

CURRICULAR INFUSION and INTEGRATION:

Conflict resolution, decision-making & critical thinking in "academic" subject areas for Learning to Live Together

(Kathy Bickmore, June 2014)

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, & ATTITUDES for effective Conflict Resolution and Learning to Live Together:

Communication (verbal & non-verbal):

active listening
asking appropriate questions
clear speaking
(e.g. stating opinions, giving reasons)
critical reading
persuasive speaking & writing
observation, noticing details & clues
identifying & expressing feelings
dramatizing, role-playing
understanding perspectives, viewpoints
communicating w/o same language

Cooperation & community-building:

patience
tolerance
persistence
managing anger & frustration
respecting self & others
sense of equity, fairness
strategies for sharing & turn-taking
taking initiative
accepting responsibility
comfort with disagreement & multiple answers
understanding basic human needs/rights
collaboration & teamwork

Recognizing & resisting prejudice

openness to unfamiliar ideas
comfort with different kinds of people
respect for different viewpoints
familiarity with various cultures
capacity to evaluate fairness
strategies for confronting unfairness

Reasoning & managing problems:

risk-taking
clarifying issues & problems
hands-on problem-solving
improvising
decision making (internal & inter-personal)
consensus-building
using voting procedures
recognizing interests, needs, & values
analysis, e.g. comparison/contrast, themes,
breaking complex ideas/ tasks into parts or steps
critical thinking, evaluation
recognizing strengths & weaknesses
synthesizing, summarizing main ideas
visually representing ideas & problems
predicting consequences

Peacemaking & negotiation:

identifying long-range & short-term goals
inventing win-win (integrative) solutions
compromising
asserting, yet knowing when/how much to give in
understanding negotiation processes
familiarity with mediation purpose & processes
understanding legal/ judicial system & alternatives
understanding of impartiality, neutral stance
respecting confidentiality

Concepts for understanding conflicts & problems:

types of conflict, how conflict works
escalation & de-escalation of conflict
social institutions handle various types of conflict
perspective, point of view
needs, interests, & positions
identifying common ground, bridging difference

SAMPLE WAYS OF PRACTICING CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS IN ACADEMIC CONTEXTS

LANGUAGE ARTS, Literature, Drama, Media Studies and ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES

Teach conflict, resolution, and justice/fairness vocabulary

Speaking skills - class discussion acknowledging and including all social identities and personality types; participate in building and practicing nonviolent communicative group norms, behaviors and rules; role play conflict dialogues

Listening and non-verbal communication skills - role play conflict situations (in "life" and in "literature") practice active listening in games, language lessons, and as part of mediation process, paraphrase and reframe to show understanding and interpretation

Writing skills - write or re-write dialogues, stories, new endings to stories, using conflict (resolution) concepts such as interests and positions, (de)escalation, persuasion

Critical thinking skills - recognize and compare/contrast alternate viewpoints; deliberate about natural and fair consequences for choices and behaviors; invent/act out/ evaluate consequences of different resolutions to conflict

Negotiation skills - students make suggestions, encourage feedback, evaluate, and clarify rules and consequences - for classroom, and for characters in stories/dialogues

Perception skills - investigate and write or speak publicly (prose or poetry) about peaceful role models, personal definition and goals for peace; practice/act out feeling words

Literature study: Analyze and role-play the viewpoints of various characters, the escalation and de-escalation of conflict in the plots of stories and poetry from various perspectives (e.g. Scieszka *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*). Reinvent: mock negotiation or mediation between characters in stories/ books such as fairy tales, *Magic Fish*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, consider fairy tales and local and regional stories in your country representative of the cultural and ethnic diversity.

Non-fiction and news study: Examine media coverage on the radio, television, or internet, from political speeches in your community, and its standpoints (biases), do follow-up inquiries about longer-term effects of conflicts and violent events and peacemaking/ peacebuilding processes; write blogs, letters to editor, or news coverage about conflict issues

Elaborate: Brainstorm/ create multiple ways of expressing the same feeling or idea

Dramatize: Speak or write 'in role' (from another standpoint), readers' theater (dramatic reading without acting), tableaux (miming perspectives without speaking), improvise alternate representations of problems and alternate resolutions

SOCIAL STUDIES, History, Geography, and Citizenship

Discuss contrasting case studies: basic human needs (as causes of conflict or cooperation), human rights, alternate approaches to redressing rights violations

Examine/compare histories of peacemakers and justice advocates; situate timelines of their lives and historical contexts, map geographic and cultural contexts

Analyze different viewpoints across time or geographic/ cultural space, identify common ground, conflicts, and alternative resolutions to human problems in history/geography. Compare the points of view of different news sources, editorial/opinion writing, blogs; assess bias and reliability of reporting and evidence.

Study types of aggression, prejudice, and anti-discriminatory action: model and role play problems, needs and wants of various parties, and alternative solutions

Compare diverse modes of communication (& communication technology), verbal and non-verbal, local and long-distance

Use/develop various visual materials (such as movies, photos, posters), and various verbal modes (such as court simulations, debates, restorative dialogues, political mediations or negotiations): translate words/pictures

Study contemporary conflicts and their roots, such as human dependence on biological environment, housing and transportation decisions, taxation and regulation, urbanization (linked to aggression, riots), farm land and green space preservation, resource scarcity, pollution

Role play/ simulate United Nations, Model Organization of American States, World Court hearings, International Criminal Court, or Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, round-table negotiations re: transnational treaty regimes & hostilities - current and in history; identify stakeholders, power relations, and points of view in international or intercultural conflicts

Share and examine various cultural identities, narratives, and worldviews, including the relative positions of power and prestige of various groups in the community and the world. Investigate and debunk stereotypes, for instance in advertisements and textbooks.

Practice democratic governance with class policies, elected student leaders, community-based service/action projects

Analyze and assess decision-making processes of governance bodies such as local councils, legislatures, courts, treaties, United Nations agencies.

MATH, SCIENCES

Apply conceptual tools to 'real' local, national and global problems: Summarize and assess the persuasiveness of data, note correlations, graph, express in ratio/proportion, examine probabilities, infer cause & effect, e.g. re: policies under debate, diversities in community and world (e.g. distributions of wealth, disease, natural resources, trade [im]balances)

Investigate & represent "tough choices" (using graphs, charts, statistics, proportions, etc) - e.g. violence and environmental damage in the local & global community

Evaluate and debate reliability of statistics in media reports

Practice estimation & measurement, using recipes from various cultures: compare/contrast nutritional values, survey peers on preferences, advocacy campaign for healthy food

Discuss when cooperating (as scientists and mathematicians do) is a good idea, vs. "cheating"¹

Play creative thinking games, connect to conflict resolution concepts such as 'inventing options for mutual gain'²

Practice problem-solving, rather than just "correct answers"

Examine cultural & historical roots of math and science, how challenges of problem-solving have been handled - e.g. biographies of mathematical and scientific innovators who at first may have been misunderstood or even ridiculed for their insights and discoveries

Science - study different points of view about issues, e.g. ecology, food chain (production, distribution, pollution), deforestation, habitat, fossil fuel dependence, carbon emissions

Examine how conflict/ escalation works (in relation to basic needs, ecological niches) in animal life: response to threats, cooperation, etc.

Scientific method - inquiry, hypothesizing, careful fact-finding, evaluation of evidence - apply to school & community problems students want to solve

Geometry - e.g. perspective, optical illusions; logical proofs re: counter-intuitive shapes or geometric rules/ relationships, apply mapping/ scale to municipal planning issues e.g. transit routes

¹ Sometimes educators frame cooperation as "cheating": it helps when teachers explicitly (1) point out the value and pervasiveness of cooperation (eg scientists do it, legislatures and councils do it when they really want to solve problems rather than only 'win'); (2) explicitly discuss these norms with students (I want you to cooperate this way in this group work, whereas in this whole-class activity or test please work individually.)

² This comes directly from the classic negotiation text *Getting to Yes* (Fisher & Ury). They say one of the most frequent problems in CR is the insufficient use of creative thinking - people often 'divide the pie' before 'expanding' it, jump to the first adequate solution idea instead of taking time to discern and invent alternate ways to satisfy each party's wants/needs - toward 'win-win' options.

ARTS

- Recognize how elements of art and design communicate feelings and ideas
- Interpret and enjoy arts from various cultures, arts for various purposes, how arts communicate issue awareness and worldviews
- Collect photos, cartoons and other images depicting conflict, for instance from recent news media.
Discuss what viewpoints are represented and excluded, how and why the conflict has escalated or de-escalated, predict what might happen next, share subjective responses
- Create independent creative projects, e.g. educational posters for advocating human rights, community problem-solving
- Draw/ paint posters and cartoons portraying conflict (resolution) and peaceful change scenarios
- Communicate different viewpoints & feelings, represent objects and problems from alternate 'perspectives'
- Music - experiment with composition, harmony, counterpoint, music to express feelings or communicate themes
- Create songs and spoken word poetry about understanding human differences, justice, peacemaking and conflict resolution

HEALTH and PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- Fair play - Promote 'do your best, have fun, cooperate, be a good sport' rather than 'beat the enemy;' willingly play and partner work with a variety of classmates
- Discuss biology and behavior, individual and collective decision-making for healthy relationships, alternate ways of meeting humans' physical and social needs, diverse bodies & families
- Describe the symptoms and clues of conflict escalation, and how actions by various participants, bystanders and other stakeholders may help (or hinder) de-escalation and long-range peace-building. Distinguish behavior (what people do) from identity (who they are).
- Understand the triggers of conflict and escalation, and how to avoid or de-escalate problems.
- Examine sources of various kinds of violence (such as domestic violence, identity based conflict based on gender, sex, race, religion, ethnicity, ability, socio-economic status), verbal and psychological harm, inter-group friction, escalation of fighting or bullying, carrying weapons) and the social supports to help prevent it, to create safe space, and to reduce harm.
- Demonstrate awareness and acceptance of diverse families, expressions of sexuality and gender.
- Practice constructive verbal and non-verbal communication, for instance disagreeing respectfully.
- Identify strategies for building safe, inclusive and peaceful environments
- Practice inclusion through community-building games, name games, cooperative exercises.

Further resources:

- Bickmore, Kathy (2005). "Foundations for peacebuilding and discursive peacekeeping: Infusion and exclusion of conflict in Canadian public school curricula" *Journal of Peace Education* 2 (2, September), 161-181.
- Bickmore, Kathy (2007). "Taking Risks, Building Peace: Teaching Conflict Strategies and Skills to Students from 6-16+" In H. Claire & C. Holden (Eds.), *The Challenge of Teaching Controversial Issues*. London: Trentham Books, 131-145.
- Bickmore, Kathy & Angela MacDonald (2010). "Student leadership opportunities for making 'peace' in Canada's urban schools: Contradictions in practice." *Interamerican Journal of Education for Democracy/ Revista Interamericana de Educación para la Democracia* 3(2), 125-152.
- Bickmore, Kathy (2011). "Keeping, making, and building peace in school" *Social Education* 75(1, January), 42-46.

Bickmore, Kathy (2013). "Circle Dialogue Processes in Elementary Classrooms: Locations for Restorative and Educative Work." *Restorative Approaches to Conflict in Schools*, edited by Hilary Cremin, Edward Sellman, & Gillian McCluskey (Routledge), 175-191.