

Equity in Widening Participation

**Developing Inclusive Practices to
Address Racial and Class Barriers in
Education**

HELOA National Conference 2026
Immy Lawlor (she/her)

Immy (she/her)

- Policy and Charter Officer, London Metropolitan University (formerly University of Reading).
- Serial WP box ticker.
- Former SEND practitioner and KS3 classroom teacher.
- Anti-racist and EDI advocate.
- Experience: recruitment, access, intensive outreach, attainment raising, race equality, EDI.





Inequity in Education

Addressing race and class.

Barriers and characteristics.

Shifting from equality to equity.



First Steps

Examples from my work.

Case studies.

Adapting activities.



Embedding Inclusion

Visibility

Learning

Culture

Education in the UK isn't fair



- It is unequal and **inequitable**.
- Racism, classism, prejudice, plus many other **barriers** to success, progression and attainment.

FSM - working class, poverty (poor?)

IMD Q1 – lives in a dodgy area...?

BAME – non-white...

NOR – suspended, maybe unnecessarily

LAC – lives in a foster family

We love an acronym in HE!

Overreliance, euphemisms for what we *really* mean.

Where can we be more honest and specific?

Addressing the discomfort



- **Barriers** to education related to race and class.
 - **Challenging topic**, even when regularly working with underrepresented groups.
- Broad, **ephemeral** and **overwhelming** concepts.
 - Terms with **multiple, changing meanings**.
 - Working class has no fixed definition, whereas FSM has parameters.
 - If I told you to improve the **inclusivity of your offering and practices** for ethnic minorities and working-class people... Where do you start?

Fear of “**saying the wrong thing**” is not an excuse for saying or doing nothing.

Barriers vs Characteristics

Characteristic	Barriers (EORR Risk)
Ethnicity (Asian)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited choice and awareness of courses• Insufficient personal support
Eligible for free school meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negative perceptions of HE• Insufficient support with applications• Cost pressures• Lower KS4 attainment.
First in family to attend HE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Insufficient information and guidance• Insufficient academic support• Cost pressures

Equality of Opportunity
Risk Register,
Office for Students

Being Black is not a barrier to applying to and succeeding at University, but **unconscious bias and racism** are.

Understanding of barriers to education related to race and class helps us to **integrate inclusion into our offering**.

Potential barriers to students accessing higher education?

- Curriculum Content
- How classes are taught
- Sense of belonging
- Prior attainment
- Preparedness for higher education
- Systemic and everyday sexism/classism/racism
- Financial pressure
- Lack of diversity
- Prior advice and guidance
- Family pressures
- Commuting
- Institutional culture
- Disability

Equity

- Don't be obsessed with **equality** when **equity** is more appropriate.
- **One size rarely fits all.**
- Make your practices **inclusive by design**, then adapt them further to meet people's needs.
- **Raise the floor**, smash the ceiling.
- If you can **justify** it, then do it.



Equality is everyone getting a pair of shoes.



Diversity is everyone getting a different type of shoe.



Equity is everyone getting a pair of shoes that fits.



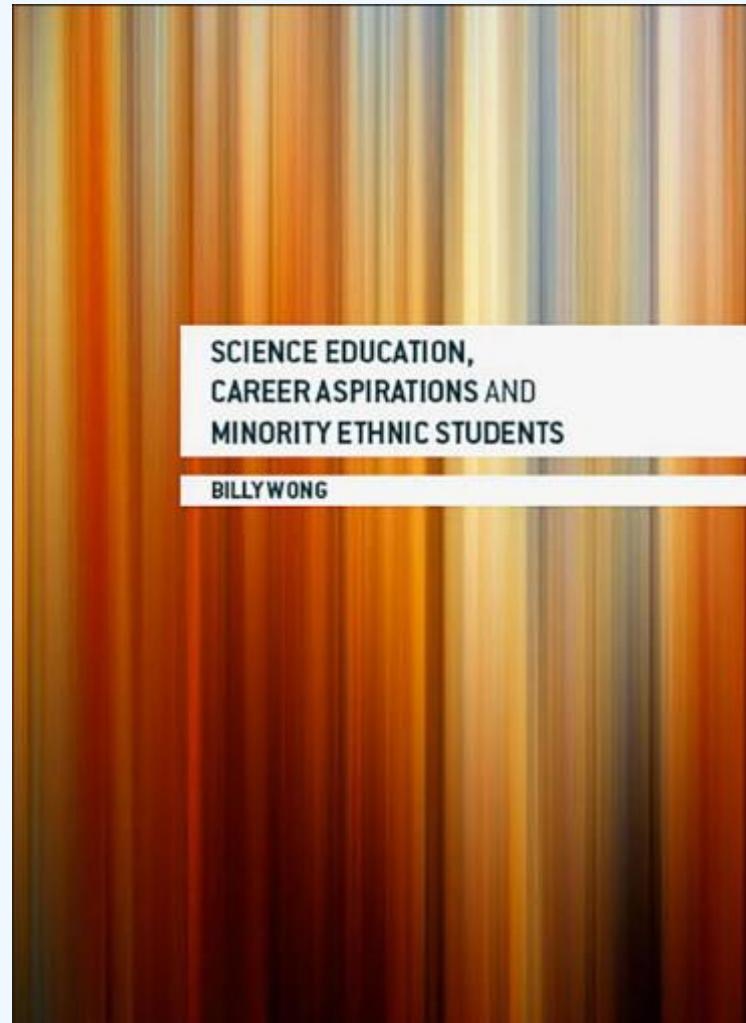
Acceptance is understanding we all wear different kinds of shoes.



