

CONVERSATIONAL TOPICS IN TEFL

A LESSON ON MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

Two pairs of eyes are better than one:
multiperspectivity in education



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INTRODUCTION

Western societies have become more ethnically and culturally diverse (cf. Geldof, 2013; Vertovec, 2007). This phenomenon has led to *superdiversity*: “an increase in diversity within diversity” (Geldof, 2013, p. 27). The classroom—a mini-society as it were—reflects a superdiverse reality in which people with varying frames of reference convene. There is growing tension in schools as the student population becomes more diverse, leading to a stark contrast between students and the primarily White and middle-class body of teachers. These teachers are generally less familiar with diversity and multiculturalism (Smits & Janssenswillen, 2020, p. 421). Nevertheless, it is of great importance that sufficient attention is paid to this diversity and that it is dealt with from different perspectives. Teachers, therefore, need expertise on addressing coexisting perspectives and achieving understanding among students (Wansink, 2018, p. 496). This approach is also known as multiperspectivity. Multiperspectivity involves offering different perspectives and seeing things through another’s lens in addition to our own (Stradling, 2003, pp. 13–14). It is essential when it comes to controversial lesson topics as they “can trigger intense emotions and/or provoke protests” (Smits et al., 2020, p. 68);

This guide provides the reader with an example of a task-based lesson on the controversial topic of migration and integration that TEFL teachers can use. In line with the current trends of growing superdiversity, this subject has become a topical issue that has sparked much debate. As there are differing opinions on the issue, multiperspectivity is needed to assure students that their perspective is being heard (Smits et al., 2020, p. 68). By adopting this approach, students will learn to look at the topic from different perspectives, link new information to their own frame of reference and gain new perspectives through critical thinking.



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CONTROVERSIAL LESSONS

Controversial lesson topics are topics that “can trigger intense emotions and/or provoke protests” (Smits et al., 2020, p. 68). A multiperspectivity approach is essential when this type of topic comes up in order to meet certain students’ needs and assure them that their point of view or perspective is being heard (Smits et al., 2020, p. 68). At the same time, it is important to teach students how to deal with controversial topics and how to cope with different perspectives and opinions, as well as disagreements. There are, however, teachers who “choose to avoid controversial topics out of a sense of inadequacy, because they want to avoid conflict or for fear of stigmatizing or discriminating against certain students” (Smits et al., 2020, p. 69). Smits et al. (2020, p. 70) developed a decision tree to determine whether it is appropriate to either discuss or avoid a controversial topic in class. The determining factor is whether there is a good atmosphere in the class. The tree provides three questions that stem from both the students’ and the teacher’s need for trust, respect, being accepted, safety and being taken into account (Smits et al., 2020, p. 70):

1. Do the students feel respected by teachers and their peers?
2. Do the students show respect to teachers and other students?
3. Does the teacher feel that they are respected by the students?

If the answer to at least one of these questions is ‘no’, the controversial topic should not be discussed in class, and the advice is to first work on creating a classroom in which there is a sense of safety, trust and respect. If the answer to all three questions is ‘yes’, the controversial topic can be discussed.



MULTIPERSPECTIVITY QUADRANT

As Janssenswillen (in Smits et al., 2020, p. 71) presents in his multiperspectivity quadrant, there are four ways in which a teacher can act when they are faced with a controversial topic, whether it be voluntarily or involuntarily.

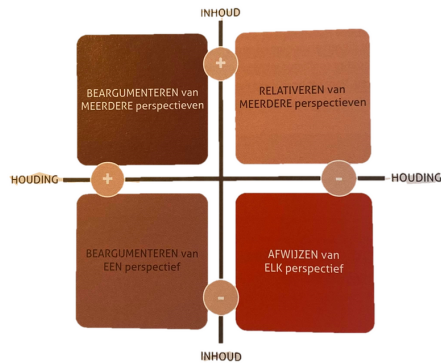


Figure 1. Multiperspectivity quadrant (Janssenswillen in Smits et al., 2020, p. 70)

In the multiperspectivity quadrant, the Y axis refers to “content” and the X axis to “attitude”. The four quadrants are described as follows (Smits et al., 2020, p. 71):

- *Afwijzen van elk perspectief*: Rejecting a student’s perspective by sending them out of the classroom and therefore silencing them. This approach can act as a time-out for the student until they have cooled down. To avoid an “us-versus-them” attitude, a personal conversation after the lesson is recommended.
- *Relativeren van meerdere perspectieven*: Avoiding a discussion by offering different perspectives, but not presenting any arguments.
- *Beargumenteren van één perspectief*: Treating a controversial topic as non-controversial by only offering one perspective. The teacher offers their perspective without further explanation. This can be frustrating for students as there is no room for arguments.
- *Beargumenteren van meerdere perspectieven*: Being open to arguments from the students. The teacher should give their reasoned opinion (at the end of the lesson).

