have my voice and concerns heard. However, certain instances have been incredibly frustrating. Comments like, "Katherine, you can't expect us to include a visual representation of a mixed-race family in this book! Do you know who our clientele is? They'll never purchase from us again!" or, "You understand that depicting a woman as a doctor is forbidden for this audience, don't you?" have been disappointing, to say the least.

My primary grievance with certain publishers lies in the lesson plans that accompany their so-called 'meticulously compiled' coursebooks. "You can download these lesson plans to cater to your students' needs. Follow them, and nothing could go wrong!" But how, one might wonder, can a technocratic, narrowly scoped lesson plan truly address the needs of a diverse learning environment? The truth is...it can't. No coursebook can fully reflect the educational needs of every student. Teachers who enter the classroom without thoughtful preparation do a disservice to our profession. Have they ever truly considered their students' diverse educational demands? Do the materials they use genuinely reflect the learners' ethnic backgrounds or family dynamics? Dare I point out that representations of same-sex couples and their families are virtually absent from ELT materials? A major publisher once had the audacity to dismiss my recommendation for such representation, responding, "Why aren't you being realistic? It's not worth the risk to include such an image just to please a few families!"

"To please a few families?" I'm sorry, but this isn't about pleasing anyone.

It's about respecting students and providing a welcoming, accepting environment where they can express themselves and thrive. Even if there were only a single same-sex couple with children in the world (and in reality, there are hundreds of thousands), we, as educators, have a duty to help all students reach their full potential. Some may ask, *if not a lesson plan, then what?* I'm glad you asked! We must carefully consider the unique educational needs of each group of students we're entrusted to guide through their learning journey.

An educational scenario should be developed based on each student's unique attributes:

- real-life circumstances
- personal educational needs
- social and communicative abilities

This approach calls for a broader, more nuanced representation in teaching materials, which undeniably requires additional time for careful adaptation and preparation.

Allow me to voice my concerns. How would you teach a class of extroverted students, except for one introverted student from a different nationality who is being raised by their grandparents? Let's consider another scenario: a dyslexic student who is being bullied, cannot speak the local language, and has just migrated to your country.

Textbooks typically lack any representation of their culture, traditions, or way of life.

Then there is the matter of gender identity and pronoun usage. Today's society often fails to respect what some deem 'different.' For instance, transgender individuals frequently face verbal abuse or even physical violence. Education plays a pivotal role in fostering respect and acceptance, and ELT should be no exception; these values must be integral to our teachings.

Therefore, evaluating educational scenarios before each lesson is essential. Meticulous preparation, grounded in respect and equity, is the cornerstone of effective teaching. Now that we recognize its importance, the next step is identifying the right tools to achieve this goal.



C. Aims and Objectives of This Handbook

By now, you've likely connected the dots as to why I felt such a publication was necessary in today's educational landscape. ELT has indeed made meaningful strides, but there's still a long way to go. If you need further reassurance of my claims, allow me to share a few cases of students whose struggles deserve our attention.

The following is a letter I received a couple of years ago:

*"Dear Ms. Reilly,
I hope this letter finds you well. My name is David and I am a trans boy who hopes to become a math teacher one day. I'm lucky to have supportive parents, something that, unfortunately, isn't very common in my country. Even though my parents love and support me, I get bullied a lot at school for being trans.*

My teacher refuses to use the correct pronouns and keeps calling me a girl, just because that is what it says on my birth certificate. I look like a boy, I sound like a boy, but the moment I raise my hand to answer one of her questions, my classmates burst into laughter when she refers to me as a 'she' and calls me by my dead name. Even though my parents have complained about this, the state and the principal continue to support her. I've been skipping classes because I can't take it anymore. I want to study and follow my dreams but that's probably never going to happen.

Please help me!

*Yours sincerely,
David"*



I keep asking myself: how difficult would it be for his teacher to simply address him properly, easing some of his suffering instead of encouraging his classmates to follow her lead?