Belonging is wearing the shoes you want without fear of judgment.

Data and insights, not stereotypes

- Barriers for **Pakistani girls** applying to university: what comes to mind?
- Don't act until you **KNOW**. Your assumptions may not match reality, or they may be outdated.
- Can you justify **WHY** are you doing something?
- Understanding these barriers on a deeper level > **untangling your prejudices** in a **reflective and honest** way.



Example Debate Activity

Discuss: what are the positives and negatives of this question being used for a KS4 debate activity??

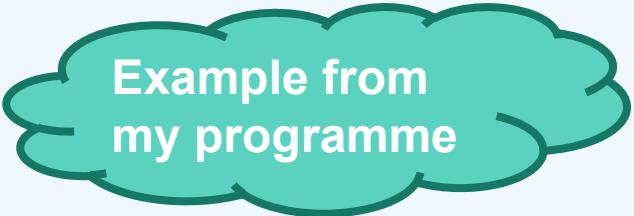
Should school uniform be banned?

Positives

- ✓ Most can relate, accessible.
- ✓ Slightly controversial, exciting.
- ✓ Think critically about everyday life.
- ✓ Discussed regularly.

Negatives

- ✓ Uniform creates necessary equality.
- ✓ Overdone and cliché.
- ✓ Hard to get them to engage critically.
- ✓ Racist, sexist, and transphobic uniform policies.



Example from
my programme

Critical Thinking Starter



What are the benefits and drawbacks of lowering the voting age to 16 in England*?

Labour's 2024 manifesto committed to giving 16 and 17-year-olds the vote.

Last month, Prime Minister Keir Starmer stated to the liaison committee of senior MPs that he intends to honour this commitment. He discussed that 16-year-olds are old enough to pay taxes, so should have the right to vote. His hope is that this is accompanied by more 'citizenship' education in schools (ref 1).

*For the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014, 16-year-olds could vote. In Wales, 16-year-olds can vote in Senedd elections.

1) Self, Josh (2025) "Keir Starmer: Labour will give 16- and 17- year-olds right to vote". Politics.co.uk <<https://www.politics.co.uk/parliament/keir-starmer-labour-will-give-16-and-17-year-olds-right-to-vote/>>, accessed 22 May 2025 at 16:41.

Example from
my programme

Rating Research Questions

- Why are people in Britain racist?
- Is Britain a racist country?
- How does racism affect the mental health of Black Year 7 students in Huddersfield?
- To what extent are racist microaggressions still experienced by employees in tech?
- Why does racism still exist?
- What are the pros and cons of anti-racism training for NHS staff?



Discuss in your groups: Which questions do you think are the best and which are the worst?

Take it further: Be prepared to share your reasons why.

How do these people synthesise information?

Example from
my programme



Teacher
Jeffrey Boakye



CEO
Will Dutta



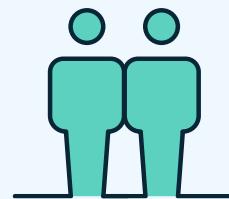
Scientist
Parveen Yaqoob



Lawyer
Bolanle Adebola



Think



Pair



Share

Adapting activities

- Most of us have adapted based on **needs** or **feedback**.
- Same skillset for **fostering inclusive practices** relating to race and class.
- You don't need to **reinvent the wheel!**

Discuss: when have you adapted an activity based on feedback or to meet someone's needs?

This doesn't have to be related to race or class.



Think



Pair



Share



Case Studies – School 1

Issues

- Black students **attaining low consistently**, with poor attendance and safeguarding issues.
- **Negative attitudes** towards education and issues with **school culture**.
- Reports of **racism from white staff**, but reluctance to engage with anti-racism training.

