

Briefing Paper for Trainee Teachers Of Citizenship Education

Managing Conflict between Individuals

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Managing conflict between individuals: a briefing paper for trainee teachers

This paper has been written specifically for trainee teachers of citizenship education. It is one of a series of papers that explores the theme of “conflict”; this one specifically addressing the issues relating to “resolving conflict between individuals”.

The paper aims to help the reader learn more about conflict and to identify the learning opportunities that arise for exploring the issue with young people through citizenship education, using classroom and wider school based activities as well as a community focus.

What is conflict?

The generally agreed definition of conflict is “violent collision; a struggle or contest; to be in opposition; to clash.” The understanding or interpretation of the term however, is variable. For some conflict is viewed as a threatening and negatively disruptive phenomenon; for others it is seen as something that is periodically inevitable and that can be a catalyst for change with positive outcomes. This sort of conflict usually arises as a result of interaction between two or more people who perceive either incompatible *difference* between themselves or feel that something of theirs is threatened by the other person. This causes them to behave, respond or react *to what they perceive*, which causes the conflict. The degree of conflict will be determined by factors such as circumstances, pride, history etc.

Why do we need to explore conflict at school?

Research carried out by Tony Sewell¹ in an inner city comprehensive looked at the skills and achievements of young people attending the school. One of the key findings of the research was that whilst the curriculum focused on the acquisition of knowledge and academic attainment, young people were having to use considerable amounts of energy to deal with conflict inside and outside of the classroom. The researcher concluded that the young people’s skills in this area (conflict resolution) were largely insufficient to manage the difficulties they were encountering and that more needs to be done to equip young people to manage the challenges of the environment in which they are expected to study as well as the world in which they live. Citizenship is an ideal subject through which to address this type of issue as it provides pupils with a forum within which they can constructively reflect on the natures of, and the interactions between, the public and private worlds that they operate within and are affected by.

Exploring and teaching about conflict in the curriculum

Opportunities to explore conflict and to begin to develop skills for conflict management and resolution are at their most explicit at key stage 3, but abound within the citizenship agenda at all key stages. Details relating to areas of the curriculum through which conflict can be explored at key stages 1 and 2 can be found in the appendices of this paper.

At key stage 3 opportunities present themselves through the citizenship and PSHE curricula and the QCA schemes of work for Religious education.

The citizenship programme of study requires that pupils are taught about the importance of resolving conflict fairly (1g).

¹ Tony Sewell 1997 *Black Masculinities and Schooling: How Black boys survive modern schooling.* Trentham.

It also aims to ensure that pupils develop enquiry and communication skills that are key to conflict management by providing them with opportunities to:

- think about topical political, spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues (2a);
- justify orally and in writing personal opinion about events and issues (2b);
- contribute to group and exploratory class discussions (2c);

Pupils skills in relation to participation and responsible action are developed through teaching that requires them to:

- use their imagination to consider other peoples' experiences (3a); and
- reflect on the process of participating (3c).

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) Guidelines advocate that pupils are taught: to negotiate within relationships (3i)

Unit 13 of the QCA schemes of work - How do we deal with conflict? - explicitly addresses conflict and provides guidance as to how conflict can be explored through RE and/or citizenship. Detailed information can be found on the QCA web-site. Resources that will help you to develop the theme further by providing guidance and ideas for lessons as well as useful general background reading can be found at the following websites.

www.qca.org.uk

www.leaplinx.com

www.asdan.co.uk

www.transformingconflict.org

www.timeforcitizenship.com

www.mediation-eu.net

www.kidscape.org.uk

www.childline.org.uk

www.bullying.co.uk

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/citizenx/local/conflict

www.nc.uk.net

Useful publications and organisations

Fireworks – National Youth Agency 2002

Conflict resolution for kids: a group facilitators guide. Pamela Lane, 1995 Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Conflict Resolution: communicate, negotiate, consolidate. Prim-Ed Publishing 2003. www.prim-ed.com

“Leap Confronting Conflict” 020 7272 5630

This organisation has produced a range of materials about conflict management and resolution for use by teachers and pupils. They offer in-house and external training support for schools.

