

Skills for solidarity: Language for solidarity and Global Citizenship

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Resource and Activity

Language is a powerful tool which can help us to understand the world around us. It helps us to understand people's lived experiences and the reasons why things happen. It can also be used to cause harm by emphasising differences, perpetuating stereotypes or making us think less of some people or places.

This activity is a way to support students understanding of language from a Global Citizenship Education perspective and focuses on understanding language for solidarity or how we can talk about different global issues and show respect and dignity to those impacted.

Solidarity means acting in a way to support others, or in other words standing with them or amplifying their message. It is not feeling sorry for someone who is experiencing a difficult situation, but wanting to see and work towards change so that it doesn't happen anymore.

You can use this activity in different ways:

- As a teaching resource and classroom activity to help students understand the power of language.
- As a tool for teachers to further develop knowledge and confidence when teaching Global Citizenship Education or its themes (poverty, inequality, sustainability, human rights, hunger, climate change etc.).

Note: The instructions below are written for use as a classroom activity.

Key message and follow up:

Sometimes when we hear about difficult situations or challenges which people face in our own communities as well as globally, we can feel powerless.

Thinking about our language is a simple way in which we can stand in solidarity with others, to tackle negative stereotypes in our own community and to think differently about an issue. It is a great first step to becoming an active global citizen!

Activity

Time: 20–30 minutes

Preparation: Print off the required number of sets of the cards below. Cut out each word and explanation, and fold over (so one side will show the word and example, and the explainer on the other side).



Activity instructions:

1. Divide your class/group into groups of up to four and give each a set of cards.
2. Explain to your class/group that they are going to explain the power of language and explain what solidarity means (see above).
3. Ask them to put the cards into a pile word side up (with the explainer on the other side hidden).
4. They are going to decide if the words on the cards might cause harm or show solidarity. They will need to do this by discussing each word and coming to a consensus.
5. They will then discuss and divide the cards into three groups:
 - **Words or phrases that they believe to shows solidarity**
 - **Words which might cause harm**
 - **Words which might be either depending on the context**

Ask each group to be ready to explain their reasons why they have put the cards into the specific category.

Discussion and reflection:

6. When the activity is complete (or after around 10 minutes) ask each team to feedback to the room and discuss as a whole group. Ask them to consider how this exercise made them feel.
7. Now, turn over each word and discuss the words and their descriptions.
8. Finally, ask the groups to write down one thing that they have learnt from this exercise and one thing that they might change when using language going forwards.



Them/Those

“People like them.”;
“People from those countries.”

Language for solidarity?

No – language of ‘us’ and ‘them’ others people and can be dehumanising. It reinforces difference.

Alternative:

Name the specific community you are speaking about or be as close as you can e.g.

“Samuel from Port-au-Prince in Haiti.”

“Communities living in rural parts of Kenya.”



Victim

“The famine victim.”

Language for solidarity?

No – it is often used as a legal term in investigations but is generally seen as a disempowering word.

Alternative:

“People who face/ have faced harm.”

“Someone who is experiencing famine.”

“Survivor.” (if appropriate)



Immigrant

“They are an immigrant.”

Language for solidarity?

Yes and no – immigrant is the general the term used to describe anyone who moves to another place.

However, it has become a controversial term and can be used to make people feel like they don't belong or shouldn't be in a place.

Alternative:

Use the name of the person or describe where a person is from.

“They moved from France to Ireland.” /

“Kevin is from Ghana.”



Poor person / Hungry person / The poor / The hungry

Language for solidarity?

No – using this phrasing defines people by the situation that they happen to be in. It is important to remember that we are talking about people and using language in this way reduces them to one aspect of their life.

People mostly experience things like poverty and hunger because of circumstances outside of their control.

Alternative:

“People living in poverty.”

“People who are experiencing hunger/food insecurity.”



Aid

“We give aid to those in need.”

Language for solidarity?

Yes – if used in the correct way. Aid is used to describe assistance given to people, but it can be a controversial term.

Ask yourself – Would you use the term ‘aid’ in a domestic context? Explore this, e.g. would a food bank in Ireland be described as giving aid?

