

Trainer book

Ways of making the classroom a safe space

Level 1

Trainer
book

Overview

The aim of this module is to learn how to make the classrooms a safe space for learners. The module explores a range of common practices which contribute to learners not feeling safe in their learning environment, and looks at how teachers can change these practices so that all learners feel included in the learning process.

By the end of this module the participants will be able to:

- explain what the main factors of a safe classroom are
- reflect on their own classrooms and their own practices so they can make necessary changes to make them safer
- apply practical strategies within their classrooms to make them safer spaces
- evaluate whether their learners feel safe within their classrooms.

Section	Description	Additional Materials	Timing (mins)
Learning outcomes	Introducing the learning outcomes for the module		5
1 Lead-in	1.1 What is a safe classroom? Introducing the main topic and thinking about the current situation	Flipchart paper Marker pens Sticky tac/tape	15
2 Discover	2.1 Developing understanding about safe classrooms Reading and sharing key information about safe classrooms	Appendix 1 Appendix 2	40
3 Embed	3.1 Why learners may not feel safe in the classroom Understanding common problems within current educational provision		15
	3.2 What can and can't be changed Understanding what teachers are able to do in their own learning environments		20
	3.3 Making the classroom a safer space Identifying solutions to these problems		15
	3.4 My classroom Thinking about how safe participants' classrooms are		10
4 Apply	4.1 Applying changes at the classroom level Identifying changes participants will make so their classes/schools are safer spaces		20

	4.2 Challenges in creating a safer classroom Reflecting on the difficulties of changing existing practices to make them safer		20
	4.3 How to know if your learners feel safe Developing strategies about how to evaluate whether learners feel safe		15
5 Reflect	5.1 Reflecting on the session Reflecting on the learning outcomes		5

Learning Outcomes



5 mins

- Explain the learning outcomes to the participants.
- Check that they understand them.
- Answer any questions.

By the end of this module the participants will be able to:

- explain what the main factors of a safe classroom are
- reflect on their own classrooms and their own practice to ensure they are making their classrooms as safe as possible
- apply practical strategies within their classrooms to make them safer spaces
- evaluate whether their learners feel safe within their classrooms.

1 Lead-in

Aim: The overall aim of this stage is to introduce the participants to the central idea of the module, namely what the term 'safe classroom' means. Participants will reflect on their own experiences, values and beliefs, and share these with the other members of the group.

1.1 What is a safe classroom?



15 mins

- Write the phrase 'safe classroom' on the board. Ask for a definition. Briefly discuss why it is an important subject.
- Ask the participants to quickly write down any factors which help to create a 'safe classroom' for their learners (2 minutes).

- Give an example if necessary, such as being friendly and welcoming when they enter the room.
- Divide the participants into four groups. Ask them to:
 - share their initial thoughts (3 minutes)
 - add any interesting points to their own box.



- Give each group a flipchart paper and markers.
- Tell groups to:
 - decide which five factors they think are most important
 - write these on the paper (5 minutes)
 - use short, focused phrases rather than full sentences
 - put their paper on the wall when they have finished.
- Tell participants to compare their ideas with the other groups (5 minutes).

Feedback

A good 'working definition' or a safe classroom is one which the learners feel secure, not threatened and not discriminated against. It's an important issue to discuss because in many learning environments, learners do not see them in this way. Even in difficult circumstances, however, teachers have the power to make their classrooms feel safer. If learners do not feel safe, then they are not going to learn effectively.

It is important to remember that this is just a lead-in activity, and so you need to control the time. Tell participants that they will have plenty of time to talk about these issues in detail in the rest of the session.

The aim of this part is just to get them thinking about some of the main ideas, as well as their current classroom practice. However, it may be worth identifying ideas which are common to several groups, and those factors which will be discussed later in this session.

Emphasise that it is especially important for vulnerable learners to feel that the classroom is a safe space, and to think about their refugee/migrant learners as they do the activities in this module.

2 Discover

Aim: The overall aim of this section is for participants to build on these reflections about their own experiences. It will use information from other teachers as well as INEE standards to enable the participants to fully understand the core components of a safe classroom.