Teaching about Conflict: Lesson Plans

The following activities have been developed to explore the issue of conflict within the classroom setting. As well as addressing the afore-cited citizenship and PSHE requirements, they also develop one or more of the following key skills that are integral to learning across the National Curriculum:

- Communication
- Working with others

- Improving own learning and performance
- Problem solving

Activity one: Understanding Conflict”

A classroom based and focused activity.

Aim:

- to provide pupils with an opportunity to develop an understanding of the nature of conflict and explore and articulate their feelings about conflict.

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson, pupils will:

- have defined and be able to explain the term conflict
- be able to differentiate between different types of conflict;
- have explored their feelings and beliefs about conflict;

This activity addresses the National Curriculum key skill areas of

- Communication
- Working with others

Introduction

Conflict may be a topic that raises uncomfortable personal feelings for some pupils, e.g. pupils who have witnessed domestic violence; fled war-torn countries, been subject to bullying etc. Establishing or revisiting “groundrules” that have been made by the class in relation to discussing ‘sensitive’ issues will create the right learning environment and maximise pupil participation and safety. It is good practice to revisit these at the start of each lesson. More information about making groundrules can be found at www.teachernet.gov.uk and www.asu.edu/provost/intergroup/resources/classgroundrules.html .

1a. What is conflict?

Divide the class into groups of 4. Ask each group to brainstorm the term “conflict” (elicit feelings and emotions that relate to conflict as well as ideas about what it is for definition purposes). Snowball feedback to main group (i.e. each group feeds back a new idea, not repeating something the previous group has said). Record all of the contributions on flipchart paper and then talk the class through the dictionary definition.

Back in small groups, ask the class to think of situations (or domains) within which conflict arises. Through feedback you are aiming to elicit examples that relate to individual / personal (home and family) conflict; local / national (community) and international (global) conflict. [Some pupils may have some personal experiences that they choose to draw on but advise that there is no need to make disclosures and for less experienced trainees who may not know the class well this is perhaps something to try to avoid or else handle with extreme sensitivity.] Record the examples that the class identify in a concentric circle diagram with the circles referring to personal-local/national etc, thus creating a visual record of the type and nature of some of the conflicts that arise. This can be referred to over the course of the series of lessons about conflict.

Make the activity easier by drawing the concentric circle diagram and labelling the domains in advance, and then seeking examples to fit within each from the class having explained each domain.

1b. Feelings and Beliefs about conflict.

Display a series of A5 size cards with statements about conflict on them, for example:

- Conflict is a natural part of life
- All conflicts end in violence
- Unmet needs can cause conflict
- Conflict can be constructive as well as destructive
- Inappropriate behaviour can cause conflict
- Learning to handle conflict constructively takes a lot of practice and skill.

Prepare 'Agree' and 'Disagree' signs and reproduce the series of statements onto individual sheets of paper, copying enough for each member of the class.

Distribute the statements sheets to pupils. Ask the pupils to work alone, read through and think about each statement, and then tick the ones they agree with.

Bring the group back together. Place the A5 cards on the floor (or a convenient, central location) in a pile face down, and the agree-disagree cards at opposite ends of an imaginary continuum line. Explain to the class that you want one pupil at a time to volunteer themselves to pick to up a card, read it aloud and place it somewhere on the agree – disagree continuum according to how they feel about it. Ask them to share (explain) their reason for placing the card where they have with the class. Any other pupil can move the card as long as they can explain their reason for doing so. Only one person should talk at a time; each card can be moved an unlimited number of times as long as pupils can justify its positioning. Work through a number of cards in this way.

Ask the class to summarise what they have learnt about their feelings about conflict.

Make the activity easier by providing time for pupils to discuss their feelings about the statements with a small group of fellow students before moving onto the whole class activity.

Make the activity harder by discussing the statements on cards as a “thinking on my feet” exercise with pupils having had no prior sight of, and therefore time to think about, the statements.

Learning outcomes

Pupils: define conflict
 understand different types of conflict
 discuss their opinions of conflict.

Activity two: Conflict in school

A class based activity with a whole school focus. The activity could be extended and adapted for use by the whole school.