Solutions

- Meetings with school staff and parents, regular **gathering of information**.
- Cohort of Black students, all eligible for FSM on my programme. Some also SEND and IMD Q1.
- All workshops delivered **on campus** with extra workshops on race and UK rap.
- **Extra training** for student workers on behaviour management.

Results

- Persistent issues throughout with **behaviour**, but engagement improved slowly.
- Year 1: students **won large prizes**. Year 2: struggled to complete projects.
- Part of the **school's development plan**, strong enthusiasm for future collaboration.
- **Training** on anti-racism and racial equity for my team.

Case Studies – School 2

Issues

- Very large cohort of **Black students** (30%), making choosing students challenging.
- Year 1, chose students who ‘**ticked the most boxes**’, dropped out due to poor behaviour.
- Highest attainment gaps in the data for **Black girls with high potential**.

Solutions

- New **school staff contact** with expertise in attainment, meetings and consulting data.
- Learning about curriculum and skills initiatives, to **fit into this schedule of activity**.
- Cohort of Black girls with high attainment potential, **extra critical thinking exercises**.

Results

- Fantastic engagement** with the programme, with noticeable improvements in confidence.
- All students submitted a project, many attained highly, the only school to **win prizes in every category**.
- Some students saw increases in their **predicted grades**, 4 joined the student leadership team.
- Renewed relationship** with the school, Black History Programme and INSET CPD.

THE DEATH OF PRINCESS DIANA: ACCIDENT OR ASSASSINATION

WEDNESDAY, 4TH JUNE

NEWS OF THE DAY

Understanding the context

Princess Diana was a beloved royal figure known for her charity work and connection with the public. Her death in 1997 still remains one of the most debated events in the modern history. The official cause of death was a tragic car accident but some still wonder if the Royal family was involved. This poster explores the issues of this topic while giving two different points of views. This poster will consider the potential damage to the reputation of the Royal family, lack of concrete evidence and the official investigations that have found no direct link to a suspect; however, we will still consider potential motives all alleged cover-ups and unanswered questions that continue to fuel the conspiracy theories surrounding the royal family's potential role in this tragedy.

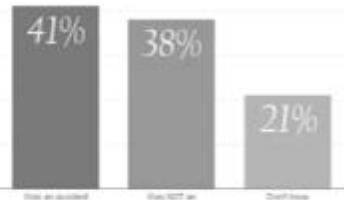


Royals lack of motive

Despite thorough investigations by both French and British authorities, there is no reliable evidence directly implicating the Royal Family in Princess Diana's death. The focus has been on the actions of the driver, the paparazzi, and other surrounding circumstances, that have not led to any connections to the Royal Family. Police reports revealed the driver was heavily intoxicated and had traces of prescription medication in his system, harming his judgment. Driving at high speed to avoid the paparazzi, he lost control of the vehicle, leading to the crash in the Pont de l'Alma tunnel. Conspiracy theories often rely on speculation rather than proven facts. The absence of direct evidence suggests that the accepted narrative of an accidental death, while tragic, is more likely than a deliberate act involving the Royal Family. The royal family had no intentions of hurting Diana and wished for her happiness and safety, making sure that she was not negatively impacted by the pressure of Royal life and media attention. Also, for some it's difficult to establish a clear motive for the Royal Family to want Diana dead, especially considering the huge negative publicity such an act would have on the Royal.

I am sitting here at my desk today in October, trying to persuade to buy me a exchange me to keep saying I had my head high — this particular place in my life is the most dangerous — my husband is planning 'an accident' in my car, break a tail light or smash head injury in order to make the path clear for him to marry Camilla. Camilla is nothing but a decoy, so we are all

A survey question sent out to the public:
On the evidence made available so far, do you believe Princess Diana's death was or was not an accident?



Diana vs the Crown conspiracy theories

Multiple conspiracy theories have emerged, suggesting the Royal Family was involved in the circumstances surrounding Princess Diana's death. One alleged motive from Diana's own words; in an interview, she stated that the Royal Family deemed her a "non-starter" as a future queen due to her independent spirit and tendency to lead with her heart rather than following the strict royal protocol. This defiance caused tension within the family. Further fueling suspicion is a letter Diana allegedly wrote to her butler, predicting a potential plot orchestrated by Prince Charles to have her killed in an engineered car accident. The alleged motive behind this prediction includes the problems of her marriage to Charles, particularly his ongoing relationship with Camilla Parker Bowles. Reports believed that as long as Diana remained alive and bound by marriage to Charles, his path to marrying Camilla would be blocked, given the current laws and societal expectations at the time. Additionally, some theories suggest the Royal Family resented Diana's popularity, which at times outshone the Queen herself. Her independence and genuine connection with the public was making her more popular and may have made her a threat to the existing power structure and a factor in considering her unsuitable as queen, making Camilla a suitable choice for queen in the eyes of the Royal Family.