The following statement was made by a student of mixed-race origin during the Q&A session following my plenary speech at a local youth conference at the University of Athens.

"Because of my skin color, I have been constantly ignored by my teachers throughout the years when it comes to discussions about customs and family traditions. One of them explicitly told me that 'If you want to talk about your customs and traditions, go back from where you came from. You're living here now. Get used to it!'" – Veronica



Perhaps the most heartbreaking response I've ever received came from a former employer who dismissed my concerns for a struggling student. This student had difficulty with reading comprehension due to dyslexia, so I respectfully requested permission to email audio

versions of the texts to his parents. This would offer him vital support, allowing him to engage with the material at his own pace and come to each lesson better prepared.

My employer, however, reprimanded me for “making exceptions” and “favoring students,” insisting that “all students should be treated equally.” He ignored the fact that each student learns and retains knowledge at their own pace and through different means. Notably, my employer had no background in ELT; he had studied business and had successfully established a school. While his marketing skills were impressive, he lacked the compassion and genuine commitment to students’ education and well-being.



This brings us back to the heart of our challenge: all students must be entitled to an education. No one should be judged based on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, family structure, or special educational needs. Every student has the right to express themselves freely—provided they do so with respect for their peers. ELT embodies the values of acceptance and inclusion, and as educators, we are obligated to uphold these standards to the best of our ability.

Breaking Barriers promotes a pedagogical approach to inclusive learning, with the ultimate goal of adapting and enhancing any teaching materials assigned to us. The stereotypical phrase “no man left behind” evolves into the more inclusive “no person left behind,” a motto which captures and celebrates the essence of this handbook.

Breaking Barriers fully supports:

- Inclusive methodologies in English Language Teaching
- Approaches to evaluating existing teaching materials
- Adaptation of these materials to foster an inclusive learning environment

By creating inclusive teaching materials, we highlight the shortcomings in today’s ELT bibliography. Addressing these gaps paves the way for our students to thrive, empowering them to reach their fullest potential and fulfil their dreams.

Chapter 1: Understanding Learner Identities in ELT

A. Recognizing and Embracing Diverse Backgrounds



Think and Engage

1. What does “diversity” mean to you in the context of a classroom?
2. Can you recall a time when a student’s unique background positively impacted a lesson or class discussion?

Classroom Chronicles:

In 2022, one of my classes welcomed a student from the Philippines named Amara. She had recently moved to Greece and faced the challenges of adapting to a new language and culture. Even though Amara was eager to participate, I quickly noticed that she was hesitant to speak up, perhaps due to uncertainty about her language skills. To help her ease her anxiety, I decided to incorporate elements of her cultural background into our lessons.

One day, we worked on a project exploring various countries and their unique customs. I invited Amara to share a few traditions from the Philippines. Any signs of tension or insecurities faded as she began describing her family’s favorite festival, Sinulog.^{lxxxiv} She spoke about the colorful parades and traditional dances, the festival’s significance and its impact on their society. The other students listened carefully, asking questions and showing genuine interest. Thanks to this experience, and many others that followed, Amara built a new found confidence, realizing that her background was not only welcomed, but celebrated as well.

This is one of many occurrences which made me realize how a student’s cultural identity can transform the classroom experience; a reminder of the importance of creating a space where each student feels seen and appreciated, ultimately leading to engagement and self-appreciation.

^{lxxxiv} Sinulog is an annual cultural and religious festival held in Cebu, Philippines, honoring the Santo Niño (Child Jesus). It features a vibrant street parade with traditional dances, colorful costumes, and rhythmic drumbeats, reflecting both indigenous and Spanish colonial influences.

Inclusive Theory in Focus:

Each and every one of us is a unique individual. This ‘uniqueness’ which defines us as distinct beings is greatly influenced by the varying cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds which have shaped our lives. In an inclusive English language teaching environment, recognizing and embracing the diversity of learners’ backgrounds is essential to creating a supportive setting that values each student’s identity and experiences (Holiday, 2016).¹⁴ By understanding how these backgrounds affect their learning experience and needs, we can better equip them with the proper tools to master the language.