Aim:

- to develop an understanding of why conflict arises, and its potential impact on individuals and communities.

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson pupils will:

- have considered reasons why conflict arises;
- have started to think about the impact of conflict on individuals
- begin to think about how conflict can be managed

These activities address the National Curriculum key skill areas of

- Communication

- Working with others
- Improving own learning and performance
- Problem solving

2a. What causes Conflict?

Preparation: Review newspapers for a couple of weeks before the activity takes place so that you can cut out and collect photo images that depict conflict.

Divide the class into small groups and distribute one image to each. Ask the groups to discuss the image. They may want to consider some of the following questions to aid this process:

- What is happening in the photograph? What kind of conflict does it depict (individual / familial / social / authority / political / religious etc)
- What are the people doing and how might they be affected by what is going on?
- What do you think might have happened to get to this situation?
- What might happen as a result?
- Could the situation affect others not in the photograph?
- How does the conflict depicted make you feel?

Take feedback from each group (about 3minutes per group); what factors are common to the different situations depicted as being causes of conflict? [intolerance, prejudice, anger, stress, physical violence, loneliness, fear, poor self-esteem, frustration, unhappiness, distrust etc.]

Issues for discussion with the class

Do any of the scenes and discussions represent conflict that is positive in nature? What are the positive effects of conflict? What are the negative effects?

Explore the idea of change being a result of conflict (and vice versa) through the discussion and the fact that this can be positive despite the fact that very often we focus on conflict as being a negative experience.

What ideas does the class have about how conflict might be managed?

2b. School conflict review

Tell the class that they are now going to spend the next part of the lesson reflecting on the nature of conflict within the school environment.

Ask the pupils to think about and make a note of any conflicts they have observed happening around them within school or that they themselves were involved in over the last week. Ask them to make a note of what happened, where it happened, and how the situation was managed or resolved. This activity does not require the people involved in the conflict situation to be identified by name; rather pupils just need to report that the conflict took place between a parent and young person or between two pupils for example.

Divide the class into small groups, ask pupils to briefly share one of the conflicts they witnessed with the other members of the group. Tell the groups that you want them to develop a list of ideas about how they think conflict can be managed, drawing on the examples they shared. They need to identify and review how the situations were managed and state what strategies they thought worked and what didn't in the handling of the situation. They can be helped to do this by alerting them to the fact that there are a number of approaches that might be used by people in conflict situations. It may be helpful for them to review the approaches used in the situations they observed alongside the following ideas.

Approaches / strategies that may be used in a conflict include:

- Communicate for example, “ let’s sit down and talk about it.”
- Co-operate, for example, the problem belongs to both of us and so does the solution.”
- Take turns, for example, “OK, I’ll go (speak) after you.”

Other approaches that could be used, depending on the situation include:

- the use of humour,
- postponing the resolution,
- avoiding,
- getting help,
- mediating,
- apologising
- listening.

If there is enough time, these ideas could be elicited from the pupils through a brainstorming activity before they move on to identify the approaches that were used in the conflict situations they observed.

Take feedback from each group with a view to getting the class to compile a list identifying “10 effective ways to manage conflict situations.” Is the class surprised by the number of conflict situations they observed taking place within school?

Arrange for the class to be able to disseminate their ideas to other members of the school community, perhaps through a school assembly.

If there is sufficient interest on the part of the pupils, and opportunity in relation to the school, perhaps the process that the pupils used to develop their list could be used to inform any future review of conflict management within the school.

Learning outcomes:

Pupils will: Understand why conflict arises
Have explored some strategies for managing everyday conflict situations.

Activity three: Conflict in the Community

A classroom based activity with a focus on conflict in the community.

Aim:

- to increase pupils understanding of conflict resolution on a community scale.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, pupils will have:

- developed an understanding of the professional management of conflict, the role that mediators play and the skills they use to resolve larger scale conflict.
- be able to reflect on the effectiveness of the management of national and global conflict.
- clarified their understanding of conflict resolution strategies

These activities address the NC key skill areas of

- Communication
- Working with others
- Improving own learning and performance
- Problem solving

This activity has been developed as a way of providing pupils with an opportunity to explore conflict resolution in the wider community (national or global). It requires some advance preparation on the part of the teacher as it involves the use of a visitor to the school.