Within the multiperspectivity quadrant, there is no better or worse option. The most appropriate course of action depends on the “class group, the extent to which the lesson topic has been prepared, and the teacher’s certainty of action” (Smits et al., 2020, p. 71).

COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

One element that should always be incorporated when teaching a controversial lesson topic is nonviolent communication. This approach to communication, which is more often referred to as compassionate communication for it better encompasses its meaning, was developed by Rosenberg (in Smits et al. 2020 p. 46) and is aimed at meeting the fundamental means of all parties involved in that communication through (Smits et al., 2020, p. 46–48). There are three primary modes of application of nonviolent communication (Smits et al., 2020, p. 49):

1. Self-empathy: connecting to our own feelings and needs and putting a name to them
2. Expressing our feelings and needs
3. Empathy: connecting to the feelings and needs of the other person

There are four components that make up compassionate communication (Smits et al., 2020, pp. 46–49):

1. Observation
2. Feelings
3. Needs
4. Requests



THREE-CIRCLE MODEL

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Sierens' (2007, p. 102) three-circle model is a model for designing learning environments that do justice to (dealing with) diversity. It is used "as a starting point for learning to design [lessons] on controversial topics" (Smits et al., 2020, p. 112). The model comprises three circles. The outer circle involves 'varying interaction', the middle circle refers to 'diversity' and the inner circle covers 'negotiation of meaning'. The model evolves from the outer to the inner circle, with the outermost circle being a precondition for the middle circle and the middle circle for the inner circle. In other words, there has to be varying interaction to be able to address diversity, and diversity is a prerequisite for negotiation of meaning (Smits et al., 2020, p. 112). Sierens' (2007) describes each circle as follows:

- **Varying interaction** refers to exchanges between "learners among themselves, learners and teachers and learning resources" (Sierens, 2007, p. 103). It is essential that these interactions are varied and set up in different ways in order to create a learning environment in which students learn to deal with diversity (just) by taking part in these varying interactions. Varying interaction can be shaped by adopting "a versatile and varying approach, encouraging collaborative learning and forming heterogeneous groups" (Sierens, 2007, p. 103).
- **Diversity** relates both to personal characteristics and each individual's different perspectives on the world (cf. multiperspectivity). Diversity can be used to "create a learning environment in which different competences, intelligences and perspectives are unlocked and can contribute to the solution of tasks and problems" (Sierens, 2007, p. 104). The building blocks useful for observing and using diversity include "broad observation, a versatile and varied approach, collaborative learning and broadening learning environments" (Sierens, 2007, p. 104).
- **Negotiation of meaning** is "the joint discussion of the meaning of concepts, messages and actions with the aim of achieving a more mutual understanding of them" (Sierens, 2007, p. 104). This ongoing process of negotiating meaning involves interpreting and acting, doing and thinking, understanding and responding. It involves continually creating "new conditions for further negotiation and further meanings" (Sierens, 2007, p. 104). As a result, it creates new relationships with and in the world. The incorporation of negotiation of meaning establishes a learning environment in which learners "recognise and develop their own meaningful perspectives, get to know other perspectives, exchange, critically compare and connect different perspectives" Sierens (2007, pp. 104-105).

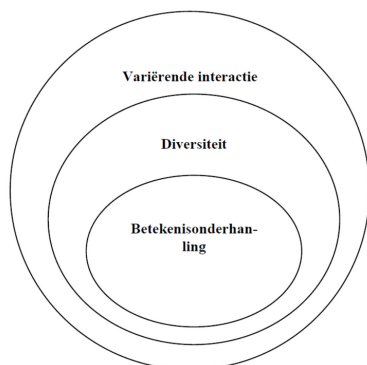


Figure 2. Three-circle model (Sierens, 2007, p. 103)

The lesson that is presented in this guide is a task-based language lesson on the topic of migration and integration. The focus of this lesson is on reading and speaking skills. The objectives are as follows:

The students can...