A fundamental aspect of embracing diversity is acknowledging that students bring a wide range of cultural influences into the learning environment. It goes without saying that these backgrounds affect not only language proficiency, but also students’ attitudes towards learning, communication styles, and interactions with their fellow students and teachers (Gay, 2018).¹⁵ Upon recognition of such influences, it becomes essential to adapt our teaching practices to bridge cultural gaps, thereby fostering a more relatable and inclusive classroom environment. This is known as Culturally Responsive Teaching, which prompts educators to incorporate elements of students’ cultural references into lessons, facilitating a more accessible and engaging experience (Ladson-Billings, 1995).¹⁶

Perhaps the most significant acknowledgment one must make is the validity of all language varieties and the impact they have on one’s identity. Dialects, accents, and multilingual abilities should not be seen as obstacles to language learning, but rather as catalysts to further embracing linguistic diversity. This, in turn, creates an environment where students feel their linguistic backgrounds are respected and valued (Kubota, 2021).¹⁷

The misconception that certain dialects or accents represent the “true” form of English, is outdated. This can be celebrated and promoted in class, enhancing students’ confidence as well as nurturing a sense of belonging.

Since we have touched upon the notion of belonging, ensuring access to educational resources should be a priority in every educational institution. Socio-economic factors have often influenced students’ access to said resources, which can affect both their performance and their desire to participate in class. Understanding which students have limited access to study materials or technology outside the classroom is essential for providing them with the necessary resources to meet with their academic obligations (Banks, 2019).¹⁸ Equitable access to classroom resources, alternative assignments, or differentiated instruction can be proven crucial in supporting learners from diverse economic backgrounds.

In essence, implementing inclusive practices through materials that reflect a variety of cultures and languages, will enable students to see themselves within the learning process. Encouraging them to share their own stories or perspectives enhances visibility and helps alleviate their concerns of being seen as outsiders within the learning environment. Respect is subsequently cultivated amongst peers and nurtures the capacity for deeper engagement in class (Paris, 2012).¹⁹

Reflection Prompt 1A

Reflect on your classroom demographics, considering factors such as cultural background, language, and socio-economic status. Write a plan for a lesson where you integrate at least two culturally relevant examples that reflect your students’ backgrounds. Afterwards, explain how these examples might assist students in connecting more with the lesson content on a more personal level.

B. Identifying and Challenging Bias in Teaching Materials



Think and Engage

1. *Have you ever noticed any stereotypes in classroom materials? How did you feel about them?*
2. *Why is it important to challenge stereotypes and bias in any educational content?*

Classroom Chronicles:

Have you ever been on a family holiday? If so, did you enjoy it? Personally, I cherish a weekend retreat I had as a child with my parents at a simple, yet welcoming resort on the outskirts of my hometown, Chicago. It was the only time my family and I enjoyed a one-night stay away from home and I am grateful my parents managed to pull it off, as our financial resources wouldn't allow for more. Fast forward to the present - as we will analyze a recent lesson which stirred these memories and emotions. To be more precise, I used a textbook story about a family's holiday experience in Europe, full of sightseeing and visits to historical landmarks. As we read the story, I noticed the indifference in my students' eyes. I then asked them to share their thoughts on the story. One student raised her hand, saying, "Miss? None of my family vacations look like this!"

Her comment ignited a lengthy conversation about why stories in English language materials often depict only one kind of lifestyle, usually middle- or upper-class and more often than not, centered around Western experiences. This struck a chord with most students, who adamantly voiced how different their family trips looked—staying with relatives, taking nearby road trips, or even spending holidays that focused on helping with family businesses. This was the first time my students ever expressed such disassociation from the textbook materials.