Diana's legacy: A conclusion surrounded in doubt

Ultimately, the persistent rumours surrounding the Royal Family and Princess Diana's death will forever be a mystery, steeped in speculation and opinions. Despite numerous investigations and countless theories, a definitive answer remains unavailable, leaving a lingering sense of uncertainty. This topic will always be fascinating, and for some, deeply sensitive. The lack of closure allows for a continued debate, ensuring that the events surrounding Princess Diana's death will remain a subject of discussion for generations to come.



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- 3) **Morton, Andrew** (1986) - Diana, Princess of Wales : <https://www.royal.uk/diana-princess-wales>
- 4) **Perry, Simon** (2022) - Princess Diana's clashes with Queen Elizabeth inside their complex relationship : <https://people.com/royals/princess-diana-clashes-with-queen-elizabeth-inside-their-complex-relationship/>
- 5) **Rothman, Lily** (2017) - Read Times original 1997 special report on Princess Diana's death: <https://time.com/4916157/special-report-princess-diana-death/>
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METAL MUSIC

Why Does Metal Music Evoke Strong Negative Reactions From Certain Audiences?

INTRODUCTION

Characterised by its aggressive and powerful sound, distorted guitars, fast-paced drumming and often dark or controversial lyrical themes, heavy metal has spawned a plethora of sub-genres since the 1980s- heavy metal, thrash metal, death metal and black metal, to name a few- with distinct symbols, lyrical content and music styles (ref 1). However, these aspects has caused a clash with mainstream values, which those unfamiliar with the genre may find hard to fully understand the 'extremity' of metal music.

Figure 1: Norwegian black metal band, Gorogoth, wearing 'corpse paint'



REBELLIOUS IMAGE

Lastly, metal's rebellious image is reinforced by its rejection of mainstream norms and its bold aesthetics. One prominent example is the use of 'corpse paint' amongst black metallers. To create a sense of inhumanity, they paint the face white with dark rings/ marks around the face and mouth (ref 2) - see figure 1. As a result, this distances metal further away from the crafted and polished image seen in mainstream music. As is often the case with any vibrant subculture, stereotypes surround the metal scene. The critics and the uninformed often paint the forbear, known as 'metalheads', with widespread misconception. Many perceive them as angry, predominantly white males, while others brand them as drug-abusing, Satan-worshippers (ref 5). These negative stereotypes are abundant, overshadowing the more positive attributes like the intense passion metalheads harbour for their music (ref 5).

SOUND INTENSITY

A big reason, if not the main reason, for metal's wide-spread disdain, lies in the music itself. Phil Tagg (1998) discusses how the tritone - a dissonant interval commonly found in metal music- has long been associated with feelings of unease and to signify mystery (ref 2). In addition, it has been historically condemned by the Catholic church as 'Diabolus in Musica', or 'the devil in music' and has been used in films, specifically in detective and horror films, to signify mystery and danger (ref 2). Consequently, this appears to account for metal and extreme metal's/death metal, black metal, skin metal, grindcore and other subgenres in similar nature reputation as a disturbing, 'evil-sounding' music. Furthermore, in pushing conventional music to the point where music collapses into what can be classed as noise, extreme metal challenges the very notion of what music is.

Conrad "Cronos" Lant, vocalist of Venom, 1984
(Source: Pinterest)



DARK THEMES

Another reason is due to the dark imagery connected to metal music. While mainstream aesthetic often embraced themes of tolerance, peace, and love, and avoided overt political or social activism, within its lyrical content, visual imagery, and aesthetic presentation, metal frequently substituted these central countercultural ideas with their opposites: evil, death, and destruction (ref 3). This is prevalent even in band names, for example the death metal bands 'Cannibal Corpse', 'Black Dahlia Murder' and 'Dying Fetus'. Black metallers wholeheartedly embraced Satanism and other occult beliefs. These visuals and lyrics are used to provoke, challenge norms, and express intense emotions or social critic. It allows artist to confront uncomfortable truths and express what is often suppressed in mainstream culture. In contrast, to outsiders, the genre would be viewed as disturbing or offensive. For example, Christian groups claimed that subliminal messages and 'backwards messages' in metal music could lead impressionable young people to murder and suicide (ref 2). However, not all metal music features aggressive or violent lyrics. Many metal songs address prosocial issues of politics, religion, the environment, global inequality and imbalances of power (ref 4) such as 'Killing in the Name' by Rage Against the Machine.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I believe that, although metal is a continuously expanding genre, it will never gain mainstream popularity like its father: rock. This is mainly due to all points discussed above- its intense sound, dark theme and rebellious image. I am almost certain that Metallica- an influential thrash metal band formed in 1981 - will be the only metal band to reach the heights of fame that they saw (nominated for 12 Grammys and won 9, sold over \$1 billion worth in concert tickets, sold 120,000,000 albums (ref 6) and their song, 'Master of Puppets' featured in Netflix show, Stranger Things). Metal never intended to appeal to mainstream, and as a result, never did.

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- 2Khan-Hamzah, K. (2007). *Extreme Metal Music and Culture on the Edge*. Berg.
- 3Hoberg, M. (2004). "Popular culture and the 'Darker Side of Alternative Spirituality: the Case of Metal Music', Vol. 21, (2004): Postmodern Spirituality
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Everything But United.

IS EUROVISION REALLY AS APOLITICAL AS IT CLAIMS TO BE?

Introduction:

The Eurovision Song Contest is an annual competition in which up to 44 countries compete and perform an original piece of music in hopes of winning the iconic glass Malmö Live trophy. According to the official Eurovision website, the 2024 contest which was held in Malmö, Sweden, was televised to a grand total of 165 million viewers. The contest is a testament to metal the Eurovision introduction of 1970 (Eurovision) has explained, stating that the competition is strictly apolitical, however in recent months with the events in Gaza and Ukraine, fans are left wondering how true this statement really is.

The Eden Golan effect:

Interest has declined for the Eurovision since levels were high, what was supposed to be a fun and apolitical competition has now become what the audience deems as a politically charged competition. CNN states that Eden Golan was not with a wave of 1000s during her performance of 'Hallelujah' as thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters, such inclusion of fan numbers, gathered in the streets of Tel Aviv for the funeral of Yitzhak Rabin, the controversial Palestinian activist. Not from the contest, but to the invasion of Ukraine a question was posed, if Israel wasn't allowed to participate, who could easily become the next to make backlash, Israel did surprisingly well in the final, coming 2nd in the public vote with 200 points, however from November 2022 (the 2023 Eurovision took place 2023 Oct 5) both refused to reinforce their countries joint points, following what the Arab star describes as 'horrible' Israel.



EDEN GOLAN
Performing on the Eurovision stage
with a heart-shaped hand gesture
for the public final.
Despite the anti-Israel
protests, she received
200 joint points
from Arab
Palestine supporters

Erasure, exposure and, favouritism?

Before anything, the Israeli delegation returned to the stage a song called 'Today' that which clearly referenced the October 7th attacks from Hamas (2023) and was in direct opposition of the sole political element in the competition. According to Eurovision representatives, countries cannot enter performances that has references due to hate that which evoked a Palestinian flag and a certain death, which are the two that are often seen as a trademark of the competition, as the 2023 public votes were largely swayed by Israel, who received a surprising 200 joint points (20 much lower than 100 occasions of invitation to participate). Second, songs to be chosen to sing to were selected, in October, Eurovision (Malmö) - placed an 'a' on the down tally - was removed from the original Eurovision voting pile, as (Göteborg) was forced with 100s while annihilating the other 20 points (100).

The people's favourite:

Amongst the most controversial and unexpected decision made this Eurovision season was the disqualification of Rotterdam's entry, Janjet Klein, 'More Than Meets The Eye', from the competition, which the Dutch representative commented on her statement that the disqualification was 'a bit of a revelation' (disqualification according to EBU, the Dutch representative was involved in an incident where she supposedly had a threatening gesture towards a female crew member, prior to 145 disqualification, he failed to attend a press conference due to the issue, which he was set to mention that before Israel's performance, they asked that 100 people to believe that Daniels involvement in the competition resulted in this incident, which the Eurovision denied as well as this, according to the Eurovision rules, disqualification of the Dutch representative due to the was based on whether her entrance would interfere or other contestants or audience, which she failed to do so.



PALESTINIAN FLAG
A group of Palestinian
protesters in London
during the funeral of
Yitzhak Rabin.
Young people are looking at
the flag and shouting 'We
will not let you do this'
during the streets of Tel
Aviv.

JANET KLEIN
PERFORMER VS. SONG:
MORE THAN MEETS
THE EYE (MATERIAL)
DISQUALIFIED, 145 BY EBU
QUALITY WAS
DISQUALIFIED BY EBU



To conclude:

With the inclusion of Israel in the 2023 edition and their likely involvement in 2026, many fans have accepted that Israel is here to stay. No matter how much they protest or express their frustration, the EBU simply refuses to listen. Many fans have speculated that the official sponsor for Eurovision, McDonald's, is the main factor behind Israel's involvement amongst the 2026, since the EBU obviously doesn't want to lose their biggest sponsor, as a result, Israel will continue to participate in the competition despite the EBU's evident bias, while their involvement continues to be a hot topic amongst the fans, there is essentially nothing that we as the fans can do, we can only sit back and watch what was once an iconic and beloved competition, spiral into political turmoil.

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Meetings with teachers

Practise **empathy** and put yourself in the kids' shoes.

Equitable solutions do not always have to be explicitly RACE or CLASS focused.

It's about being empathetic, understanding where the kids are at and implementing solutions to address inequity.

Creating an **evidence** base

Speak to education leaders

Engaging with academic **research** and education **policy**

Research the backgrounds of the groups you work with.

Gathering Information

Consult **data** from the DfE, LA, HEAT and geographical areas.

Start your **anti-racism** journey.

Adapting an activity



You're supporting some **small group work** during a subject taster session.

The students are tasked with doing **research on computers** and **delivering speeches** on their findings. You notice one student is **struggling to write anything down**.

You ask how they're getting on, and they say they really want to make a speech, but they **don't know where to start** with their research and **feel nervous** about making a speech to the group.

How could you adapt this activity so that this student can **participate meaningfully**?

STEP

Space – consider moving to another space, maybe it's too noisy or there's not enough personal space?

Task – can you change what you are asking from a student?

Equipment – is there an issue with materials being used?

People – Would it be better to pair them up with someone? Allow them to do it on their own?



Think



Pair



Share

Adapting an activity

The students are tasked with doing **research** on **computers** and delivering **speeches** on their findings.

- Access to **research skills** information and training.
- Limited to no access (or consistent access) to **technology** at home.
- Public speaking is tied to **confidence**.

You notice one student is **struggling to write anything down**.

- Potentially English as an Additional Language (EAL), a SEND need or insufficient access to **study skills** and **notetaking**.

They really want to make a speech, but they **don't know where to start with their research** and feel nervous about making a speech to the group.

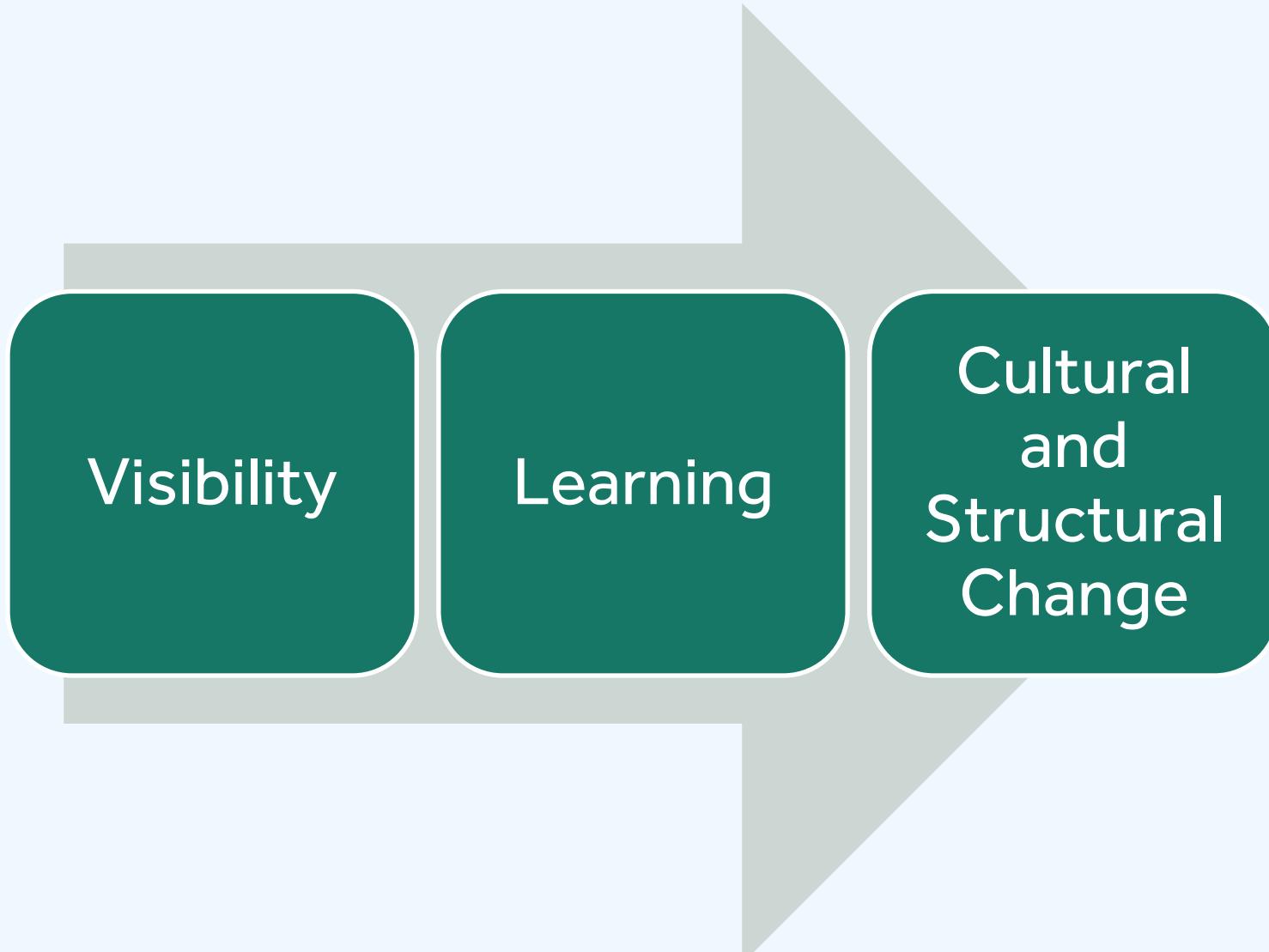
- This information should be used to inform **how** you assist the student and **the type of support** you could provide.

