

# PODCAST



## PODCAST 4: COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES: WHEN WORDS ARE NOT ENOUGH

### “WORDS MATTER – WHY LANGUAGE SHAPES INCLUSION”

**We often say that words have power.** But we don't always stop to think about what that really means. Language is something we use every day - at school, at work, online. And yet, we rarely pause to ask how the words we choose can include or exclude, heal or hurt. Sometimes, it takes just one word to change how someone feels about themselves - or how others see them.

I remember the first time I truly understood how much weight words carry. It was during a group discussion at school. Someone made what they called a harmless joke.

People laughed - everyone - except one student. He went quiet. His eyes dropped to the desk. The conversation moved on quickly, but the silence stayed in the room. Later, I asked him about it. He said, “I know they didn't mean to hurt me. But I still felt small.”

That moment stayed with me. It made me realise how easily we excuse harmful language when it's hidden behind humour. Or when we say things like, “Oh, you're overreacting.”

But the truth is this: Language doesn't need to be hateful to be hurtful. Sometimes exclusion happens quietly through tone. Through jokes that rely on stereotypes. Through who we choose to name - and who we leave out. Words shape the stories we tell about each other. If a young person hears all their life that they are "lazy," "too emotional," or "not good enough," those words can slowly become part of their identity. But if they hear they are "creative," "capable," "resilient," the story changes.

### **Language can build confidence just as easily as it can destroy it.**

Inclusive language isn't about being politically correct. It's not about policing speech. It's about understanding that every word we use reflects what we value. When we choose language that respects diversity, we create space for people to exist as they are - not as others expect them to be. That's empathy in practice. And it often starts with small things: Using the names people prefer, not assuming someone's background or gender, and avoiding labels that reduce a person to just one part of who they are.

But inclusive communication isn't only about words. It's also about listening - really listening. When someone tells us that something we said was hurtful, we have a choice. We can defend ourselves. Or we can listen and learn. Being open to correction doesn't make us weak. It makes us respectful. And respect is the foundation of inclusion.



In a world where communication moves faster than ever - through posts, comments, messages, and tweets - our words travel far. Sometimes, to people we will never meet. They can encourage or discourage. Invite or reject. Connect or divide. That's why words matter. Because they don't just shape conversations - they shape who we become together.

So next time you speak, write, or post something online, pause for a moment.

### Ask yourself:

Will these words open a door for someone - or close it?

Because every word carries a choice.

### Reflective Questions

1. Can you remember a time when someone's words had a strong impact on you - positive or negative?
2. What did that experience teach you about the power of language?
3. In the coming days, where could your words build connection instead of distance?



*Funded by the EU. The views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the European Union or the Foundation for the Development of Education. Neither the European Union nor the Foundation for the Development of Education are responsible for them.*

*All results developed within the project „Building Community Links” are made available under open licenses (CC BY-SA 4.0 DEED). They can be used free of charge and without restrictions. Copying or processing these materials in whole or in part without the author's consent is prohibited. In the case of using the results, it is necessary to indicate the source of financing and its authors.*