1. Form an opinion on an argumentative text which discusses arguments for and against letting more refugees into Europe (at an assessment level). (Reading skills)
2. Express a well-founded point of view on letting more refugees into Europe after reading an argumentative text on the topic. (Speaking skills)
3. Show willingness to speak in English, and participate in class. (Attitude)

The primary learning material used in this lesson is an argumentative dual-position text titled *Arguments for and against letting more refugees into Europe*. The article was published by Debating Europe on February 27, 2017. It presents three arguments for and three arguments against. The students critically engage with the perspectives presented in the multiperspectivity text before forming their own opinion. Moreover, they play the devil's advocate during a class debate.

The lesson objectives and the text are suitable for a class in the 6th year of secondary school in general education. The focus of their studies should be on modern languages. Please note the importance of identifying the initial situation before teaching this lesson. It is essential to be aware of the students' background knowledge and any learning difficulties. Especially in a lesson where the focus is on a controversial topic, and a multiperspectivity approach is of importance, being aware of the students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds is beneficial. These backgrounds will come up during the lesson as cultural heritage is an important part of one's frame of reference and the lens through which one sees the world.

The text can be found in the next two pages, along with the glossary to make the text more accessible for the target audience.



TEXT: PART 1

Arguments for and against letting more refugees into Europe. (2017, 27 februari). Debating Europe. <https://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/arguments-letting-refugees-europe/#.YlJlXJAZZPb>

FOR taking more refugees into Europe

1. VALUES MATTER

As Europe's Post-War unity, democracy and basic rights come under unprecedented threat, we need more than ever to stand up for our values. Compassion, solidarity, respect for the needy and for minorities, and application of the rule of law are vital. The Geneva Convention on Refugees and other international agreements clearly commit European governments to respect and protect refugees. Violation of such commitments undermines international law and respect for a rules-based world order. Failure to protect families threatened by war, massacre and oppression will erode core values at the heart of European civilisation.

2. REAL SECURITY

The idea that shutting out refugees will bolster Europe's security is a dangerous illusion. Closing the door to those fleeing violence will increase antagonism, alienation and anti-Western sentiment. Abandoning refugees to kick their heels in Middle Eastern camps will allow resentment to fester and increase the risk they fall prey to extremist recruiters. Ensuring their integration into European society, providing training and opportunities will reduce the danger of them turning to the dark side. Many will eventually return home with an understanding and respect for European values and help build new societies there. Daesh is trying to smuggle operatives into Europe among refugees from Syria, so vigilance is needed, but an over-reaction will be counter-productive. Almost all jihadi terror attacks in Europe have been planned and executed by European citizens or residents. In the United States, the number of refugees admitted since 1980 is 3 million; the number implicated in a fatal terrorist attack since then is zero.

3. ECONOMICS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

In 1960, nations now making up the European Union had an average birth-rate of 2.6. In 2014, the rate had dropped to 1.4 children per woman, well below the 2.1 needed to keep the population from decline. Europe's native population is shrinking fast. That means a declining workforce has to support more older people. The EU's old-age dependency ratio is projected to rise from 27.8% to 50.1% by 2060. There are four solutions: persuade European women to have a lot more babies; raise retirement ages so we all keep working longer; increase taxes to pay pensions; or bring in more migrants. Refugees arriving in Europe are mostly young, willing to do work natives shun and equipped with skills the job market needs. History is full of refugees making successful contributions to their host countries – from successive waves of Europeans fleeing to the United States to escape persecution, to Vietnamese boat people in Australia, or Ugandan Asians in the UK. When the latter group fled to Britain in the 1970s, the reaction from many resembled today's anti-refugee hysteria. Forty years later, a former teenage refugee turned businessman and legislator told parliament how Britons with south Asian roots make up 2.5% of the UK population but contribute 10% of its national output.

