A TED Talk Lesson Plan: Change Is Not a Four-Letter Word
by Emily J. Clark

"People can't change." Perhaps you have heard this before; perhaps you have felt similarly at times. Particularly with the current widening gap in ideologies in the United States, it seems that having a civil, nevertheless productive, conversation with a person with opposing beliefs of any kind is impossible. Yet, I recently watched a TED Talk by Megan Phelps-Roper about how engaging with others on social media—of all places—changed her life.

This video resonated with me. The idea behind this video—that a person can and did change so drastically—nips at the corners of my consciousness. The idea of change, the comfort of not changing, the belief in others' ability to change, whether or not we should change—has left me with only more questions. Can these questions be addressed in a controlled and loving manner? Taking it a step further, what are my own thoughts on change and how can I be a conduit for change? What catalysts typically stimulate change? In reflecting on how to create a space for such conversation, I felt hope that there could be a safe place to reflect as I could create this space.

You might be asking, "Why is this relevant to ESL teaching?" As ESL/EFL professionals, we are often wired to embrace change and perhaps even crave it. That said, being open to change does not apply to all. To many, change is intimidating and, as a result, avoided. We, too, may find ourselves in a situation that feels immovable, as if no amount of data, logic, reason, or argument will change the situation. The situation may seem bleak. However, when I watched this TED video, it was not only talking about the catalyst for Megan's change, but also—and perhaps most important—giving advice on how we, too, can be open to change. It is this hope that we must bring to our students. Hope that the world can be better—will be better—starting with open dialogue and kindness.

It is with this mindset that we can dialogue with students and give them a safe place to express their fears and our fears, and perhaps collectively hope that people can change—for the better.

The following is a lesson plan based on the Megan Phelps-Roper video and the concept of positive change. While this video is a calm retelling of her personal change, some may find the topics she discusses (religion, homophobia), the language she uses (occasional profanity) and the images she shows (hate speech) uncomfortable. For this reason, it is considered adult in nature, best geared toward a mature audience. This lesson plan can be used in any skill-based course; students will practice listening, speaking, reading, note-taking, writing, and civic engagement.

> **Materials:**
> - TED video with key for notes, tone, and key information
> - Discussion questions (handout or displayed)
> - Gap-fill sentence strips
> - Technology (Socrative, Kahoot, Voicethread, Audioboom; optional)
> - "10 Rules of Change" article discussion questions
> - Annotated list of local nonprofit organizations, model research

chart, and plan (optional)	
Audience: Adult (18+) and high intermediate (B2) to advanced (C2)	

Objective: Students will be able to
• identify main ideas and key supporting information
• identify speaker's tone
• engage in group discussion on the topic of change
• create a project-based plan for local engagement
Outcome: Open dialogue, increased connection to community, practice with skill-building using content-based material
Duration: 50 minutes (+ for follow-up activities)

Teacher Guiding Questions

These questions are meant to be addressed before broaching this topic and lesson plan. It is important for you to answer these questions internally as well. This is a challenging lesson and space, so it important that you facilitate it well and that you are sensitive and introspective when you do so.

What are your own thoughts on the following questions?

- Is it possible to change one's beliefs?
- Is it possible to change one's behavior?
- If not, why do you believe this? What evidence do you have to support your opinion?
- If so, why do you believe this? What evidence do you have to support your opinion?

Lesson Plan

Warm-Up

With a partner, students try to define the following words and phrases, using their own ideas. They can reference the dictionary if needed. You should prepare the definitions and display them after 3–4 minutes.
- Change
- Belief
- Belief System
- Behavior
- Thought Pattern

Ask this question to the whole class: Do you think that people can change their beliefs or behaviors? Students should support their answer.

Alternatively: Students could answer this question via Socrative or Kahoot. Ask the question again at the end of class as an exit ticket to see if students have changed their mind, and share the numbers during the following class. For example, "50% of you did not believe that people could

change at the beginning of class, but by the end of class, 75% of you thought they could, which means that 25% of you changed your beliefs on this."

Guided Listening and Note-taking

Use the Megan Phelps-Roper TED Talk as an example of change. Have students listen for:

- *Topic*: What was her overall message?
- *Tone*: Is this an informative or persuasive talk? Give examples to support your response.
- *Key information*: What four steps did she give the audience about change? (Students should take notes after a second time listening to the video.)

Recall Questions

1. Describe Megan's life before she left Westboro Baptist Church.
2. Describe some ways that the Twitter participants communicated with Meagan.
3. What were the steps that she describes as ways to facilitate conversation?

Guided Practice: Speaking

Synthesis Discussion Question: Read the following quote from the movie *Rocky IV* to students. You can display it on the board, provide them with a printout, and/or watch the scene together in class.

> "During this fight, I've seen a lot of changing, in the way you feel about me, and in the way I feel about you. In here, there were two guys killing each other, but I guess that's better than twenty million. I guess what I'm trying to say, is that if I can change, and you can change, everybody can change!" (Chartoff, Winkler, & Stallone, 1985)

Ask students: Do you agree with this quote? Why or why not?

Independent Practice: Speaking

You can practice via in-class discussion or you can use voice-interactive technology, such as Voicethread or Audioboom. Note: Moderation is recommended.

Reflection and Critical Thinking Discussion Questions

1. Is changing your beliefs a good idea? Why or why not?
2. How do you feel about Megan's change? What would you have done in her situation?
3. What questions would you ask her if you had the chance?
4. Have you had difficult conversations with others before? What did you do? If not, how would you approach such a conversation if you needed to in the future?
5. What do you think about her advice for change? Are these good ideas? Would you follow these ideas?

Information Gap Exercise: Complete the Sentence

Students pull out strips of paper from a box. Each strip contains half of a complete sentence. They should then find the person with the strip of paper that completes their sentence. After doing so, both students should discuss the sentence and either agree or disagree with the sentence. Here are some examples:

- (1) Change is possible, (2) but it is not easy.
- (1) If change were easy, (2) everyone would do it.
- (1) In life, everything changes (2) if you wait a while.

Task-Based Project: Engaging in Community

After the listening and speaking activities, in small groups, have students brainstorm ways to make positive change locally, nationally, and/or globally. The culmination of this discussion should be a group project of sorts to get the students involved in the local community.

See **Appendix A** for a few possible activities to add to this lesson, either during class if you have time, as homework, or as longer term class projects.

Homework: Follow-up Reading

Here are some possible outside reading assignments. Have the students respond orally via Voicethread or Audioboom, in a written response to turn in, or via an online discussion board post.

Advanced Students

Compare the content of the TED video with this blog post by an online interlocutor, Lisa McColgan, who responded to (and eventually became friends with) Megan Phelps-Roper.

Response Questions

- What would you ask either Megan or Lisa if you could?
- How do you feel about engaging with people on the Internet in this manner?

Intermediate-Advanced Students

"The 10 Rules of Change," an article in *Psychology Today* by Stan Goldberg.

As change often starts with self, you can have the students read this article first, applying it to themselves. They can use these questions to interview a partner and compare their answers (in-class or online; see **Appendix B** for the list of discussion questions.)

Disclaimer: *The author would like to note that she is advocating for positive change and openness and not promoting the abandonment of belief systems, be they political, religious, or social in nature.*

References

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Appendix A: Engaging in Community Project

How To Get Involved: Local Engagement for International Students

Rationale: As educators, we desire to have international students feel a part of their community. There are many different ways to do this. The following are a few examples of ideas, both previously implemented and hypothetical.

Project Idea 1: Nonprofit Volunteering

A former colleague from the University of Iowa, Angela DeBoer, and I created a speaking project that later culminated in volunteerism. We used Charity Navigator as one source for students to research nonprofit organizations with the idea that they would use this information to create a poster and present this as a program-wide poster session. The goal was to promote research and oral fluency skills. Additionally, we had a representative from a local organization give a talk to our combined students for additional listening practice and background on a nonprofit organization. The students and I also volunteered together at a local foodbank for a volunteer experience. This was an optional activity, but the majority of the students participated.

If I were to repeat this process here in Lawrence, Kansas, I might set it up in this way:

Preparation

There are both local and national nonprofit volunteer opportunities in Lawrence, so I would try to find a variety of organizations. I might also contact organizations prior to creating this list to ensure that this type of project would be appropriate for the students. Prior to this lesson, I would make an annotated list of nonprofit local organizations. I would focus on the needs of the organization and my students' background, preferences, and linguistic ability.

In-Class

Overall Set-up

Organization Choice → Research → Model Plan/ Class Group Volunteer → Group Plan → Group Project Volunteer
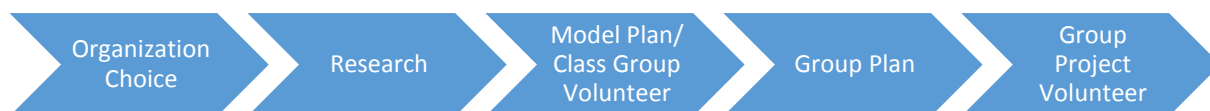
- ✓ Give annotated list of organizations and chart (Table 1) to students.
- ✓ Forms groups of three to four students, or allow students to form their own groups.
- ✓ Students use annotated list to research and complete the chart on the history, organizational structure, purpose, and impact of the nonprofit organization.
- ✓ Once the students have completed the research (online, in-person, phone), the students create a plan for how they could engage with this organization.

✓ Set limitations and expectations for students to prepare them for this experience. I would also recommend that the entire class do a volunteer opportunity first before doing these individual projects.

The following is an example explanation and chart for how I would implement local volunteering here in Lawrence, Kansas.

Just Food is a local food bank here in Lawrence. Just Food has listed volunteer opportunities involving task-based assignments such as sorting items and picking up items, but students could also discuss how they could work with clients. I, as the teacher, would encourage the students to be involved with clients, if possible, because it is the human interaction that provides opportunity for engagement and dialogue.

Table 1. Nonprofit Information Chart

Organization Name	History	How It Works	Purpose	Impact
Just Food	2008/2009- Econ. Rec Act & ARRA funds ->Richard Jackson, CEO, ECKAN	Donated & purchased food is stored, sorted, and distributed to "partner agencies & Douglas Co. residents"	To fill food gap, alleviate "food insecurity," and "eradicate hunger" in Douglas Co.	"Just Food and its 35+ partner agencies feed more than 8,000 people per month in Douglas County."
Lawrence Humane Society				
Big Brothers, Big Sisters				

Volunteer Action Plan

The students should both create and implement this volunteer action plan. That said, here is a list of possible actions that you may use to guide the students in creating their plan.

1. **Contact the Organization:** Students should contact the organization to learn about volunteer opportunities available. They should also ask if volunteer training is available.
2. **Time Commitment:** Students should decide how often they would like to volunteer. They should also decide if they will volunteer individually, as a group, or both. I would recommend that students volunteer as a group as this is likely to be more comfortable for students.

3. **Keeping Track:** Students should track their hours, experiences, and difficulties as they go along. They should keep you informed if there are any difficulties that require your intervention. This information will be used as a reflection, so it is important that students document what they learn as they go.
4. **Reflection:** Students should complete a reflection on this experience, particularly regarding change. You should have them either keep a paper journal, blog, or vlog, or have them give a presentation on their organization and experience.
5. **Optional Assessment:** You should decide if you want this project (any or all parts) to be graded. You could treat this as a portfolio, using alternative grading. You could grade their written responses to discussion questions, or you could assign a group presentation, which could be assessed with a rubric.

Project Idea 2: Student Forum

Host a forum through your school. Train your students as group leaders to facilitate conversation on change using discussion questions. A forum of this nature might work best in small groups. Ask other teachers or administrations to be present in each group to observe and/or intervene if needed.

Project Idea 3: Voicethread Pals

Create a Voicethread for your class. Have the students create pseudonyms. Have each group post questions and respond to each other. Then, invite another class to participate. You might consider expanding this to a public Voicethread to reach a larger audience. Teacher moderation is necessary as the goal of the exercise is to dialogue, albeit in a calm manner.

Project Idea 4: Twitter

Similar to Phelps-Roper, create a class Twitter account. Students can comment and engage with others on this account. Moderation is needed.

Project Idea 5: Newspaper Series

You could contact your school or area newspaper about doing an ongoing column on international student engagement and volunteerism. Each student could publish one article over the course in the newspaper with the help of self, peer, teacher, and newspaper editor revisions. These pieces could be reflective, persuasive, or informative.

Reference

Just Food. (n.d.). History of just food. Retrieved from http://justfoodks.org/about-us/history-of-just-food/

Appendix B: "10 Rules of Change" Discussion Questions

The following are the 10 rules with one to two discussion questions for each rule.

Rule 1: All behaviors are complex
Can you think of a behavior that you would like to change? What steps would you need to do to "break down this behavior"?

Rule 2: Change is frightening
Which is more frightening for you: changing or not changing?

Rule 3: Change must be positive
How would you reward yourself for changing? Ex: I need to do my homework. If I finish my homework first, I will watch a movie.

Rule 4: Being is easier than becoming
What problems might you have with changing your behavior?

Rule 5: Slower is better
How long will it take for you to change your behavior? 1 week? 1 month? 1 year? How will you stay motivated?

Rule 6: Change requires structure
Do you have a plan for how you will reach your goal (changed behavior)?

Rule 7: Know more, do better
Do you have a friend who can monitor and encourage your progress with change? How often will you talk to this friend?

Rule 8: Practice is necessary
Do you have a plan for how you will practice your changed behavior?

Rule 9: New behaviors must be protected
Are there people, places, or things that you should avoid in order to change?

Rule 10: Small successes are big
What would you consider to be a small success for this change? What would be a big success?

These questions are based on the article, "The 10 Rules of Change," by S. Goldberg, published 1 September 2001 in *Psychology Today*.