Taking a cue from our heated conversation, I asked the students to rewrite the story to reflect a vacation they could relate to more closely. In contrast to the one presented in the book, the students' stories reflected diverse cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and family dynamics. Some wrote about spending time with extended family, celebrating cultural festivals, or exploring places within their countries. The activity was an eye-opener, and it felt like a small step towards making our materials more representative. This experience reminded me of the importance of recognizing bias in teaching content and of the benefits of adapting lessons to reflect students' own realities and experiences.

Inclusive Theory in Focus:

Identifying and addressing bias in language teaching materials is essential for promoting inclusion in any educational setting. Biases embedded in educational content may pose a subtle, yet detrimental influence on students' perceptions of themselves and others. CDA provides a framework for uncovering these biases, as it examines how language can both reflect and shape cultural and social ideologies, as stated by Fairclough (2010).

In ELT contexts, specifically in textbooks and resources, the social roles, relationships, and cultural norms depicted, may reinforce stereotypes. Analysis of such contexts can reveal underlying biases regarding race, gender, nationality, and socioeconomic status that are implicitly endorsed by the language. Research by Gray (2013) suggests that many ELT materials continue to portray Western, white, middle-class individuals in the majority of examples, often disregarding diverse voices and experiences. By examining the representation of various groups, language educators can distinguish and address potential biases that may marginalize students of diverse backgrounds.

A significant first step is to scrutinize individuals represented within the contexts of our materials, while also examining the absence of others. Studies show that language learners may not identify with the characters or scenarios presented that do not reflect their cultural realities (Kubota, 2003).³⁵ A case in point is portraying Western settings as “the norm” while presenting other cultures as “alien”, which can negatively influence students' self-esteem and reinforce “othering.”³⁶ Including content that exhibits a plethora of backgrounds can inspire a more inclusive mindset and enable students to see themselves reflected within the curriculum (Canagarajah, 2005).³⁶

Language teachers can actively challenge these biases by adapting educational materials and integrating diverse perspectives. Substituting stereotypical images or text with varied cultural examples, using gender-neutral language, and incorporating authentic resources that represent a variety of global perspectives, are just a few techniques which may be implemented (Sunderland, 2004).³⁷ For instance, instead of using traditional examples of family structures, teachers might include diverse family dynamics, such as single-parent households, same-sex parents, or extended family living situations, to better represent the diversity within the student population.

The inclusion of tasks that encourage students to critically engage with the target language and address proper representation can also deepen their understanding of societal attitudes. Activities might involve analyzing a text's portrayal of gender roles or discussing how certain adjectives are attributed to different groups. This approach not only helps students develop critical literacy skills, but also empowers them to question societal norms exhibited not only in the materials at hand, but in language itself.

If educators consider the potential of CDA in ELT classrooms, it will enable them to stimulate a more equitable and inclusive learning experience by critically engaging with language. By actively dismantling potential stereotypes, teachers encourage students to embrace diversity and view language as a tool for comprehension and respect of varied perspectives.

Reflection Prompt 2B

Review a selection of teaching materials or sample texts. Identify any instances of bias or stereotyping, and propose one or two alternatives that would make the content more inclusive. Share how these changes could positively affect student connection and comprehension.

³⁶ Othering is the process of perceiving or portraying individuals or groups as fundamentally different and inferior, often reinforcing stereotypes and social hierarchies. In education, it can manifest through materials and interactions that marginalize certain identities, making it essential for educators to challenge such biases and foster inclusivity.

