

COOPERATIVE GAMES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROGRAMME FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Government strategy for education aims “to help learners develop the skills they need for learning, life and work” (Scottish Government, 2012). Skills such as communication, problem solving and teamwork are found in the Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2012) and are at the core in Non-violence Education Approaches.

At Edinburgh Peace and Justice, we believe that helping young pupils develop conflict resolution skills is essential not only for people’s development, but also to build peaceful and respectful communities. Through our programme on **Cooperative Games and Conflict Resolution Programme for Primary Schools** we aim to help children (5 to 12) gain the skills required to establish positive relationships, improve communication, enhance the ability to work cooperatively and address conflict in a constructive manner.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION WITHIN THE SCOTTISH CURRICULUM OF EXCELLENCE

Conflict resolution skills are based on ‘cooperation, communication, sense of community, empathy, self-control, concentration, self-efficacy, creativity, and problem solving’ (Jensen, 2003 and Sylwester, 2000 cited in Sandy, 2006). At the Edinburgh Centre for Peace and Justice, we see conflict as an opportunity to grow and learn. Through promoting children’s learning of conflict resolution skills, we aim to assure children’s optimal psycho-social development as well as to contribute to the development of more peaceful and empowered communities.

In line with the Scottish Curriculum of Excellence, our project on conflict resolution skills for primary schools focuses on the four principal capacities to be learned and developed.

Successful Learners. The wide range of activities used in our conflict resolution workshops encourages enthusiasm and motivation for learning, creativity, independent thinking, cooperative learning, decision making and conflict management. All attributes and capacities listed in the Curriculum for excellence. In addition, we aim to promote a critical, experimental and constructivist approach to knowledge and learning.

Confident individuals. Conflict resolution workshops through cooperative games and educative group dynamics help children develop self-awareness, increase their self-esteem and achieve well-being. Evidence shows how children that are able to constructively address conflict and

difficulties in their life are more confident and also more capable to build positive social relations with others (Sandy, 2006).

Responsible citizens. Our programme on conflict resolution workshops focuses on values such as respect, responsibility and active citizenship. Through cooperative learning, we aim to help primary school pupils “develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland’s place, developing informed and ethical views on complex issues” (Curriculum for excellence- Scottish Government, 2012).

Contributors. A crucial element of non-violence education is its focus on conflict resolution. This involves helping, children improve their communication skills and problem solving capacities. In addition, our conflict resolution workshops encourage assertiveness which is required to maintain an enterprising attitude.

In addition to the four principal capacities specified in the Scottish Curriculum of Excellence , our programme on conflict resolution skills can certainly correspond to the area of **Health and Wellbeing** (See following section on Outcomes and Aims).

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

- AIMS:
 - Promote a culture of peace, respect and dialogue amongst the school community.
 - Encourage a positive, proactive and prosocial approach to conflict in the school community everyday life.

- EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES:
 - Enhance pupils’ skills to manage conflict in a constructive and effective manner.
 - Improve pupils’ communication skills including assertiveness and active listening.
 - Enhance cooperation and mutual understanding amongst the school community.

In addition to these aims and outcomes, our workshops on conflict resolution skills at schools have been designed to particularly support the area of **Health and Wellbeing** within the Scottish Curriculum of Excellence. In this sense, we aim to help the school community achieve the following outcomes:

- Develop self-awareness and respect for others.

- Meet challenges, manage change and build relationships.
- Experience personal achievement and build resilience and confidence.
- Understand and develop wellbeing and social skills.
- Understand how decisions can affect our mental wellbeing.
- Assess and manage risk and understand the impact of risk-taking behavior.
- Reflect on strengths and skills to help make informed choices.
- Acknowledge diversity and understand that it is everyone's responsibility to challenge discrimination.

PLANNING AND METHODOLOGY

The Cooperative Games programme is design to work with pupils currently enrolled in primary education at Edinburgh. The programme is delivered in four sessions over 8 weeks, 50 min each session, to better fit the schedule of schools and the learning capacities of the children. By delivering each session every two weeks, the course facilitator can make sure that children have enough time to reflect upon the skills learned and put them in practice. Hence, children are involved in an active learning process grounded on pupils' own experiences.

The programme sessions are divided in four main areas:

Area	Purpose and skills developed
Understanding me and others.	In this session, pupils are encouraged to reflect about their and others' needs through team building activities and cooperative games.
Managing my anger.	This session includes a set of group dynamics to enhance children's skills to recognize own emotions and manage them when facing conflict.
Improving my communication.	This session focus on communication skills and active listening through documented educative and cooperative games.
Understanding my skills to manage conflict.	In this session, pupils will be able to consolidate their learning and skills through reflective practice and group dynamics.

Sessions will be carried by skilled facilitators in the field of conflict resolution, cooperative games and peace education. Our facilitators have carefully designed each session to assure that activities and contents are adequate to meet the needs of pupils from a wide range of backgrounds and ages. In addition, our programme relies on extensive evidence on how pupils' academic performance and future adult workplace success is strongly linked to the conflict resolution skills they have developed during their childhood (Sandy, 2006)

UPDATE ON THE PROGRAMME

We ran our Cooperative Games Programme at Dalry Primary School in Edinburgh over the course of 2015 -2016 school year. Facilitators delivered a total of 50 lessons to 5 different groups. Each term we worked with a different class group (P 2/3, P5 and P6/7 and with a special needs group. Thus, the facilitators gained significant experience working with a range of class sizes and ages and a mix of special needs children.

Feedback and evaluation from Dalry Primary School Teachers

Teachers at Dalry Primary indicated 100% "somewhat improved" or better with over 50% indicating "significant improvement" in the five areas of behaviour identified in the Curriculum from Excellence which the programme aims to address (self esteem, communication/social skills, cooperation, managing anger and identifying emotions). Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher reported 100% significant improvement in all five areas.

Head Teacher Grant Gillies commented "Specific individuals gained considerably and there was an impact on both behaviour and confidence. The PSA included in the workshops also noted a difference in the behaviour of the pupils." "I would recommend it to any school as the difference is tangible. Our school has 75 percent EAL and 1 in 3 of our pupils are in child poverty. This is not an easy place to start but it's testament to Fiona and the team that it more than succeeded." Deputy Head Teacher Vanessa Kelly commented "Pupils really enjoyed the sessions. They all loved learning new skills which they also used in the playground with other children."

BIOs OF LEAD FACILITATORS

Fiona Oliver-Larkin is a primary level Steiner Waldorf trained teacher, English (CELTA) teacher and performer. She specialises in circus skills and rhythmical education, working through songs, stories and movement games. She has 5 years experience working as a teacher. Working jointly with other facilitators Fiona delivered the Cooperative Games and Conflict Resolution Programme at Dalry Primary School in 2015-16 and has 2 years experience supporting children with additional needs to participate in everyday classroom learning.

Fiona jointly runs Voice Box Theatre Company, a cross disciplinary theatre company with roots in circus and a strong commitment to outreach and education at home and abroad. The last two years has seen them travel to India and Mexico to run two social circus cultural exchange programmes with children from diverse backgrounds, including children living on the street and in slums. These two projects focused on crossing cultures and social inclusion, using circus skills, theatre games and performance. See www.voiceboxtheatre.co.uk for more details.

Kate Wilkinson is a Group Facilitator, with one and a half years experience, at Green Shoots, the social inclusion project of The Green Team that delivers customised, practical, environmental and outdoor learning experiences to groups of young people from Edinburgh and the Lothians.

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