2.1 Developing understanding about safe classrooms



- Divide the class equally into participant As, Bs and Cs.
- Tell participants to:

- look at Appendix 1, and read their text (i.e. participant A reads text A). They must not read the other texts
- make notes about their text (5 minutes).



- Create groups. Each group should have an A, B and C.
- Tell participants to:
 - give a spoken summary of the text to their partners
 - listen to the summaries of others in their group and write down anything they think is interesting or important. (10 minutes)
- Monitor and help groups who may find this difficult.
- Tell participants to:
 - work together to write a sentence which includes what they think is the central point of the texts (3 minutes).
 - write no more than 20 words
 - read their sentence to the class (7 minutes). Do not allow too much discussion at this stage. This will follow in the next section.



- Tell participants to:
 - read the text in Appendix 2 (5 minutes). This is a summary of some of the main points raised in the three texts
 - discuss the questions with their group.

Feedback

If your class cannot be divided equally by three, create one or two groups with four people in them (e.g. 2 x As).

When participants give a summary of their text, don't let them look at the original text – only at the notes which they made. This will help them develop their notetaking / presentation skills.

Some difficult / unfamiliar terms are used in some of the texts. Refer participants to the 'Noticeboard' section, which has basic definitions. Where possible, get other participants to explain these terms – if this is not possible, you should explain.

When taking feedback on the 20-word sentences, ask other groups to comment, e.g. to say whether they (dis)agree, and if they have any experience of this in their classroom. This will encourage them to listen actively.

When discussing Appendix 2 with the group, elicit that they have control over all of them. Allow some time for this discussion. You might discuss some of the following points:

1. It can sometimes be difficult to find this information out. You might have access to some of this information through your institution, or you might discover things about your learners accidentally (e.g. in feedback to a task). If learners do talk about

difficult issues, you will need to manage this carefully. There is the risk, for example, that what they say might upset other members of the class.

2. Introduce this idea to learners by asking them a simple question which has multiple answers, e.g. 'What is your favourite colour?' After you receive multiple answers, ask whose answer is correct (i.e. nobody). This will help them understand the point.
3. Learners may not have a framework for thinking about these questions. In such situations, you should not force people to answer this question. What is important is that learners feel they have some control over how they see themselves – and that their identity is not necessarily something which is fixed.
4. Some educational institutions may not support the use of home languages, preferring to use English or another national / international language. However, educational research shows that allowing learners to use their own language is more motivating, inclusive, and leads to better outcomes. In *Education in a multilingual world*, for example, UNESCO recommends that at the first stage of education taken place entirely in a person's first language (see here: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000129728>).
5. Educational institutions are often hierarchical, and learners have little control or influence over what happens. This may be similar to their own lives, where they are constantly told what to do by their parents, police, government etc. The classroom offers an opportunity for some of these norms to be challenged (and turned upside-down).
6. Some forms of discrimination have very deep roots, and may not be visible. Clearly, it may be difficult to talk about some of these forms of discrimination in your group. Even if you can't go into detail about the issues, it is important to raise them. One way to get participants thinking about these issues is to ask them to have empathy – that is, to imagine that they are a learner who is discriminated against – e.g. a girl, a disabled learner, a learner who doesn't speak the language of instruction – and to imagine what it would feel like to be that person in a class.
7. Some learners may have few opportunities to do this in their life outside the classroom. The classroom may be the only place where this is possible, and so it is important to provide this opportunity. This does not mean, of course, that all their problems will be solved. However, it may mean that they can do something positive to help themselves.
8. If learners think and talk about difficult issues, it may become clear that some need expert help. Participants should not feel it is their responsibility to solve all these problems, because they can't. What they can do is be a kind and sympathetic adult. Participants should also be aware of experiencing 'vicarious trauma' from listening to and supporting their learners.

Many of the issues raised here are explored in more detail in other Modules: *Culture and the Classroom*; *Discrimination*; *Introduction to Trauma*.