Gloss:

- Unprecedented: never seen before
- Vital: very important
- Violation: breaking, going against
- Massacre: mass killing
- Erode: damage, reduce to nothing
- Bolster: support, strengthen
- Alienation: distance, detachment, becoming less and less known to each other
- Resentment: dissatisfaction
- Fester: keep growing, become worse & more intense
- Vigilance: watchfulness
- Shun: avoid, ignore
- Persecution: hostility and ill treatment, especially because of race and/or politics

TEXT: PART 2

Arguments for and against letting more refugees into Europe. (2017, 27 februari). Debating Europe. <https://www.debatingeurope.eu/focus/arguments-letting-refugees-europe/#.YlJlXJAZZPb>

AGAINST taking more refugees into Europe

1. BETTER FOR THEM TO STAY CLOSE TO HOME

One day, peace will return to Syria, Iraq and other nations whose citizens are fleeing war and oppression. When that day comes, those countries will need the refugees to return and rebuild. The more refugees become settled down far from their homelands, the less likely they will go back to join that vital reconstruction effort. Before the war, Syria had 31,000 doctors. Now more than half are believed to have fled, many treating patients in Europe. Iraq complains of a serious brain drain as its skilled young professionals form the vanguard of those seeking a new life in the West. Rather than welcoming refugees for re-settlement in Europe, governments should be investing in the long-term future of countries like Syria and Iraq by working for peace and security there, and increasing support for refugees camped in neighbouring countries. We should ensure they have decent living conditions with access to training, education and work opportunities to prepare for the day when they can return to rebuild their homelands.

2. IT'S A RECRUITMENT CALL FOR POPULISTS

Welcoming refugees is unpopular with voters. Letting more of them in is a gift for the demagogues challenging Europe's democratic order. Voter unease with Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcome for refugees has fuelled support for the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. It scored significant successes in five state elections in 2016 by riding public angst over refugees, and threatens to become the biggest opposition party after September's general election. Germany is not alone: populists across much of Europe and beyond have touted the spectre of refugees as terrorists, sex pests, disease carriers, threats to gay rights, Christian values, the welfare state and just about anything else that might win them votes. At a time when Europe's democracy is facing grave dangers, the refugee influx must be curbed to reduce the risk of a lurch to the far-right.

3. EUROPE CAN'T COPE

Europe is full. The European Union registered 1.2 million first-time asylum seekers in 2015, and a further 954,000 over the first nine months of 2016. It is simply too many. Our social services, housing departments, health systems and schools can't cope with any more. The influx is concentrated in certain places, creating local tensions, and strains within communities. The absence of a workable re-distribution scheme within the EU, and the unwillingness of refugees to relocate, means some countries and regions are unfairly burdened – Germany and Sweden in particular. The arguments over where to locate incoming refugees places undue pressure on European solidarity. With Britain preparing to split and euro-hostile parties on the rise in other countries, the very fabric of the EU is under threat. It would be foolish to add to those strains by importing more refugees.

Gloss:

- Vanguard: a group of people leading the way in new developments or ideas.
- Demagogue: a political leader who seeks support by appealing to the desires and prejudices of ordinary people rather than by using rational argument.
- Tout: try to persuade people of
- Spectre: something to be feared
- Influx: arrival of large numbers
- Curb: check, restrain, limit
- Lurch: uncontrolled movement
- Strain: tension



PICTOGRAMS

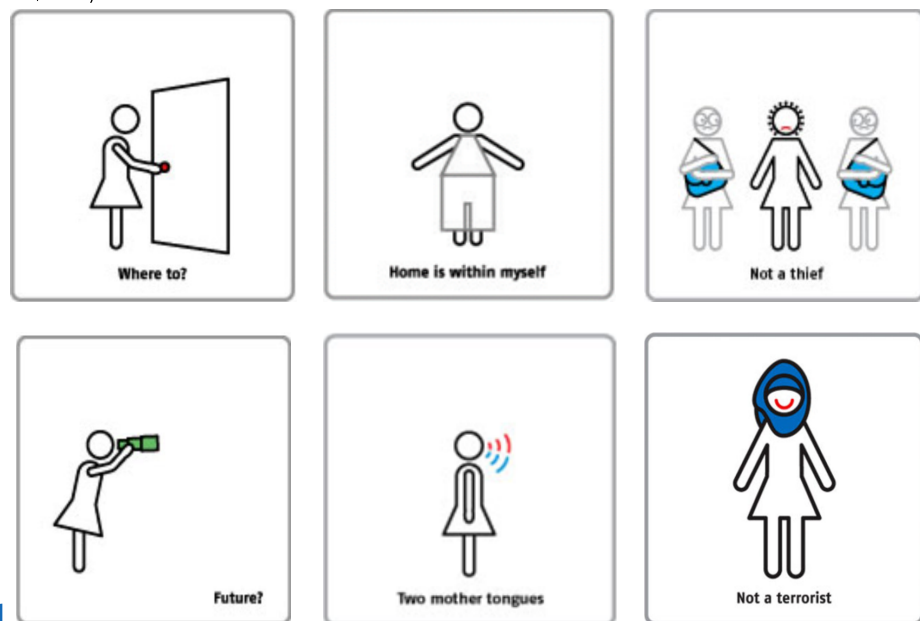
PHASE 1: ENGAGE PHASE

TIMING 10'

