Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools: Keynotes

Keynote 1
Violence and Conflict: Issues and Strategies for Schools

The following information is also relevant to Keynote 1:

The Introduction: Background information outlining the context and purpose of the project.

Keynote 1 – Violence and Conflict: Issues and Strategies for Schools: A theoretical background to understanding conflict and violence and how schools can address issues of intolerance. (This document.)

Keynote 2 – A Whole-School Approach to Combating Racism and Prejudice: An audit strategy for schools to plan and monitor their approaches to combating racism. This is adapted from Racism No Way (www.racismnoway.com.au/strategies/framework/body-Schools.html); a web site aimed at teachers seeking to challenge and counter racism.

The following Keynotes cover the nine most significantly represented religions in Australia and include suggestions for classroom activities:

Keynote 3 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam
Keynote 4 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism
Keynote 5 - The Abrahamic Religions: Middle Eastern Christians
Keynote 6 – The Abrahamic Religions: Islam
Keynote 7 – Arabs and Muslims in Australia
Keynote 8 – Indian Religions: Hinduism
Keynote 9 – Indian Religions: Sikhism
Keynote 10 – Indian Religions: Buddhism
Keynote 11 – Bahá’í Faith

You can also download a full version of Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools, which includes all of the Keynotes listed above. This full document, as well as all of the above sections can be downloaded from the Keynotes Explained (http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchkeynotes.htm) web page on the Multicultural Education http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm) site.
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Why people fight

Different theories are offered for the causes of violence and aggression. Human behaviour is complex and no one theory holds all the answers.

It is important not to equate violence with aggression. A person may behave aggressively without being violent. Aggression is a behaviour characterised by verbal or physical attack. It may be appropriate and self-protective or destructive and violent.

Some people believe that fighting between individuals and groups is instinctive and inevitable with aggression being used to maintain the dominance of an individual or a group over limited resources or territory. It is an instinct shared by people and animals. The ‘aggression as instinct’ theory is an extension of the ‘survival of the fittest’ theory.

This explanation, however, overlooks the capacity of people to change behaviour and to develop and implement moral codes to govern the way people relate to one another.

An extension of the ‘violence as instinct’ argument comes from psychoanalytic theory: violence is essentially determined by unresolved conflicts or thwarted impulses within the individual. Freud, for example, asserted that “… It really seems as though it is necessary for us to destroy some other thing or person in order not to destroy ourselves, in order to guard against the impulse to self-destruction”.

This explanation is criticised on the grounds that it fails to acknowledge social processes and conditions that influence behaviours and beliefs.

The third theory of aggression moves away from the idea of violence as instinct to violence as a result of an external stimulus or obstacle which creates a build-up of frustration in the individual or group when they are prevented from having their basic needs and desires met. Collective violence, for example, can arise when a group feels frustrated because members believe they are not receiving their fair entitlement to goods, resources, cultural recognition or political power. This explanation of violence stresses social contexts, such as inequality among groups or contested cultural norms that lead to struggles for power or become rallying points for change.

It appears that an element of frustration is often connected with violent behaviour but the explanation overlooks the fact that frustration does not always result in individual or collective violence. Experience shows, however, that collective violence increases when there is high unemployment, increased poverty and international tension.

Struggles for power are often accompanied by ideologies of racial or ethnic superiority claiming some pre-existing order of merit among groups. This view justifies violence on the grounds that rational argument and the use of fair processes in settling disputes are not relevant because of the entrenched positions people inevitably adopt. Although the causes of the recent conflicts in
the Sudan for example are complex, ethnic tensions have been both a contributing factor and a result of the conflict.

A fourth theory, the Social Learning Theory, maintains that aggressive behaviour is learned behaviour. When witnesses of violent behaviour see someone achieve satisfaction through violence, they become more willing to use violence themselves to achieve their ends. An influential study of aggression in children (Bandura 1973) found that children who had witnessed adults committing violent acts were significantly more likely to commit acts of aggression themselves. This applied also to violent acts seen on film. Social learning theorists do not accept that violence is instinctive. They point to examples of societies in which aggression is largely absent and to examples of violent behaviour both collective and individual in which frustration was not the motive. They admit that frustration can be a possible trigger for violence, but claim that aggression is learned behaviour rather than an automatic response to frustration.

Social learning theorists maintain that if people find rewards in violence, either through achieving their goals or through acting out their anger without harmful consequences, they are increasingly likely to be violent in the future. Others can become caught up in the violence cycle. When violence becomes common in a society, it becomes more likely that others will choose to model themselves on the violent participants (Gurr, 1970, pages 172–173).