3 Embed

Aim: In this section, participants will think about common practices which can result in the classroom not being a safe space. They will examine, in detail, the reasons for this. Participants will look at how significant changes can be made to the classroom, and classroom practice, which will make the classroom a safer space.

3.1 Why learners may not feel safe in the classroom



15 mins

- Tell participants to:
 - look quickly in their books
 - say what the text type is
 - read the text by themselves (3 minutes)
 - buzz with a partner (i.e. they talk briefly about the key points) and check they understand the contents (2 minutes).



- Discuss with the whole class why the manager has identified these as areas to work on – what would be the negative impact of these points on the learners. Also discuss whether these points would be relevant in subjects other than English.

Feedback

This text is a lesson observation sheet, written by a manager for a teacher. Some participants may be familiar with this kind of document and process, but others may not. You may need to explain (or ask other participants to explain) the purpose of the document (i.e. for managers to support teachers in developing their skills and effectiveness in the classroom).

You should explain the system which is being used:

- 'what went well' (i.e. positives from the class)
- followed by 'could do better' (i.e. areas to improve).

Emphasise the choice of language, which is supportive and developmental; it does not talk about 'problems' or 'bad things'.

In the discussion, ask questions such as:

- how did the learners feel entering the room, when there was nothing on the walls?
- how did the learners feel when all their mistakes were corrected?
- how did the learners feel when they weren't allowed to use their home language at all?
- how did the girls feel when the teacher was not talking to them?

You will need to be sensitive in these discussions since some participants may feel threatened or feel that they are being criticised. Try to keep it as general / abstract as possible at this stage. However, if participants choose to personalise it, that is also fine.

In response to the final question, the answer is 'yes'. This is also relevant to other subject areas – these are general points which are applicable in all classrooms.

3.2 What can and can't be changed



20 mins

- Tell participants that in the feedback for this lesson, the observer explained more about the seven 'could do better' points. These are included in the box in the Participant Book.
- Tell participants to:
 - work individually
 - read the explanation for each 'can do better' point
 - tick what they think *can* be changed and cross what *can't* be changed.



- Divide the participants into pairs.
- Ask them to compare and give reasons for their ideas.
- Go through the answers one-by-one. In feedback, discuss what changes can and can't be made in the situations given.

Feedback

When teaching in difficult circumstances, participants can sometimes have a negative mindset, and feel that nothing can improve. Certainly, some things can't be changed – but importantly, some things can be changed. It is important to focus on the latter group – to tell participants that there are things which they *can* do to improve the difficult situations in which they might be working. These changes can have a huge impact on learning outcomes, and create a much more positive experience. In challenging teaching environments, small changes can often have a significant impact. So in feedback you might focus on:

1. You can't change the physical aspects of the classroom, but you can change what goes on the wall.
2. You can change how you start the lesson.
3. It's difficult to change the fact that learners don't do homework – indeed, there might be good reasons for this. What can change is the kind of homework which teachers give – and what the minimum requirements needed to do the homework are.
4. You can't change the book content, and it may be very difficult to obtain different materials. However, teachers can change the way they teach the material (e.g. change the characters).
5. You can't change the fact that learners will make mistakes, but you can change how, and how often, you correct them.

6. You can't change the fact that your learners may not be skilled in the language of instruction. It may also be difficult to change the language policy of the school you teach in. However, you may be able to change the languages which you use in your classroom. Teachers may have the ability to decide this.
7. You can't change the number of boys / girls in the classroom, and it may be difficult to change where they sit. It is also difficult to change social and cultural attitudes towards men and women. However, the teacher can change where they stand in the classroom, or where they look, when they teach.

3.3 Making the classroom a safer space



- Tell participants that in the feedback for this lesson, the observer also made recommendations about potential solutions to these problems. They must write the correct heading (e.g. homework / textbooks) in the space.



- Take feedback and discuss in more detail. (1-2 minutes per item).

Feedback

When introducing the task, tell participants that they may already have mentioned some of the suggestions in the previous section.