Preparation:

Contact a local mediation service and invite a mediator to attend your lesson with a view to being interviewed by pupils. A mediation service is technically any organisation that works to help parties resolve conflict and therefore a variety of services could be grouped under this banner. Some examples of well-known mediation services include marriage guidance organisations, youth counselling services, the community liaison division of the local police force, and legal firms with a family or employment law brief. Who you choose to invite will be determined by the type of visitor you think will be most credible to the pupils in relation to the subject.

There are a host of issues that warrant consideration when inviting an external party to contribute to students learning in the classroom. Circular 4/95 offers guidance in relation to this issue by talking about using visitors within PSHE lessons (available at www.dfes.gov.uk). Guidance is also offered by Tacade².

Some general points to think about when using visitors in the classroom.

As a starting point remember that although many visitors may have a lot to offer in terms of subject expertise, they are not necessarily skilled at communicating with young people.

Check that the school is happy for you to invite a visitor into the classroom. Do they have any written guidelines in relation to this?

Be clear with the visitor about what you want from them and what their role is.

In relation to this activity, their role is to be questioned by the class about the work that they do in relation to conflict, rather than having to give a presentation to the class. Make sure that the visitor knows this.

Be clear about how much time the visitor has. Ensure that both the pupils and the visitor know this.

Make sure that the visitor knows where they fit into the overall programme that the pupils are being taught; this way they will have some idea what issues the pupils have been discussing to date. It is good practice to avoid using visitors as “one –off” events; make sure that their contribution fits into the overall programme that you are teaching.

Assure the visitor that you will manage the session and deal with any issues that arise during it.

Evaluate the contribution and value of the visitor to the class and their learning.

² Tacade / LDPF (1997) ‘Making the most of visitors: using outside agencies in school drug education.’ The Advisory Council for Alcohol and Drug Education / London Drugs Policy Forum.

Be prepared to give the pupils feedback on their handling of the session since this type of lesson provides pupils with a social experience and an opportunity to practise and develop their personal and social skills as well as the chance to learn more about a subject.

Lastly and most importantly, inform pupils in advance that there will be a visitor in their forthcoming lesson who will be able to help them learn more about the subject area they are studying (in this cases, managing conflict).

3a Resolving conflict and understanding mediation

Introduce and welcome the visitor to the class.

Revisit the aim of the lesson with the pupils and visitor. Remind the pupils that the visitor is present to help them learn more about managing conflict, using the community as an example.

Divide the class into four smaller groups. The task for each group is to think of three questions to ask the visitor that will help themselves and the rest of the class to understand conflict management more thoroughly. They have 5 minutes to do this in. Give each group specific areas to ask questions in relation to, for example, questions about:

- the nature of the organisation the visitor works for [for example, what is a mediation service? What is the philosophy of the organisation? What skills do such services offer?]
- the types of conflicts that require third party intervention [for example, why do people need help to resolve conflict? What type of situations benefit from the involvement of a third party? What skills do mediators bring to conflict situations?]
- the visitors experience of conflict in the community [for example, what does it look like, what form does it take, what is it's impact, why does it arise?]
- conflict resolution strategies [for example, how can conflict be managed and resolved? What strategies do mediation services utilise? How can co-operation be secured? Can all conflict be resolved?]

Groups are to take it in turns to ask one question each of the visitor until all the questions have been answered.

Thank the visitor for their participation.

Ask the pupils to reflect on the exercise;

What have they learnt about conflict management (in relation to communities) from the visitor?

What have they learnt about organisations that work to resolve conflict?

What have they learnt about themselves?

Ask pupils to discuss in pairs how they would start a dialogue to work towards resolving a conflict that might be involved them. Take feedback from the class.

Learning outcomes

Pupils will: Know about people and organisations that work to resolve conflict
 Understand the difficulties involved in resolving some conflict and be able to relate them to communities on a large scale.
 Have put into practise their ideas for conflict resolution.

The outcomes will be dependent to some extent on the nature of the visitor.