**Conflict resolution**

Conflict is an ordinary part of everyday living. It is integral to living in groups, making decisions, solving problems and therefore, not necessarily bad. It can produce new ideas, broader perspectives and creative interaction among people who initially disagree.

Using violence to deal with conflict, however, is unlikely to resolve the root cause. In fact, it is likely to exacerbate the situation and create additional conflict.

The protracted conflict in the Middle East shows that violence as a solution to conflict is thoroughly destructive to all parties. It has caused deepening rancour in the wider Muslim world and this has led to an environment where fanatical extremists have been able to recruit people to their causes, particularly among those experiencing deprivation, inequality and a deep sense of injustice. Acts of terrorism in the USA, Bali, Spain Britain and India, and the consequent U.S. interventions in the Middle East have broadened the conflict to encompass much of the globe. The negative social, economic and political effects of these events will last well beyond the cessation of war. The casualties of these conflicts and others around the globe include the large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers who are living in uncertain conditions in countries of asylum waiting for resettlement.

Schools in a democratic society have a responsibility to teach students the value of cooperative and non-violent forms of conflict resolution and to help them develop and practise the relevant skills.
What schools can do

Develop clear, inclusive policy

Schools need to develop clear definitions of harassment, bullying and violence and have clear policies for preventing and responding to them.

School policy-making and planning should be a cooperative undertaking focusing on issues of social justice including values education, multicultural education, human rights, gender equity, peace education, Koori education, and programs specifically targeted at meeting the needs of students from language backgrounds other than English. A whole-school approach to student welfare and discipline needs to be adopted by all members of the school community.

Model non-violent conflict resolution

Students learn as much by observing significant adults as they do by being told what to do. If teachers and parents shout at kids or each other and regularly play power games there is every chance that young people will adopt similar methods of resolving conflict.

When families and schools demonstrate through their daily interactions that all people deserve respect and that decisions are made by groups rather than by individuals acting in their own interests, young people are more likely to come to value that way of behaving.

Young people cannot be expected to promote and encourage the peaceful resolution of conflicts if they do not see conflict resolution principles and strategies being modelled by adults in all areas of their lives, including business, sport, entertainment and personal relationships. Adults play a part in making the environment more peaceful by practicing non-violent conflict resolution when minor or major disputes arise in their daily lives.

Have clear sanctions against violence in classrooms and playgrounds

All schools have codes of conduct that apply to members of the school community, including staff and students. These include rights and responsibilities of staff and students, and rules and consequences for misbehaviour. Many schools have specific rules and consequences that relate to violent behaviour. Effective codes of conduct are living documents: written in simple language, frequently revisited and reviewed by staff, students and parents, and applied consistently.

Effective schools have a range of agreed preventive and responsive strategies that all staff apply before principals use their powers under the Education Regulations to suspend a student who displays violent behaviour.
Teach about the resolution of conflict

In the past, many schools shied away from curriculum content dealing with conflict, with the exception of wars involving the British Empire or Australia and its allies. Classroom approaches tended to be nationalistic or ethnocentric, presenting ‘our’ side more sympathetically than might be justified by historical evidence that has since emerged. Issues that perhaps reflected badly on ‘our side’ tended to be avoided. The treatment of Indigenous Australians in early colonial history provides one such example.

Today, teachers are more aware that conflict resolution can be studied in a variety of curriculum areas. The learning domains of Interpersonal Development, Civics and Citizenship, and Humanities – History are particularly fertile areas for studying conflict resolution in the family, school and community, within the legal system and other social institutions. Conflict resolution can also be studied from an historical perspective. Media treatment of issues such as family violence, sexual harassment and racist violence at home and abroad, challenges schools to make a conscious effort to help students make sense of their world.

This is a long-term task for schools, not something that can be done in any one area of the curriculum or by one teacher acting in isolation from the whole-school plan. Components of a whole-school approach to student welfare and discipline will include aspects of the following:

- values education such as those identified in the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (Commonwealth of Australia 2005) (http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=8758).
- social and emotional wellbeing training including: building self-confidence, self-esteem and trust, forming positive relationships with adults and peers, managing anger and coping with stress
- communication skills necessary for working effectively in groups, e.g. active listening
- cooperative learning strategies
- models of decision making
- intercultural studies
- civics and citizenship education: principles and practice underlying our civic institutions in Australia and development of skills necessary to interact effectively with the community
- conflict management and resolution strategies for staff and students, e.g. problem solving and mediation
- conflict resolution skills, e.g. managing emotions, defining the problem, developing options, appropriate assertiveness, negotiation and mediation
- anti-bullying programs, e.g. peer support and building resilience
• peace education including historical perspectives and non-violent strategies such as Gandhi’s core principles

• anti-racism education.