When taking feedback, ask participants to reflect on their own experiences (and the experiences of their own learners), and to compare these with the information which they have read. You should also talk about any difficulties which they might face in implementing these solutions.

Answers: (a) homework (b) classroom (c) textbooks (d) class atmosphere (e) error correction (f) gender bias (g) classroom language

3.4 My classroom



- Ask participants to:
 - think about what they have learnt in the module so far, and how safe their own classrooms and their own practices are
 - make notes if they wish to
 - share their thoughts in groups of 3 (5 minutes).
- Take feedback in class (5 minutes).

Feedback

Some participants might find this activity difficult, as they have to be honest about their own classrooms. However, it is necessary to do this, if meaningful change is going to take place.

It may be necessary to spend a little time having this conversation with the group as it is essential. Where possible, get other participants to say why this honesty is important (rather than you). To do this effectively, you should introduce the activity in a positive way – to say that teaching refugees is often very challenging. It may not always be possible to create a space which is completely safe – what is important is to try and make it as safe as possible. Emphasise that nobody is being judged. If your class find it difficult to share their ideas in small groups (or if you think they will), you could do this as a whole class discussion.

In discussions, participants should begin by talking about the positives – e.g. those things which do make a safer classroom – before they move onto areas which need to be changed. They must give reasons / evidence for what they say.

At the end, say that in the next section, participants are going to think more specifically about the particular changes which they could make in their own educational institutions,

4 Apply

Aim: In this section, participants will think about what kind of changes they can make in their classrooms and schools, so that learners feel safer. Through role play, they will think about how they can address difficulties in implementing change. They will also learn how to evaluate whether learners feel safe.

4.1 Applying changes at the classroom level



20 mins

- Tell participants to:
 - read the 'personal development plan' in their book
 - discuss the questions in small groups.
- Check that the class are clear on what they have to do. (3 minutes)

Feedback

The rationale for this activity is that participants reflect on their own experiences and what they have learnt in this session. They must think about what changes they can make in their own teaching. Before they start the activity, you might want to check that all participants understand what they have to do (e.g. ask what's the first thing you do, then what's the next thing you do etc.)

In response to the two questions, you might discuss the following:

(a) The problem presented is that only a few learners are doing the homework set by the teacher. The reason given is that they have work to do when they get home, meaning they don't have time to do written homework. There may be other factors as well (e.g. no pen, paper, electricity).

(b) The plan is to do oral homework, where learners share with their family what they learnt. This will help them remember the information, and it will also build their confidence. It will also help to create a more positive educational culture at home. The teacher will also be able to plan better, since more learners are likely to do this homework. What is important is that they begin each lesson by asking the learners to report back on what they did.



- Tell participants to:
 - think about their own classrooms, and also what they learnt in this session so far
 - write their own 'personal development plan'
 - use any language they feel comfortable with (5 minutes)
 - share their responses in the same groups as before (7 minutes)
- Based on the feedback received, participants made changes to their plans. (5 minutes)

Feedback

When learners write their own plan, they should focus on realistic and achievable things which can make a real difference to the learners in their particular context. They should focus on one specific change they would make in their classroom to make it a safer space.

It's important for participants to listen to the feedback they are given in groups, as they can use this to make changes to their plan.

If there is time, participants can write down more than one change they are going to make. Alternatively, this could be something which they do in their own time, as part of their own personal development.

4.2 Challenges in creating a safer classroom



20 mins

- Check participants understand how a role play works, and what the purpose of doing a role play is.
- Do an example with the whole class:
 - ask if anyone would like to share their personal development plan with the class. If nobody wants to do this, ask them to make up a situation (e.g. a parent complaining that their child is not given enough written homework to do)

- explain that you will now do a role play where you (the trainer) will pretend to disagree with what the participant wants to do. The participant must try and convince you to change your mind by explaining the value and importance of this change.
- Divide the class into pairs. They have 6-8 minutes to prepare their first role play.
- Each pair performs their role play to another pair.
- Participants prepare their second role play.
- Each pair performs their second role play, in the same group as before.
- Take feedback.