Developing an inclusive mindset helps you to better identify barriers affecting groups of students in scenarios like this.

**An bhfuil
aon Gaeilge
agat?**

Embedding Inclusion Analogy

Comparing
Gaeilge and
Equitable WP



Visibility

Learning

Cultural
and
Structural
Change

Inclusion Analogy: Equitable WP vs the Irish Language (Gaeilge)



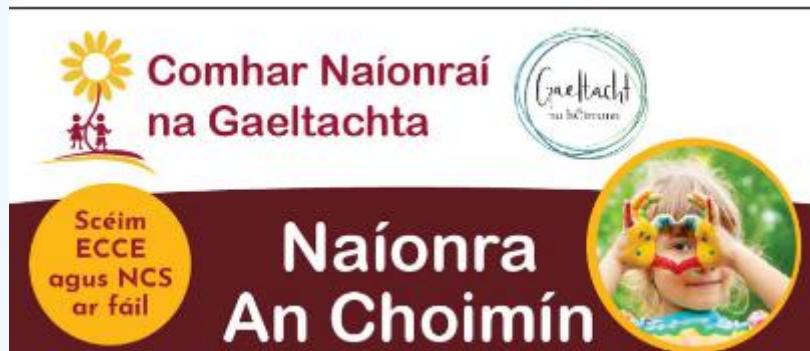
Like an iceberg analogy, but more practical.

Level 1: Visibility



- Placenames and road signs
- Government buildings
- Announcements on public transport
- Media usage
- Diverse images and stories in prospectuses, presentations and brochures.
- Statements about your commitment to anti-racism and inclusion.
- Messages in job recruitment adverts.

Level 2: Learning



- Irish-medium education (naónraí agus gaelscoileanna)
- Gaeltacht summer colleges.
- Compulsory subject in all schools.
- Duolingo, self-teaching resources and online learning.
- Training and CPD.
- Reading on race and class (see last slides).
- Using research to support your interventions.
- Learning about schools' needs.

Level 3: Cultural and Structural Change



- Equal status to English in law, 20% of public sector jobs by 2030.
- Identity and Language Act 2022 (NI).
- Spoken outside of education.
- Social housing in Gaeltacht areas.
- Fairer recruitment of staff to WP roles.
- Equitable student pipeline practices.
- Integration into policy and practice, with EDI targets in all strategies.
- Culture of feedback and progress.



Inequity in Education

Addressing race and class.

Barriers and characteristics.

Shifting from equality to equity.



First Steps

Examples from my work.

Case studies.

Adapting activities.



Embedding Inclusion

Visibility

Learning

Culture

Beyond today

- Apply learning and mindset to other areas.
- Beyond 'typical' characteristics:
 - Inclusion by design
 - Commuter students
 - SEND
- Further reading
 - Book suggestions (next slide)
 - UniTasterDays articles.

UniTasterDays

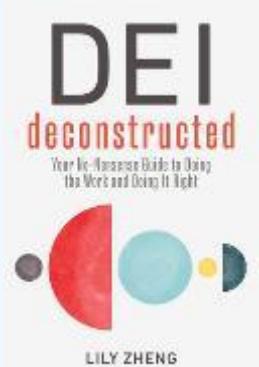
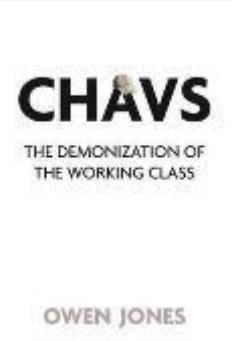
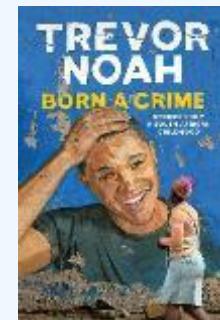
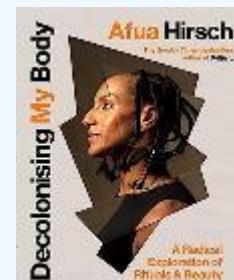
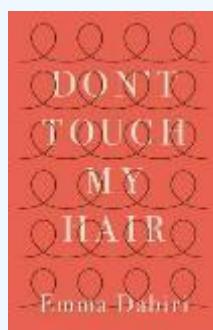
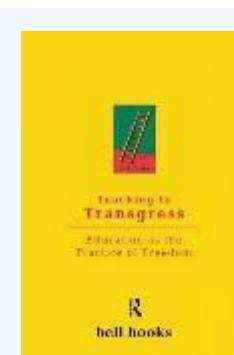
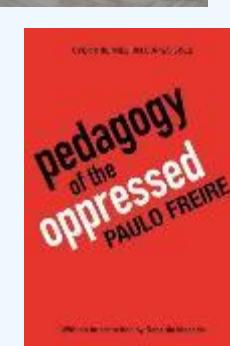
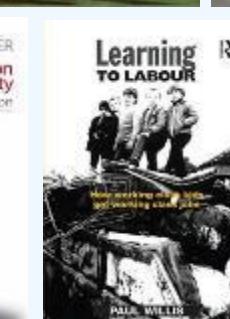
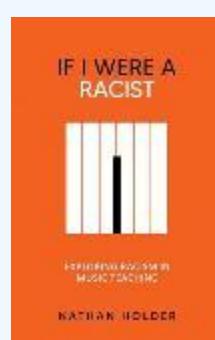
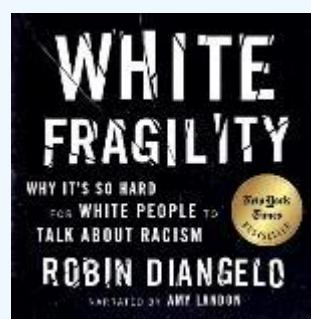
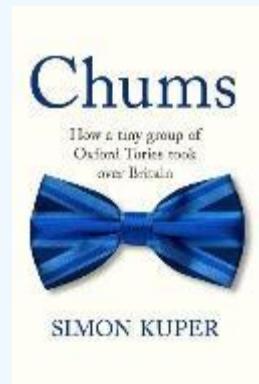
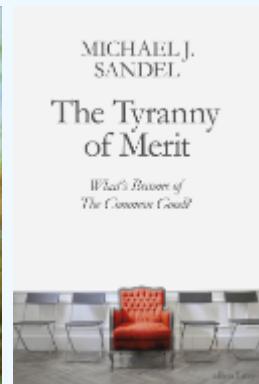
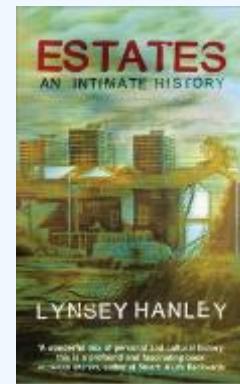
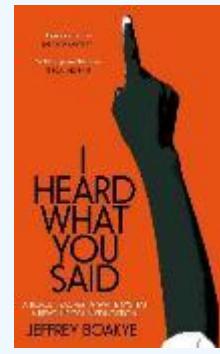
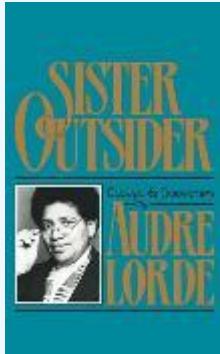
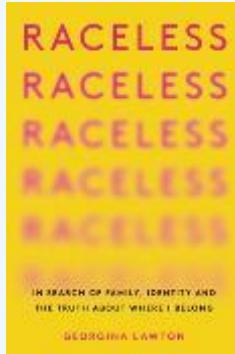
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