Alternative:

Overseas development assistance /
Support to communities

Or

Specifically name how people are being supported:

“Food and hygiene products were distributed.”

“Cash transfers were given so that people could purchase the food that is best for their family.”

Language for solidarity?

No – the idea that some countries are developed, and others are ‘developing’ carries the idea that some countries have reached their potential and others are inferior.

All countries are developing in different ways, but the use of the term in this way reinforces a negative stereotype about a place or community, and overlooks all the ways in which all countries need to change to become more equal and sustainable.

Alternative:

“Lower income countries / Higher income countries.”

“The world’s poorest countries /
The world’s wealthiest countries.”

“Global South.”*



Developing World / Developed country

“Hunger is a problem in developing countries.”



Third World / First World

“Famines happen in third world countries.”

Language for solidarity?

No – this term was used historically, but is now recognised as perpetuating a stereotype.

Arguably, this term has racist implications and enforces a supremacy of some countries over others. It also reinforces a separation between people from different places. Whilst we all may live in different places, we are all part of one world and are interlinked in many ways through the food system, environmental impacts and political decisions.

Alternative:

“Lower income countries / Higher income countries.”

“The world’s poorest countries / wealthiest countries.”

“Global South/Global North.”*



Global North / Global South

“Many countries in the Global South are facing food insecurity.”

Language for solidarity?

Yes (for now) – language changes and evolves all the time and our understanding of how words can cause harm is constantly developing.

Global South/North is a term which is frequently used to describe lower income / higher income countries; however, it is one which people are moving away from.

The criticisms of it are that it reinforces a divide between different places in the world which stereotypes them and doesn’t recognise that there are people experiencing poverty and inequality in all countries, as well as people who are wealthy all over the world!

Alternative:

“Lower income countries / Higher income countries.”

“The world’s poorest countries / The world’s wealthiest countries.”



Poverty / Hunger / Famine

Language for solidarity?

Yes – these describe situations that people experience, although it is important not to reduce people to this experience, e.g. you would say a person is living in poverty rather than that person is poor.

Poverty and hunger describe a wide range of experiences that people go through in all parts of the world, so it might be helpful to read their definitions!

Famine has a very specific definition, so it is also important to consider if it is being used in the right way before using it.



Beneficiary

Language for solidarity?

No – this term can reinforce the idea that people are helpless and cannot do anything to support themselves unless other people help them. The meaning of the term is that someone is ‘benefitting’ from the goodness of others. It undermines people’s choices and is a disempowering term.

Ask yourself - would you use the term ‘beneficiary’ to describe people in the country where you are? E.g. would you describe someone receiving food from a food bank in Ireland as a beneficiary? What about someone taking part in an educational programme in Ireland run by an organisation like Concern? Think about how this makes you feel.

Alternative:

“Participant.”

“The people who Concern works with.”

“Community members.”



Refugee

Language for solidarity?

Yes and no – refugee is the term used to describe someone who has legally granted international protection in a country. When a person's application is in process, you might use the term 'asylum seeker' or 'International Protection applicant'. However, refugee has become a loaded, or controversial, term and can be used to make people feel like they don't belong or shouldn't be in a place. We are all people with different interests, personalities and experiences at the end of the day and should avoid reducing people to one word.

Ask yourself – how would you feel being reduced to a word and people using this to stereotype you? E.g. "No teenagers in the shop"; "Teachers are always on holiday".

Alternative:

Use the name of the person or describe where a person is from

"They moved from France to Ireland" /

"Kevin is from Ghana."

"Maria is seeking International Protection in Ireland."



Support/Supporting

"We raised money/wrote to our TDs to support people who are experiencing hunger."

Language for solidarity?

Yes – this term or phrasing recognises that making change or tackling an issue like hunger is complex and we can play a small part in this. It is a better phrase to use than 'helping' which can be seen to put the person 'helping' in a superior position and might feed into a stereotype that people can't help themselves.

Ask yourself – what is the best way to support communities who are experiencing hunger or poverty?

Being a global citizen is about working to prevent these issues ever happening so things like voting for politicians with policies which promote equality and justice, holding people with power to account and shining a light on important issues. These are some of the best ways that a person can support a community who is experiencing a problem.