Without revealing the topic of the lesson, the students are shown six pictograms. The students discuss what they think the images mean, who drew them and why. They could also discuss whether they relate to any of the situations or feelings portrayed in the pictograms, and/ or choose a favourite image and explain why. By not mentioning the topic of the lesson straight away, the teacher can gauge who has background knowledge or experience with the subject. The students who quickly see the link between the pictograms and the lesson topic are those to whom the subject is more relevant and more prominently present in their frame of reference.

The pictograms were created during a project by the artist collective 'Migrantas'. Migrantas use pictograms to provide visibility to the thoughts and feelings of people who have left their own country and have immigrated to a new one.

This lesson phase is inspired by the book *Parsnips in ELT: Stepping out of the comfort zone* (Finegan et al., 2016)



WORD CLOUD

PHASE 2: ACTIVATE PHASE

TIMING 7,5'

The teacher writes the word 'refugee' on the board (or using a digital tool, such as Mentimeter or Nearpod), and the students are asked to give an example of something that they associate with that word. The students can elaborate on why they have chosen that word, what it means to them and how it makes them feel.



Now that the topic has been revealed and the students' prior knowledge has been activated, the teacher asks whether anyone knows a person who is a refugee or comes from a refugee background. In other words, the students are given the opportunity to talk about their experiences and reveal how their perspective on the topic has been shaped by their frame of reference.



READING THE TEXTS

PHASE 3: STUDY PHASE

TIMING 7,5'

PRE READING:

The title of the text is shown and the students are asked what they think the text will be about, as well as what type of text it could be. Then, the students are asked:

- What are some FOR arguments that might be included in the text?
- What are some AGAINST arguments that might be included in the text?

By asking these questions, the teacher activates the students' prior knowledge. It also gives insight into the arguments students would use themselves or have heard before but do not necessarily agree with. Both arguments and counterarguments have contributed to the construction of each individual's perspective on the topic.

WHILE READING:

The students are given the text on a handout and are asked to read the text individually.



THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

PHASE 4: ACTIVATE PHASE

TIMING 20'

POST READING:

The class group is divided into two halves. One half of the class is on the FOR side, and one is on the AGAINST side. The students get 10 minutes to discuss their arguments for or against letting more refugees into Europe. They are told to think of counterarguments they can use against the other party in order to win the debate.



When the 10 minutes are up, two students from each party are called to the front to have a debate. Compassionate communication is essential during this part of the lesson. Afterwards, the class votes to decide who has won the debate, and the students talk about why the winner's arguments were the most convincing.



IN THEIR SHOES

PHASE 5: ACTIVATE PHASE

TIMING 5'

The students are asked to imagine being forced to leave their home country because of a crisis situation. They are asked the following questions:

- What would you miss the most?
- What problems would you be faced with?

To ensure the whole class is actively participating, the think-pair-share method can be employed where the students think about their answers, discuss their answers in pairs and share their answers with the rest of the class.

What would you miss the most?	What problems would you be faced with?

This activity fosters multiperspectivity skills because the students are looking at a situation from another perspective than their own and are putting themselves in another's shoes.



ASSIGNMENT: FLIPGRID

The teacher can choose to give the students an assignment to do at home. The students are asked to form a well-founded opinion on letting more refugees into Europe, record themselves in a video clip of at least one minute, and upload it to Flipgrid. Flipgrid is a digital discussion platform where teachers can set up a page for students to upload videos. The students can watch each other's video clips and leave a comment, which creates a fun and supportive online learning environment.

For this assignment, the students can use their handouts with the reading text and the notes they have taken during the lesson, but they are also encouraged to look up more information on the topic of refugees. After uploading their video clips, the students are asked to comment on the two videos that have been uploaded before theirs. The last student comments on the first two students.



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