Feedback

Explain to the class why you are doing a role play (i.e. it can be very realistic, and help participants prepare better when in their own learning environment). They may find the idea of doing a role play a bit unusual or scary. Explain to them the value of the activity – that ‘acting’ and not being yourself can sometimes help you think of things which you otherwise would not think of. Doing this at this stage can help you identify interesting and innovative solutions to these potential problems.

At the end of this activity, ask the class to say some general principles which are useful when trying to implement changes which may not be popular, for example: allow critics the opportunity to explain why they disagree with you; ask critics to give reasons why they disagree with you; look at opportunities to compromise; talk to other colleagues who may agree with you as it is easier not to fight alone; predict the criticisms which might come, and work out responses to them.

4.3 How to know if your learners feel safe



15 mins

- Divide participants into groups of 3 or 4.
- Ask them to discuss the questions (5 minutes):
- Take brief feedback on each question.

Feedback

You might discuss these points:

- It's important to know whether learners feel safe because this is a primary responsibility of schools and many other educational establishments. For some learners, especially in refugee contexts, the place where they learn is their only safe space. Since many learners are reluctant to share how they feel, participants need to be active in obtaining this information.
- You need to check on how safe learners feel on a regular basis.
- It can be done in a range of different ways, both formal and informal. You should not necessarily accept what learners say at face value, since they may sometimes give a ‘preferred’ answer (i.e. the answer they think they should give), and say they feel safe even if they do not.
- You might discover that people have particular need for specialist support, which you may be able to help them with. There may be (I)NGOs or other actors available locally

who can do this. Alternatively, the information which you gain could be used to shape what you do in your lessons. It may also be useful to share this information with other teachers.

- Tell participants to:
 - look in their books at the pictures
 - discuss what they think about these techniques for assessing how safe a class feels (5 minutes)
 - report their thoughts back to the whole class (5 minutes).

Feedback

When learners discuss the four pictures, encourage them to say what they really think. If they think something would not work, they should feel free to say this. Or, they may think there are some strategies which might only work with some groups. They may also have their own ideas, which they should be encouraged to share.

When taking class feedback, you might mention some of these points:

1. The 'Blob' tree (idea taken from <https://www.blobtree.com/>) can be useful for many learners, especially those who have less confidence / ability in speaking. They can point to the particular 'Blob' on the 'Blob tree' to show how they are feeling. This is particularly useful for younger learners and learners who have little experience of being in education
2. Learners can use the emojis, like the 'Blobs', as a 'non-verbal' way of saying how they feel. Whilst younger learners / teenagers may be more interested in this, it could be used with adults, if participants feel it is appropriate for their learners. Even learners who lack experience in education are likely to recognise emojis (since they are universal), so it is a good way of engaging with everybody.
3. A learner council is a small group of learners (5-10) from one class who are elected by the other learners. Their job is to speak on behalf of the other learners, and to accurately share their views on relevant issues. Learner councils can be an effective way for a class to share how it is feeling with the teacher. Learners may be reluctant to share what they think directly with the teacher (or may not have the language or confidence to be able to do this). However, they may be willing to do this through their peers. This can be a powerful tool for those who may have negative views towards authority or systems.
4. Anonymous feedback boxes can be used for learners to communicate with teachers if they feel unable to do so directly. It can help give the teacher an accurate picture of how the class is feeling. This may be helpful for vulnerable learners who may be scared of directly sharing their opinions.

5 Reflect

Aim: To reflect on the key points learnt in this module, and to identify what the main 'take home' messages are from the module.

5.1 Reflecting on the lesson


5 mins

- Tell participants to:
 - discuss briefly ('buzz') in pairs three key things they have learnt in this session
 - share this information with another pair.
- Ask 8-10 participants to share one point with the whole class.

Variation

The feedback part of this activity could also be done as a 'mingle' activity. Participants could come into the middle of the room and share their feedback. This is a good physical activity, and they would also listen to lots of different perspectives.

Back page design

© British Council 2019

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities.