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MODULE 4

Building Inclusive Learning Environments

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Module Overview

Inclusive learning environments, whether one talks about formal or non-formal education, are essential because the barriers facing marginalised learners are systemic and interconnected. In the context of language learning, this means shifting the focus away from speaking "perfect" English toward genuine communication and connection.



For many young people, especially those with a migrant or refugee background, the fear of making mistakes in a new language is one of the biggest barriers to participation in learning, in social life, and in wider society.

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Key skills and why this topic matters in youth work

In practice, key skills for youth workers include facilitating communication-focused rather than correctness-focused interaction, holding space for multilingual expression, and normalizing imperfect English as a valid and courageous form of participation.

Learning outcomes

Show respect for and curiosity about different accents, language backgrounds, and communication styles within a multilingual group

Recognise that communication matters more than correctness, and that mistakes are a natural and valuable part of language learning

Reflect on their own language learning journey and identify personal growth beyond formal correctness

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Activity title:

Role-Play “Words Without Walls”

Example real-life scenario:

🎬**JUST A JOKE?**
In this video, we highlighted to create a inclusive learning environment through a real-life situation connected to cultural intelligence in youth work.



💬Key message: One laugh can be enough to make someone go silent. A kind response can bring confidence back.

WATCH HERE

Description

Participants discuss inclusive communication challenges relevant to their own communities to play out the scenes in which accent-based reactions arise in a group setting.

The goal is to notice what is easy to miss and build the courage and tools to respond.

The activity addresses two complementary perspectives: the experience of the person whose accent is judged and the decision-making challenge of the youth worker in the room. Both are essential.

Target Group

Youth workers, volunteers and trainers working with culturally and linguistically diverse groups, mixed groups of native & non-native English language speakers.

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As a result of the participation in this activity, participants will be able to:

- Name accent-based discrimination as a real form of exclusion in educational settings;
- Apply at least three concrete facilitation strategies to interrupt accent bias and rebuild psychological safety in a group;
- Examine their own unconscious assumptions about ‘correct’ or ‘professional’ English and how those assumptions affect their practice

Skills Addressed



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Activity Type and Materials Needed

- Printed role cards (3 roles)
- Scenario description handout
- Flip chart or whiteboard
- Markers
- Timer
- Safe Space Agreement poster
- “What I noticed” sticky notes for the Observer role

Step-by-Step Implementation

STEP 1. PART 1

Session Opening & Agreement

10 min

Welcome participants and co-create the Safe Space. Briefly summarise the video scenario.



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STEP 1. PART 2
Session Opening & Agreement

10 min

Ask who has ever felt judged for how they speak, not what they said, but how. Acknowledge that this is very common and that the activity explores what we can do about it.

Agreement Points: Every accent in this room is a sign of language skill, not a language deficit; We do not correct, mimic, or finish each other's sentences; Silence is a valid response in the role-play and in the debrief; We speak from our own experience; we do not speak for groups.

STEP 2. PART 1
Introduction

20-25 min

Invite the participants to team up in small groups and identify inclusive communication challenges they may have faced in real life. The idea behind it is to demonstrate cultural differences in communication and how toxic communication can also be approached or resolved.

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STEP 2. PART 2

Introduction

20-25 min

Encourage participants to write down real-life scenarios and prepare them for the role-play.

STEP 3

Round 1 - Scene Play

10 min

Role play Group 1. One group is performing and the rest observe and making some notes silently. Allow the scene to develop for 6-7 minutes, then call time.

STEP 4

Debrief in the Groups

7min

Within each small group of three-five participants everyone shares what the moment felt like. No judgement — just observation. And sharing.

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STEP 5

Round 2 &3 – Scene Play

25 min

Rotate the groups for role play of their scenarios. Between scenes, pause for 5 minutes of group reflection. Allow and encourage young people experimenting with different approaches to demonstrate language inclusivity in all the possible and diverse forms.

STEP 6

Whole Group Reflection

15 min

Bring everyone together. On the flipchart, create two columns: 'What accent bias looks like in practice' and 'What youth workers can do'. Collect contributions from all groups. Discuss: What surprised you? Where did you feel stuck? Which interventions felt most natural, and which felt risky? Close by naming the list on the right as a shared resource the group has built together.

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Debrief

Reflection Questions

- When you were in the role of the Non-Native Speaker, what moment felt most exposing?

- As a Youth Worker, what do you think, is the best way to approach those kinds of situations?

- Where in your own organisation or practice might accent-based discrimination be hiding?

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Tips for Learners

If you are a native English speaker, pay attention to how little effort your participation costs you. That gap is the point.

Speak from your own experience. Avoid generalisations like ‘people always’ or ‘that group tends to’.

If a scene brings up personal memories of discrimination, it is okay to step into the Observer role without explanation.

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Tips for Learners

These phrases help youth workers actively interrupt accent-based dynamics without shaming individuals. Share these with participants during the activity, or use them yourself as the facilitator.

Someone mimics or mocks an accent	"Let's make sure everyone feels comfortable speaking here. That kind of comment can make it harder."
Group repeatedly asks someone to repeat	"I heard [name] clearly. Let me build on what she said: [restate the idea]."
Youth worker tempted to over-simplify speech	Speak at your normal pace. Slow down only if asked. Paraphrase content, not accent.
Someone stops contributing after a bias moment	Check in privately: "I noticed that, and I'm sorry it happened. Your idea was valuable."
Whole group goes quiet after an incident	"What just happened there? I'd like us to name it together."
Praising courage, not correctness	"Thank you for sharing that. The idea matters — the exact wording never does."

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Resources

1. **Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture** (https://rm.coe.int/prems-007021-rfcdc-competences-for-democratic-culture-and-the-importan/1680a217cc)
2. **Dictionary (Inclusion Europe):** (https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read-term/)
3. **Toolbox of non-formal learning activities for enhancing youth engagement** https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/toolbox-of-non-formal-learning-activities-for-enhancing-youth-engagement.4060/
4. **Handout to prepare:** Role Cards (3 types) + Scenario Cards (3 scenes) + Facilitator Language Card. All can be adapted directly from this sheet.
5. **Ted X Talks: How do we judge others when they speak** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hj7wkh6nONE)



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