**Selected teaching strategies**

All the following ideas require careful planning and sensitive teacher supervision.

• **Role play**: Walking in other people’s shoes; taking turns at being the victim and the aggressor; role play stages of conflict from conflict to win/win resolution; ways to negotiate; active listening.

• **Simulation**: Creating a risky situation, but with safety.

• **Verbal self-defence**: Contrived insults and protective responses; learning how to say no; developing “I feel … and I want” …. Statements, e.g. “I feel annoyed when you keep bumping my desk. I want you to stop.”

• **Teach appropriate language** and register to help minimise conflict.

• Use **graphic organisers** to map the conflict. What is the issue? Who is involved? What are their needs? What are their concerns/fears/anxieties?

• **Survey attitudes**: Is it okay for parents to hit their children? Is war ever justified?

• **Debates**: “The pen is mightier than the sword until you run out of ink”; “Why should I negotiate when I’m bigger than he/she is?”

• **Interpreting body language**: What you say is not necessarily what you mean; the significance of eye contact is not the same in all cultures.

• **Workshops and vignettes**: Use case studies to stimulate class discussion and sharpen tools of analysis.

• **Analyse media reports**: Deal with conflict from a linguistic point of view, content, views presented and graphics.

**Skills for better relationships**

The following skills need to be developed and practised through a variety of strategies and contexts:

• allow each person a chance to speak

• build trust

• respect other people’s right to be heard and don’t interrupt them

• practise active listening
- stick to the point
- don’t blame
- separate ideas and behaviour from the person
- ask questions to clearly establish issue
- acknowledge feelings: check back to clarify understanding, allow silences and notice body language
- summarise to make sure you agree on the facts
- listen to feelings as well as facts
- share your own feelings
- emphasise points of agreement as well as clarify points of disagreement
- keep individual personal experiences confidential to the group
- respect others’ cultural traditions, values and languages
- always support one another
- be sensitive to the hidden curriculum in the group process
- become aware of the effects of non-verbal behaviour, e.g. aggressive stance or expression
- be alert to manipulative strategies used by others
- give up ‘getting your own way’ (exercising power over) and look for a better group solution (sharing power with)
- assert your own rights without infringing those of others
- try to have all people participating equally
- be creative in looking for options
- find a solution that meets the needs of both parties.

**Escalating conflict**

Conflict tends to escalate if:

- exposed emotion such as anger and frustration increases
- a perceived threat increases
- more people get involved and begin choosing sides
• students involved were not friends before the conflict
• students have few peacemaking skills at their disposal
• there is a perception that a party involved in the conflict is not being treated fairly.

Reducing conflict
Conflict can be reduced if:

• attention is focused on the problem, not the participants
• the participants are removed to a more neutral space
• there is a decrease in exposed emotion and perceived threat
• the students were friends before the conflict occurred
• the participants know how to make peace, or have someone to help them do so.

Useful websites
The **Values for Australian Schooling Kit** can be found online at the Australian Government’s Values Education website. (http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/)

**Bullying. No Way!** is an anti-bullying education resource with examples of whole school approaches that show how schools interact with their local communities (http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/ideasbox/schools/).

**Mind Matters** is a resource and professional development program designed to support Australian secondary schools in promoting and protecting the social and emotional wellbeing of members of school communities (http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters/).

**Kids matter** is a whole-school approach that aims to improve the mental health and well-being of primary school students (http://www.apapdc.edu.au/kidsmatter/).

**Racism. No Way!** is an anti-racism education resource for Australian schools with lesson ideas, games and a library (http://www.racismnoway.com.au/).


**Bullying Online** is a resource from the United Kingdom with sections for schools, parents and young people (http://www.bullying.co.uk/).
Bullying at school includes information from the University of Glasgow, Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) (http://www.scre.ac.uk/bully/index.html).

Bullying in schools and what to do about it is a resource based on research undertaken by Dr Ken Rigby, University of South Australia (www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/).

ABC’s Behind the News - London Terrorism (PDF, 70KB), a worksheet discussing appropriate classroom responses to acts of terrorism, specifically the London bombings. It draws on state education department guidelines (http://www.abc.net.au/tv/btn/teachers/activitysheets/ep18/0719terrorism.pdf).

Bibliography