C. Supporting Mental Health and Well-being



Think and Engage

1. *What role should teachers and peers play in supporting each other's mental health and well-being in class? Share your thoughts.*
2. *What kind of classroom activities or routines do you think can help create a supportive and low-stress environment for learning? Provide an example.*

Classroom Chronicles:

As the date of their C2 English Language Assessment Exams approached,^{cxvii} the stress in my class was all too obvious. Anxiety overwhelmed many of the students, occasionally leading to arguments amongst them. Despite the fact that I frequently emphasized the importance of their achievements – their command of the target language and the personal effort they have made – some felt immense pressure to meet the high expectations of their parents, while others worried about the societal perception of failure. Fortunately, we introduced sessions which helped alleviate their frustrations and anxiety. These sessions focused on stress-management techniques, effective communication, and brief yet relieving activities, such as online trivia quizzes and board games, to support students feeling anxious during lesson.

A few days before their exams, we paused the lesson to reflect upon all their achievements - the moments we bonded throughout the academic year during birthdays and Christmas celebrations, the silly times that brought laughter, and the instances of support and compassion during the challenges they faced. It was definitely worth it, as it eased their tensions and helped them focus on their well-being.

Exam day finally arrived. As their teacher, my main concern was their mental well-being. They had nothing to prove to me. A certificate meant little if it came at the cost of burnout. I accompanied them to the exam center, and before long, they were in and out in no time. Eventually, the results were released - they had all passed. But even if they had not, I would still have been proud of them. What mattered most was that their anxieties didn't

^{cxvii} C2 refers to the highest level of language proficiency as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), indicating an advanced mastery of English.

get the better of them and that they faced this “ordeal” with their heads held high and their confidence unscathed.

Inclusive Theory in Focus:

Mental health and well-being play a crucial role in a student’s overall development and learning. In inclusive classrooms, educators must recognize the significance of promoting an environment that promotes mental health. Given the personal and societal challenges students face, supporting mental health has become more important than ever. Mental health issues can affect students’ capacity for learning, their commitment, and their overall experience in the educational environment. Academic pressure, personal difficulties, or societal expectations can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges, all of which can pose a negative impact on a student’s ability to fully engage in the learning process.

To effectively address these issues, educators must be aware of the mental health challenges that may affect their students. By recognizing warning signs and offering timely emotional support, educators can help mitigate the challenges students might face. Furthermore, integrating mental health awareness into the broader context of inclusive teaching practices can effectively prevent such issues from ever arising. Fostering mental well-being is also crucial for promoting self-regulation, resilience, and positive coping strategies, which can have a lasting impact on their personal and academic development (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).⁶⁹

Key Approaches to Supporting Mental Health:

- **Promoting Emotional Literacy:** Educators can promote emotional literacy in the classroom by incorporating activities that help students identify, understand, and manage their emotions. Techniques such as introducing mindfulness exercises, writing a journal, or guided discussions about mental health can encourage students to contemplate their feelings and better handle any negative emotions they are being plagued by.
- **Fostering a Supportive Classroom Environment:** Emotional safety and inclusivity are crucial elements when fostering a supportive educational network. Teachers must offer opportunities to students to discuss their experiences and address misconceptions about mental health. This can be achieved through the context of the lesson when addressing social, emotional, and cultural elements and how the students identify with them. This approach not only helps students manage their emotions but also encourages peer support and understanding.
- **Providing Access to Mental Health Resources:** While most educators are not trained mental health professionals, they can provide students with resources and guidance on where to find professional help. Encouraging open dialogue about mental health can also help reduce the stigma that often prevents students from seeking support. Educators, however, should be wary when offering ‘unsupported’ or ‘untrained’ guidance and should first confer with the school psychologist, as well as the parents or guardians of their students, to ensure all parties are aware. This will facilitate the maximum potential of support from all parties.

- **Integrating Mental Health into Curriculum Design:** The incorporation of mental health topics in the curriculum via case studies, stories, or guest speakers, can raise awareness and reduce biases. By integrating mental health in the curriculum, teachers stress the importance of addressing any underlying mental health issues before they escalate further.
- **Recognizing the Impact of Family and Social Contexts:** Students' mental health is often influenced by factors outside the classroom, such as family dynamics, socio-economic conditions, and social pressures. Recognizing these factors and offering tailored support can help ameliorate their grievances or frustrations.

Addressing Stress and Academic Pressure

In many educational systems, particularly at higher levels of learning, students often experience elevated stress as they approach significant assessments. For instance, those preparing for B2 or C2 level exams (CEFR) may feel pressure not only from their own ambitions but also from family expectations, social norms, and peer comparisons. If not properly managed, stress can impair students' cognitive function, reduce concentration, and lead to burnout – side effects I have personally witnessed over the years.

Therefore, it is important for educators to recognize the pressures students face and create an environment where stress is acknowledged and managed accordingly. This includes:

- ✓ normalizing conversations about stress
- ✓ mentoring them on how to implement relaxation techniques
- ✓ providing them with strategies to balance school demands
- ✓ allowing flexibility in deadlines
- ✓ promoting healthy study habits
- ✓ encouraging breaks during intense study sessions

Inclusive Strategies for Supporting Well-being

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** In earlier chapters, we examined how UDL offers a framework for designing learning experiences that accommodate the diverse needs of all students, including those with mental health challenges. By providing multiple ways of immersion, representation, and expression, UDL supports students in managing their mental health while also ensuring they thrive in the educational environment (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).^{cxviii}
- **Peer Support Systems:** Although formal peer mentoring programs are not always available, students can still benefit from informal peer support. Group activities, collaborative projects, and peer feedback can encourage social interaction, reduce feelings of isolation, and foster a sense of belonging. This, in turn, will inevitably lead to improved emotional resilience and instill a sense of confidence within students - as personally observed throughout my classes.

- **Teacher-Student Relationships:** Establishing a positive, trusting relationship with students is one of the most effective ways to support mental health. Teachers who are approachable, empathetic, and who actively listen to students can make a significant difference in helping students feel comfortable and supported, even in challenging situations. Educators, however, should be mindful not to overstep their authority, as there is a difference between being friendly and being friends.

Reflection Prompt 5C

Consider a situation where you or someone you know struggled with stress, anxiety, or other mental health challenges. Reflect on how these challenges affected learning and commitment. What steps can educators and peers take to create a classroom environment that supports mental well-being? Develop a brief action plan outlining three ways to foster positive mental health practices in a learning environment.

Expanded Section

C. Inclusive Vocabulary: Language for Equity and Respect

Words carry power and educators should be wary of their impact on the learner. The vocabulary we use in teaching not only reflects societal norms but also shapes how students perceive themselves and others. In English Language Teaching (ELT), incorporating inclusive language helps create an environment that respects diverse identities and challenges outdated stereotypes. This subchapter explores practical strategies for integrating inclusive language into your classroom and provides examples to support your teaching.

Why Inclusive Vocabulary Matters

Using inclusive vocabulary ensures that language does not marginalize or exclude certain groups. For example, terms like *policeman* or *fireman*, for instance, imply gender exclusivity, whereas *police officer* or *firefighter* are gender-neutral alternatives that acknowledge diversity. Similarly, *chairman* can be replaced with *chairperson* or simply *chair* to promote inclusivity.

Inclusive vocabulary also involves addressing stereotypes, practicing cultural sensitivity, and affirming diverse identities. For instance, teachers can avoid assumptions by using terms like *partner* instead of *husband* or *wife*, thereby ensuring inclusivity for LGBTQI+ individuals.

