

# Sponsored How to teach students about access to education

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The pandemic offers a springboard to teach young people about access to education. Teachers across the world explain how they are teaching students about the right to education



Inequality in the world isn't new. For years, educators have tried to bridge the gap between disadvantaged students and their more privileged peers.

But, over the past 18 months, the pandemic made these inequalities even more visible and, for some, even more stark. The partial closure of schools and move to remote teaching for most students shone a spotlight on the issue of access to education, with often the poorest students missing out.

This was a problem felt across the globe as countries everywhere grappled with the pandemic and home learning. Yet one slight silver lining has been that this collective experience of lockdown, which saw the inequalities already evident in education amplified, offers educators an opportunity to harness something really powerful in the classroom.

“With shared experiences of disruption to schooling, socialising and life in general, plus a growing awareness of global events, now is the perfect moment for students to develop empathy for other children's experiences,” says modern foreign languages teacher Victoria Leonard. This shared experience of the pandemic is something Leonard is highlighting by showing her students videos of other people's experiences of lockdown around the world to help them develop their awareness of our interconnected global lives.

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James Lake, head of politics at JFS School in London, drew on the changes students faced when schools fully reopened as an opportunity to discuss how individuals' circumstances differ:

“One pupil asked if we're behind on the curriculum,” says Lake. “I told them no, because they all did really well logging on to lessons during lockdown. Then they asked why exams weren't going ahead, and that led to a discussion about how not every pupil was able to have access to their full timetable online as they did. They agreed they were the lucky ones.”

We've pulled together some ideas from teachers on how to utilise this opportunity to teach children about the right to education.

## **Link education access with inspirational achievements**

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At Cleves Cross School in County Durham, pupils learn about access to education by celebrating inspirational role models such as Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg and Margaret Hamilton. Year 4 pupils select and study women they feel have made a difference to education and discuss them in class.

This year's cohort had the opportunity to discuss their chosen figures with prime minister Boris Johnson and Julia Gillard, chair of the [Global Partnerships for Education \(GPE\)](#) and former Australian prime minister. The two were visiting the school ahead of the [joint UK-Kenya Global Education Summit](#), which aims to raise \$5 billion over the next five years for the vital work of GPE. The number of children out of school has soared: at the height of the pandemic, [1.6 billion children around the world were out of school](#). The summit puts a spotlight on girls' access to education and calls for urgent investment in education more widely for every child.

“40 million more children into education is a great aim,” says Cleves Cross headteacher Alison Lazenby. “And the focus on girls is welcomed as they appear to have been impacted even more by the pandemic.”

Lazenby says that learning [the rights of the child](#) encourages students to think about their own rights and understand that although there is a right to education, that doesn't mean everyone receives it. Students explore the barriers to young people across the world accessing education such as gender inequality and conflict, illustrating how varied other children's experiences are around the world.

“Our pupils recognise that not all children across the world are able to access education” says Lazenby. “It’s important that our children understand their situation and their place in the wider world. Our area in particular is fairly mono-cultural and this means it is vitally important that as a school we make sure children have an understanding of different races and cultures.”

During the prime minister’s visit, he participated in a live link-up with school children in Kenya as part of the British Council and UK aid’s Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning initiative. Lazenby says this partnership with Koduogo Primary School in Kenya through the Connecting Classrooms programme has been tremendous at opening children’s eyes to the experiences of other children, and believes school partnerships can be a powerful way to build global understanding. Indeed, forging international connections for both pupils and teachers via collaborative learning has garnered recognition for Cleves Cross through International School Award accreditation.

## Highlight gender inequality

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Roughly 1 in 5 children cannot go to school. While some barriers to education such as conflict, apply to children of all genders, many affect only girls due to discrimination.

Research by the British Council found that Nigeria has an estimated 10.5 million children out of school – more than any other country. And economic factors and parental beliefs are the top three barriers to girls’ accessing education as cited by Nigerian teachers.

Factual resources from Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning, Oxfam and Unesco can help students understand gendered barriers to education. To build empathy, why not use stories rather than statistics?

“In addition to the Connecting Classrooms resource material, I use case studies and news articles to encourage classroom debates and problem-solving discussions,” says Mahlaqa Saeed, a teacher at Dawood Public School in Karachi, Pakistan.

Try using a mixture of factual materials, news stories and interviews to introduce topics like unpaid care work, child marriage, pregnancy, menstrual hygiene and more, in age appropriate ways.



## Connect issues at home and abroad

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It's important to highlight in a sensitive way that many of these are global issues; for example, period poverty affects many women in the UK, too. A survey by Plan International UK found that one in 10 girls has been unable to afford sanitary products.

And although the gender pay gap in the UK has been declining slowly over time, it's still prevalent, and a topic Saeed suggests linking to: "Students are often surprised to learn about the existence of gender-based wage gaps around the world, especially that they exist in developed countries.

"The world is rapidly becoming one big global village where we share common issues. When there is cross sharing of learning material through mediums as the Connecting Classrooms initiative, students are able to participate in open discussions about global concerns."

Saeed believes that as young people begin to learn how similar issues impact different countries, they may identify better with counterparts across the world, and through learning exchanges, together they may even come up with collective solutions. "This is where we, as teachers, play a key role in encouraging collaborations across borders so as to broaden the learning horizons of our students."

She says young people not only need to learn about rights; they need to be able to advocate for others. "It is imperative that young students are made aware of the importance of gender discrimination," says Saeed. "So that they are aware of their own

rights as citizens of the world and are able to recognise and respect the rights of those who are unable to realise or speak up for them on their own.”

## Learn gender responsive pedagogy

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Maina WaGĩokĩ, vice principal at Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa, trains the trainers that lead Connecting Classrooms professional development courses for teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa. He explains how both he and his teachers benefited hugely from being grouped with schools from around the world on the virtual learning platform to explore different ways of teaching the topic.

“Teachers don’t just learn about the idea of gendered access to education,” says Dr WaGĩokĩ. “They also learn how to deliver their lessons in a gender-responsive way.

“They use texts that don’t discriminate or create gender bias. For example, in the roles at home, John could be washing dishes and Mary fixing the lightbulb. References to “he” and “she” or “him” and “her” are balanced in the narrative.

“In some cases, teachers are either gender blind – they don’t focus on or talk about gender inequality – due to a lack of knowledge, skills or competencies, or they play safe by being gender neutral,” says Dr WaGĩokĩ. “But we need teachers to be gender and inclusion conscious so that inclusion and gender is core and considered throughout.”

Leaving gender out of the curriculum doesn’t take it out of the classroom. It still affects students’ lives and learning experiences. But by becoming conscious about gender and inclusion, teachers can harness gender inequality as a powerful learning opportunity.

Showing students that the same issues cross continents helps boost global citizenship, teaching the next generation of leaders that they can take action to address educational inequality once and for all.

**Connecting Classrooms Through Global Learning offers a wealth of ready-to-go resources packed with creative and engaging ideas to bring themes of global importance to life. Teach about the topics in this article with inspiring resources Gender Equality and Quality Education. Find out more about fantastic opportunities to collaborate with an international partner school and build global understanding in your classroom.**

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## Ettie Bailey-King

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