Inclusive Vocabulary: Suggested Alternatives

Non-Inclusive Term	Inclusive Alternative	Explanation
Actress / Heroine	Actor / Hero	Applies a consistent term for all genders in performing arts.
Air hostess / Stewardess	Flight attendant	Reflects the non-gendered nature of the profession.
Bachelor / Spinster	Unmarried person	Eliminates terms with gendered connotations and possible bias.
Businessman	Business executive	Highlights professionalism without gender bias.
Chairman	Chairperson / Chair	Removes male-centric bias in professional titles.
Fireman	Firefighter	Acknowledges the diversity of individuals in this role.
Forefathers	Ancestors	Recognizes contributions beyond a patriarchal lens.
Housewife	Homemaker	Acknowledges that this role is not exclusive to women.
Mailman	Postal worker	Provides a neutral term, inclusive of all genders.
Mankind	Humanity	Emphasizes inclusivity in referring to all people.
Man-made	Human-made / Artificial	Reflects that creations are not inherently male-associated.
Manpower	Workforce / Staff	Avoids implying that workforces are exclusively male.
Maternal/Paternal Leave	Parental Leave	Neutral term recognizing leave for caregiving roles, irrespective of gender.
Policeman / Policewoman	Police officer	Avoids gender-specific terms, recognizing that the profession is open to all.
Salesman	Sales representative	Promotes a professional title free from gender assumptions.
Spokesman	Speaker	Removes the male-centric implication while maintaining clarity.
Waiter / Waitress	Service attendant	Acknowledges inclusivity in the hospitality industry.

Classroom Strategies for Inclusive Vocabulary

Model Inclusive Language:

Use inclusive vocabulary consistently in your instructions, materials, and discussions. For example, say *students* instead of *boys and girls* to avoid unnecessary gender binaries.

Teach Awareness of Language Evolution:

Discuss how language changes over time to reflect societal shifts. For instance, words like *actress* have largely been replaced by *actor* to denote equality in professions.

Encourage Students to Reflect:

Ask students to identify biased or exclusive terms in texts and suggest inclusive alternatives. This can be a collaborative and thought-provoking activity.

Create a Vocabulary Wall:

Dedicate a classroom space or virtual board to inclusive vocabulary. Regularly update it with terms and phrases that students encounter in lessons.

Discuss Context and Appropriateness:

Emphasize that inclusivity does not mean erasing all traditional terms but understanding their context and choosing words that align with respect and equity.

Activities for Teaching Inclusive Vocabulary

Activity 1: Rewrite the Headlines

Provide students with news headlines or text excerpts that use outdated or biased language. Ask them to rewrite these using inclusive alternatives.

- Example: “*Firemen Rescue Kitten from Tree*” → “*Firefighters Rescue Kitten from Tree*”

Activity 2: Build a Profession List

Ask students to brainstorm gendered professions (e.g., *nurse, doctor, waiter, actress*) and replace them with neutral terms (*nurse, doctor, server, actor*).

Activity 3: Inclusive Role-Playing

Create role-play scenarios where students practice using inclusive terms in real-life situations, such as addressing diverse family structures or introducing someone without assuming their gender.

Activity 4: Detecting Stereotypes in Language

Have students analyze sample advertisements, stories, or dialogues to identify stereotypes and suggest more inclusive wording.



Breaking Barriers

Inclusive ELT Through Critical Discourse Analysis
and Universal Design for Learning

by Katherine Reilly

In a world where language classrooms serve as a microcosm of diverse identities and experiences, *Breaking Barriers* offers an essential guide to making language teaching genuinely inclusive and empowering for all learners. This book integrates the transformative potential of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with the flexibility of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), creating a teaching paradigm that respects and embraces diversity.

ELT expert Katherine Reilly weaves a thoughtful narrative grounded in research and practical insight, reflecting real classroom challenges and triumphs. Through compelling case studies, innovative methodologies, and a compassionate commitment to accessibility, *Breaking Barriers* reimagines teaching practices for educators worldwide. Readers will discover practical strategies for embracing diverse identities, fostering safe learning spaces, and cultivating student agency.

More than a methodology guide, *Breaking Barriers* stands as a research-informed teacher development handbook, blending scholarship with real-world classroom experience to redefine inclusion in ELT.

Engaging, reflective, and deeply practical, this book dismantles barriers to learning and demonstrates how teachers can unlock the potential of every student, regardless of background or identity.

"An indispensable resource for educators committed to teaching with empathy and equity."

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